

The Development and Evolution of European Art Cinema: Focus on the French New Wave

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Abstract. The New Wave was the third film movement of real significance that emerged after the Second World War. Its exploration of film theories and ideas profoundly transformed the innovation of film creation and the interpretation of film philosophy to a new dimension, thereby reshaping art cinema. Starting from the historical context of New Wave cinema, this article focuses on the keywords of New Left art cinema (documentary, reflection, subjectivity) and their historical process of evolution within themselves; then it explains how the film critics R.B. Truffaut, director Jean-Luc Godard and the film critics R.B. Truffaut, and the film directors Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Luc Godard have contributed to the evolution of New Wave art cinema, and how the New Wave art cinema has been transformed into an innovative and philosophical cinema. It goes on to analyse the division of the New Cinema Movement (between the leftist Manualists and the rightist Left Bankers), "which to a certain extent weakened the independence of the aesthetics of the art cinema and led to its gradual infiltration and influence by Hollywood's narrative mode, and to the development of a new aesthetics of the art cinema and the New Wave movement's aesthetic turn in the May Storm. Finally, it explores the impact of the New Cinema Movement on art cinema. The kernel of values that have had a profound impact on cinema suggests that cinema is being transformed from a utopian art into a contemporary paradigm of cinematic art with certainty and historical authenticity.

Keywords: French New Wave, art cinema, authorship, renovation of film language

1. Introduction

In the second half of the 20th century, cinema underwent a profound transformation under the impetus of the French New Wave. This global film movement, which emerged in the late 1950s and 1960s, was born out of a critique and reflection on the European film tradition. It inherited the spirit of European avant-garde's relentless exploration of the possibilities of film form; It also absorbed the humanistic concern of Italian neo-realism, which was rooted in reality and close to the lives of ordinary people. However, the target of this film movement was the current French film industry, but also the global film industry at that time - the globalisation of the French "quality cinema" with its high investment, star-studded casts, sophisticated sets and highly dramatic narratives, and the Hollywood genre films. The "imperialist" discourse. The pioneers of the French New Wave took to the streets of Paris with small cameras, using film manuals and the theory of "authorship" as their

banner, and used unconventional cinematic language to announce the arrival of the era of a free and conscious cinematic ontology of the individual creative subject.

On the basis of the trajectory of the French New Wave film movement, this paper uses the method of bibliographic analysis to search for and read relevant information and documents. The advantage of this method lies in the fact that it can systematically explain the basic features, internal tensions, historical motives and subversive contributions to the world's art cinema genealogy, which is conducive to the conduct of the study.

2. Overview and background

2.1. Historical orientation of the New Wave

The French New Wave movement is commonly understood as the period between 1958 and 1964, its most explosive, creative and important core phase. It has been identified as the third international film innovation with worldwide impact, following the European avant-garde film movement of the 1920s and the neorealist movement of Italian cinema in the 1940s [1]. The New Wave movement comprises two main groups. The so-called New Wave movement has two parts, one of which was created by the Film Handbook. The five main critics of the film industry are the authors of the film. This group of passionate young critics transitioned into filmmaking. Their works are based on Bazin's documentary aesthetic, and they are good at photographing young people in Paris, favouring depth of field and long shots, as well as having a strong personalised style. The other group, the "Left Bankers", gathered on the left bank of the Seine, are the so-called writers' cinema. This group was slightly larger, comprising intellectuals born in the 1920s who were obsessed with literature, such as Alain René and Agnès Varda. The rise of this school of cinema had a strong impact on the Hollywood commercial cinema model that was dominating Europe and America at that time, and the French tradition of "quality cinema" that was so stereotypical and criticised by the world, and it also opened up a wide world for the emergence of "author's cinema" and the trend of the world's art cinema. It also opened up a wide world for the rise of "authorial cinema" and the world trend of art cinema. The very name of this movement bears the mark of this era, signalling the break with the old and the creation of the new.

2.2. Socio-cultural context

The emergence of the New Wave had a particular social background. The post-World War II generation of French people was generally characterised by a deep sense of disillusionment and the "MalduSécle" (pain of the century). The demise of fascism in the Second World War did not bring the expected light, and the Cold War, the bloodshed of the anti-colonial war in Algeria (in which France was involved), and the shattering of the Stalinist myth plunged the generation into a general crisis of faith and spiritual emptiness. Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy of existentialism, such as "existence precedes essence", "man is free, man is free", "the other is hell", etc., became the foundation of a generation of French intellectuals. These ideas have become the spiritual core of a generation of French intellectuals and filmmakers, and have deeply influenced the expression of the New Wave's films on the state of existence of human beings, the dilemma of human freedom of choice, and the disconnection of human beings [2]. After more than twenty years of development, French post-war cinema has begun to enter a period of maturity in the art of cinema, building on the experience of countless predecessors, such as Italian Neo-Realism, the French New Wave and New Hollywood. Most importantly, post-war European cinema, including French cinema, became self-

conscious - after a long period of stylistic discussion, the form of the film was directly linked to its content. At the same time, technological advances provided the material prerequisites for the aesthetic expression of the New Wave. The invention and widespread use of portable, lightweight, noiseless 16mm and 35mm hand-held cameras (the Eclair Cameflex), and small synchronised recording equipment freed filmmakers from the constraints of expensive and cumbersome traditional studio equipment, and this was a direct result of the New Wave's iconic live-action style of narration, whereby the camera could dive straight into the streets, apartments, cafes and cafes of Paris with direct and easy access. The film camera could dive directly and conveniently into the real Parisian streets, flats, and cafes, capturing the moments and textures of life, giving the film an unprecedented documentary style and vitality.

3. Case analysis

3.1. François truffaut and The 400 Blows

A critic of the Cinema Handbook, Truffaut made his directorial debut with the New Wave masterpiece *The 400 Blows*, which was one of the earliest powerful practices of auteurism and one of the earliest powerful formal innovations. First of all, in terms of aesthetics, the new realist film creation advocates "carrying the camera to the street", insisting on going out of the studio, shooting on location, and replacing the previous "zero-degree editing" with "long shot" scene scheduling [3]. The "long shot" scene scheduling replaces the flashy world presented by the previous "zero degree editing". Let it present a non-decorated world, in the aesthetic tendency to highlight the theme of realism, the creators focus on reality, so that the social reality of life to get a faithful record of the art of film, the sense of storytelling of literature dissolved in the film life of the "news report" like documentary writing. A three-minute long shot at the end of the film is a classic, in which the camera gazes at the ocean in front of Antoine as he runs across the field in a daze. A classic shot with the same meaning as the end of the film - a big long shot - its sense of openness and existential loneliness allows the audience to participate in the discussion of Antoine's unknown fate. The second point is the improvisation of the non-professional actors in the film, which is a great example of how the film can be used as a film [4]. Truffaut advocates improvisation and gives his actors a lot of space to play during the shooting of a film. Of course, this requires a certain amount of acting talent and the ability to deeply understand the characters in the film. Truffaut encourages improvisation by non-professional actors, which is a great freedom of openness in film shooting - improvisation requires non-professional actors to have a certain acting ability and a deeper understanding of the characters. Truffaut had the audacity to cast Jean-Pierre Léaud, a 14-year-old non-professional actor, as Antoine. Jean-Pierre Léaud's unobtrusive, spontaneous performance shattered the inertia of dramatic and formulaic acting at the time, and was well suited to the film's "realism" aesthetic. He allowed the actors to improvise, capturing the unique expressions and gestures of the children, filling their roles with an exuberant and trustworthy sense of life. In terms of the film's thematic expression, "*The 400 Blows*" strongly reflects Truffaut's own childhood experiences (he was a delinquent, abused by his stepfather, ran away from home and was sent to a juvenile detention centre during his adolescence), and directly reflects, through Antoine's eyes, the coldness and rigidity of the French education system, and its alienation of human beings. For example, the purposely closed composition of the school scene and the teacher's mute and stubborn image are all images of the French education system's alienation of human beings. This kind of expression of the alienation of human nature by the French education system can be regarded as the director's own critique of his hometown and social scrutiny, and is also the best interpretation of the

practice of "universalisation" of the theory of "authorship". Truffaut's mastery lies in the fact that he did not stop at a simple narration of his own experience, but refined it artistically, truly interpreting the story of Antoine, which originated from his own childhood experience, into a sad interpretation of the themes of youth, such as "youthful confusion, growing up anxiety, and family estrangement". This is an expression of compassion for youth themes such as "youthful confusion, anxiety of growing up, and family alienation", thus transcending Antoine's story from his own experience and allowing more people to share his feelings and empathy.

3.2. Jean-Luc Godard and Exhaustion

Godard's *Exhaustion*, radical and unstoppable, became one of the most typical and influential works of the New Wave [5]. He had a great impact on the innovation of film language, the most famous of which is the application and development of the "jump cut" technique. He re-established the rules of film language, a method of cutting the film after shooting the footage without connecting it, intentionally omitting the connection and jumping, thus artificially interrupting the continuity of time and space, destroying the coherence of the plot, and thus creating a feeling of breaks and ruptures between the images. In this film, Godard creatively uses a lot of jumping - deleting the "redundant" shots in action and space, and connecting the shots of different times in the same scene directly and roughly. There are 326 non-standard edits in the film. For example, in the shot of the car driving forward, he deleted the middle "redundant" shots, that is, the car driving on the road for a period of time after the shot, and this produces a sudden break in the picture and the rhythm of the sudden, breaking the sense of fluency and "invisible editing" principle, creating a break and a break in the film. It breaks the principles of fluidity and "invisible editing" in film editing, creating a sense of breaks and cracks, sudden dissonance and a slice of urban life; there is also a new means of breaking the "fourth wall". The protagonist, Michel (Jean-Paul Belmondo), faces the camera several times in the film and directs his gaze at the audience. The most iconic scene is when he says to the camera: "I hate the police" ("J'suiconmaisj'suipaislic!").

The above method breaks the immersive assumptions and illusions of traditional cinema, deconstructs the assumptions of the film, and breaks the link between the audience and the characters. Thematically, the film reflects the absurdity and meaninglessness of existentialism. Michel's behaviour is subjectively devoid of traditional motives and rationality, and there are many purposeless and episodic behaviours, and his death is even more sudden, without any heroism or tragedy. This is the most graphic interpretation of the existentialist philosophy's concept of "existence and then essence" - man exists first and then defines himself, but this process of self-definition is full of absurdity and meaninglessness [6]. Godard seeks the events and clues that connect the world within the image, from which he derives the spiritual part of human co-temporality, as well as the part of memory or legend for human beings. In Godard's film images, they become the most distinctive expression of "interiority". In Godard's film *Exhaustion*, he uses non-linear narrative structures, textual interrelationships and critiques of politics and ideology, and other techniques [7]. The character Michel drives the car and tells the audience his views on cars, roads, and women. This kind of filming technique, which is outside the plot and seems to have become a documentary, makes the character's own thoughts, concepts, and attitudes more directly presented in front of the audience, and attempts to communicate directly with the audience under the premise of breaking down the boundaries of the traditional film narratology. The transformation of the originally hidden narrative space into an external narrative space in film art undoubtedly provides a new path for the creation of films and extends the boundaries of the narrator's narrative

space. Godard's works inspire the audience to think about the form and content of the film, and open up a new path for film art.

3.3. Agnès Varda and the Cleo of Five to Seven

In the New Wave movement, which was dominated by male directors, Varda's uniquely feminine vision and poetic realism expressed the inescapable presence of women. The New Wave movement in French cinema, led by Jean-Luc Godard and François Truffaut among others, led to a new generation of filmmakers committed to seeing the world through new eyes [8]. In the Introduction to the History of Cinema, the New Wave directors are divided into two schools, one called the "Cinema Manual School" (also known as the New Wave School) and the other called the "Left Bank School". Agnès Varda is generally regarded as the representative of the Left Bank School. Compared to the Film Manual school, the Left Bank directors were older and paid more attention to literary tension in the narrative of their films, which was a unique creation of Varda's, i.e., the length of the film (about 90 minutes) was synchronised with the time of the events in the film (5:00-7:00 p.m.). It is as if the viewer were wearing a watch, following the heroine, Cleo, through these two difficult hours as she waits for the diagnosis of her terminal cancer. This format creates a great sense of realism and suspense due to the intensity of the time, the character's inner torment and the audience's empathic experience. Varda borrows the female gaze, disrupting the traditional "gaze" from the male director's point of view, and deconstructs the male gaze in the film through the eyes of the female singer Cleo. The tarot card reading at the beginning of the film stands out, as the director's camera constantly captures Cleo's facial expression when she is being stared at while the (male) reader reads Cleo's destiny through the cards.

However, based on the New Wave's focus on real space, Varda's film adds a detailed description of psychological facts [9]. Her camera goes beyond depicting Cleo as a "watched" object, and delves into Cleo's psychological and inner world, showing her feelings, panic and even resistance to the external gaze. Varda's New Wave footage focuses more on psychological reality. From the beginning of the film, she follows Cleo's actions and thoughts throughout the film, making women the subject of the film. Cleo's central transformation in the film is the "great awakening of existence" while waiting for the results of her diagnosis - a shift in her perception of the true meaning of life, the appearance of beauty and ugliness, and the fear of death; it is a kind of "death anxiety", an existential transformation. It is a "death anxiety", an existential awakening - from being a pop star who relies on his appearance and is defined by others (especially men), Cleo, in the course of wandering through the markets of Paris, in the course of his encounters with other people (especially a soldier who is about to go to war in Algeria), begins to look at his internal fears from the outside and to think about the value of his own existence, the value of the self, the value of his own existence, the value of his own life, and the value of his own life. In the course of his encounters with others (especially a soldier who is about to go to the battlefield in Algeria), Cleo begins to look at his inner fears from the outside and from the inside, to think about the value of his own existence, and in a way to awaken to his subjectivity. As an important female director in the New Wave's inner circle, Varda's contribution to women's voices and gender perspectives in the New Wave is indelible, and unlike other so-called typical "film manuals" (she is closer to the "left bank"), Varda's films naturally express a deeper understanding of the movement. Varda's films also naturally show an examination and complementation of the movement's gender blindness. Cleo's psychological portrayal of women's way of being and experience within a specific patriarchal structure is an intervention and injection of humanistic concern for women's voices, indispensable to this historical

movement, which was initiated and written mainly by men, and which questions the gender power structure within it.

4. The central thematic features and far-reaching effects of the New Wave

4.1. The central thematic feature of the New Wave

The existentialist question of individual freedom, the relentless criticism of the ills of the French social order, and the rise of independent authors were the spirit of the French New Wave. The first spirit of the French New Wave was the existentialist question of individual freedom. Behind the constant quest for freedom, there was a deep scepticism, and Sartre's existentialist ideas were always at the centre of the directors' storytelling. For example, the absurd crime of Michel in Godard's *Exhaustion* and Antoine in Truffaut's *The Four Hundred Blows*, their motives and actions lack clear justification, the main character's behaviour often has nothing to do with morality, and often dies unreasonably due to chance, or is shelved before the end of the story due to the discovery of no justification for it. Their behaviour embodies to some extent the absurdity that man faces in life, as described in Existentialism is a Humanism. Their lives are also the absurd and cold lives that ordinary people have to go through in modern life. The second spirit of the French New Wave was a grim critique of the ills of the post-war French social order, including rebellion against the war, denial of the power of the male group, and rebellion against the system of authority. The image of the rebellious young man in *Exhaustion* subverted the myth of the power of the young man in the mainstream ideology of France, and the contempt for women was reflected in *My Left Foot* and *Witness for the Prosecution*. In *Cleo at Five to Seven*, Varda makes her characters face the impact of the Algerian War on their lives, and challenges the male domination of the "watched" with the gaze of the female subject. The film adopts a stark documentary style, reflecting the collective trauma of a generation long suppressed. The film's grim documentary style echoes the collective trauma of the "pain of the century" generation, which was suppressed by the times. The third spirit of the French New Wave is the rise of the authorial subject in cinema. In terms of creation, both Antoine and Michel are part of the director's autobiography, Antoine as a symbol of the director's life, and Michel as the embodiment of the director's strong feelings of self-rescue. In this work, which is the first in the history of cinema to be "personal style" and "authorship", the problems they faced in their personal creation have become a matter of public concern. The personal experience of life, the rise of independent authorship through the revelation of true human nature, and the universal concerns of humanity such as youth and death have made the "personal" the driving force behind the creation of "Our Father".

4.2. The far-reaching effects of the New Wave

These contents and characteristics have completely reconstructed the genetic map of art cinema. In terms of the creative subject, the establishment of the "author theory" has made the director the subject of thought, and the director, along with the corresponding thematic expression and aesthetic experimentation, have jointly reconstructed the creative norms of global art cinema. At the level of the creative subject, due to the establishment of the "author theory", the film director can be "liberated" from the assembly line industry, and the director becomes the most important subject of film expression. Bergman's anxiety about death in *Wild Strawberries* and Antonioni's description of human "alienation" in *Stranger Things* have made the existentialist proposition of auteur cinema clearer; Asian directors such as Hou Hsiao-hsien (the autobiographical character of *Once Upon a*

Time in Childhood) and Hsu An-hua (the local concern of Running to the Sea of Rage) have also closely integrated the sense of authorship with local reality. From the point of view of narrative logic, the liberation of narrative logic brought about by the establishment of "author theory" is equally far-reaching, as "author theory" has given birth to and contributed to the dissolution of linear causality (open endings, fragmentary narratives) and the elimination of genre rules. The authorial theory has given rise to and fuelled the dissolution of linear causality (open endings, fragmentary narratives) and the breaking of genre rules (e.g., *Exhausted* subverts the rules of film noir), and it has unleashed the narrative possibilities of art cinema in a new way [10]. Influenced by Bazan's "documentary aesthetics", the French New Wave slowly abandoned the traditional narrative structure of cinema, i.e., the dramatic narrative structure, and pursued the naturalness of everything, adopting a free-flowing narrative, letting the characters perform according to the same or similar ways in their daily lives, and placing the editing on the seemingly unrelated events in the two clips, in order to establish a certain intuitive understanding and reasoning path with the audience, and to show the theme and the intention of the film production. By placing the editing on two seemingly unrelated and disorganised events, the film expects to establish some kind of intuitive understanding and reasoning with the audience, revealing the theme of the film and the intention of the film's production. Wong Kar-wai's deconstruction of time in *Chungking Forest* and his placing of the narrative in a cyclical pattern in Hong Chang-soo's *This Time is Right, That Time is Wrong* are, to a certain extent, adhering to the spirit of this "cinematic revolution". In addition to this, and more importantly, the extension of the traditional connotation of realism, the birth of the "authorship theory" in French New Wave cinema, and the influence of existentialist thinking, led to the creation of a realist creative initiative [3]. Influenced by existentialism, French New Wave cinema put forward the call for realism. Whether it is *Exhausted*, which shows Michel's post-crime experience in contrast to the "dichotomy" of moral criticism in Hollywood genre films, or *The Four Hundred Strikes*, which connects the life experience of the boy Antoine with the trivial daily life, both of them break the traditional narrative framework and chain of causality, and constitute the portrayal of the reality of the daily life of the little people and their inner realities in the disordered narrative clues, laying the cornerstone of the inner realism of the modern art cinema. They lay the foundation stone of modern art cinema's inner realism.

5. Conclusion

The French "New Wave" movement, though short-lived and brilliant as "a flash of lightning in the sky of cinema history", originated from a specific post-war French social and cultural context - the "agony of the century" and the existential anxiety of the young generation, as well as the changes in photographic technology regarding lightness. The "agony of the century", the existential anxiety of the young generation and the "existentialist" ideology, as well as the change of photographic technology regarding lightness. Through combing the representative works of Truffaut, Godard and Varda and the identity of their core directors, we can see that, regarding film aesthetics, the New Wave deconstructed the established modes of the film industry - documentary long shots and live-action shooting, subversive editing (especially "jumping joints"), and the use of "jumping joints" in film. The New Wave's deconstruction of the established models of the film industry regarding aesthetics - documentary long shot and location shooting, subversive editing (especially "jumping joints"), casual and unprofessional performances, open narrative structure, and subversive deconstruction of genre films. On a philosophical level, it is also possible to see in it the depth of the presentation of the thematic content of existentialism - the presentation of human freedom, the dilemma of human choice, the alienation and isolation of human beings, and the dystopia of human

life. Of course. It seems that they are against grand narratives, and specialise in finding small topics and small characters to reflect the big society. These keen observations, revelations and criticisms of society are the source of French cinema, and these revelations and criticisms constitute the ideological core of French cinema - their films "are in fact the philosophy of life, the art of life". However, it is worth noting that the French "New Wave" was not a stable unity regarding its nature, and there was a split between the "Manualists" and the "Left Bankers". At the same time, after the May Storm of 1968, there were divisions within the French New Wave, such as "Godard's radical turn and Truffaut's return to narrative". The end of the French New Wave as a concentrated movement signalled a shift from the vanguard to the consumer; its avant-garde aesthetics and narrative deconstruction techniques were quickly absorbed and assimilated by the film industry. Its avant-garde aesthetics and narrative deconstruction techniques were quickly absorbed and assimilated by the film industry". But the French "New Wave", which lasted only about ten years, and which is only a special case in the textbooks of cinema history, was a revolutionary creation in the language of cinema. But its legacy is immensely rich and enduring. It revolutionised the meaning and genealogy of "art cinema", establishing the director as the central "author" of the film. The film fundamentally shook the mode of film production and viewing psychology in France and many other countries around the world. The ripples of the New Wave spread all over the world, giving birth to such masters of European cinema as Bergman and Antonioni, directly triggering the Hong Kong-Taiwan New Cinema in East Asia, and establishing the overall situation of modern art cinema focusing on the self, paying attention to the form, and highlighting the authorship of the director. The New Wave proved that the possibilities of cinema as a kind of art were infinite and had a strong vitality. It has not only become a monument in the development of European art cinema, but also remains an inexhaustible source of inspiration for the spirit of modern cinema. Its independent temperament, courage to make breakthroughs and strong involvement in reality will always inspire future film writers to explore the boundaries of images.

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