

Film Appreciation
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Lecture - 08
Traditions in World Cinema French New Wave

Good morning. We are continuing with our discussions on traditions in world cinema.

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So, today's topic is the French New Wave. Now, it is an interesting area because it had a far reaching, a pretty long-lasting impact on world cinema. The keywords here are auteur film theory. We are going to look at certain directors. We are also going to look at certain major names associated with this movement called the French New Wave, which is so important in our understanding of traditions in world cinema. Some of the major names that we will be touching up on – Francois Truffaut, Jean Luc Godard and Alain Resnais. These films... The films that they are known for or perhaps a better way of putting it would be the most memorable films are Last Year in Marienbad, that is by Resnais. The 400 Blows or Les Quatre Cents Coups; that is by Francois Truffaut. Jules and Jim – that is again by Truffaut. And, A Bout De Souffle and Bande A Part by Jean Luc Godard; I mean just a handful films, but of course, these people had made much more than this.

Now, what is auteur theory? It was developed by a film critic – a French film critic called Andre Bazin. And, his disciples, who were a bunch of film critics such as Truffaut, Godard ((Refer Time: 02:15)) They declared and the manifesto was that, the director was the true author of a film. You get it like the way an author pens a novel, a book. Similarly, a director is also an author of a film and he is the one who can stake a major claim on the authorship of the film. So, it is not the studio, not the technical team, not the stars definitely or the genre; but, it is the filmmaker, is the director, who can stake a claim to being the real owner – the real author of a film. It all begin on 30th March 1948 when Alexander Astruc, who was a literary critic cum cine critic. And, he published an article called La camera stylo, which is like camera is a pen. And, it heralded a new wave in cinema. Astruc based his article on analogy comparing a film director to a novelist; and, a camera becomes his pen. The comparison implied that cinema had a language of its own. The idea was clear to elevate cinema to the level of other arts and to emphasize on its personal and psychological value.

The peak of the French New Wave is between 1958 and 1964, where several young film directors wrote and directed hundreds of films in France; these filmmakers were determined to shake up the film industry by presenting a collection of unconventional stories told in bold new styles. So, you have to remember two terms here: new styles of cinema and unconventional stories. I would you ask you to watch a movie like Jules and Jim here, which is about ménage a trois – three young people, two young man and a young woman – how they fall in love, and their adventures, their journey through history and then journey through life and then the end, they meet with. So, an extremely bold and adventurous kind of a story and unconventional story told in a very new style.

New Wave films were basically low-budget. They were produce quickly and were made to look spontaneous, unlike the high production kind of a cinema – glossy cinema; that was the order of the day. These films helped in launching a new generation of stars, for example, actors who otherwise would not have ever got a chance; they were not trained and they were not like conventional kind of actor, but they were given a chance to prove their abilities; and, soon a new generation of actors took over. Most famously, someone like Jean-Pierre Leaud, who was a very frequent star of all Truffaut films. So, we had actors, the New Wave actors, who would wonder about the streets of Paris without

makeup and were shot by hand-held cameras. Though it changed the cultural landscape, it was a truly social phenomenon that grew out of a range of influenceable factors.

An important reason for the rise of the New Wave cinema was France's post-second world war cultural context, Andre Bazin and influential film critic wrote extensively about films and soon created an awareness about films. People were encouraged to discuss about the relative values of films and directors. Thus, it all fostered a detailed knowledge of film history as well as film techniques and storytelling. Another land mark of this period was establishment of a film journal – a serious films journal and not a typical fan magazine – a film magazine, a gossip magazine. But, it was a very serious film journal called *Cahier du Cinema*. And, it was established in the 50s. It was an influential journal of French films and discussed world cinema. The policy was to put into practice the manifesto of the French New Wave directors. And, the idea – some of the basic ideas of the premises were they criticized films, which had high production values, which relied on studio and stars and followed the genre conventions.

Francois Truffaut built on this idea few years later when he wrote his essay called *A Certain Tendency in the French Cinema*, which is an essay that paved the way for the French New Wave. It denounce the tradition of quality, which was evident in film by the likes of Claude Autant-Lara and Jean Dellanoy, where the script was paramount and the emphasis was on psychological realism and artistic production values. Together Truffaut and Astruc challenged the conventional idea that film is a producers' medium causing the idea of *politiques des auteur* to become a central concept of the *Cahier* and the New Wave – The French New Wave. Now, the keywords here are *Cahier du Cinema*, that is, the journal and Truffaut's essay – *A Certain Tendency of French Cinema*. And again, let me repeat the idea was to do away with high production cinema, which relied on studios and stars and also genres, and to give – and to experiment with new stories, new kinds of unconventional stories; and, these stories should be told using certain new cinematic techniques.

Going back to Truffaut's tradition of quality, what he means by quality is that, something that is contrived and projects a bourgeois image of good taste and high culture for French New Wave style should draw attention to itself and style should become independent of the story. The new wave relied on a close relationship between criticism and film making; that is, the films were informed by manifestos, by film critics, who often

became directors themselves. The Cahier critics formed their pantheon of important auteur-directors including Jean Renoir, Robert Bresson, Jean Cocteau, Max Ophuls, Jacques Tati, Jacques Becker; and, they were great admirers of Hollywood or British Hollywood film director Alfred Hitchcock and also Hollywood director such as Samuel Fuller, Howard Hawke, Nicholas Ray and so on. So, though the auteur-theory has been hotly debated since its inception, it nevertheless is an important tool to understand films through an understanding of the director and their body of works. With this point, let me quote Truffaut to you or let me cite Truffaut's famous quotation that, I demand that a film express either the joy of making cinema or the agony of making cinema; I am not at all interested in anything in between. So, a cinema has to either capture the joy or agony and it should be – and it should be clearly reflected on screen.

French New Wave cinema was also quite influenced by film noir especially as it was prevalent in Hollywood. The reason was during the Second World War, American films were not screened in the occupied France basically the areas round Vichy; this means that, immediately after the war, there was a great demand for Hollywood products. Some of the much appreciated films were *The Maltese Falcon*, *Citizen Kane*, *Double Indemnity* and *Laura*. Through these films, the French cinephiles recognized that a key event has been taking place in Hollywood and they have been missing out on something that important. Now, most of these films were based on the noir film; so, based on popular novel – pulp novelists – works of pulp novelists such as Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler and James Cain, etcetera. Film noir combined the hard-boiled pros of these writers with European Expressionism – Expressionist cinematography, interplay of lights and shadows were so-called chiaroscuro lights; which immensely appealed to Cahiers. All these things immensely appealed to Cahier critics. And, this was one of the cinemactical styles and moments that French New Wave directors were extremely influenced by and tried to incorporate some of the features in their films.

There is also a difference between the French auteur and Hollywood auteur theory. So the auteur theory in Hollywood or in America was developed by someone called Andrew Sarris. For Hollywood, an auteur is a director who transcends the script by imposing on it his own style and vision or his signature style. An auteur film involves subjective and personalized filmmaking and especially through ((Refer Time: 13:27)) how a director's stages, scenes, lights, sets, costume, etcetera. For French New filmmakers, there is no

pre-existing story; what is important are the spontaneous events that took place in front of the camera. And of course, director is more important than the producer. Moreover, an auteur is a director, who manifests a consistency of style and theme across his works and believed in abandoning the script in favor of improvisation and spontaneity.

Coming to French New Wave, the label *nouvelle vague* was in other words ((Refer Time: 14:13)) was a cool journalistic expression already in prevalence in 1950's. The New Wave was initially a phrase applied to the post-Second World War generation in France. Identified as something – somewhat rebellious towards established French institutions. It was a generation that identified more with the great Hollywood star James Dean, Jazz music – Hollywood products rather than French philosophers or French actors such as Jean Gabin. So, we are talking about that generation which was quite Hollywoodized. Now, French New Wave practitioner – they rejected the cinematic practices of the 50's. They made low-budget films, shot on locations with new actors. In other words, they came out of the studios and they preferred natural lights to studio style lighting and preferred natural sound to extensive studio dubbing.

During the Second World War, American films were... Basically, we have already talked about that, the American films were not screened; and, this was the time when French filmmakers started sort of paying homage to Hollywood films and their styles and techniques of film making. They used light-weight cameras, lights and sounds equipment. And, it allowed the French – the New Wave film French directors to shoot in the streets rather than in studio. And, this fluid camera motion became a trademark of the movement, which shots often following characters down Paris streets. The ((Refer Time: 16:06)) and coffee bars became a defining feature of the films. These people – these filmmakers dealt with the stories about the young and the rebellious; they used the language of the youth were heavily influenced by the popular culture, especially the Hollywood popular culture. Generally, featured existential themes think breathless and think of the hero, who is – who exhibits what you can term only as so-called existential cool. And then, there was also a touch of acceptance of absurdity of human existence. So, that is influence of French existentialist philosophy here.

The characters in French New Waves films are often marginalized young anti-heros and loners with no family ties, who behaved spontaneously and often at amorally or immorally and are by enlarge, anti-authoritarian. There was a general cinecism

concerning politics. And, cinema reflected a deliberate distancing between a screen and spectators. They did not attempt to create feeling of empathy, but it was more like Brechtian kind of cinema, where the idea was to force the spectators to think rather than empathize feel with what is happening on this screen. The most important legacy of the French New Wave cinema was to create a strong authorial voice and it also led to the democratization of cinema with people trying... Everyone could now aspire to become a filmmaker, because these filmmakers prove that, films need not have high gloss, high glamour and high production values.

One of the key filmmakers of the French New Wave was Alain Resnais. He studied film editing at France's first film school IDHEC. And, after living college, he directed a couple of documentaries including *Night and Fog*, which was released in 1955, which is a highly evocative work on the horrors of Auschwitz. Influenced by comics, graphic novels and the exceptional works of the French writer Marcel Proust and the German writer Franz Kafka, Resnais's work reflect homage to all these three writers. His films illustrate a crossover between the developments in *nouveau roman*, the new novel and the *nouveau vague* cinema. In his first film, *Hiroshima mon amour*, which is based... which is a 1959 movie, which is based on a screenplay by Marguerite Duras, Resnais draws on the experience of his documentary short films. We are sure... We are told that, French actress is having an affair with a Japanese architect in Hiroshima, where she has come for a film shooting. And, Resnais uses documentary footage of the 1945 bombing of the city, that is, Hiroshima. And, the film began as a documentary about Hiroshima and the bomb. Our remarkable moment in the film is when the actor – the heroine of the film looks at her lover – the Japanese lover, who is sleeping and is outstretched right-hand twitches slightly. This leads with a jolt to the memory of the twitching arms of the dying German lover. So, this is like association of memory – associative nature of memory. So, it is quite Proustian in an evocative.

Resnais is a most controversial and still... The discussed film is a typical kind of film that film appreciation enthusiast talk about and classes talk about it, is called *Last Year at Marienbad* – *L'annee derriere a Marienbad*, which was released in 61. It is a film about loss and regret. And, it is quite derivative from Goethe – the German writer Johann Wolfgang Goethe's memories of falling in love with a young girl at a place call Marienbad. So, when Goethe was rejected by her, he penned a personal poem called

Marienbad Elegy. Resnais sets the scene in an elegant baroque castle, which has been converted into a luxury hotel. This is a haven for the rich and clientele spend their time with card games, theatre performance and a strolling in the Baroque garden outside. It is based on a screenplay by the nouveau roman novelist Alain Robbe-Grillet. And, the film is set like a puzzle involving three characters a woman is... There are no names. So, the woman is A and X is her lover, who claims to be; an M is perhaps her husband or any figure of authority. So, the film is narrated by X, who tells A that, they met last year and were lovers. A claims no recollection of this affair and pleads X to live here alone. X recalls a death; still A does not remember anything. So, Marienbad's reputation rests on its status as a puzzle that can never be solved, where the director flouts all the traditional cinematic rules between subjective and objective points of view. Like in most works of Resnais, the past ways like a nightmare and memory plays havoc with the characters. It is a poetic work and Marienbad enjoys its status as a touchstone of modernist cinema.

Another important filmmaker about whom we have already been talking about him, that is, Francois Truffaut along with Jean Luc Godard; Truffaut is best known and most influential of all French New Wave directors. He created strong narrative elements from his own life and was initially influenced by Hollywood cinema of the 40's. Later, he developed interest in the films of Howard Hawks, John Ford, Hitchcock. Five of his best films feature a character named Antoine Doinel, which is a thinly disguised version of Truffaut himself. I was telling about how the New Wave directors made personal kinds of films; things that they could relate to. So, his those films are Antoine et Colette, Stolen Kisses, Bed and Board, Love on the Run and of course, 400 Blows. He is also credited with classics such as Shoot the Pianist, Jules and Jim, Day for Night, which was released in 1973. The 400 Blows is his most distinguished film, which is interestingly dedicated to Andre Bazin. It is inspired by Truffaut's own life and it shows a young boy Antoine Doinel growing up in Paris in a troubled household like Truffaut, Antoine also has a very difficult relationship with his mother. He is neglected by his mother and his stepfather and takes refuge in the world of films just like Truffaut.

The young protagonist Antoine Doinel is played by the great actor Jean-Pierre Leaud. So, I have already talked about him earlier that, he was one of the new stars of the French New Wave films. A French New Wave gave birth to several promising actors; and, Jean-Pierre Leaud was one of the most important actors of this period. The film is a

result of an unwanted... The boy is a result of an unwanted pregnancy just like Truffaut. The boy lives in a very small apartment with his mother and stepfather and they are indifferent to him and he also faces problems with his teachers. He seeks so less in the company of his friends, stories by Balzac and cinema. The film was famously shot on real Paris locations. And, Truffaut pays homage to the process of filmmaking when young Antoine writes in an amusement park and centrifuged, which resembles a zoetrope in its earlier avatars. Zoetrope is a film equipment.

Jules and Jim is adapted from a novel. Another great film and sensitive film worked by Truffaut. Jules and Jim – they fall in love. They are best friends and fall in love with the same woman Catherine. They are separated by the First World War and later they try to live together in a sort of ménage a trios, which was very unconventional according to the morals of those times. The situation is made possible when Jules married to Catherine and he declare that he would rather tolerate infidelity than lose either one of them. He does not want to lose his wife and he does not want to lose his friend. So, he permits them to continue having an affair and continue living in the same house.

Day for Night, 1973 is also a personal account for – Truffaut's personal account of the precarious relationship between life and illusion and the off-screen upheavals between the members of the film production team. It stars Truffaut himself as a film director. And, there is a moment, where he as a boy, steals a poster of Citizen Kane from the front of a theatre and that moment finds a place in Day for Night. One of the most significant filmmakers of this period was Jean-Luc Godard, who is started off as a critic with Cahier du Cinema just like Truffaut and Chabrol and others. He also emphasized on style and form and is considered a radical filmmaker by any standard. He was influenced by the German dramatist Bertolt Brecht and his theory of alienation; and, he famously declared. You need a beginning, a middle and an end, but not necessarily in that order.

You remember Aristotle, who said there should be a beginning and a middle and an end; and, a plot should follow that order. And, Godard questioned it. His major films are Breathless, The Little Soldier, A woman is a Woman; I am just giving you the English translations – My Life to Live, Contempt, Alphaville, All is Well and Bande a part. Breathless is his most significant work, most famous work. And, according to the film critic, Roger Ebert, modern films begin with breathless; it is a 1959 film. The plot in Breathless centres on Michel played by Jean-Paul Belmondo, who is a small time

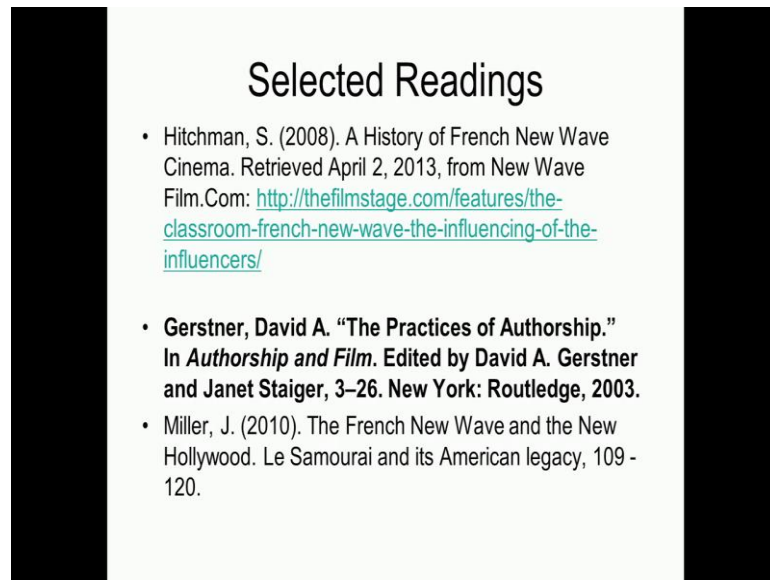
Parisian crook, who has just murdered a policeman. Anxious to flee the country, he persuades his girlfriend Patricia played by Jean Seberg to accompany him. It was a key film of the French New Wave and rejects the well-made traditional French cinema and adapted an edgier and more experimental style.

One of the key features of this film is the employment of an editing technique or a jump cut. The jump cut involves an uncanny jolt in a film's progress drawing the viewers' attention to disturbing elision of time and space. A film might cut abruptly from one location to the next without any attempt to employ those devices or matches of eyeline. You see when you watch the movie, it should match your eyeline; it should be at an eye level. But, a jump cut suddenly disrupts that and therefore calls attention to itself that, something is happening, which is not continuous. So, it disrupts the illusion of continuity. A brief history of jump cut – it was the French pioneer George Melies who first recognized that a jump cut could generate magical or comic effects. If the appearance of a subject film from a single vantage point was altered between shots. Although Godard was not the first to use or think about the possibilities of a jump cut, modern use of the technique has more or less come to be associated with him.

So, this is what I wanted to tell you about the French New Wave. And, it had a lasting impact on world cinema as we have been talking about Andrew Sarris, the leading film critic from America. And, he too supported the ideas of the auteur theory and propounded that, indeed it is the director, who is the sole author of his work. This is regardless of the contribution of the writers, producers, or actors. Sarris's *The American cinema* maps the history of the talking picture period up to 68 – 1968 into 11 categories of filmmakers with title such as Pantheon Director, Strained Seriousness and Likely Likeable. And then, each category files directors in an alphabetical order. So, what we are talking basically about is the directors' authority here.

And, what did a French New Wave led to or lead to? It led to the democratization of cinema, the idea that films could be shot using minimum equipments; they could be shot on real locations without the gloss of studios and also without the aura of stars. So, this led to the impression that, anyone who has a story to tell is free to tell a story. And, even today, we see with the growth of digital filmmaking and all, how film make more and more people are beginning to find their own voice.

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So, this is the selected readings. These are the selected readings. I would like you to focus on these. So, you have Hitchman, a history of French New Wave cinema; you have David A. Gerstner – The Practices of Authorship; J. Miller – The French New Wave and the New...

So, thank you very much and we meet for our next class.