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Jean Louis Schefer

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THE ORDINARY MAN OF CINEMA



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Jean Louis Schefer : The Ordinary Man of Cinema (Semiotext(e) / Foreign Agents) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Ordinary Man of Cinema (Semiotext(e) / Foreign Agents):

The first English translation of a foundational work in cinema studies and the philosophy of film.When it was first

published in French in 1980, *The Ordinary Man of Cinema* signaled a shift from the French film criticism of the 1960s to a new breed of film philosophy that disregarded the semiotics and post-structuralism of the preceding decades. Schefer describes the schizophrenic subjectivity the cinema offers us: the film as a work projected without memory, viewed by (and thereby lived by) a subject scarred and shaped by memory. *The Ordinary Man of Cinema* delineates the phenomenology of movie-going and the fleeting, impalpable zone in which an individual's personal memory confronts the cinema's ideological images to create a new way of thinking. It is also a book replete with mummies and vampires, tyrants and prostitutes, murderers and freaks -- figures that are fundamental to Schefer's conception of the cinema, because the worlds that cinema traverses (our worlds, interior and exterior) are worlds of pain, unconscious desire, decay, repressed violence, and the endless mystery of the body. Fear and pleasure breed monsters, and such are what Schefer's emblematic "ordinary man" seeks and encounters when engaging in the disordering of the ordinary that the movie theater offers him. Among other things, Schefer considers "The Gods" in 31 brief essays on film stills and "The Criminal Life" with reflections on spectatorship and autobiography. While Schefer's book has long been standard reading in French film scholarship, until now it has been something of a missing link to the field (and more broadly, French theory) in English. It is one of the building blocks of more widely known and read translations of Gilles Deleuze (who cited this book as an influence on his own cinema books) and Jacques Rancière.

Schefer's insights flicker in and out. Flashes of illumination are followed by pages that read like an obscure prose poem -- suggestive, but enigmatic and sometimes unyielding. A strange and often beautiful book, *The Ordinary Man of Cinema* has little to say about the beauty of film itself. Rather, the word that keeps resurfacing is sublime. For Schefer, film does not inspire aesthetic contemplation but instead directs us toward the limits of the thinkable. (Artforum) About the Author Jean Louis Schefer (born in 1938) is a prolific and influential scholar of art history, theology, philosophy, music, and linguistics, as well as an author of fiction.