

## A CERTAIN TENDENCY OF THE FRENCH CINEMA FRANCOIS TRUFFAUT

These notes have no other object than to attempt to define a certain tendency of the French cinema - a tendency called "psychological realism" - and to sketch its limits.

If the French cinema exists by means of about a hundred films a year, it is well understood that only ten or twelve merit the attention of critics and cinephiles, the attention, therefore of "Cahiers."

These ten or twelve films constitute what has been prettily named the "Tradition of Quality"; they force, by their ambitiousness, the admiration of the foreign press, defend the French flag twice a year at Cannes and at Venice where, since 1946, they regularly carry off medals, golden lions and *grands prix*.

With the advent of "talkies," the French cinema was a frank plagiarism of the American cinema. Under the influence of *Scarface*, we made the amusing *Pepe Le Moko*. Then the French scenario is most clearly obliged to Prevert for its evolution: *Quai Des Brumes (Port Of Shadows)* remains the masterpiece of *poetic realism*.

The war and the post-war period renewed our cinema. It evolved under the effect of an internal pressure and for *poetic realism* - about which one might say that it died closing *Les Portes De La Nuit* behind it - was substituted *psychological realism*, illustrated by Claude Autant-Lara, Jean Dellannoy, Rene Clement, Yves Allegret and Marcel Pagliero.

### SCENARISTS' FILMS

If one is willing to remember that not so long ago Delannoy filmed *Le Bossu* and *La Part De L'Ombre*, Claude Autant-Lara *Le Plombier Amoureux* and *Lettres D Amour*, Yves Allegret *La Boite Aux Reves* and *Les Demons De L'Aube*, that all these films are justly recognized as strictly commercial enterprises, one will admit that, the successes or failures of these cineastes being a function of the scenarios they chose, *La Symphonie Pastorale*, *Le Diable Au Corps (Devil In The Flesh)*, *Jeux Interdits (Forbidden Games)*, *Maneges*, *Un Homme Marche Dans La Ville*, are essentially *scenarists' films*.

### TODAY NO ONE IS IGNORANT ANY LONGER . . .

After having sounded out directing by making two forgotten shorts, Jean Aurenche became a specialist in adaptation. In 1936, he was credited, with Anouilh, with the dialogue for *Vous Navez Rien A Declarer* and *Les De Gourdis De La Ile*.

At the same time Pierre Bost was publishing excellent little novels at the N.R.F.

Aurenche and Bost worked together for the first time while adapting and writing dialogue for *Douce*, directed by Claude Autant-Lara.

Today, no one is ignorant any longer of the fact that Aurenche and Bost rehabilitated adaptation by upsetting old preconceptions of being faithful to the letter and substituting for it the contrary idea of being faithful to the spirit - to the point that this audacious aphorism has been written: "An honest adaptation is a betrayal" (Carlo Rim, "Traveling and Sex-Appeal").

In adaptation there exists filmable scenes and unfilmable scenes, and that instead of omitting the latter (as was done not long ago) it is necessary to invent *equivalent* scenes, that is to say, scenes as the novel's author would have written them for the cinema.

"Invention without betrayal" is the watchword Aurenche and Bost like to cite, forgetting that one can also betray by omission.

The system of Aurenche and Bost is so seductive, even in the enunciation of its principles, that nobody even dreamed of verifying its functioning close-at-hand. I propose to do a little of this here.

The entire reputation of Aurenche and Bost is built on two precise points: 1. *Faithfulness* to the spirit of the works they adapt: 2. The talent they use.

#### THAT FAMOUS FAITHFULNESS . . .

Since 1943 Aurenche and Bost have adapted and written dialogue for: *Douce* by Michel Davet, *La Symphonie Pastorale* by Gide, *Le Diable Au Corps* by Radiguet, *Un Recteur A L Ile De Sein (Dieu A Besoin Des Hommes - God Needs Men)* by Queffelec, *Les Jeux Inconnus (Jeux Interdits)* by Francois Boyer, *Le Ble En Herbe* by Colette.

In addition, they wrote an adaptation of *Journal D'Un Cure De Campagne* that was never filmed, a scenario on *Jeanne D'Arc* of which only one part has been made (by Jean Delannoy) and, lastly, scenario and dialogue for *L'Auberge Rouge (The Red Inn)* (directed by Claude Autant-Lara).

You will have noticed the profound diversity of inspiration of the works and authors adapted. In order to accomplish this tour de force which consists of remaining faithful to the spirit of Michel Davet, Gide, Radiguet, Queffelec, Francois Boyer, Colette and Bernanos, one must oneself possess, I imagine, a suppleness of spirit, a habitually geared-down personality as well as singular eclecticism.

You must also consider that Aurenche and Bost are led to collaborate with the most diverse directors: Jean Delannoy, for example, sees himself as a mystical moralist. But the petty meanness of *Garçon Sauvage (Savage Triangle)*, the shabbiness of *La Minute De Verite*, the insignificance of *La Route Napoleon* show rather clearly the intermittent character of that vocation.

Claude Autant-Lara, on the contrary, is well known for his non-conformity, his "advanced" ideas, his wild anti-clericalism; let us recognize in this cineaste the virtue of always remaining, in his films, honest with himself.

Pierre Bost being the technician in tandem, the spiritual element in this communal work seems to come from Jean Aurenche.

Educated by the Jesuits, Jean Aurenche has held on to nostalgia and rebellion, both at the same time. His flirtation with surrealism seemed to be out of sympathy for the anarchists of the thirties. This tells how strong his personality is, also how apparently incompatible it was with the personalities of Gide, Bernanos, Queffelec, Radiguet. But an examination of the works will doubtless give us more information.

Abbot Amedee Ayffre knew very well how to analyse *La Symphonie Pastorale* and how to define the relationship between the written work and the filmed work:

"Reduction of Faith to religious psychology in the hands of Gide, now becomes a reduction to psychology, plain and simple . . . with this qualitative abasement we will now have, according to a law well-known to aestheticians, a corresponding quantitative augmentation. New characters are added: Piette and Casteran, charged with representing certain sentiments. Tragedy becomes drama, melodrama." (*Dieu Au Cinema*, p. 131).

## WHAT ANNOYS ME . . .

What annoys me about this famous process of equivalence is that I'm not at all certain that a novel contains unfilmable scenes, and even less certain that these scenes, decreed unfilmable, would be so for everyone.

Praising Robert Bresson for his faithfulness to Bernanos, Andre Bazin ended his excellent article "La Stylistique de Robert Bresson," with these words. "After *The Diary Of A Country Priest*, Aurenche and Bost are no longer anything but the Viollet-Leduc of adaptation."

All those who admire and know Bresson's film well will remember the admirable scene in the confessional when Chantal's face "began to appear little by little, by degrees" (Bernanos).

When, several years before Bresson, Jean Aurenche wrote an adaptation of *Diary*, refused by Bernanos, he judged this scene to be unfilmable and substituted for it the one we reproduce here.

"Do you want me to listen to you here?" He indicates the confessional. "I never confess."

"Nevertheless, you must have confessed yesterday, since you took communion this morning?"

"I didn't take communion." He looks at her, very surprised. "Pardon me, I gave you communion."

Chantal turns rapidly towards the pri-Dieu she had occupied that morning. "Come see."

The cure follows her. Chantal indicates the missal she had left there.

"Look in this book, Sir. Me, I no longer, perhaps, have the right to touch it." The cure, very intrigued, opens the book and discovers, between two pages, the host that Chantal had spit out. His face is stupefied and confused.

"I spit out the host," says Chantal.

"I see," says the cure, with a neutral voice.

"You've never seen anything like that, right?" says Chantal, harsh almost triumphant.

"No, never," says the cure, very calmly. "Do you know what must be done?"

The cure closes his eyes for a brief instant. He is thinking or praying, he says, "It is very simple to repair, Miss. But it's very horrible to commit."

He heads for the altar, carrying the open book. Chantal follows him.

"No, it's not horrible. What is horrible is to receive the host in a state of sin."

"You were, then, in a state of sin?"

"Less than the others, but then - it's all the same to them." "Do not judge."

"I do not judge, I condemn," says Chantal with violence. "Silence in front of the body of Christ!"

He kneels before the altar, takes the host from the book and swallows it.

In the middle of the book, the cure and an obtuse atheist named Arsene are opposed in a discussion on Faith. This discussion ends with this line by Arsene, "When one is dead, everything is dead." In the adaptation, this discussion takes place on the very tomb of the cure, between Arsene and another cure, and *terminates the film*. This line, "When one is dead, everything is dead," carries, perhaps the only one retained by the public. Bernanos did not say, for conclusion, "When one is dead, everything is dead," but "What does it matter, all is grace."

"Invention without betrayal," you say - it seems to me that it's a question here of little enough invention for a great deal of betrayal. One or two more details. Aurenche and Bost were unable to make *The Diary Of A Country Priest* because Bernanos was alive. Bresson declared that were Bernanos alive he would have taken more liberties. Thus, Aurenche and Bost are annoyed because someone is alive, but Bresson is annoyed because he is dead.

## UNMASK

From a simple reading of that extract, there stands out:

1. A constant and deliberate care to be *unfaithful* to the spirit as well as the letter;
2. A very marked taste for profanation and blasphemy.

This unfaithfulness to the spirit also degrades *Le Diable Au Corps* - a love story that becomes an anti-militaristic, anti-bourgeois film, *La Symphonie Pastorale* - a love story about an amorous pastor - turns Gide into a Beatrix Beck, *Un Recteur a l'ile de Sein* whose title is swapped for the equivocal one of *Dieu A Besoin Des Hommes* in which the islanders are shown like the famous "cretins" in Bunuel's *Land Without Bread*.

As for the taste for blasphemy, it is constantly manifested in a more or less insidious manner, depending on the subject, the *metteur-en-scene* nay, even the star.

I recall from memory the confessional scene from *Douce*, Marthe's funeral in *Le Diable*, the profaned hosts in that adaptation of *Diary* (scene carries over to *Dieu A Besoin Des Hommes*), the whole scenario and the character played by Fernandel in *L'Auberge Rouge*, the scenario *in toto* of *Jeux Interdits* (joking in the cemetery).

Thus, everything indicates that Aurenche and Bost are the authors of *frankly* anti-clerical films, but, since films about the cloth are fashionable, our authors have allowed themselves to fall in with that style. But as it suits them - they think - not to betray their convictions, the theme of profanation and blasphemy, dialogues with double meanings, turn up here and there to prove to me guys that they know the art of "cheating the producer," all the while giving him satisfaction, as well as that of cheating the "great public," which is equally satisfied.

This process well deserves the name of "alibi-ism"; it is excusable and its use is necessary during a time when one must ceaselessly feign stupidity in order to work intelligently, but if it's all in the game to "cheat the producer," isn't it a bit scandalous to re-write Gide, Bernanos and Radiguet?

In truth, Aurenche and Bost work like all the scenarists in the world, like pre-war Spaak and Natanson.

To their way of thinking, every story includes characters A, B, C, and D. In the interior of that equation, everything is organized in function of criteria known to them alone. The sun rises and sets like clockwork, characters disappear, others are invented, the script deviates little by little from the original and becomes a whole, formless but brilliant: a new film, step by step makes its solemn entrance into the "Tradition of Quality."

## SO BE IT, THEY WILL TELL ME . . .

They will tell me, "Let us admit that Aurenche and Bost are unfaithful, but do you also deny the existence of their talent . . .?" Talent, to be sure, is not a function of fidelity, but I consider an adaptation of value only when written by *a man of the cinema*. Aurenche and Bost are essentially literary men and I reproach them here for being contemptuous of the cinema by underestimating it. They behave, *vis-a-vis* the scenario, as if they thought to reeducate a delinquent by finding him a job; they always believe they've "done the maximum" for it by embellishing it with subtleties, out of that science of nuances that make up the slender merit of modern novels. It is, moreover, only the smallest caprice on the part of the exegetists of our art that they believe to honor the cinema by using literary jargon. (Haven't Sartre and Camus been talked about for Pagliero's work, and phenomenology for Allegret's?)

The truth is, Aurenche and Bost have made the works they adapt insipid, for *equivalence* is always with us, whether in the form of treason or timidity. Here is a brief example: in *Le Diable Au Corps*, as Radiguet wrote it, Francois meets Marthe on a train platform with

Marthe jumping from the train while it is still moving; in the film, they meet in the school which has been transformed into a hospital. What is the point of this *equivalence*? It's a decoy for the anti-militarist elements added to the work, in concert with Claude Autant-Lara.

Well, it is evident that Radiguet's idea was one of *mise-en-scene*, whereas the scene invented by Aurenche and Bost is *literary*. One could, believe me, multiply these examples infinitely.

#### ONE OF THESE DAYS . . .

Secrets are only kept for a time, formulas are divulged, new scientific knowledge is the object of communications to the Academy of Sciences and since, if we will believe Aurenche and Bost, adaptation is an exact science, one of these days they really could apprise us in the name of what criterion, by virtue of what system, by what mysterious and internal geometry of the work, they abridge, add, multiply, devise and "rectify" these masterpieces.

Now that this idea is uttered, the idea that these equivalences are only timid astuteness to the end of getting around the difficulty, of resolving on the soundtrack problems that concern the image, plundering in order to no longer obtain anything on the screen but scholarly framing, complicated lighting-effects, "polished" photography, the whole keeping the "Tradition of Quality" quite alive - it is time to come to an examination of the ensemble of these films adapted, with dialogue, by Aurenche and Bost, and to research the permanent nature of certain themes that will explain, without justifying, the constant *unfaithfulness* of two scenarists to works taken by them as "pretext" and "occasion."

In a two line resume, here is the way scenarios treated by Aurenche and Bost appear:

*La Symphonie Pastorale*: He is a pastor, he is married. He loves and has no right to.

*Le Diable Au Corps*: They make the gestures of love and have no right to. *Dieu A Besoin Des Hommes*: He officiates, gives benedictions, gives extreme unction and has no right to.

*Jeux Interdits*: They bury the dead and have no right to.

*Le Ble En Herbe*: They love each other and have no right to.

You will say to me that the book also tells the same story, which I do not deny. Only, I notice that Gide also wrote *La Porte Etroite*, Radiguet *La Bal Du Comte d'Orgel*, Colette *La Vagabonde* and that each one of these novels did not tempt Delannoy or Autant-Lara.

Let us notice also that these scenarios, about which I don't believe it useful to speak here, fit into the sense of my thesis: *Au-Dela Des Grilles*, *Le Chateau De Verre*, *L'Auberge Rouge* . . . .

One sees how competent the promoters of the "Tradition of Quality" are in choosing only subjects that favour the misunderstandings on which the whole system rests.

Under the cover of literature - and, of course, of quality - they give the public its habitual dose of smut, non-conformity and facile audacity.

#### THE INFLUENCE OF AURENCHE AND BOST IS IMMENSE . . .

The writers who have come to do film dialogue have observed the same imperatives; Anouilh, between the dialogues for *De Gourdis de la Ile* and *Un Caprice De Caroline Cherie* introduced into more ambitious films his universe with its affection of the bizarre with a background of nordic mists transposed to Brittany (*Pattes Blanches*). Another writer Jean Ferry, made sacrifices for fashion, he too, and the dialogue for *Manon* could just as well have been signed by Aurenche and Bost: "He beleived me a virgin ans, in private life, he is a professor of psychology." Nothing better to hope for from the young scenarists. They simply work their shift, taking good care not to break any taboos.

Jacques Sigurd, one of the last to come to "scenario and dialogue," teamed up with Yves Allegret. Together, they bequeathed the French cinema some of its blackest masterpieces: *Dedee D'Anvers*, *Maneges*, *Une Si Jolie Petite Plage*, *Les Miracles N'Ont Lieu Qu'une Fois*, *La Jeune Folle*. Jacques Sigurd very quickly assimilated the recipe; he must be endowed with an admirable spirit of synthesis, for his scenarios oscillate ingeniously between Aurenche and Bost, Prevert and Clouzot, the whole lightly modernized. Religion is never involved, but blasphemy always makes its timid entrance thanks to several daughters of Mary or several good sisters who make their way across the field of vision at the moment when their presence would be least expected (*Maneges*, *Une Si Jolie Petite Plage*).

The cruelty by which they aspire to "rouse the trembling of the bourgeois" finds its place in well-expressed lines like: "he was old, he could drop dead" (*Maneges*). In *Une Si Jolie Petite Plage*, Jane Marken envies Berck's prosperity because of the tubercular cases found there: *Their family comes to see them and that makes business good!* (One dreams of the prayer of the rector of Sein Island).

Roland Laudenbach, who would seem to be more endowed than most of his colleagues, has collaborated on films that are most typical of that spirit: *La Minute De Verite*, *Le Bon Dieu Sans Confession*, *La Maison Du Du Silence*.

Robert Scipion is a talented man of letters. He has only written one book; a book of pastiches. Singular badges: the daily frequenting of the Saint-Germain-des-Pres cafes, the friendship of Marcel Pagliero who is called the Sartre of the cinema, probably because his films resemble the articles in "Temps Modernes." Here are several lines from *Amants De Brasmort*, a populist film in which sailors are "heroes," like the dockers were in *Un Homme Marche Dans La Ville*:

"The wives of friends are made to sleep with."

"You do what agrees with you; as for that, you'd mount anybody, you might well say."

In one single reel of the film, towards the end, you can hear in less than ten minutes such words as: *prostitute*, *whore*, *slut* and *bitchiness*. Is this realism?

#### PREVERT IS TO BE REGRETTED . . .

Considering the uniformity and equal filthiness of today's scenarios, one takes to regretting Prevert's scenarios. He believed in the Devil, thus in God, and if, for the most part, his characters were by his whim alone charged with all the sins in creation, there was always a couple, the new Adam and Eve, who could end the film, so that the story could begin again.

#### PSYCHOLOGICAL REALISM, NEITHER REAL NOR PSYCHOLOGICAL . . .

There are scarcely more than seven or eight scenarists working regularly for the French cinema. Each one of these scenarists has but one story to tell, and, since each only aspires to the success of the "two greats," it is not exaggerating to say that the hundred-odd French films made each year tell the same story: it's always a question of a victim, generally a cuckold. (The cuckold would be the only sympathetic character in the film if he weren't always infinitely grotesque: Blier-Vilbert, etc....) The knavery of his kin and the hatred among the members of his family lead the "hero" to his doom; the injustice of life, and for local color, the wickedness of the world (the cures, the concierges, the neighbours, the passers-by, the rich, the poor, the soldiers, etc. . . .)

For distraction, during the long winter nights, look for titles of French films that do not fit into this framework and, while you're at it, find among these films those in which this line or

its equivalent does not figure, spoken by the most abject couple in the film: "It's always they that have the money (or the luck, or love, or happiness). It's too unjust, in the end."

This school which aspires to realism destroys it at the moment of finally grabbing it, so careful is the school to lock these beings in a closed world, barricaded by formulas, plays on words, maxims, instead of letting us see them for ourselves, with our own eyes. The artist cannot always dominate his work. He must be, sometimes, God and, sometimes, his creature. You know that modern play in which the principal character, normally constituted when the curtain rises on him, finds himself crippled at the end of the play, the loss of each of his members punctuating the changes of acts. Curious epoch when the least flash-in-the-pan performer uses Kafkaesque words to qualify his domestic avatars. This form of cinema comes straight from modern literature – half Kafka, half Bovary!

A film is no longer made in France that the authors do not believe they are re-making Madame Bovary.

For the first time in French literature, an author adopted a distant, exterior attitude in relation to his subject, the subject becoming like an insect under the entomologist's microscope. But if, when starting this enterprise, Flaubert could have said, "I will roll them all in the same mud - and be right" (which today's authors would voluntarily make their exergue), he could declare afterwards "I am Madame Bovary" and I doubt that the same authors could take up that line and be sincere!

#### MISE-EN-SCENE, METTEUR-EN-SCENE, TEXTS

The object of these notes is limited to an examination of a certain form of cinema, from the point of view of the scenarios and scenarists only. But it is appropriate, I think, to make it clear that the *metteurs-en-scene* are and wish to be responsible for the scenarios and dialogues they illustrate.

*Scenarists' films*, I wrote above, and certainly it isn't Aurenche and Bost who will contradict me. When they hand in their scenario, the film is done; the *metteur-en-scene*, in their eyes, is the gentleman who adds the pictures to it and it's true, alas! I spoke of the mania for adding funerals everywhere. And, for all that, death is always juggled away. Let us remember Nana's admirable death, or that of Emma Bovary, presented by Renoir; in *La Pastorale*, death is only a make-up job and an exercise for the camera man: compare the close-ups of Michele Morgan in *La Pastorale*, Dominique Blanchar in *Le Secret De Mayerling* and Madeleine Sologne in *L Eternel Retour*: it's the same face! Everything happens *after* death.

Let us cite, lastly, that declaration by Delannoy that we dedicate, with perfidy, to the French scenarists: "When it happens that authors of talent, whether in the spirit of gain or out of weakness, one day let themselves go to "write for the cinema," they do it with the feeling of lowering themselves. They deliver themselves rather to a curious temptation towards mediocrity, so careful are they to not compromise their talent and certain that, to write for the cinema, one must make oneself understood by the lowliest. (*"La Symphonie Pastorale* ou *L'Amour Du Metier*," review Verger, November 1947).

I must, without further ado, denounce a sophism that will not fail to be thrown at me in the guise of argument: "This dialogue is spoken by abject people and it is in order to better point out their nastiness that we give them this hard language. It is our way of being moralists."

To which I answer: it is inexact to say that these lines are spoken by the most abject characters. To be sure, in the films of "psychological realism" there are nothing but vile beings, but so inordinate is the authors' desire to be superior to their characters that those who, perchance, are not infamous are, at best, infinitely grotesque.

Well, as for these abject characters, who deliver these abject lines - I know a handful of men in France who would be INCAPABLE of conceiving them, several cineastes whose world-view is at least as valuable as that of Aurenche and Bost, Sigurd and Jeanson. I mean Jean Renoir; Robert Bresson, Jean Cocteau, Jacques Becker, Abel Gance, Max Ophuls, Jacques Tati, Roger Leenhardt; these are, nevertheless, French cineastes and it happens - curious coincidence - that they are *auteurs* who often write their dialogue and some of them themselves invent the stories they direct.

THEY WILL STILL SAY TO ME . . .

"But why," they will say to me, "why couldn't one have the same admiration for all those cineastes who strive to work in the bosom of this "Tradition of Quality" that you make sport of so lightly? Why not admire Yves Allegret as much as Becker, Jean Delannoy as much as Bresson, Claude Autant-Lara as much as Renoir?" ("Taste is made of a thousand distastes" - Paul Valery).

Well - I do not believe in the peaceful co-existence of the "Tradition of Quality" and an "*auteur's* cinema."

Basically, Yves Allegret and Delannoy are only caricatures of Clouzot, of Bresson.

It is not the desire to create a scandal that leads me to depreciate a cinema so praised elsewhere. I rest convinced that the exaggeratedly prolonged existence of *psychological realism* is the cause of the lack of public comprehension when faced with such new works as *Le Carrosse D'Or (The Golden Coach)*, *Casque D'or*, not to mention *Les Dames Du Bois De Boulogne* and *Orphee*.

Long live audacity, to be sure, still it must be revealed as it is. In terms of this year, 1953, if I had to draw up a balance-sheet of the French cinema's audacities, there would be no place in it for either the vomiting in *Les Orgueilleux (The Proud And The Beautiful)* or Claude Laydu's refusal to be sprinkled with holy water in *Le Bon Dieu Sans Confession* or the homosexual relationships of the characters in *Le Salaire De La Peur (The Wages Of Fear)*, but rather the gait of *Hulot*, the maid's soliloquies in *La Rue De L'Estrapade*, the *mise-en-scene* of *Le Carrosse D'Or*, the direction of the actors in *Madame de (The Earrings Of Madame De)*, and also Abel Gance's studies in Polyvision. You will have understood that these audacities are those of *men of the cinema* and no longer of scenarists, directors and literateurs.

For example, I take it as significant that the most brilliant scenarists and *metteurs-en-scene* of the "Tradition of Quality" have met with failure when they approach comedy: Ferry-Clouzot *Miguette Et Sa Mere*, Sigurd-Boyer *Tous Les Chemins Menent A Rome*, Scipion-Pagliari *La Rose Rouge*, Laudenbach-Delannoy *La Route Napoleon*, Auranche-Bost-Autant-Lara *L'Auberge Rouge* or, if you like, *Occupe-toi d'Amelie*.

Whoever has tried, one day, to write a scenario wouldn't be able to deny that comedy is by far the most difficult genre, the one that demands the most work, the most talent, also the most humility.

ALL BOURGEOIS . . .

The dominant trait of psychological realism is its anti-bourgeois will. But what are Aurenche and Bost, Sigurd, Jeanson, Autant-Lara, Allegret, if not bourgeois, and what are the fifty thousand new readers, who do not fail to see each film from a novel, if not bourgeois?

*What then is the value of an anti-bourgeois cinema made by the bourgeois for the bourgeois?* Workers, you know very well, do not appreciate this form of cinema at all even



when it aims at relating to them. They refused to recognize themselves in the dockers of *Un Homme Marche Dans La hille*, or in the sailors of *Les Amants De Brasmort*. Perhaps it is necessary to send the children out on the stairway landing in order to make love, but their parents don't like to hear it said, above all at the cinema, even with "benevolence." If the public likes to mix with low company under the alibi of literature, it also likes to do it under the alibi of society. It is instructive to consider the programming of films in Paris, by neighbourhoods. One comes to realize that the public-at-large perhaps prefers little naive foreign films that show it men "as they should be" and not in the way that Aurenche and Bost believe them to be.

#### LIKE GIVING ONESELF A GOOD ADDRESS . .

It is always good to conclude, that gives everyone pleasure. It is remarkable that the "great" *metteurs-en-scene* and the "great" scenarists have, for a long time, all made minor films, and the talent they have put into them hasn't been sufficient to enable one to distinguish them from others (those who don't put in talent). It is also remarkable that they all came to "Quality" at the same time, as if they were giving themselves a good address. And then, a producer - even a director - earns more money making *Le Ble En Herbe* than by making *Le Plombier Amoureux*. The "courageous" films are revealed to be very profitable. The proof: someone like Ralph Habib abruptly renounces demi-pornography, makes *Les Compagnes De La Nuit* and refers to Cayatte. Well, what's keeping the Andre Tabets, Companeer, the Jean Guittons, the Pierre Verys, the Jean Lavirons, the Ciampis, the Grangiers, from making, from one day to the next, intellectual films, from adapting masterpieces (there are still a few left) and, of course, adding funerals, here, there and everywhere?

Well, on that day we will be in the "Tradition of Quality" up to the neck and the French cinema, with rivalry among "psychological realism," "violence," "strictness," "ambiguity," will no longer be anything but one vast funeral that will be able to leave the studio in Billancourt and enter the cemetery directly it seems to have been placed next door expressly, in order to get more quickly from the producer to the grave-digger.

Only, by dint of repeating to the public that it identified with the "heroes" of the films, it might well end by believing it, and on the day that it understands that this fine big cuckold whose misadventures it is solicited to sympathize with (a little) and to laugh at (a lot), is not, as had been thought, a cousin or neighbour down the hall but ITSELF, that abject family ITS family, that scoffed-at religion ITS religion - well, on that day it may show itself to be ungrateful to a cinema that will have labored so hard to show it life as one sees it on the fourth floor in Saint-Germain-des Pres,

To be sure, I must recognize it, a great deal of emotion and taking-sides are the controlling factors in the deliberately pessimistic examination I have undertaken of a certain tendency of the French cinema. I am assured that this famous "school of psychological realism" had to exist in order that, in turn, *The Diary Of a Country Priest*, *La Carrosse D Or*, *Orpheus*, *Casque D'Or*, *Mr. Hulot's Holiday* might exist.

But our authors who wanted to educate the public should understand that perhaps they have strayed from the primary paths in order to become involved with the more subtle paths of psychology; they have passed on to that sixth grade so dear to Jouhandeau, but it isn't necessary to repeat a grade indefinitely!

Notes:

(The original translation of this article in *Cahiers du Cinema in English*, no. 1, did not indicate the exact points in the text to which these notes refer.)

1. *La Symphonie Pastorale*. Characters added to the film: Piette, Jacques' fiancée; Casteran, Piette's father. Characters omitted: the Pastor's three children. In the film, no mention is made of what happens to Jacques after Gertrude's death. In the book, Jacques enters an order.

Operation *Symphonie Pastorale*: a. Gide himself writes an adaptation of his book; b. This adaptation is judged "unfilmable"; c. Jean Aurenche and Jean Delannoy, in turn, write an adaptation; d. Gide refuses it; e. Pierre Bost's entry on the scene conciliates everyone.

2. *Le Diable Au Corps*. On the radio, in the course of a program by Andre Parinaud devoted to Radiguet, Claude Autant-Lara declared in substance, "What led me to make a film out of *Le Diable Au Corps* was that I saw it as an anti-war novel."

On the same program, Francois Poulenc, a friend of Radiguet's, said he had found nothing of the book on seeing the film.

3. To the proposed producer of *The Diary Of A Country Priest* who was astonished to see the character of Doctor Delbende disappear in the adaptation, Jean Aurenche (who had signed the script) answered, "Perhaps, in ten years, a scenarist will be able to retain a character who dies midway through the film but, as for me, I don't feel capable of it." Three years later, Robert Bresson retained Doctor Delbende and allowed him to die in the middle of the film.

4. Aurenche and Bost never said they were "faithful." This was the critics.

5. *Le Ble En Herbe*. There was a adaptation of Colette's novel as early as 1946. Claude Autant-Lara accused Roger Leenhardt of having plagiarized Colette's *Le Ble En Herbe* with his *Les Dernieres Yacances*. The arbitration of Maurice Garcon went against Claude Autant-Lara. With Aurenche and Bost the intrigue imagined by Colette was enriched by a new character, that of Dick, a lesbian who lived with the "White Lady." This character was suppressed, several weeks before the film was shot, by Madame Ghislaine Auboin, who "reviewed" the adaptation with Claude AutantLara.

6. The characters of Aurenche and Bost speak, at will, in maxims. Several examples: *La Symphonie Pastorale*: "Ah! It would be better if children like that were never born." "Not everyone has the luck to be blind." "A cripple is someone who pretends to be like everyone else."

*Le Diable Au Corps* (a soldier has lost a leg): "He is perhaps the last of the wounded." "That makes a fine leg for him."

*Jeux Interdits*: Francois: "What does this mean - 'to put the cart before the horse?'" Berthe: "Oh, it's what we're doing." (They are making love.) Francois: "I didn't know that's what it was called."

7. Jean Aurenche was on the crew of *Les Dames Du Bois De Boulogne*, but he had to leave Bresson because of incompatibility of inspiration.

8. An extract from the dialogue Aurenche and Bost wrote for *Jeanne D'Arc* was published in "La Revue Du Cinema;" #8, page 9.

9. In fact, "psychological realism" was created parallel to "poetic realism," which had the tandem Spaak-Feyder. It really will be necessary, one day, to start an ultimate quarrel with Feyder, before he has dropped definitively into oblivion.

## **DVA UREDNIKOVA KOMENTARJA**

(v antologiji natisnjena pred Truffatovim besedilom)

*This article (originally written in January 1954 for Cahiers du Cinema, no. 31) is one of the important historical landmarks in the growth of auteur criticism, and bears glowing testimony to the polemical context in which it developed. In no uncertain terms, Truffaut attacks the "Tradition of Quality" which he saw as the province of the much despised metteur-en-scene (in contrast to the auteur), as well as a monolith of anti-clerical, anti-military, anti-bourgeois negativism masquerading as fidelity to literary classics. John Hess' two-part article in Jump Cut, nos. 1 and 2, 'La Politique des Auteurs,' examines the political viewpoint expressed here and in other early French auteurist writings quite thoroughly, stating: "La politique des auteurs was, in fact, a justification couched in aesthetic terms, of a culturally conservative, politically reactionary attempt to remove film from the realm of social and political concern, in which the progressive forces of the Resistance had placed all the arts in years immediately after the war." Hess' article is highly recommended as a supplementary text.*

*Truffaut's article also poses a clear problem for film scholarship insofar as most of the films to which he refers (the Tradition of Quality) are virtually unmentioned in recent film histories and seldom exhibited in English-speaking countries. Many national cinemas remain nearly unknown outside of their officially designated hey-day. That gaps also exist in the most readily available information on the French cinema - which Truffaut and Godard, among others, resurrected from moribund complacency - is not too surprising. Any thorough evaluation of the growth and development of the auteur theory and the New Wave, however, will surely need to bring to light many of these half-forgotten films from the 1940's and early 1950's in France.*

*Another useful source of early French auteur criticism is Godard on Godard with its rich supply of Godard's early writing.<sup>1</sup> Godard's essays - "Bergmanorama," a celebration of Bergman, or "A Time to Love and A Time to Die," even more giddy praise of this film by Douglas Sirk - are good examples of the glorification of beauty and moral vision above all else, a radical departure from Bazin's praise of self-effacement and a drastically different point of view from that of Godard's own later work.*

## AUTEUR CRITICISM

*Although many argue that the debate about auteur criticism is passe, it seems less resolved than suppressed. Film magazines manifest varying degrees of openness to auteur study, from relative indifference (Film Quarterly) to general acceptance (Film Comment); but the voices of grave doubt or critical salvation that characterized auteur discussion in the early 1960's have died down considerably. This could signal the gradual assimilation of auteur principles into the broader context of film criticism, and to some extent this is definitely true. On the other hand, it may represent a decision to follow separate paths which will make assimilation all the more difficult. My own guess is that the latter is more nearly the case, partly because of a tendency to perpetuate the association of auteur study with "la politique des auteurs," the method with the polemic first introduced by Francois Truffaut. The polemic joined formal, stylistic insights with moral, hierarchical judgments (of which praise for the films of Jerry Lewis may be representative as was Truffaut's vitriolic attack upon the literary, and liberal, films of France's preeminent directors in favor of solitary, and conservative, spiritual struggle in films like Europe '51, I*

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<sup>1</sup> Godard on Godard, translated and edited by Tom Milne (New York: The Viking Press, 1972).

Confess, and Johnny Guitar). *The two need not be wedded inseparably, and one of the most promising directions in recent work is, to me, the attempt to link up auteur methods of stylistic analysis with other forms of criticism (for example, genre in Kitses' Horizons West, structuralism in Wollen's Signs and Meaning in the Cinema, semiology in Cahiers du Cinema's essay on Young Mr. Lincoln), where even the problems of the various blendings bring out limitations and potentialities that auteur study linked to "la politique des auteurs" neglects.*

*For Andrew Sarris, auteur theory (which he admits is more an attitude than a systematic theory) was a progressive step beyond the "forest" criticism practiced by pioneer historians like Paul Rotha, Richard Griffith, and Lewis Jacobs.<sup>1</sup>*

*Auteur study stressed the how over the what, a history of films over films in history. Although the danger of excesses was already apparent to Andre Bazin, who warned against a "cult of personality" and other sins, we should also note that auteur criticism had seminal importance in stressing formal questions of visual analysis. This stress has prompted some of the re-examination of genre criticism, and (for me at least) has helped lay the groundwork for the more rigorously scientific and theoretical attempts to deal with cinematic characteristics of code, system, and structure represented by semiology and structuralism. Auteur study thus stands as a portal on the demarcation line between contextual studies and formal analysis, while one of the corrective thrusts in certain branches of auteur, structural, and semiological study has been to reintegrate an understanding of how a film communicates with what it is communicating. The guidelines for work of this sort have in many ways been set out in the later writings of Levi-Strauss, where he relates myth to culture, and in the writings of the French structural Marxist, Louis Althusser, whose concepts of "structuring absences" and of the ideology of ideology - the function of "constituting concrete individuals as subjects" - create space within a formal analysis for ideological interrogation.<sup>2</sup>*

*Of the essays included here, those by V. F. Perkins, Raymond Durnat, David Bordwell, Robin Wood, and Thomas Elsaesser represent what might be called typical director studies involving the identification of a personal style and a directorial identity through one or a series of films. Wood's article provides an instructive example of how a directorial personality can be sorted out of a film which was part of a minor cycle, which merged the talents of Hemingway, Faulkner, and Jules Furthman,<sup>3</sup> and which served as a vehicle for the talents of ~ Humphrey Bogart.*

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<sup>1</sup> We should recall, though, that these writers and others like John Grierson, Otis Ferguson, and James Agee frequently discussed directors at length. They emphasized discussing a director's treatment of social issues, however, an approach that did not seem to prompt as close attention to visual style as the more romantically inclined champions of auteur theory demonstrated. The two approaches are clearly not incompatible, but there is a sharp difference in emphasis (from theme to style) and a general tendency for auteur critics to be more socially conservative than their predecessors. The auteur critics ignore social history and the socially conscious critics ignore style, however, at their own peril.

<sup>2</sup> See the Overture to *The Raw and the Cooked* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), and "The Story of Asdiwal" by Claude Levi-Strauss; "Cremonini, Painter of the Abstract," "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" in *Lenin and Philosophy* (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1971) and "The 'Piccolo Teatro': Bertolazzi and Brecht" in *ForMarx* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), both by Louis Althusser.

<sup>3</sup> Furthman was a major but neglected Hollywood writer praised by Pauline Kael in her "Bonnie and Clyde" article in *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang*.

Finally, the selection from Stephen Koch's book on Andy Warhol, *Stargazer*, examines the characteristics of a non-Hollywood filmmaker from an auteur-like stylistic viewpoint as well as a biographical and psychological perspective. Although included in the *Structuralism-Semiology* chapter, Peter Wollen's chapter from *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, "The Auteur Theory," also relates directly to the texts included here.

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