

The Technique of the French New Wave: Bazin and Truffaut in the 400 Blows

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ABSTRACT

Every new wave film has an inseparable relationship with the French new wave. The emergence of French New Wave films pushed the modernist film movement in Western Europe to a climax. The significance of the existence of new wave films is not only the pursuit of art but also the depiction of life by French artists in the new wave period. It is not difficult to find the connection between the Truffaut and the French new wave. The visual expression and artistic pursuit understood by new wave films are simple and direct to explore the soul through the mobilization of the lens. Through a long lens to maintain the continuity and unity of space and time, it is argued that a sense of intimacy and reality is delivered. The shooting method of new wave films is not as roundabout as that of old films, nor is it one-sided. This also helps the new wave of films to reach a direct way to communicate with the audience.

Keywords: French New Wave, The 400 Blows, Bazin, Truffaut.

1. INTRODUCTION

French New Wave's main shooting technique is Bazin's long shot. A long shot refers to a relatively long time (some as long as 10 minutes), a scene, a scene for continuous shooting, forming a relatively complete shot paragraph [1, 2]. As the name suggests, a long shot is taken continuously over a period that occupies a large portion of the film. The last 80-second shot of Antoine's escape is a classic lens [3]. A long shot refers to the continuous performance of a moving picture for a long time to maintain its integrity of the moving picture. It's a shot taken over a long period that doesn't cut through space and keeps space-time intact. This lens maintains the continuity and unity of space and time in the same screen picture, which can give people a sense of intimacy and reality. The rhythm is relatively slow, so the lyrical atmosphere is thicker. It was widely used during the French New Wave [4]. At the beginning of the film, there was no background music, only the sound of the leading actor running and using the panoramic camera. The camera motion of new wave films is very wide. It often uses horizontal or other moving shots, moving with the characters or their relationships in a

scene. The final seventy-one seconds long shot shows Antoine running towards the sea. Firstly, the vision shows, running down the stairs, then the panoramas, pushing the rails and moving with Antoine. This shot uses the method of the documentary which is combining subjective and objective, and the film has a strong sense of personal biography. At the end of the movie, he ran into the sea. He was confused about what to do next in the future. The camera fixed on his face, showing his helplessness, vast and hazy and fragility, which was full of narrative forms. The lead character of French New Wave films often lacks clear goals [5]. The actors wander around all day. In the film the 400 Blows, rebellious Antoine is sent to juvenile prison an event and spends a lot of time outdoors on the road or in the street. In the shot of Antoine standing on the beach, his face shows that he is thinking about something, which is probably Antoine's state at the time. Although he gained freedom, he was confused about his future, which was similar to the confusion of western students about their ideal and future in the 1960s. Truffaut found something common in youth. The most important point of French New Wave films is that they usually have an ambiguous ending, which leaves the audience in suspense. It does

not exist with a fixed meaning, it can accommodate the meaning is diverse. A long shot can show the full extent of a scene from the perspective of God. It can be seen from a close first-person perspective, showing the characters' feelings of surprise or anxiety. It can switch back and forth between the third person and the first person, and at the same time reflects the epic grand spirit and the helplessness and sad of the little people; It can also present a fantastical worldview in which reality and fantasy are intertwined, where the past and the future life together. It can be seen that the films of the new wave usually choose non-professional actors and the directors' style as the main way of production, adopt a large number of live shooting, by non-storytelling, breaking the concept of drama based on the law of conflict.

This film intentionally describes the situation, psychology, friendship and family relationships of modern cities, which is different from traditional films in that is full of subjectivity and lyricism [5]. The 400 Blows emphasizes life, using live-action. Most of the film does not have a complete story and its expression shooting technique is also changeable. Truffaut believed that life was a combination of desultory events without continuity [6]. He denied the traditional complete plot structure in film creation and replaced dramatic plots with trivial life details. Looking back, the French New Wave movement not only produced many highly original and valuable films but also proved that a film industry can be transformed by a group of talented and enterprising young people who simply love movies and work hard. French New Wave proposed, "In making a film, the important thing is not to make the film, but to be the producer of the film" [7]. Truffaut declared: "Another thing should be shot in another spirit, without an expensive studio. You should shoot on the street or even in real homes" [8].

The 400 Blows strikes prove the point. Long shots, moving photography, the voice-over, inner monologue, natural sound that express people's subjective feelings and mental state in films, and even "jump connect" and "jump cut" that break the unity of time and space by shaking the lens in violation of the convention. The making of the film perfectly depicts Antoine's life and his confusion and shows us the importance of the work of photography. To some extent, filming plays a crucial role in expressing the spirit of the film. in the shooting process of the film, the director uses semi-impromptu shooting mode, hence, actors can freely play the express their real emotions, which has a large space for development. Truffaut put the narrative language in the film close to life, including the characters' language also comes from life. A natural photography style is adopted, and the logic between the events in the film is presented directly on the screen without any processing so that the audience can feel a real picture and flow out the most real emotions when watching the film. Later directors

use pseudo long shots, clever use of virtual focus, faithful to the scene experience while using technology to weaken the art and look. For example, the round shooting of Chariots of Fire, the repeated use of close shots, high camera, close to the ground shots and flashbacks. The long shots can form a complete narrative with continuous narrative and inner montage skills, which makes the narrative more complete and can more coherently accept the visual information of the director and thus more directly express the story. Long is film director, but at the same time for cinematographer technical requirements is very high, generally need to be taken when the photographer handhold shooting, or Stan Nikon, both way for cinematographer strength is a serious test in addition also need a director for actors scheduling can smooth the rationalization, to achieve the perfect effect of long shots.

2. PSYCHOLOGICAL SITUATION PROBED BY TRUFFAUT

In the film the 400 Blows, Truffaut uses many filming techniques to intellectually explore Antoine's struggles while figuring out his identity and position in the world. Antoine grew up in an environment where he excruciatingly struggles to maintain an affinity relationship with adults around him, including his parents and teachers. Because Antoine has no one to relate to, this lack of intimacy drives him further away from what is deemed "normal." Towards the beginning of the film, at 12:21, Antoine is shown sitting at his mother's vanity, which has multiple mirrors. And in this specific scene, Truffaut uses the mirrors to illustrate how Antoine is still trying to understand who he is and how his identity seems fragmented.

At 12:21 of the film, audiences see Antoine sitting at his mother's vanity, which has three mirrors showing every detail of his face. He first combs his hair, picks up a perfume bottle, and curls his eyelash. These actions are considered stereotypical of a woman, and the fact that Antoine tries to experience these things depicts how he is in a state of seeking his sexual identity. Moreover, the fact that it occurs at a woman's vanity indicates that his perplexity is related to sexuality and Antoine's curiosity about sex. Truffaut uses a relatively low-key tone in this scene, where the color black covers most of the area. Antoine's confusion with self-identity makes him sink deeper and deeper into his thoughts and out of reality. The use of general dark tones in the scene effectively supports the communication of the theme. The composition of this scene is also interesting to pay attention to. Antoine's reflection in the mirror is placed in the middle of the frame. While one mirror is perfectly enough to allow him a good glance at his appearance, three mirrors were able to reflect every detail of his face. This could be an indication of Antoine's eagerness to

figure out his identity. In his mind, this will allow him to have a better position in the world and fit into the society which he was initially alienated and excluded from. In addition, the three mirrors could be hindering the set of three concepts in psychoanalytic theory - the id, ego, and super-ego, which are describing distinct, interacting agents in the psychic apparatus [9].

The three agents are theoretical frameworks that reflect a person's mental activities and interactions. The size and the placement of the mirrors suggest the consciousness of Antoine. The big square mirror placed directly in front of Antoine is the main focus of the composition, it perhaps represents the super-ego, where he is most conscious and this part of him is responsible for dealing with real-world things. The small mirror illustrates the id, where he is partially conscious and involves his inner moral judgment. The large rectangular mirror on his side represents the ego, which is subconscious and represents the undiscovered desire he is not aware of. Furthermore, the fact that Antoine is intellectually inquisitive and observant when he wants to make him unsuited in regular life and typical schooling makes him feel left out from society. His deviant behavior is attributable not just to the ignorance of the grownups in his life but also to him being trapped in his mind where he is constantly contriving new schemes and paying little attention to the environment around him.

The spinning wheel scene starts at 22: 11, it is one of the exceptionally memorable and iconic in the 400 Blows. In this scene, audiences see Antoine getting into a wheel. They experience that same feeling, that vertiginous feeling that is both freeing, exciting and terrifying all at the same time. Antoine is gradually stepping into the real world, and these mixed feelings are overwhelming. Truffaut chose to film the scene that way, giving the audience that real sense of experiencing it with him, the exhilaration and the terrifying part of it, and knowing that he is not supposed to be doing it. At 22: 50, the camera follows Antoine, and they see Antoine's perspective where people see adults' blurred faces. The audience is unable to identify and remember all the faces of these people, just like how people interact or simply walk by strangers in life. These people often shape our values and influence our perceptions of the world, but audiences often do not pay much attention to them. In Antoine's perspective, the faces are almost as if they are spinning. It demonstrates how Antoine struggles to juggle relationships or communicate well with adults around him. The audience sees how resilient and mischievous Antoine is in this scene. However, his world is beginning to spin. He manages to stay upright initially but turns upside down moments later. This is further reflecting Antoine's situation in reality. His world is beginning to get tough and bewildering. He is discovering a secret about his mother, Jimbo. He finds his mother Jimbo hugging and

kissing another man. Antoine may have been a liability to his parents, too, after he ran away and stole and ends up in juvie. All these explicitly imply that he will encounter more challenges.

3. BAZIN'S SHOOTING TECHNIQUE AND TRUFFAUT'S UTILIZATION

French New Wave's fundamental shooting method is Bazin's long-shot [10]. The long shot alludes to the nonstop execution of a moving picture for a long time to preserve the keenness of the moving picture. As one of the most classic long shots, the finale in the film 400 Blows has started a new chapter in films. It's a shot taken over a long time that doesn't cut through space and keeps space-time intaglio. This focal point keeps up the coherence and solidarity of space and time within the same screen picture, which donates a closeness and reality. In the film the 400 Blows, Antoine escaped from adolescent jail, spending a parcel of time outside. Within the shot of Antoine standing on the shoreline, he was befuddled about his future to the disarray of western understudies in the 1960s. Truffaut found something common in youth. The foremost vital point of French New Wave movies is that they usually do not have an equivocal finishing, which clears out the group of onlookers with suspense. Revealing features of the French New Wave, they are divided into four episodes. The first episode starts at 1: 34: 34 and is set in the juvie.

Firstly, it gives a scene where all the teenagers play football together. The shot gradually concentrates on Antoine as he is running on the playground. The turning point happens when a boy kicks the football out of the field. Antoine prevents another child from bringing back the football. He walks out of the margin and throws the football into the playground. Antoine's figure observed from behind occupies the bottom left in the shape of a triangle. Antoine directly turns around and begins running. The line of the field separates Antoine and the other children in the juvie. It not only foreshadows the following escape but represents the difference between him and others. After recording his creeping out of the wire below, the shot rushes back to administrators in the juvie. Suspense is created, leading the audience to be curious about what will happen next. Then the camera focuses on Antoine again. Antoine's figure becomes smaller and smaller while the administrator chases behind. The administrator is an incarnation of all the stress that Antoine has experienced which continuously wants to catch him and force him to be exposed to a disappointing reality. In this scene, Truffaut creates a sense of documentary film as the camera moves.

The second episode starts at 1: 35: 42. Spatial misalignment is made between the adult and Antoine. In the following six seconds, the administrator passes the bridge while Antoine hides under it. The camera moves downwards from the administrator to Antoine and stops

until Antoine disappears into the thicket. It infers the next scene in which Antoine starts his journey to the sea. The deep focus that Truffaut has used makes those details such as Antoine's confused expressions and inner soliloquy while running in the last stop-motion shot even more apprehensive.

The third episode begins at 1: 35: 54 as Antoine finally owns freedom and runs along the country road. From 1: 35: 54 to 1: 37: 14, the figure of Antoine almost stays on the right side but is close to the middle of the scene all the time. The mid-shot implies Antoine's resolution and eagerness to reach the destination. Due to the extended tracking shot along the country road, the scene moves smoothly but creates a sense of documentary as well. Nothing can be heard but Antoine's footsteps. Combining with a scene of the countryside as the background, it offers a peaceful and tranquil vibe. All the attention is paid to Antoine. This period represents changes that have taken place in Antoine's self-awareness and pursuit of freedom and are also a process of releasing pressure. Furthermore, the camera potentially accumulates the emotions and makes preparations for the final explosion at the beach. Although the environment unstopably changes, Antoine never stops running. Suffering from being misunderstood by almost everyone besides or discord from the original family, he seems to become the one who cannot be accepted by society. The 13-year-old teenager is puzzled about the changeable world. The finale is a catharsis for his confusion. Different from other shots running in the previous episodes, without any restriction, Antoine starts to run for himself. That action is also likely inspired by his behavior which expresses a child's confusion on the playground.

The fourth episode is from 1: 37: 15 to the end. Truffaut has used stacking to transform the scene. From the left side into the west, a parallel follow-up shot is taken on Antoine. The shot alters from mid-shot to a long-range view of him while the scene moves from him to the ocean behind. It illustrates that Antoine ultimately reaches the ocean. The background music, which is the same as the one at the beginning of the movie, starts when the camera slowly swings to the ocean. From the right side to the left side, the camera shows the panorama of the last scene. The camera swings to Antoine's figure after viewing the environment which stays at the bottom left of the shot. Then the camera keeps using long-range shots as Antoine goes down the stairs and stays on the left side of the scene. It makes the distance seem to be longer and emphasizes the hard work Antoine has done to reach the sea. Meantime, the sounds of waves and Antoine's footsteps help build the mood at the end. When Antoine is close to the ocean, the camera moves with his figure from left to right and fixes in the middle as his feet contact the ocean. The scene is pushed forward, altering from the long-range view to a close-up shot. Antoine's confused facial

expressions are highlighted at the end of the whole film. Although Antoine reaches the ocean in his dream, he does not express his excitement. He is still puzzled about what will happen in the future. As has been mentioned above, again, this open-ended conclusion emphasizes for the audience that the agony of youth when facing the inner-self is tremendous.

4. CONCLUSION

What Truffaut has created is not an unfathomable art but the life perception closest to people, closest to people's lives, and the things most impacting people's hearts. Long lens, mobile photography, voice-over, inner monologue, and natural sound express people's subjective feelings and psychological state in the film. These techniques correspond to the style of the author's films of the new wave, most of which record or express an event or some characters in a focused way. It has a strong biographical color in the film selection to combine "subjective realism" with "objective realism". In addition, new wave films usually choose the personal style of nonprofessional actors and directors as the main production method, adopt a large number of live shooting, and break the drama concept based on the law of conflict through non-story-telling. To sum up, the 400 blows, as the first work of the new wave, is closely related to the new wave in France. The lenses and pictures used in the 400 blows also show people's most real-life and experience people's most real psychological feelings. For most French New Wave movie studies, there will be more inspiring studies on Bazin's philosophy and Truffaut's movies in the future.

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