

BLEACH RESISTANT

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Cancel, cleanse, clear, cross out, cut, delete, divest, eliminate, erase, exclude, extirpate, peel, purge, purify, shorten, suppress, undo, unravel, remove, tear off, withdraw.

(in my opinion, all there is to know to perform our job)

It's been eighteen years since I've been teaching in script writing workshops, and thirty- five since I started writing scripts. I think I started being useful in these workshops when I stopped writing for a while to reflect on what I had done. I learned some things that seemed important to me, most of all to distrust routine, professional jargon and learning on models. Anyone can analyse an already-made film; it's harder to invent them. At ECAM, we ended last year without having viewed a single film; it deprives students of ninety or a hundred minutes of deliberation, and in this trade, time is golden. It is vital in films as it is in classes; narration time and communication time, that of exposing ideas and the necessary time to assimilate them, which, on the other hand, can last a whole lifetime.

The courses we have given all over Europe are promises we'll unlikely fulfill, and not precisely for a lack of effort; we promise newcomers, "come, and you'll end up with your script in the can!", which are good and loyal intentions; but experience taught us that few people who come to workshops can assimilate what is needed to achieve this, that is, concepts that are really hard to transmit. In many of these groups there frequently is a lot of people who have a lot to do with Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club, or the so- called radio consultancies; lost souls searching for a relief to their anguish. Being a castaway in life is not a sufficient guarantee to write scripts. Many come loaded with useless knowledge that keeps them from getting interesting stories, banal myths around films and the process of making them that are transmitted through the years, authentic labyrinths of language where students get lost because they lose their truth, which they are yet to discover and that would be the foundation of their fertility. We should find a way to make an adequate selection of aspiring students. We are indulgent when we should be strict. We should be honest to those we observe are not able, and save ourselves unproductive efforts. We ought to establish a direct and personal relationship with students; understand them and make ourselves understood. It is complex to say the least because language betrays us. Teaching of script writing is becoming

a Tower of Babel with each passing day. Hundreds of handbooks, innumerable terms, some pompous, some trivial, for the same concepts. Glossaries that rarefy understanding instead of making it easier. A terminology so abundant and jumbled is a trap for those who want to learn because they get lost in language. The terms they use, structure, act, drama, turning point, climax, anti-climax or sub-plot, (a term whose origins I utterly ignore, I confess. A term so un-aristotelian; if you need a sub-plot, you are working against dramatic unity) Like Molière's doctors, we've learnt complex professional jargons of our own creation to feel more important. The less you know, the more abstruse concepts you'll handle. What one says about synopsis is not the same as what another explains, and what Mr so-and-so talks about when dealing with treatment is not what I read from Mr. What's-his-name. While all they need to know is the difference between an idea and another, and which of them is more suitable to be seen on screen. Each workshop should develop its own glossary, and fight its way through defining each complex term, until it becomes understandable, and that is not always the case.

The first of these terms to be discussed is the script itself.

What is it? Why is it written? What's its use?

Answers are quite interesting and show the depth and extension of the Empire of cliché, set phrase and lack of reflection. The most common is to consider it an inalterable piece that shapes (the hideous verb they love so much) what they see in their imagination, a whole film, with a soundtrack- songs decided before beginning work- colours, actors, editing. I can see the film, they say; they think the job is merely to write a film they think they have invented in their imagination. A set of scenes from other films, situations with little or no foundation that bury the idea they want to transmit. The invasion of images is hideous and new screen writers write through a cloning process, as if seeing and understanding were synonymous. Rudolf Arnheim once wrote that people often confuse the world of sensory perceptions with that of thought, and therefore it seems to them that seeing is understanding (Visual thinking) It is my opinion that nowadays many of our younger colleagues walk down this blind alley.

The script is the handbook for making the film. Its structure should tell the story. It is the list of dialogues, and first draft for the soundtrack. Is it the story? Is it the plot? All answers open up the everlasting argument. Story and plot are the literary forms of the film, and in a way more elaborate ones, as they're more rhetoric and self-conclusive. The script presents alternative ways of presenting them. More complex and simpler at the same time, damned to exist

in a definite time, like told tales, where a grunt substitutes a word and a whisper contains all emotion. Story against the plot and the script against story. The film will only devour the script and transmutes it, because then only time will matter.

We've heard Roman Gubern say that cinema is a dialect. That's true. But, while we're at it, we could go a bit further and affirm that each film is a language in itself, a language learnt by the public as it unfolds. That's a brilliant idea that, of course, is not mine. It was copyrighted by Walter Murch, the editor of *Apocalypse Now* and *The Godfather III*. He exposed it in the very advisable book "In the blink of an eye: A perspective on film editing".

The first person that should understand this is the script writer, who in fact is the one to discover or invent it. A specific language for each film. Different problems arise, concerning the relationships of characters, with space and time; which is what shapes the plot. Each story is told in only one way, and it is the screenwriter's job to find it. It is a painful simplification we make when we affirm that the natural ways of understanding are reason and logic. And that applies to movies too. We work with our aim at making everything understandable at the very time of seeing it. That's why terms such as information, exposition and even plot come up in our vocabulary. These are venomous words that pervert our natural storytelling impulse. But it is not true to say that we are only driven by reason; we don't perceive what happens to us through a philosophical process. In fact, there are important facts to our lives we will never find out about. It's just not true that we understand film because we can identify every word and image in it. We understand them mainly because of their and our emotion; but also desire and frustration, fear and rapture. We don't follow films because we understand them step by step. I'd rather say the contrary: films are interesting to us because we don't quite understand them, because what they tell us always has some mystery to it and we pay attention in the hope of disclosing it. That's spectacle, the revelation of secrets, the hope to share it. We talk little (I know, it seems impossible) about how to capture the viewers' interest and alter their time perception. We only pay attention to what we want to understand. It is the hope of getting it that keeps the public active. And in this hope, the storyteller makes expectations dance, fears turn, and sympathies fall down. The craft of telling tales: the creation of emotions.

These reflections bring to my mind the nights in ancient times, when primitive men gathered around the fire at night after hunting and frozen to their bones, each talked about what had happened. They told everything that was special; that they had found a mammoth

trapped in the marsh, and were unable to get it out, that they'd stumbled upon members of hostile tribes, and what they had to do to get to tell the story. One tells what one fails to understand, and thus creates a certain tension that is the backbone of all narrative, no matter its form. It is the backbone of cinema, too. Our only chance to know if what we are about to tell can be turned into a movie is to define if time is essential to the story. Cuts in time define storytelling in films, and relate it to Slumberland. We must talk about the language of dreams. We ought to look back to silent cinema and reconsider it. Silent films had a universal language. A valuable treasure we've lost or been deprived of: the language of dreams. The ability to jump with not a moment's notice in space and time, the introduction of enigmatic characters, the courage to face what one doesn't understand to try and prevail over it. Cinema. The public responds with emotion, shivers, laughter, fear or terror. They respond if they like being wherever one has taken them. Films are a means of participation and that we forget too often.

A part of our existence is verbal, we communicate using words, and we seem to live in a world of words where all can be expressed and understood. But our verbal part of life is tiny when compared to the one we spend in silence, the time of loneliness and dream, of reflection and rage, of desire and frustration. Most of our time is inhabited by silence and what happens in it is full of mystery and can sometimes horrify us. A part of our animal nature lurks in this silence, which is a great part of our life. This is a brilliant idea I expose and that I can qualify as brilliant because it is not mine, but from Vincenzo Cerami, the screenwriter from *La vita è bella*. Cinema has an ability to express that for which we have no words, the mysterious and disturbing part of ours; elusive, if I may use such a scarcely used word. That's why we like films. There's nothing more boring than what you can explain. In fact, we can tell a scene is bad because it seems too explanatory. But for what you can't explain, you must make a bigger effort. Nietzsche's two brains: "A higher culture should offer man a double brain, something like two cerebral chambers, one to feel science, one to feel un-science; with both side by side, with no confusion among them, isolated, separate: that's a health need". (*Human, too human*). Then came father Freud and defined the three freudian instances. Cinema aims at all three, it bangs on them all asking for answers. Not without some shame, I'll repeat them here. Id, Ego, Superego. We'll talk about them all now. We aim for all of them when elaborating our story's structure.

I know the ideal tool to do this job, one that is not specifically narrative: it comes from life. Saint Sigmund Freud constructed a theory around it: free association. Freedom is within us, not outside, not in others' films, but in ourselves... Because, getting back to the beginning of my speech, I think the main tool for our job, the one we talk about here, is transmitting knowledge, us the elders to those now beginning. But they should also transmit theirs to us, the elders. That's transference. We shouldn't be lazy, and we should be faithful to what we believe we can do. And walk through our dark areas, an affected but appropriate term for us. Even those dark areas of creation where the only evidence is that you're doing things wrong and you're a grotesque, ridiculous being that can write nothing but tomfoolery. They're just phases, and I think it's only too common, we all have doubts and terrible crisis of the "this isn't any worth" kind. You never know when you'll find something valuable. That's the pain and the pleasure of storytelling. Thanks for your attention.