

**CREATIVE POST-PRODUCTION SYMPOSIUM
BEACONSFIELD, APRIL 2010**

HOSTED BY NFTS, SPONSORED BY GEECT AND CILECT

REPORT BY ROGER CRITTENDEN, ORGANISER

Introduction

A number of delegates asked me how long it had taken to organise the Symposium. If truth be told the foundations were laid nearly a decade ago when Renen Schorr, then Chair of GEECT asked me to consider a meeting on Editing, because he knew I was writing a book about European Editors.

However until Nik Powell and Michael Kuhn, until recently Chair of NFTS Governors, conceived and carried through the plans for the new building at Beaconsfield it was not practical to do the idea justice. Once the building was being erected I suggested to Nik that we should host such an event and he embraced the thought with his usual enthusiasm.

The only time in the history of NFTS that such an event has been hosted before was in 1980 when, under Founding Director, Colin Young, we organised the CILECT Congress, but on that occasion we sensibly mounted it in Edinburgh, not just because the selection of whisky was unlimited, but because Beaconsfield just didn't have the appropriate facilities.

So, having secured the grants from GEECT and CILECT, it was last autumn that I seriously set about planning the event. In a way the seeds had been planted in Lodz the year before when some of us were guests of the Polish Film School and Camerimage. From that core group (Roberto Perpignani, Michal Leszczykowski, Sylvia Ingemardotter and Larry Sider and myself) the concept grew. Last December the same group, minus Michal, because he was cutting a feature, but plus Juliane Lorenz and Annabelle Pangborn were guests of EICTV in Cuba- another experience which fertilised the plans. In January this year I was asked to lead another similar event at the Tokyo Arts University in Yokohama. On that occasion I was joined by Dominique Auvray, filmmaker and editor, who works with Pedro Costa.

I mention this background to reinforce the value of practising before offering such an event. Like trying a play out of town before the West End or sneak previews of a film. However the scale of this Symposium far exceeded the previous events and I dared that scale because of practising elsewhere and also because of the presence of two special friends and colleagues.

When I decided to propose that the NFTS combine all post-production disciplines under one head I knew its success would depend on recruiting the right person to run this new department. Very few people would have filled the bill. One such was Larry Sider, the founder of the School of Sound. Thankfully he was persuaded to take it on. It was one of the best appointments we ever made.

Under Larry the task of integrating the education in editing, sound and music was begun and by the time he handed over to Annabelle Pangborn it was in shape for her to build on. Such integration is not without logistical and conceptual problems but in my opinion well worth the effort. It makes educational sense, even if industrial practice often artificially separates the process.

With Larry and Annabelle in my corner I felt completely secure in producing this event.

I submit this report as a record of an event which was unusual, both because it concentrated on a neglected area and also because it brought together an unprecedented group of individuals who between them provide a snapshot of an important aspect of the last fifty years of European Cinema, plus a special perspective from the United States.

Summary of Proceedings

(Based on notes taken by NFTS student, James Morgan, for which I am most grateful)

Thursday, April 8th 2010

After welcome speeches by Nik Powell, Annabelle Pangborn and Roger Crittenden, we were fortunate to have secured a preview screening of 'Ghost' the new film by Roman Polanski. This was thanks to Optimum Releasing.

This was followed by a Q and A with Dean Humphreys, Polanski's regular Sound Supervisor, which was moderated by Larry Sider.

This is the seventh film of Polanski's that Dean has worked on.

Dean said that Polanski hates a cluttered soundtrack- if you don't see it, it usually isn't heard. He credits the sound recordist with obtaining tracks that need no EQing or compression- only a matter of levelling.

He has a radical approach to the work- claiming to do 90% of the mixing on his home work station - and that big desks and all that time in the studio have become both costly and unnecessary.

Dean believes with Polanski that dialogue is the backbone of the track and everything else puts flesh on that skeleton.

This was an unusual job in the sense that Polanski was arrested on the first day of mixing and they had to work with a system of feeding DVD's back and forth to his cell with copious comments coming back on a regular basis.

Interesting that Polanski changed the ending of the film the way he did on 'Chinatown', creating a darker result rather than an upbeat neat resolution- very much a 'European' approach.

Dean's comments about the process were challenged from the audience and he admitted that he couldn't work the way he does without having learned the traditional approach and that students will still benefit from intense training in the mixing studio even though he believes that the system is moving more and more towards achieving a high percentage of the mixing before going in for a short period of 'sweetening'.

Friday, April 9th 2010

Roger Crittenden began the morning by referring to the establishment of NFTS by Colin Young as a learning rather than a teaching institution and the need to sustain that thought in our deliberations, coupled with the important tradition in European Cinema of 'open narratives' with no simple or easy resolution. It seemed to him that the medium was more useful for asking serious questions than offering pat solutions and that this enquiring attitude should inform the education in our Schools.

ANNABELLE PANGBORN

He then introduced Annabelle Pangborn, the current Head of Editing, Sound and Music at NFTS to outline the integrated curriculum.

Annabelle mentioned the discussion with Dean, the night before, and promoted the idea that cross-discipline knowledge is fundamental. At NFTS students are expected to embrace the notion of integration AND specialisation, overall to embrace the idea that they are filmmakers.

Annabelle outlined many of the workshops and exercises in the curriculum:

They include- a mixing workshop from prepared tracks; a director/editor workshop- making parallel cuts from the same material and then compare and arrive at a joint third cut; 'Abscheid'- a workshop for composers where they are asked to support one or other of two possible interpretations of a relationship.

Annabelle believes in the development of a deep relationship with material in post- creating an obsession that is necessary to make the most of the film. Not everything can be explained- rather a consistent dialogue occurs between students and tutors and amongst the students themselves via reviews and observation. NFTS encourages different ways of thinking.

Annabelle then asked NFTS Tutor, Jo Ann Kaplan to talk about a particular exercise 'Looking and Seeing'. Brief is minimal but strict. This involves filming the changing of a bicycle tyre in one ten minute shot. They must then edit a 2 minute extract, deciding where the shot should start and finish. This is followed by a second shoot in which the students can introduce one extra element/character. But no dialogue. They then cut their own work and the work of one other student. Jo Ann showed some examples of each stage.

Asher Tlalim, another NFTS Tutor, then talked about the "Documentary Poetry Exercise".

Students make a film based on a poem that has inspired them. Exploring the relationship between the word on the page and the image on the screen in evoking an emotional response not based in narrative exposition. The workshop lasts 5-6 weeks and the students work collaboratively. Asher showed several very different examples.

LARRY SIDER

RC introduced Larry to talk about broadening the education.

He started by referring back to Dean Humphrey's making the distinction between teaching, learning and being professional- important differences. In teaching we can be 'biting the hand that feed us', by challenging conventional professional practice. The limitations of teaching film- time, money as well as deciding how and what to teach. Too much reliance on convention- instead we should be 'mining' and digging/exploring for new ideas and not to over-emphasise commercial success or values.

Larry talked about working with the Quay Brothers over many years and the value of knowledge and understanding beyond film. He always remembers discovering in his own college library that the shelves round the corner from 'Cinema' were 'Religion and Philosophy'. Nice metaphor for creative people being able to see round corners in their work

rather than being blinkered and narrow.

Larry believes in 'cross-pollination', presenting a broad range of subjects and artists at his 'School of Sound'. In the commercial world there is little opportunity for people to develop artistically- do we teach how to get a job or to develop students' voices?

Larry mentioned the BFI Production Board environment which encouraged a whole generation of alternative/independent filmmakers- maybe the model for a future film school? Certainly nowhere for those types of people to go now for nurturing and support. He showed some Peter Greenaway clips as illustration and an example of each filmmaker at BFI being influenced by their particular background e.g. painting and architecture in his case.

At NFTS tension between departments has shaped curriculum- multi-disciplined approach has not always been easy. For instance Larry believes that nobody can properly engage with work in post unless they understand performance and acting.

Larry showed a section of a film where Tom Keating 'forges' a Titian painting and thus demonstrates the intricacies of his techniques- analogous to understanding the deeper functioning of other practice including sound design in film. Teaching practice not only needs to go deeper but also wider.

Q & A WITH ANNABELLE PANGBORN AND LARRY SIDER

Delegates were given the opportunity to respond to the mornings presentations. There was a comment about the future being as important as the past- referring to Dean's enthusiasm for the technology. Larry replied that it doesn't take 2-3 years to learn Pro-tools or Nintendo so what needs to be taught? Annabelle says that it is fundamentally about individuality. Learning must be student focussed not tutor focussed.

Question about content and organisation- servicing the Industry versus creativity. Annabelle suggest the balance is crucial- giving, for instance, the sound designer the chance to develop his or her own creative style before working with directors. When students graduate they will be hired for their ability to contribute most to the work. How are technical processes taught alongside artistic processes? Larry suggested that now students have considerable technical knowledge and need to learn more about the film making process.

There was a question about feedback to students and Annabelle explained the process of reviews- establishing a constant dialogue even with tutors from other departments. This can be stressful but is invaluable.

HOWARD SCHUMAN

RC introduced this eminent screenwriter and tutor to talk about the relationship between the screenplay and editing.

Headed 'It all begins on the page' Howard said it was more accurate to say 'It ought to begin on the page', as often there is neither knowledge nor consciousness of the function of editing in the mind of the screenwriter. Howard learnt from his early TV days the potential value of considering editing in the writing in order to tell the story more effectively.

Howard showed a 20 minute section of 'Kuroneko' a Japanese ghost story directed by Shindo, Where a series of murders are progressively short-handed in masterly fashion

taking advantage of cinematic condensing techniques- clearly to Howard demonstrating how understanding the power of editing can inform the screenwriting.

Howard also told of a personal experience when he was forced to re-conceive a scene because of production difficulties and took advice from the editor who convinced Howard that a brief visual scene could serve better than several pages of dialogue.

He concluded by wondering whether modern screenwriters and students are able to think visually- an ability that is essential for good writing for the cinema.

ROBERTO PERPIGNANI

What is the future for editing?

Roberto began his career with Orson Welles - almost through serendipity. He had studied and begun to practice as a painter but meeting Welles changed all that- cinema became his life he said, because he enjoyed the collaboration and working towards a common goal. In the 1960's cinema was immersed in provocation- it was made by passionate filmmakers. The seventies brought about a feeling of change- normality came back- it was less 'childlike'.

Roberto thinks that modern editing is less expressive- that a golden age of cinema has come and gone. However he wants to reinvent cinema - to do the equivalent of picking up the ball and to invent rugby with cinema. He suggests that there is nothing to be afraid of. Editing isn't in the present- it is simultaneously in the past and the future - one of the most unstable places to be. Welles captured a story in 'Citizen Kane' and his subsequent films- from a multitude of subjective angles: Roberto suggests that 3D technology gives us potentially more scope for a subjective point-of-view.

DARIO MARIANELLI

A graduate in music composition from NFTS in 1997, Dario is already an Oscar winner for his score on 'Atonement' (directed by Joe Wright). Dario first worked with Joe on 'Pride and Prejudice' and it was there that he began to experience scoring before the shoot since they needed a cue for Kiera Knightley to play, who could not play the piano.

Dario demonstrated how he developed themes that could be played with two fingers but were in the style of early Beethoven, since the story is set in 1797, and could be elaborated on in subsequent variations as 'score' rather than diegetic music. He then showed us different sequences from the film. Using the different moods and aspects to illustrate/support the feelings and character of Elizabeth (Knightley). Ironically Knightley didn't play the piece in the final film as it was transferred to Darcy's sister.

Dario made a particular point of the fact that Joe Wright does not like temp music and this gives Dario the chance to explore composition without preconception and to supply material as the cut progresses rather than after picture lock.

Dario further illustrated his work with 'Atonement'- starting with the use of the rhythmic typewriter as percussion at the start- transforming the 'writing' of the novel in to film as the music transforms from the mechanical sound. He also showed how the diegetic music in the Dunkirk scene is woven into the score through the stunning seven minute shot that includes the choir on the bandstand. A real challenge to match the evolving mood and drama in this continuous mise-en-scene. It was so clear how Dario had benefited from a broad film-making education at NFTS.

JULIANE LORENZ

Juliane began by telling the audience how young and inexperienced she was when she started working with Rainer Werner Fassbinder: in a real sense he was her film school. She used a flatbed film editing machine and found the process very easy.

'Berlin Alexanderplatz' was the biggest project they worked on together. The 15 hour series was shot over 9 months. It was supposed to take 12 months but shortage of money meant it had to be pared down. The shooting was prepared with great care by Fassbinder and he shot each scene once only. Juliane was therefore able to keep up and the first cut was ready very soon after shooting finished.

Juliane did all the sound work herself, with no sound editor. She showed a long sequence which demonstrated the density of the track with strong use of music and specific off-screen sound. Juliane has supervised the restoration of 'Berlin Alexanderplatz' which is now available in a splendid edition on DVD. She emphasised the importance of learning from the masters and believes that new ideas and the development of film language goes on.

Saturday, April 10th 2010

The day started with a panel of NFTS graduates in editing and sound talking about their education and subsequent careers. They were: Ewa Lind; David Freeman; Adrian Rhodes and Peter Lambert.

RC asked them to talk about life after the NFTS and looking back, what sort of School they would have preferred. They were chosen because they represented both students at NFTS before the curriculum was properly organised and after that happened.

EL: School was a bit of a mess. Directors had to raise funds for their own films; curriculum was self-organised and students stuck around for varying amounts of time. There were always casualties of this system. However Ewa did enjoy her experience, largely because she formed strong relationships with several directors- fiction, documentary and animation and upon leaving found that the Industry was very similar to the world of the School.

DF: Emphasis was on selection of the intake- once you were accepted to the School you were left to your own devices. He found it frustrating to work in relative solitude away from London. Guest tutors provided sanity from the outside world. David felt that the friendships he formed were the most significant benefits of the School.

AR: Felt he learnt a lot because he was left to his own devices- specialisation was less clear cut than it is now and he described himself as a workaholic who loved every minute. Adrian felt confident on leaving and not afraid to talk to directors and producers.

PL: Peter had a very positive/organised experience at NFTS. However he felt he wasn't prepared for the politics of the Industry, having been so creatively inspired he was in a position where he had to start from scratch and learn what an assistant editor did.

EL: Learning how to communicate and to effectively convey ideas- that was the training.

DF: Feels he is still learning and that Film School continued after leaving.

AR: Lesson after School - learning the politics of the industry and how to 'bite your tongue'.

PL: Felt that taking harsh criticism in School prepared him for criticism in the Industry.

DF: If he were to redesign the School he would encourage rebellion and a fighting attitude.

EL: Says she is still arrogant but conveys her feelings more amicably!

Nicolas Chaudeurge - graduate editor in the audience - explained how student arrogance can be misconceived as ungrateful. He was very forthright in his questioning of a visiting director and he eventually ended up working with him!

MICK AUDESLEY
in conversation with Roger Crittenden

Mick studied Graphic Design at the Royal College of Art and already harboured a desire to work in film. Eventually he managed to gain a foothold through the British Film Institute Production Board, then a place that new talent was nurtured- both directors and other crafts. He then became a surrogate student at NFTS when invited to cut Terence Davies' film, 'Madonna and Child' and was lucky enough to be present when Alexander Mackendrick spent time tutoring at the School.

Through his contacts at the BFI Mick worked on Bill Douglas's film 'Comrades' in 1986-7, the hugely ambitious film of the story of the 'Tolpuddle Martyrs', the beginnings of trade unionism in rural Dorset and the seven men who were transported to Australia as convicts. Mick showed a sequence from the film, in Australia when, faced with his bestiality, the convicts murder one of their number. He commented that films like this aren't made anymore - in such a languid poetic style, but seeing it again after twenty years he remained convinced that it was successful.

There is never any doubt of the point-of-view in Bill Douglas's films, and Mick is suspicious of material shot with more than two cameras as it confuses the viewpoint - 'who has five eyes?' said Mick. Mick digested the material by drawing every shot and making detailed notes about every choice- so as to be secure in responding to the question - why? This preparation is absolutely necessary by whatever method you employ- partly to reinforce trust between director and editor- without trust so much time can be wasted as every choice has to be justified. Always work for the director - not the producer. Digital technology has increased accessibility for all - so trust is even more important, but Mick appreciates the convenience of digital. However just because anything is possible it is not necessarily good - for instance temp music is a mixed blessing- if the cut works without music then it will work with a score- using temp can cover up less than good editing.

Mick then showed a sequence from 'High Fidelity', one of many films he has edited for Stephen Frears. It is a classic editor's scene because it relies on repeating the action as the hero imagines what might happen if he takes various approaches to confronting his rival. Mick said that previews helped with the timing of the comedy. Mick said he believes it is important to engage with the script from an early stage- prior to shooting, during and after- because it gives you the tools to work effectively.

YANN DEDET

Yann delivered a dense, poetic description of several phases in his career, which will suffer badly from being reduced to a précis. 'How I build their stories and how their stories build me' was Yann's preferred title.

Apprenticeship in the film laboratory - chemicals and cans - the nightmare of numbers as he stamped the film by hand- every foot with a new number. The frustration in this Aladdin's cave of not being allowed to touch the material - but he secretly tried his first splices - he was bewitched!

His favourite sections of shots - the moment the film slows and stops - accelerating the action - overexposing the film moments he would learn later that could be used. Yann talked about several of his major collaborations with directors: Francois Truffaut; Dusan Makaveyev; Jean-Francois Stevenin; Maurice Pialat; Philippe Garrel; Manuel Poirier. Their different approaches demonstrate that cinema is not as homogenous as the conventional conservatives would have us believe.

So with Truffaut, Yann learnt that everything could be used- from before the clap to after 'Cut' - everything could be useful. And this attitude could be extended to playing with the material in the laboratory- editing was a game. (*Think how Truffaut would enjoy digital editing!- RC*).

Truffaut proved to Yann that directors can always imagine a shot they never took because it is in their heads- but searching for the non-existent shot is no joke.

Truffaut said 'beware the seventh reel', i.e. around seventy minutes into a normal length feature- the film can go flabby when the audience knows all they need to know about characters and the situation and can be impatient for a resolution.

'Adele H' was a particular problem in this respect - and when Truffaut felt they had solved it he said with modesty: 'Of all this mess - let's pretend we organised it'.

Makaveyev chose Yann, so he told him, to cut 'Sweet Movie' because he hated Truffaut's films! His was another way. The film was about sex, money, chocolate, violent group therapy and corpses in the forest of Katyn. To mix all this up Makaveyev covered a wall in the cutting room with cabalistic signs indicating the quality of the scenes as something sexual, historical, frightening, childish, horrifying, funny, expensive, tender, beastly etc. His choice of shots was like a painter dancing in space- the editing of image and sound like a moving sculpture.

Stevenin didn't respect the continuity or progression of a sequence shot. In fact he would rather invert and mix-up the development of an emotion, breaking the psychological progression of the scene. At the same time he was always looking for small mistakes or flaws - he sculpted time by ellipses. Everything was done to give the impression of things happening by chance. The interaction between image and sound was an important part of Stevenin's approach- never a sound because it was beautiful but because it even secretly had a narrative function.

For Maurice Pialat 'a shot for nothing' was the best thing that could happen - it was a proof that the film could breathe for itself. To give life to the movie beyond just telling the story. 'Would you like a movie with a sequence ending by someone talking about the sea and the next sequence you are at the seaside?', was Pialat's first question to Yann. He was testing his preference between the script and the movie. It is because of this that Pialat always removed the 'scenaristic hinges' that he and his scriptwriter Arlette Langman had written in. Rather than 'hinges' Pialat had much more belief in the expression on the face of the actor- to show the slaps that life gives: 'life at work' to paraphrase Bazin who said cinematography is showing 'death at work'.

Philippe Garrel only trusts the first take. He also shoots his scripts in scene order. This discipline shows great faith in cinema and makes the cast crew very concentrated in giving

immediately everything they can. He knows that films are often too much edited, too full of sounds, too full of colours, of movements and that all this surplus risks to bury the heart of the movie.

Once editing 'L'Amour fantome' Garrel stopped the editing machine and said we have to cut there because Johanna stopped playing- and I saw as he did that at this frame she was no longer the character but herself- this is the way he always sees behind the frame- keeping his tensed way of living with the characters of his movies.

Manuel Poirier has this taste for editing as little as possible- in 'Strawberries Blood' he shot as for TV with master shots, mid shots, close-ups etc. but edited only one shot for each sequence.

The common point with these directors and others (Brigitte Rouan, Cedric Kahn, Claire Denis) is that to make the work blossom they give their collaborators free rein. Yann said he hadn't shown clips because he was still editing the films in his head - and that often what he is telling about these movies is lies - as we say in French 'Monteur, menteur' - editor, liar. He then showed a sequence from Stevenin's 'Double Messieurs' to finish.

EDITING DOCUMENTARY: DAVID CHARAP AND JOHN MISTER in conversation with Elizabeth Wood

Elizabeth Wood stated that in documentary the relationship between director and editor is a potent and exciting one because the story is written or formulated in post-production. She also made the point that documentary and fiction have had a long history of interaction both through many different filmmakers and through the exploration of form.

David Charap trained in Prague where he understood very little of the language and developed a distrust of dialogue which has stayed with him. He came back to England and got involved with Pawel Pawlikovski on 'Last Resort', where he was able to apply his understanding of documentary to a fiction film. He showed an example of a cut in a sequence where an action and a reaction could only be both shown by cheating the cut.

David looks to inject a sense of meaning into the film via the edit rather fine tuning the cuts. Is he a scriptwriter as such? David refers to editing documentary as film-making and enjoys shuffling things around. He showed a part of a film about a film he was cutting when the commissioning editor visits the edit suite and discusses the problem of the opening with David and his director, Marc Isaacs. Nice illustration of the way an editor has to function as a defender and advocate for the film and certain integrity of purpose.

John Mister showed an example of the editing process with the ending of 'The Leader, his Driver and the Driver's Wife' which he cut for Nick Broomfield - he realised afterwards that his perspective from a cutting room in London was less insightful than Nick's on the ground in South Africa. But it is always worth having the argument. He believes that you should 'never assume something can't work'. This is something he has learnt over years of experience and breaking free from the hidebound attitudes that his original mentor tried to imbue him with.

Q & A WITH DAVID CHARAP AND JOHN MISTER

EW asked what they would teach to documentary directors.

David - how helpful it can be to have a partner in making films (i.e. an editor).

John - avoid going near format television- it is the death of documentary.

EW asked where is documentary going.

John believes things are cyclical and we are on a downturn of this cycle.

David believes that documentaries as opposed to journalism will get less and less space on television.

MICHAL LESZCZYLOWSKI

Michal found himself as an editor - strong link with music - his brother studied piano. Obsessed with the notion of process - given a dozen shots there are an infinite number of choices possible - editorial choices are not rational because all possible choices cannot be considered. Life and editing is the playing out of the opposition of rationality and free will.

Michal discussed humbleness in the process - the idea that asking questions is more productive than definite answers. Talent is expressed sensibility - film school should be a place where talent is recognised and allowed to grow. Michal does things first and then tries to understand them - 'I do not think therefore I am'. He showed a clip from the film he made of Tarkovsky making 'The Sacrifice' - the climax of the house burning - shot twice.

SYLVIA INGEMARSDOTTER

When Sylvia began working with Ingmar Bergman at 28 she was not aware of his influence or status in world cinema. She was very young and inexperienced to be taking on such a role. The first collaboration with Bergman was 'Autumn Sonata' - a hard film to work on. The routine was clearly established. Bergman would come at 11 in the morning and stay until 2 discussing all that had been done since the day before. Then he would leave and Sylvia would execute their joint decisions.

She suffered from feelings of frustration at being dominated by Bergman and often had a feeling of solitude and loneliness, but she kept her feelings to herself. But she survived through determination and learning to be so well organised he couldn't surprise her with his demands.

'Fanny and Alexander' was hard work but they had a cut of the long version within weeks of the finish of shooting. She was always her own assistant since Bergman hated anyone else in the cutting room - it was a private place. In the later years Bergman would only work every other day and Sylvia had to adjust her own working rhythm to suit him. Thirty years after they started working together Bergman was finally very complimentary to her. She learnt that the editor is not the directors tool but a valuable resource and creative influence. She has become a very strict teacher- she said there is no excuse for bad craft.

HERVE de LUZE

in conversation with Roger Crittenden

Herve joined us from Paris in the middle of cutting another film, to talk about working with Polanski and specifically on 'The Ghost'. He has been Polanski's editor since 'Pirates' in 1986.

Herve said you always have to understand the meaning in a Polanski film so as to tell the

story in the most unique way. Herve had been a fan for many years before working with Polanski- back to 'Cul-de sac and 'Repulsion'. It was difficult to build trust with Polanski - it was slow at the beginning because Polanski was very shy. He does not socialise but wants people to understand what he wants. They had many arguments on 'Ghost'. Worked long days - usually 14 hours. Polanski was Herve's big break. Prior to their meeting he had spent a year and a half at the French Cinematheque assisting Henri Langlois, the legendary film historian who inspired Truffaut's generation to understand and be inspired by the history of Cinema. For Herve it was his Film School.

Sunday, April 11th 2010

WALTER MURCH

Walter joined us after a long journey from Buenos Aires, via Savannah and Washington.

Walter began by saying that emotion was the 'primary engine' behind what we do. He quoted Victor Fleming who said: 'Good editing makes the director look good. Great editing makes the film look as if it wasn't directed at all'.

Motion Pictures + Montage = Cinema

Cutting film creates an 'operatic' experience and wasn't discovered until about 14 years after cinema was invented. Hepworth and the other British pioneers pre-dated the 'edited' films such as Porter's 'The Great Train Robbery'.

Walter then presented a diagrammatic formulation of the way cinema combines power and coherence through the efforts of the filmmakers and the response of the audience to the projected image and sound. But emotional content is something that cannot be defined or guaranteed- sometimes it works - sometimes it doesn't.

Herman Hesse was sceptical about 'virtuosi' - manipulating our emotions to a greater or lesser degree. Walter used an example from 'Godfather 1' to demonstrate the use of image and sound to direct the audience but rather than leading their emotional response, reacting to it- for instance by not using dramatic music until after the high point in the drama. At the same time using sound e.g. the rumbling of unseen trains off-screen to underline the tension - an idea that Walter introduced, knowing the proximity of the railway to the location.

Also in 'Godfather 3' holding back the scream of Pacino after the murder of his daughter- even though the image clearly shows him screaming before the sound is added. Walter then reminded us of his 'rule of six' with emotion at the top and 3D space at the bottom - emphasising the hierarchy of importance in deciding the reasons for cutting. He went on to talk about the 'triune brain', described by Dr. Paul Maclean, and its relation to why we have such primal responses to film. Filmic stories can create a response on all three levels by combining use of instinct, emotion and logic.

Q & A WITH WALTER MURCH

Mention of a '2nd brain' - impulses from the stomach and heart. The only thing we actually 'feel' in our brain is a headache. Physically we feel emotion in our bodies - our hearts, our guts.

Walter was asked about the 'two and a half' rule. Audiences can only pay attention to between two and three elements of sound at once - so you can create the illusion that

everything is being heard all of the time through 2 to 3 elements. Discovered this when synching the movement of robots on 'THX1138'.

After several further questions Walter concluded by responding to being asked if he has ever had to save a performance by discreetly side-stepping the question. Instead he mentioned cutting 'The Unbearable Lightness of Being', where Daniel Day Lewis always gave the same performance over a number of takes but Juliet Binoche always tried something different. He found the latter more helpful in editing even if the unevenness was awkward because the options gave you flexibility.

FINAL Q & A: ANNABELLE PANGBORN, LARRY SIDER AND ROGER CRITTENDEN

Annabelle talked about the uniqueness of speakers at the Symposium and the complex discussion of educating at Film School, about how to encourage the expression of someone's individuality through film. Need to encourage the idea of school as a community where ideas can be shared.

Mihal Leczszylowski suggested sharing an exercise he does in Sweden where several students do a cut of the same scene and then compare results.

Teaching through creative, playful exercises - should producers learn editing?

Nik Powell suggested that each School should describe one exercise and add it to the feedback.

Question of how, if a directing student who develops the idea and doesn't do a good job, is it possible to assess the progress of editing student. Easier to control and assess at NFTS because of small numbers so individual progress can be tracked and reviewed.

If Film Schools promote the idea of 'commercial film' principles of sound and vision how can students be opened up to other forms?

Should students avoid specialising and prepare themselves to be ideas/concept people in the modern/new media world?

Do schools accept students who are easy to teach rather than those who will challenge and change the culture of the school and the Industry? Who do you accept? Annabelle said she promotes diversity as being at the core of the selection process.

Comment made that perhaps it would be more useful to develop good/new exercises that help students to investigate expression. Larry talked about a series of exercises, known as the 'Spring Circus' which didn't involve filming at all, but explored ideas and other modes of creative expression. NFTS used to do this workshop each year. Eventually this fell off the curriculum through lack of general support when the pressure was on specialist training. Perhaps it should be revived!

Towards the end of this final session a first year cinematography student at NFTS felt moved to comment publicly that he had been inspired by the symposium to recommit himself to his future in film. That all these passionate people he had heard had rekindled his own belief in the medium.

The symposium concluded with a vote of thanks from Nik Powell to all delegates, guests and to all those who had helped with and supported the event, including our own students, but especially to GEECT and CILECT for their funding.

FOOTNOTE

If the Symposium felt like a series of Hamlets without the Prince, in that directors were constantly mentioned in absentia, it was also true that the importance of editing and all post-production to the education and practice across the whole spectrum of film-making was for me the question that these few days begged in my mind.

Hearing Howard Schuman so convincingly make the case for screenwriters to understand editing reminded me that this wider perspective was part of the original aim. Producers, actors, cinematographers - all were invited to provide this broader view, but work commitments prevented the likes of Jeremy Thomas, Tilda Swinton and Brian Tufano from attending and contributing.

The point they would probably have underlined is that understanding post-production should be an integral part of ALL education in Film School - whatever the specialism.

So maybe that is the agenda for another event?

RC - May, 1st 2010