



Another Cinema¹

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Abstract

It is necessary to confirm the place of film in the culture of each particular place and that filmmakers are only truly grounded if they make films in the spirit that emanates from their own traditions: not in imitation of second hand genres that have dominated our screens almost since cinema began. It means being passionate about your roots and inspired by all creative and artistic expression rather than only by other films. In this article I talk about this in relation to my own experience and in relation to some particular filmmakers who represent the variety of cinematic expression now available to us from around the world.

Key-words

cinema, culture, tradition, filmmakers, creativity

Resumo

É necessário reafirmar o lugar do cinema na cultura de cada lugar em particular e, além disso, que os realizadores apenas se tornam verdadeiramente enraizados em seus locais se eles fizerem filmes mantendo o espírito que emana de suas próprias tradições: não imitando gêneros de segunda mão que têm dominado as telas quase desde o início do cinema. Isso diz respeito a ser apaixonado em relação a suas raízes e inspirar-se em cada expressão criativa e artística em vez de inspirar-se apenas em outros filmes. Neste artigo, proponho debater tal questão em relação à minha própria experiência e em relação a alguns realizadores em particular, que representam a variedade da expressão cinematográfica agora disponível a nós ao redor do mundo.

Palavras-chave

cinema, cultura, tradição, realizadores, criatividade

Some years ago Victor Erice was a guest at the National Film Theatre in London. At the end of a discussion with Geoff Andrew in front of the audience he was asked what he thought about the future of cinema. He became extremely serious and said he was very pessimistic. He was especially pessimistic about small cinemas or the cinema in countries which had neither the means to maintain its own industry nor the control over its own distribution and exhibition that could guarantee that indigenous films would get enough screenings to justify the cost of making them.

It was an impassioned plea from a man who only has three features to his name. But if he never makes another film “The Spirit of the Beehive”, “The South” and “The Quince Tree Sun” will stand as an eloquent memorial to his name.

To lose even one national or regional cinema impoverishes us all and eventually will lead to a total homogenisation of the so-called product made deliberately to appeal to the lowest common denominator and peddling one view of the world – irrelevant to the way the vast majority live, breathe and dream. We must all do what we can to protect the threatened species of world cinema.

So this evening I want to take Victor Erice as my inspiration and talk about two things. Firstly I believe we have to confirm the place of film in the culture of each particular place and that filmmakers are only truly rooted if they make films in the spirit that emanates from their own tradition. Not in imitation of second hand genres that have dominated our screens almost since cinema began, since

the dominant form was borrowed from theatre. It means being passionate about your roots and inspired by *all* creative and artistic expression rather than only by other films.

Secondly I will talk about this in relation to my own experience and in relation to some filmmakers including those you have been able to view films by in the last couple of days

One thing most of us share in relation to cinema – at least my generation – is two revelations. Firstly the magic of films – usually moving in a continuum from heroes to identify with, to heroines or heroes to fantasise about. The second revelation is seeing one or more films that reveal a potential in the medium we had not suspected in the first flush of being swept away.

For me this second revelation happened at University. In particular there were two films; Ingmar Bergman’s “The Seventh Seal” and Akira Kurosawa’s “Rashomon”. Between them I realised that cinema could be about any agenda and that the form such films could take did not have to rely on linear narrative or one point of view. The idea for instance that a film could contain four versions of the same events as in “Rashomon” was itself enough to take my breath away.

These and other films contemporary with my college years made me believe that films were what I wanted to be involved in, despite the fact that I was studying sociology. After making a short film with some friends I managed to get a foothold in filmmaking but my own initiation into the work was very conventional and suddenly I seemed trapped in the efficient machine of mainstream filmmaking.

That was my experience until I worked as an editor with Ken Russell on several of his films. I am going to show you an extract from the most successful. It is called ‘A Song of Summer’ and deals with the last years in the life of the composer Frederic Delius when he was helped to continue composing by a young man from the North of England, Eric Fenby. The story is told from Fenby’s point of view who also helped to write the script. We join the film when Fenby has arrived at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Delius in the French countryside. Coincidentally they lived not far from the place where Renoir shot “Une partie de campagne”, that wonderful film which was actually put together by Renoir’s partner, Marguerite, whilst he was away in the USA during the Second World War.

There was nothing revolutionary about Song of Summer but it had a focus and energy, which fed right through the process and

touched me deeply as a young editor. Looking back I realise there was an analogy between Fenby trying to understand the desire of Delius to translate his thoughts into music and my own yearning to support the director's intention.

To be honest, Russell was as incapable of explaining what he wanted me to do as the editor as Delius was to explain the thoughts and ideas for music that had been gestating in his head for perhaps years. The encouraging thing for me was that, as the film shows, eventually Fenby managed to help Delius complete a considerable number of important compositions over the next three years.

Film and music are different languages – if you can call them languages –, but putting the right notes in the right order on manuscript paper involves an understanding not totally dissimilar to putting the right shots in the right order in cutting a film.

However it is possible when cutting to make an attempt, which in itself reveals what might be possible. Both film and music clearly have a strong dependence on rhythm. Both also derive their effect on a balance between sound and silence – or in film between action and stillness.

I remember showing the Delius film to the late great pianist, Edith Vogel, when I persuaded her to do a masterclass at the NFTS – one of my attempts to open the eyes and ears of students to the value of the other arts. She said she liked the film but said there was not enough silence – she was right, but I couldn't say how much I had struggled to create those moments of silence and stillness, which can resonate in the minds and hearts of any audience.

What would Edith now say if she saw the Bourne or Bond films or much of modern cinema, which mistake speed and fast cutting for meaning? Or perhaps it is more a cynical device to hide the emptiness of those films? I suspect Edith Vogel would have run screaming from the cinema – or more likely slipped quietly out to find refuge in a place of meditation.

But at the same time I was learning my craft as an editor, the French New Wave swept us all away and made another kind of cinema possible and visible. The mentor to those so-called auteurs was one very special man: André Bazin.

A brief comment on the “auteur theory”, a label which was invented by critics but has stuck ever since. When I researched and wrote the book on Truffaut's “La Nuit americaine” (Day for Night), I discovered something of the reality of the way he and his comrades worked.

The first discovery was very unusual. In the film, when Truffaut is rewriting a scene overnight, on the wall of his hotel room you can see what looks like a chart of the film.

For my research I visited the offices of Truffaut's company – Les Films du Carrosse – it was still maintained after his death by his former wife, Madeleine Morgenstern, and she gave me complete access to the archives. I was searching for any material that related to the film. Eventually on the very top of some high shelves I spied a length of rolled up paper. I fetched a ladder and retrieved it. As I unrolled it on Truffaut's desk I realised it was the document in the film. In fact it was the structure of the film scene by scene in different colours – since the structure of the film works on three levels: the film itself, the film being filmed and the lives of the cast and crew away from the cameras.

Having found the document, which was 10 feet or three meters long and actually a section of heavy duty wallpaper, I had to find out why it was in this form. Fortunately, my next appointment in Paris was with Suzanne Schiffman, who was Truffaut's career long assistant and by the time of "Day for Night" one of his co-scriptwriters.

She remembered the wallpaper and explained that while Truffaut was finishing his previous film, "Une belle fille comme moi", they and the other writer Jean-Louis Richard, were staying in a villa, near Nice whilst developing the screenplay. They were having real problems with the structure – with the three levels I mentioned. In the dining hall there was this massive table for banquets. One of them, she didn't remember who, realised that they needed to lay out the structure in a big enough form to use it as a kind of battle plan. A roll of wallpaper was the obvious answer.

If I could show you the roll of paper, you would immediately make one clear observation: there are three styles of writing, namely those of Truffaut, Suzanne Schiffman and Richard. Here is evidence of collaboration literally writ large. In fact, there is no film of Truffaut that doesn't have at least one other writing credit alongside his name.

If that is not enough to open up the question of the nature of auteurism, then my discussions with the editors underlined how the collaboration worked. Truffaut visited the cutting room on most days, usually for an hour or so. He would seldom comment on particular cuts, but they said his signature was all over the film by a kind of osmosis.

In fact, what the editors Yann Dedet and Martine Barraque stressed more than anything else to me was the problem of dealing with Truffaut's moods which affected his ability to focus positively on the work. All editors will recognise the phenomenon, as we have all experienced the anxiety associated with the arrival of some directors into the cutting room on each particular visit.

My point here is that the really clever thing about so-called auteurs is that they choose their collaborators very carefully. In fact, even the visual style of most French New Wave films owes more to the cameramen, Raoul Coutard and Henri Decae, than to any visual master plan emanating from the directors. It was always thus: How much do we owe the visual quality of Griffith's films to his cameraman Billy Bitzer? Even the invention of the syntax of conventional film?

Truffaut was always subject to moods and insecurities, and we have to thank Bazin for virtually adopting him when he seemed doomed to a life on the wrong side of the law as a wayward teenager. "Les Quatre cents coups", Truffaut's first feature film is a fairly accurate picture of his troubled early life; sadly, Bazin didn't live to see the film realised.

But returning to Bazin himself: In one of the essays which were later collected in the seminal work: "What is Cinema?", André Bazin expressed the notion that if two or more elements are essential to a scene, then cutting is forbidden – that their coherence must be respected by being seen in the same shot rather than only related by being cut together.

Few filmmakers have the courage to follow this rule or to even work through the implications. Even Robert Flaherty whose "Nanook of the North" Bazin quoted as authentic in this sense couldn't follow it through when faced with the boy and the alligator in the Louisiana swamps – there is no shot of the two in the same frame, although we can understand why not. However, directors such as Renoir and Wyler tended to contain significant action within the frame rather than achieving connections by montage. Visual integrity signified a moral integrity. Aesthetics and ethics are merged.

The films that you may have seen in preparation for this talk represent for me work that is all in the spirit of Bazin, despite their individuality, and encourage me to think all is not lost to the deprived

and broken form of cinema we are force fed with most of the time.

You were unable to view the work of the Iranian master, Abbas Kiarostami – for me “The Wind will Carry Us” and “Taste of Cherry” are examples of this poet, painter and filmmaker’s consummate skill in presenting the world or his view of it in a way that feels unmediated by self-conscious affectation. It does not surprise me that Kiarostami has collaborated with Victor Erice (“Correspondences”, 2007). Their deep affinity is reflected in a mutual admiration. Their book is a unique document between two such seers.

Jean-Luc Godard is reported as saying: “Cinema was born with Lumière and died with Kiarostami”. I believe on the contrary, that he is part of a renaissance in a very deep sense.

There is a moment from “Five”, his film dedicated to Ozu Yasujiro which demonstrates to me that the transcendent can make you laugh. It is the sequence of the ducks.

Strangely you could argue that Bazin’s rule doesn’t go far enough – here there is no cut but how do we know what is outside of the frame which provokes the action of the ducks?

They are as if going to church and then rushing away because the devil has appeared from behind the altar. And the sound – are those really the ducks feet we hear? Actually there were 800 ducks and a duck keeper who was able to herd them like a pied piper, it is the only crowd scene in a Kiarostami film since he can’t stand the idea of a horde of extras. In context, this scene is such a change of tone since the other sequences are purely single images that provoke meditation rather than laughter.

It is not surprising to me that Kiarostami writes short poems similar to haiku: it is the poetic equivalent of distilled profound thought conveyed through the juxtaposition of verbal images. They have been collected in the book “Walking with the Wind”. For instance:

*The key hanging
from a woman’s neck
in a rice paddy
falls off without a sound
a kettle boils on the kitchen stove.*

Kiarostami lets us make connections that are already embedded in his images and sounds, but if we filmed this simple stanza what

questions must we answer? How long would we need to hold on the woman in the paddy field before the key drops?

If we shot the scene should there be just one cut to the kettle – or would the kettle be established first – we would have to answer questions like: what is the connection between a woman’s neck/a key/the kettle – beyond the visual – and can we convey that on film? Is she planting rice, checking the new green shoots or harvesting – what effect does that decision have on our response to the images? How would sound reflect the thought? Or support the emotion?

I believe all these are editing questions, though not necessarily cutting questions. I am only interested in editing as an integral part of the concept and realisation of films – not as something in isolation – this is a major part of the reasons for my choice of filmmakers.

I am glad you have had the opportunity to sample the work of Nuri Bilge Ceylan. If you have seen “Three Monkeys” you will appreciate his style. If you want to enjoy more of his image making, his cinemascope black and white images of Turkey can be viewed on his website and they have also been published in a book. For me they are some of the most evocative stills that combine people and landscape, the elements that speak in tandem are there in their Bazinian wholeness. Just as the building in which the family live in “Three Monkeys” seems to me like a sailless ship adrift in a wasteland that is the remnants of a civilisation which has lost its rudder.

His images always contain the emotion, which is never achieved by cutting. Thus the appearances of the spectre of the dead boy are immaculately conceived within the shot of the person he is appearing to, though only “we” the audience see the two of them within the frame. You know the character “feels” the presence and that is profoundly more evocative than actually seeing. Does this take Bazin’s idea to another level?

Ceylan has this to say about editing: “The final selection of scenes that will be in the finished film is mainly down to the editing process. I’m incapable of knowing beforehand. Cinema is very special because all these images cannot take on any sense until that precise moment when you put them together. In my opinion, someone who is capable of knowing in advance the end of a film – that must be possible, but such a way of working pushes filmmaking towards didacticism”.

For a director, all the possibilities present in filmmaking from editing to sound editing represent a continual quest to offer more

potential and more perspectives, to considerably increase the richness of a film. I never stop considering all the options. In the relationship between filmmaking and our spirit we haven't yet managed to fully exploit the power of cinema.

This is the kind of statement that makes Godard's presumption about the death of cinema arrogant and sterile. It is time to listen to other voices who still yearn for and search after an ever more acute expression of their spirit through the medium.

When he won the award for best director at Cannes for this film *Ceylan*, he said: "I dedicate this award to my beautiful and lonely country, which I love passionately".

You can feel in this and in "*Uzak*" and also in "*Climates*", his other major films, that his soul is embedded in his own culture and environment.

I am glad you have had the opportunity to watch a film by Aki Kaurismäki, "*The Man without a Past*". I think his humour and offhand style, both in his films and his actual persona, contribute to him being underrated as a filmmaker. Yet some people have called him the Finnish Bresson. He is a biting critique of capitalism disguised as the pathos and desperation of no-hopers. He has such a lugubrious sense of humour which often depends on not-cutting, whilst we share the failings and failures of his sad characters. Buster Keaton would have enjoyed a drink or two with this serious clown. If you watch another of his films "*Ariel*" look at how Kaurismäki holds on to the shot for the collapse of the lean-to garage after the hero has driven away in a car left to him by a man who has committed suicide. It is the pause before the shed falls that makes the moment cinematic.

I am very glad you have had the opportunity to watch Chantal Akerman's "*Jeanne Dielman*", and I recommend that you try to see both "*Les rendez-vous d'Anna*" and "*From the East*". Delphine Seyrig is hypnotic. Compare her performances in Resnais' "*L'année dernière à Marienbad*" and "*Muriel*" or Truffaut's "*Baisers volés*". Her performance here owes nothing to her experience either as an actress or a woman. Her concentration on the details of the daily routine is partly down to not being used to cooking and cleaning. I think Chantal had to teach her how to peel potatoes and boil an egg, but the meticulous attention to the diurnal tasks is a great part of the film's quality and the shocking denouement. Ask yourself if a more conventional presentation of this woman's life would do it justice.

“Les rendez-vous d’Anna” is about a woman filmmaker. The lead is played by Chantal’s frequent collaborator Aurore Clement, whom you may know from “Apocalypse Now Redux” where she plays the plantation wife in the sequence originally removed from the film.

Ironically I think it is the most authentic group of scenes in that film and resonates with a sense of the colonial history of that country, prior to the US involvement.

Clement as the filmmaker in “Les rendez-vous d’Anna” struggles to relate to people, even her mother and boyfriend. They all are preoccupied with problems of their own which prevent them from seeing or sympathising with her needs. It is a poignant piece portraying a character who feels unable to find peace even in isolation. There is discretion in the cutting and in the decisions about what to show. How space is used and what is not shown are here connected to the emotional tone rather than the concrete physical content of the narrative. The opening of this film is the clearest statement that I know by a filmmaker that cinema did not need to follow in the footsteps of Lumiere. It opens on a shot looking down the platform at a railway station. Eventually the train arrives – but from behind the camera and the passengers get off and walk away from us.

I know you have also had the chance to view Lucrecia Martel’s “La Nina Sante” (The Holy Girl) and I am sure many of you have seen her more recent film “The Headless Woman”.

I am particularly impressed by her use of sound to involve us in the inner lives of her characters. This is made all the more effective by her visual style often shooting very close but with compositions that are dynamically off-centre. The editing has to reflect this off-beat approach. Martel is clearly not interested in portraying good and evil as black and white – seeing all the shades of grey that exist in human personalities, which makes her all the more thought provoking.

Finally you were able to view Carlos Reygadas’ third feature “Silent Light”: almost like science fiction to discover a community of Menonites in Northern Mexico. Reygadas fascinates me because his journey to filmmaking involved coming to Europe after studying law in Mexico and falling in with a bunch of film students and seeing the light so to speak. Despite his inexperience I am moved to my soul by his situations and characters.

The non-actors are so committed and convincing in a way that

no recognisable stars could be. Reygadas certainly appreciates the value of holding a sequence shot without cutting. But it is also about detail – remember the shot from outside of the back of the van inside which a Jacques Brel concert is running on a ancient TV and the leading characters contrive to hold hands, perhaps for the last time. “Silent Light” is the least sensational of his films, just note how the woman’s resurrection is played in a shot that includes those who witness it.

I have to say that the filmmakers whose work has been shown come from a much longer list of those I admire for similar reasons. I would have liked to include Claire Denis from Africa via France: for instance “Beau Travail” (does any film have such an hypnotic ending as the gyrating movements of Denis Lavant?), “Vendredi Soir”, “35 Shots of Rum” or the corruscatingly moving work of Pedro Costa, whom I am sure needs no introduction from me. Or further the Dardenne Brothers from Belgium, Theo Angelopoulos from Greece or Bela Tarr from Hungary.

That is, without extending the list to the Far East – Japan, Vietnam, Korea, Thailand – source of many wonderful films these days which speak eloquently about their own cultures and concerns. Any single example can only represent one take on that area of the world. For example, the Taiwanese director Hou Hsiao Hsien – not a new filmmaker, – but hewho made a very special film to mark the anniversary of Ozu Yasujiro’s birth which is called “Cafe Lumiere”. Ozu is one of the primary antecedents to most of these filmmakers I am talking about, and if you haven’t seen his films I recommend you start with “Tokyo Story”.

For me, the lack of privilege given to the camera is significant in what I feel is a real authenticity, and definitely a direct reflection on Ozu’s approach; often you will be given a back view of two characters as they contemplate or reflect on their lives. Our point of view is as observers, without dominating the events we see. This is what I see as the most important difference from conventional cinema and the editing has to reflect that stylistic form. Primarily, this means cutting is used with discretion rather than like the machine gun staccato interruptions of contemporary montage. But more than that it represents another way of presenting life – not as if it is staged for the camera.

All of these filmmakers represent for me the desire to transcend

the limitations of form which is present in all creative expression, especially in the performing arts so that ideally the content is so exquisitely expressed that the form dissolves.

Part of my education as an editor was the opportunity to cut films about all kinds of artists. For instance apart from Delius, the composers Wagner and Schumann. Or writers, from John Milton to George Eliot and Virginia Woolf. Or painters such as Paul Klee. From these experiences and from the study it led me to I formed thoughts about the analogies with cinema. Not only that, but I began to realise the way the arts stimulate each other and are part of the whole culture if used to the full effect.

For instance the Wagner film taught me several lessons – firstly the actor playing Richard Wagner was as overbearing and arrogant as the real character. It meant he played every scene at his own pace, including separating reactions from speech. He would deliberately react, pause then speak or speak, pause and eventually react as though this mechanical separation was the way humans normally behave. This made the rhythm of editing very difficult to control. Often the natural reaction to a situation was just not given by him. From this I learnt about the art of controlling rhythm and stealing reactions from anywhere they could be lifted and placed where I needed them. Often this would be before the clapperboard or after the director shouted cut.

The film was based around the composition of “The Siegfried Idyll” and its first performance after the birth of Wagner’s son by Cosima. It was cutting this music that showed me what Bresson called “musical delectation”, in the way evocative music will always swamp the inner feelings of a film, like too much sugar takes the edge of a good coffee or too much lime will spoil a caipirinha.

Getting to know about Schumann disturbed me, partly because of his own split personality that finally caused his tragic death and partly because I am also a Gemini – not just the knowledge that our emotions are a delicate balance between elation and depression, but haunted by there always being two sides to an argument, two valid opinions: how to square this or even represent this in dramatic expression? How does the rupture of a cut avoid misrepresenting the truth?

Then the writers – editing a film on John Milton and his descent into blindness:

Remember his sonnet:

*"When I consider how my light is spent
'ere half my days in this dark world and wide
and that one talent which is death to hide
lodged with me useless".*

which ends with:

"They also serve who only stand and wait".

It is perhaps the most moving line in all English poetry, but for me it is also a mighty blast at the people who believe action is the only measure of value, when most action is negative. This is from a man who survived civil war, regicide, the plague and the Great Fire of London yet managed to write "Paradise Lost".

Then George Eliot – or Mary Anne Evans – reminding us that only a century or so ago women wrote under male pseudonyms just to get published and be taken seriously. But she was modest to the end. Even Emily Dickinson preferred to be published anonymously or not at all if she had to adopt a male persona. Her rejection of celebrity is more and more relevant:

*"I'm nobody! Who are you?
Are you nobody too?
Then there's a pair of us – Don't tell!
They'd banish us, you know".*

*"How dreary to be somebody!
How public like a frog
To tell your name the live long day
To an admiring bog!"*

The bog that is created by tabloid journalism or reality TV would have driven Emily even more quickly into a reclusive existence. Personally I found the world of George Eliot's characters much more appealing than those of Jane Austen or even the Brontë's – millers and weavers are a breed much closer to that of a cobbler or shoe repairer like my father.

Then there was a film on Virginia Woolf, which surprised me because her world was very remote from mine. Surprised on the

level of recognising how cleverly she was able to portray both the outer world of appearances and the inner world of hopes and desires. How to represent this in film? The tempting but dangerous device of the voice over, as a literary equivalent – but whose point of view are the images representing? Cutting for sub-text is an art in itself very much dependent on whether the screenplay and realisation are good enough to give the right opportunities.

Finally, from my editing recollections a film on the painter Paul Klee. Recently I was told the story of the time that he and Kandinsky were both working at the Bauhaus. Klee had his studio above Kandinsky. Every day Kandinsky found his work was interrupted and disturbed by the noise from above, as though Klee was struggling with some intruder. Finally Kandinsky could stand it no longer and stormed upstairs and burst into Klee's studio to find him prancing around in front of his canvas. Kandinsky complained that he could not work under these circumstances and Klee replied: "But don't you dance when you are painting?". So much like editing, which it has been said is like dancing, one of the reasons some editors prefer to work standing up.

My joy when cutting this film came from Klee's description of how he saw the process of making a painting – he described it as "taking a line for a walk". Some of his paintings are truly that, you can follow the line from beginning to end, but even figuratively it is a wonderful metaphor for the process – not only the process of painting but of editing. Again, when editing, we should only interrupt the line with a cut if it needs to change direction instantly.

So what are the general thoughts we can take from the arts that are useful in cinema, especially considering editing as part of the whole work?

Many of the formal questions that always confront filmmakers were previously considered and resolved by painters. They fall into three main categories. Firstly, the limitations or confines of the frame. Secondly, the problem of perspective or depth of the image. Thirdly, the function of composition to reveal what the artist intends. Filmmakers struggle with each of these and the solutions for effective storytelling are a combination of the way we shoot and how editing is used to support it.

Two other questions overlap with the specific nature of film. Those are the use of image to tell narratives and the problem of the

fourth wall. This last one relates to the direct gaze, a subject that has fascinated me for some time, and that was the subject of a separate lecture I gave some time ago at the National Gallery in London.

It has to be emphasised that all these questions of how we use image and indeed sound are only relevant when connected to what it is we want to say – style and content are or should be inseparable.

Nor is it only the two dimensional comparison of painting to film that is relevant, even ignoring the recent revival of interest in three dimensional or 3D filmmaking. Sculpture also has valuable lessons for film. The Hungarian National Film School used to force camera students to spend their first year composing and lighting marble busts. Perhaps they still do. Why? Because a two dimensional medium needs to represent three dimensional objects convincingly. Not only so that the audience can believe in the representation but also because the face and the body express most of the meaning in narrative drama. Yet the eyes, the window of the soul, are “dead” in sculpture. At the same time dramatic action is much more convincing if we can sense the “bulk” of people and objects. The sculptor plays with this sense of bulk or volume to express his or her feelings and intentions.

On the other hand, writers often compare narrative film unfavourable to fiction writing. In his book “Consciousness and the Novel”, David Lodge is unequivocal about the limitations of film as compared with the novel. He asserts that cinema is unable to convey “inner states”, whereas fiction can describe the psychological lives of characters. Lodge is not alone in his assertion and it is difficult to argue against, except where a sensitive or poetic voice-over is employed as the equivalent of the storyteller, though this is often felt to be a crude device and against the true nature of cinematic expression.

It seems to me that the truth is far less absolute. Much of this potential for expressiveness has to do with the way the medium is employed. For instance, films that are overwhelmingly concerned with a dynamic and relentless plot do not even provide space for the audience to contemplate the “inner states” of the characters. Whereas a more studied and leisurely type of film encourages the audience to consider these things – without them being imposed.

This type of film is also likely to depend much less on cutting so that the *mise-en-scène* gives the clues to those that are attuned to looking for them, to the emotional and even intellectual thought

processes of the characters. Are we not given windows into the souls of Ceylan's characters, or those of Reygadas or Martel?

On the other hand, does fiction writing struggle with analogous problems to film? Yes, I think it does. Graham Greene said that "plot" was the lowest form of storytelling and the element that can easily overwhelm any attempt to express or address the more serious questions about the way we live. Most cinema does not pay heed to this limitation and suffers accordingly.

Alongside this is the question of art concealing art and the denial of the self in expression and in the development of style. Flamboyant cinema usually equates with superficial films. Flaubert said: "Human speech is the cracked cauldron on which we beat out tunes only fit for bears to dance to, when what we really desire is to move the stars to pity". If that is the true of speech, how much more true is it from the vast majority of films.

This leads me to Poetry, the inspiration for many filmmakers. Both Tarkovsky and Bertolucci had poet fathers and the latter was a successful poet before becoming a filmmaker.

Poetry is predominantly the most formalised means of creative expression, with the exception of music. And yet poetry can be the most emotionally charged and personal. Jacques Prevert, the screenwriter of "Les Enfants du paradis", that zenith of so-called poetic realism, was first and foremost a poet. His poems are very evocative and very imagistic, like short scenarios as in "Dejeuner du matin":

Here it is in French:

Il a mis le café

Dans la tasse

Il a mis le lait

Dans la tasse de café

Il a mis le sucre

Dans le café au lait

Avec la petite cuiller

Il a tourné

Il a bu le café au lait

Et il a reposé la tasse

Sans me parler

Il a allumé



*Une cigarette
Il a fait des ronds
Avec la fumée
Il a mis les cendres
Dans le cendrier
Sans me parler
Sans me regarder
Il s'est levé
Il a mis
Son chapeau sur sa tête
Il a mis son manteau de pluie
Parce qu'il pleuvait
Et il est parti
Sous la pluie
Sans une parole
Sans me regarder
Et moi j'ai pris
Ma tête dans ma main
Et j'ai pleuré*

and in literal English:

*Breakfast
He poured the coffee
Into the cup
He put the milk
Into the cup of coffee
He put the sugar
Into the coffee with milk
With a small spoon
He stirred
He drank the coffee
And he put down the cup
Without speaking to me
He lit
A cigarette
He made circles
With the smoke
He shook the ash*

*Into the ashtray
Without speaking to me
Without looking at me
He got up
He put
His hat on his head
He put on
his raincoat
Because it was raining
And he left
In the rain
Without a word
Without looking at me
And I buried
My face in my hands
And I cried.*

It doesn't matter what language – the effect is moving in its simplicity – and a film of it without dialogue and perhaps without cutting might transcend the mundane banality of the moment. I might even suggest to the filmmaker that the last gesture could be excised. If he or she just looks at the camera rather than cries how much more might we sympathise.

I would like to go on and discuss the relevance of Music, Dance and Theatre to our understanding of the way cinema portrays the world, but this could take several hours.

To encapsulate several influences that can point us to a different future I will however mention the variety of forms embraced by these performance arts. In particular, music has the orchestral suite alongside the symphonic form. Dance has imitated this in the choreography of several pieces on a shared theme and theatre, certainly since Beckett, has been host to many fractured dramas, sometimes held together by emotional ties rather than narrative ones.

It seems to me that the neuroses of our modern society and the fragmentation that our bodies and minds face in surviving each day must find reflection in the way films work in future. One filmmaker that springs to mind who is in tune with this is the Swede Roy Anderson. “Songs from the Second Floor” is a series of narratively unconnected vignettes that accumulate in their enervating validity.

We should finally acknowledge that classical drama, as expostulated by Aristotle and exemplified by Sophocles, was relevant in form and content to the society of Ancient Greece in its objective to conserve the structure and function of the city state for the minority who had the status of citizens. Neither slaves nor women ever had that privilege.

Even if exposition, development, climax, catharsis and resolution, the three act structure, protagonists and antagonists are interesting concepts that can be made to fit certain kinds of dramatic storytelling, isn't it time to relinquish the notion that our modern society is best served by a form devised for the ritual retelling of myths and history? On the other hand, it's a pity that some other principles of Greek Drama, such as the three unities of time, place and action are not given more careful consideration. I understand especially the Ancient Greeks' prohibition of violent action on stage, since the causes and effects of action are the proper subject of drama – not the action itself, which is a distraction from our dispassionate consideration of ethics. If only filmmakers appreciated this fact more – and were less eager to make a killing at the box office, but more keen to encourage humanity to consider more closely and carefully the reasons for negative and destructive activity.

For me the example that shines most brightly is a filmmaker who even predated the first films of Bazin's proteges. Her name? Agnes Varda. From "La pointe courte" (1956) to "Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse" (2000), Varda has consistently challenged the form and taken a radical view of life through the lens. She had no film education before she made her first feature, which Alain Resnais kindly cut for her. Her background was in painting and literature and she had been a photographer for the theatre. There is a lesson for us all in her particular approach to cinema.

As a postscript, you might be curious why there are no British filmmakers in my list. That is largely because we have been and remain victims of sharing a language with the dominant monoculture of Movies – Hollywood. We play host to many of their big productions and they invest in the kind of films to be made in England that connect with that form.

But the unique voices we could and should support have always struggled to get their projects made. Terence Davies represents the best current example. His autobiographical trilogy and the moving

“Distant voices – Still lives” and “The Long day Closes” have a unique style. Fortunately after a gap of several years he has just started shooting a new feature, an adaptation of “The Deep Blue Sea” from the play by Terence Rattigan, but it shouldn’t be like this for the really talented filmmakers who simply want to use their own style to say something rather than imitate tired genres.

I hope the story is different in Brazil, but that is something I am currently ignorant about. I hope to remedy that before I return next year.