

Introduction to Film studies
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Lecture No. # 16
The French Masters (contd...)

Robert Bresson

Good morning, we continue our discussion of The French masters today; we are focusing on Robert Bresson.

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But, before that I will just try to recap what we have been doing so far, characteristics of the French nouvelle vogue or the French new wave. So, we know that the masters we were discussing (O) the other day and they believed in casting, non professional, non trained actors to get kind of performance which was low on melo drama, that was one thing they the practitioners of the French nouvelle vogue. As there was a group, we have already seen lead by the critic Andre bazin who establish a journal called Cahier du cinema and these film makers rejected the cinematic practices of the 1950's, trufa franca

truffaut even went so far on writing an essay and it is a watershed kind of a piece called certain quality of French cinema.

And what is that certain quality or certain tendency of French cinema and what is that focusing on big budget and big star cast films basically based on these French classics and then when you adapt a novel in to film then all the problems that accompany, you have to cast big stars, you have to have big sets, you have to have the backing of a big studio and that is what truffaut means by a certain tendency or a certain quality of French cinema and these people that Nouvelle vogue directors they rejected these practices of the fifties. They believed in making low budget films and we have already talked about that using hand held camera and shooting on locations they came out of the shackles of the studio so real locations real people and of course, prefer natural light to studio lighting, natural sound to extensive studio dubbing we have seen all these.

Now, we are talking about a period remember rules of the game was made in 1939 and we are talking about a period of that is second world war and this was a time when American films were not screened in France. Remember there was a part of France which is called the occupied France occupied by who?

(O)

Good. The Nazis the Germany, Germans. So, American cinemas because America was supposedly the enemy and films were their movies were not shown screened in France. Now, immediately after the war there was a huge demand for Hollywood products and some of the much appreciated films included film noirs such as the Maltese falcon starring Humphrey Bogart double indemnity, this is the Billy wilder movie and Laura so the Otto Preminger movie. So, these were they belong to the category of film noir; this term also was coined by the French critics noir and these critics apart from the impress by auteur like Hitchcock and Howard Hawks, they also admire the techniques which Orson Welles introduced the perfect in citizen Kane, which was made in 1941.

So, the French cine fields the film critics they recognized that a major revolution is taking place. Which French cinema is unaware of and they are recognized that it is the key event in Hollywood; it is a key period in Hollywood?

(O)

Good that is going on French film noir; the so called film noir most of them were based on novels by pulp novels as we were talking about yesterday. James Cain we talked about Mildred pierce remember James Cain postman always rings twice and Mildred pierce Raymond Chandler, what did he write a great movie based on his very popular pulp novel the big sleep directed by Howard Hawks. We were talking about Howard Hawks starring Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall, so dash ell Hamlet who wrote a Maltese falcon Raymond Chandler James Cain and their kind of heroes, their kind of lords.

So, the Hollywood film noir combine the hard boiled prose of these writers, the noir writers with European expressionist cinematography and all these immensely appeal to the Cahier critics. Now, see noir and the hard head hero they were extremely popular with the French film makers and French critics does anyone remember that key scene from Godard's Breathless, which is often considered as a homage into film noir. Do you remember (())? Have you watched the Breathless? Is there any moment where that is from fatale, but a direct reference to the film noir of Hollywood is? There anything, any shot which you remember?

Does anyone do you remember, no hero the great Jean-Paul Belmondo he plays a very grey character morally ambiguous character in Breathless and his signature is stylish. He wears all those very stylish Taylor suits; he wears that hat and he is always smoking a cigarette. Now, there is a point when he comes face to face with the poster of Humphrey Bogart and the poster is from Harder; the harder they fall it is a film noir and he just you know the look in Jean-Paul Belmondo's eyes like pure worship. He looking at his hero who he wants to become which is very clear, that is Godard paying homage to film. So, we have already talked about other features.

The employment of light weight cameras, why do we need cameras as opposed to exactly hand held which can be used to shoot on actual locations, actually streets and lights and sound and all these equipments allowed the new wave directors to shoot in the Persian cities rather and in streets, rather than in studios, the fluid camera motion you understood. Can anyone tell me, what is a fluid camera motion as opposed to static camera exactly camera tracks you know we were talking about Max Opus and we talked about pan camera panning the entire scenario and then we have the fluid shots of Godard.

There is a particular scene Godard was once married to this beautiful actress Anna Karina not Anna Karenina that is Leo Tolstoy; Anna Karina you remember so they made the movie together I cannot remember the title of the film, where she enters a music shops; you know shops we sell music records etc not CD's those days but, records and she enters a shop and she says, I want something by Judy garland wizard of oz. She was also a song (()) I think so she is looking for some music by Judy garland and the camera just tracks Anna Karina across the shop as she looks for Judy garland on the shelves. And then she finds the record and she comes back and pays bill; the camera follows her throughout the freedom of movement freedom of camera.

So, that is what we understand by fluidity of camera motion and this is as a you know camera is never still and when you watch a movie like mean streets for example, which we will soon be discussing after once we finish Hollywood French. New wave then we will be stepping into that area also and scorsese's mean streets camera is never static handheld camera. Has anyone watched mean streets here? How many of you have watched mean streets?

(())

No, I am surprised we will do that soon. Then mean street is a text book I know you know watched all the greats by martin Scorsese good fellas onwards. So, I think that was the year when most of you were born. Good fellas are eighty nine, so around that period so coffee shops, coffee bars, Paris is known for it is coffee shops. All those intellectual discussions Jean-Paul Sartre (()) we know those existentialist writers so the (()) of Persian histories and coffee bars became a defining features; of all these films actors sitting in coffee bars on Persian Streets and handheld light weight cameras gave the directors that kind of freedom to shoot on actual location, which is that most recent movie by maniratnam I get that impression kadal has anyone watched it? How is this?

(())

Yeah, tell us why it is not good; I mean maniratnam is supposedly one of the pioneers of new, it is not alaipayuthey or a it is just an another basically an technically the camera and the music are very good the story is very mundane but, technically and who did the cinematography Rajiv menon that is the regular fine we talk about autism. So, a cinematographer and director actor the aravind swamy comes another feature of French

new wave cinema was that they did not believe in story and believed in improvisation on sets.

So, traditional linear narrative structure that classic linear structure was completely demolished and who was the people, what stories do they tell you about? Now think again mean streets and Bonnie and Clyde and Easy Riders what are they stories about the young and the rebellious the misfits the alienated hero. These films use the language of the youth watch Godard's Breathless and you will feel the some of the things he tells is dull then were Scandalist then and for some of us they are Scandalers even today and Breathless was made way back in 1960. So, using the language of the youth heavily influenced by popular culture, what do we understand by popular culture, I mean I do not like the way people use the word culture very loosely, you know this culture north Indian culture, this American culture, Western culture? What is culture? What is popular culture in common (()) popular culture it is used to refer to something there is not classic; that is not enjoyed by a certain (()) something that is (()) so popular culture same.

Cinema commonly refers to something like Bollywood or within India refers to the word acular, which is considered for the masses as opposed to certain strata, very nice. Now, see popular culture is simplistically put is that culture which is enjoyed by the masses commonly accessible; easily accessible. So, we understand that r d Burman is accessible to most and Mozart is not that is the idea so same in Hollywood rock and roll music accessible to most whereas, it often would not that is the idea. So, in these films language of the youth street jargon as opposed to very stilted kind of language that is cinema used at one point think martin Scorsese again think easy riders again born to be wild that is the signature theme of the movie they are not using some classical strain of music they are unlike (()) who begins movie with Mozart.

So, (()) is still meant for elitis for all his sympathy for none for common people but, people like Godard they broke away even from that so, Extensive use of popular culture especially popular Hollywood culture featured existentialist themes that we will talk about and acceptance of the absurdity of human existence. So, most of these heroes think trufas four hundred blows think Godard's Breathless band of outsiders bande a part, you know bande a part is a movie by Godard and it has been immortalized by tarantino his production house Quentin tarantino's production house is called a band apart.

So, the characters in French new wave films are often marginalized and anti heroes not conventional goody two shoes heroes loners, they betray no family ties behave impulsively spontaneously immoral and a moral and are frequently seen as anti authoritarian and all these features are found in classic; in the Counter culture Hollywood, new wave cinema extremely anti authoritarian again think bonnie and Clyde. Again think day afternoon anti authoritarian written all over it mean streets any other example easy rider of course, is a key text and we were talking (()) about (()) the other day all these movies shakes the foundations of traditional way of thinking and attitudes and believes and morals a general Sinicism concerning politics.

There was a student revolution in 1968 in Paris, are you aware of that student rebellion in the Persian universities in 1960's? Please, look it up it will fine tune your understanding of this entire cultural scenario murakami for instance in Norwegian wood makes a reference to that incident. Please, look at that what is Persian student rebellion a deliberate distanciation between screen and spectators often breaking the fourth wall Godard's characters is start talking to us breaking the fourth wall.

Otherwise, cinema is generally considered to be consisting of three walls they know such thing as they do not recognize, why because they want us to become one with the proceedings on the screen but, when you break the fourth wall to involve the audience in whatever is happening on screen and compel them to think rather than empathize and sympathize with characters. So, as (()) rightly said that people should cry with brains and not with that was what the French nouvelle vogue aspire to do any comments? Here any questions? So, I am just giving you an overview of what French nouvelle vogue was? All about before moving on to Bresson, so ask me questions please.

(())

Bogdonavich, yes it should be. It belongs to that its anti authoritarian, definitely family ties absolutely no such thing as family ties in the movie that means you have the freedom to choose your own father. You are not compelled to follow an authoritarian figure, just because you are born in a particular family. So, rebellion against that construct of family as well she lies this guy and she says I want you to be my father figure and not anyone else we are talking about paper moon and also watch the last picture show bogdanovich

again. What is up doc you are talking about same genre or yes in the same genre absolutely? It is a comedy it is a reworking of Howard Hawks bringing a baby.

Bringing up baby is a nerdy gicky kind of a professor romance between a gicky professor played by Cary Grant and light hearted girl as played originally by Katherine Hepburn and in what is up doc by Barbara Streisand and is a romance between the two of them love story; although based on a novel is quite anti authoritarian. The (()) examples in (()) Hollywood cinema how far do you think that this sort of movement has happened in India of course, we had one in parallel cinema movement all those movement by Neelam and Shyam Benegal. So, do you remember those films? There is a movie called Nishant, there is a movie called Manthan is based on real people shot on location is based on an entire dairy movement Amul and its set in Gujarat shot on actual locations mostly with non professional actors and all the grades which starred in Manthan.

Later on became pillars of heart, hearty cinemas in India, Naseeruddin Shah, Shabana, Azmi, Smita, Patil Girish Karnad but, they were not that great or they were not commercially successful actors, that they were first featured in Manthan is a landmark movie. According to me, before that there was Nishant again by Shyam Benegal Saad Mirza and he made a movie called Albert Pinto ko Gussa Kyo Aata Hai in Hindi; that means why does Albert Pinto get angry all the time, angry the original authentic angry.

Of course, we have our more beloved angry young man let us not get into that, so that angry young man remains but, Naseeruddin Shah was the angry young man in a couple of new wave kind of cinema in all these films adhere to all the conventions of Italian neo realism and French new wave of course, now they are here and they are now of course, they have been love sex (()) the very good example Balki is a good combination of realism as well as commerce but, then you have Santhosh Sivan who I would call poetic realist, he makes quite realistic films but, romantic they are poetic.

So, we had him for one of our conferences and he spoke extensively about his style influences so one of these days I will show you the recording from that lecture, who else is extremely Anu Rakesh his cinema is quite authentic, it speaks of the authentic people of India very realistic very much grounded in our socio political (()) and he often cast non professional actors, I mean you watch Gangs of Wasseypur except Manoj Bajpayee and some of the actresses none of them are recognized guy I mean Nawazuddin Siddiqui

is big. Now, after that all those movies and he was definitely not cast, because of his looks right star aura or whatever so what did French nouvelle vogue cinema what is the legacy, what did it give to us a strong auteurial voice?

So, everybody wanted to be an auteur for a very long time democratization of cinema about real people and about real themes that is what we mean by democratization of cinema. It is no longer a domain of the very elitist movie speaking the language of the common people, starring people who are very average who look like common regular people and not that so called movie star from here, we will move on to you have something to say. Now, we move on to Robert Bresson and in particular I am going to discuss his film called Pick Pocket. Do we have anyone here who is familiar with Pick Pocket but, heard of it good Pick Pocket is a classic ask me one of the best films I have ever watched?

What is it all about the hero is the Pick Pocket but, true to French nouvelle vogue cinema is a very intellectual, very existentialist inward looking loner sort of a hero and Bazin had a far reaching influence on all these film makers especially the film makers are from nouvelle vogue and also American Hollywood new wave cinema Martin Scorsese. For example, (()) by Bresson Taxi Driver Robert De Niro character there are several elements. Which are common the protagonist (()) Pick Pocket and Drivers (()) character just watch this scene? See how much music has Bresson used this is the scene as it's the chapter (()) so just pay attention to his acting style the protagonist heroes acting style, the narrative technique, the use of voice over use it how the camera moves, these are the things I want you to pay attention to and Paul Schrader has given commentary on this particular movie.

Paul Schrader is currently you know Paul Schrader is good screen writer for Taxi Driver frequent collaborator with Martin Scorsese also worked with him on Raging Bull and I guess the Last Temptation (()) Paul Schrader is a Scorsese combination Schrader is supposedly was supposedly the intellectual among these new wave Hollywood directors than directors the entire group and he has written a great seminal book delineating the works of Carl Dreyer you remember we talked about Dreyer Joan of Arc, the Danish maker remember Joan of Arc we were when we are talking about modernists. So, (()) I talked about Dreyer Carl Dreyer and the book focuses on the works of Dreyer (()) the Japanese master and Bresson by Schrader.

So, Bresson 1907 to 1990 made only 13 movies in career, which is spanning 40 years and believed in necessarily casting non professional actors, whom he called models actors are not nothing more than models not our olden models but, actors are models and believe in a dictate that all his transformation transforms you spiritually, intellectually diary of a country priest you can see across the background religion and spirituality and are common motives in his films. So, you consider the most (()) of all film makers not in the narrow sense of the word but, in a more spiritual more you know all encompass sense of the term.

So, you just watch the clipping from pick pocket comment sounds are very realistic the footsteps good music, how much background music did you notice? Any background music the hero is about to pick somebody's pocket? Generally it would be a company lot of thrilling kind of a music, there is no music it is all in a day's work for him know very regular anything else the action are really deliberate, when he puts the latch takes his jacket off and puts it on the (()) the way he does it is a deliberate sort of thing like he does every meticulous he is a very meticulous person the way he takes off his jacket at the end of the scene puts it up on hanger, hangs it very meticulously carefully up their lives very sparingly in a room and surrounded with books.

He is an intellectual, told very intellectual French philosophy, Russian philosophy that is what most of the time we find him reading when he pick somebody's pocket. He is holding a newspaper what about actor? He is a non professional he was not well known actor to begin with. So, it was a deliberate attempt on Bresson's part to cast non professional actor, what effect does it do? We see lots of emotion expressions on no that are one technique that people like Dreyer and Bresson employed very frequently that make the actors rehearse. So, well firstly cast non professional actors because there were otherwise there would not be any sense of lack of empathy, the moment you cast well known actors beloved actors your sympathies are directly automatically quit them no matter what roll they enact it is Scarface Al Pacino at (()) Al Pacino whatever he does is good enough for us.

But, the moment you cast a non professional actor what happens you are forced to think about the events you are not emotionally manipulated. So, eschewing the use of actors eschewing well known actors and stars eschewing the use of music, because what does background music generally does to us, exactly it leads our emotions. It dictates our

emotions; it manipulates our emotions, background music especially the way use in our cinema it tells us where to cry and where to laugh right and where to you know there is a certain kind of flute music playing and you know is a love scene. So, you know the other day I was watching a movie I would not tell you the name of the movie, it is a Hindi movie with friend of mine and the music starts playing and she nudges me and she says you know what it is a love scene, she is going to tell him that she loves him and I said how do you know and she said look there are two things; there is music pawan moon lit night secondly and thirdly this is boys pay attention to this.

She is wearing a pink dress, so everything falls in place it happen the way you know and its supposedly a more realistic kind of a movie made by one of those directors, who prides himself on doing not so conventional. Still there are certain pros but, here you do not know empathies or sympathize just to distance yourself from the whatever is happening and just think what is happening? So, the director is not making any judgments you make your own decisions or judgments about whatever is taking place on screen.

So, pick pocket bresson is considered one of the (()) of film makers his style includes realism along with absolute esitism, if you watch this particular scene and you watch all his films why this particular scene you will find that how all details are (()) very sparing extremely sparing use of all cinematic elements and he believed the cinema is interior movement. His major works include the angels of sin scripted with jean Giraudoux was playwright French playwright of that period. The ladies of the Bois de Boulogne 1945 which was adopted or adapted by bresson along with jean Cocteau, do you remember we were doing Cocteau beauty and the beast?

(())

Yes, so Cocteau was another important artist, painter, writer, actor film, director, playwright diary of a country priest is based on a novel by George Bernanos and tells the story of a young priest living in the country side. So, lot of a spiritual religious elements in the devil probably (()) he brought the theme of literal and figurative (()) one of his last films pick pocket starred the actor, you just saw martin LaSalle and marika green man, who feels alive when he pick pockets and is a pick pocket by choice this is the vocation. This is the career, when you are quite on the mark when you observe does

everything very meticulously, he is not forced to be a pick pocket that is the only way he feels alive.

So, it is a very existentialistic you feel alive, when you are doing some crime when you are committing a sin. Otherwise, you are useless you are dull; you are emotionally cannot feel connected to anyone unless and until he touches them in order to rob them and that is the only connection you feels it move it is a wonderful movie you watch it lots of his themes. So, bresson's themes regular themes the expression of spiritual interiority and also inferiority through concrete images and sounds very little dialogue very little music but, real life sounds and very concrete images his heroes alienated loners misfits extremely (()) and therefore, the influence on de niro and Scorsese taxi driver is inspired by (()) notes from underground the direct most direct influence on bresson's pick pocket pick up on south Street, a Hollywood film 1953 pick pocket opens with the very enigmatic caution the style of the film is not that of a thriller.

So, just because of the story of the pick pocket do not expect the thriller, here it is a very moral existential theme, there is a disclaimer on screen Michelle the actor, the hero is an enigmatic intellectual based on Dostoevsky's raskolnikov in raskolnikov is a famous character crime and punishment. He lives in a small room just like raskolnikov surrounded with books, who a petty thief who pushes moral boundaries by indulging in picking pockets in a way it is a critic of capitalism, because Michelle often dresses becomes a regular ways people always tell him you are well dred, you are quite educated why do not you take up a job he says I do not want to end up becoming somebody's slave or a regular wagon.

So, picking pocket is not the definitely only choice available to him, he makes that choice he is not compelled to by that so what bresson is discussing now here is free will versus coercive social forces, society demands certain things. But, this man wants to retain his free will and therefore, he chooses to become what he is he may or may not agree with him; he has a sick mother so, his family ties and he does not feels much attached to his mother. He has saintly girl friend, who suffers and suffers because of him but, his most satisfying human contact is made when he picks people's pockets bresson's adherence to the principles of French new wave acting should be draining actors of emotions and that what you feel when you look at his face drain of emotions; this is what

dreyer also practice and preach using non actors avoiders of extreme close ups in order to dispense with oneness with empathy avoiding music.

Because, he could not want to lead emotions influence emotions and use of voice over did you notice that use of and very (()) it is not an emotional voice (()) to it total rejection of melo drama. When mother dies nothing happens, so there is no background music no tearful farewells mother just dies and by bringing all these cinematic elements together what does he try to achieve allows the audience with great deal of freedom to interpret the actions on screen, he does not lead you off he does not tell you what to think or feel he allows you just watch certain concrete images and makeup your own mind about that so this we have already seen.

And anti authoritarian and misfits those characters and all these elements are found in bressons pick pocket existentialist characters yes of course, there is a famous montage when I and urge you that you watch the movie and there is a famous montage which has been emulated by several directors of picking pockets.

So, a montage where the hero indulges in pick pocketing and that is something that all of us that is a text book kind of a montage seen the movie finally, raises moral questions will we be judged and by what law what law of the oneses or the laws created by man or more universal a clipping and this is just a digression there is a scene when finally, Michelle is imprisoned and his lady love comes to visit him in the prison and they talk to each other through this grill the prison bar and the same scene is replicated by the Scorsese remember Scorsese and Schrader combination and Schrader is a great follower of bresson. So, was Scorsese and this is the scene from New York anthology remember New York stories is a set of three films made by Scorsese pieces life lessons starring nick nolte.

The other two films in that anthology are by Coppola and woody Allen. So, there is a if you have not already watched that enthologies called New York stories, so this is the scene from New York stories, where Scorsese pays his homage to bresson replicates; almost the same scene nick nolte a prisoner of his own cell a prisoner of his own creativity he plays a painter Scorsese influence on taxi driver again a combination famous collaboration between Scorsese and Paul Schrader both admires of bresson taxi driver 1976. So, following the same tradition the same conventions as bresson did using

a confessional narration a voice over a lonely alienated socio path kind of a hero looking for a reason to live the world for him is morally grey dark existentialist, absurdist almost meaningless world and a weirdistic look at the society.

So, most of the time you watch pick pocket through micelles eyes and in taxi driver is de niro's eyes and we were talking about close up of his eyes and mostly it is a weirdistic gaze at the world outside and Paul Schrader of course, tends to be a great admirer so we will be discussing bresson tomorrow and if you have any questions please bring them on tomorrow try to watch pick pocket if possible and we will be talking about bressons a man escaped in the next class.

Thank you very much.