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Writers wearing sunglasses: literature, scripts, and screens in nouveau-roman and new German cinema, by Pablo Gonçalo.

There are many doorways by which we can join the dialogues between literature and cinema. We can choose from historical, narrative, or drama selections, besides, of course, the broad debates about literary adaptations. However, my intention here is to focus on part of the historical role of scripts. Since the 1930s and the advent of sound films, established writers and dramaturgs have sought out the film industry. Screenwriting, as an institutional, economic, and narrative field, is where the most interesting interactions between these two languages take place. At that time, for example, we find distinctive writers such as Bertolt Brecht and F. Scott Fitzgerald who sought interaction between Hollywood and the UFA. They wrote numerous scripts - trying, insisting, but only occasionally successful in transposing to the screens the restlessness of their dramaturgical and cinematographical ideas. Brecht and Fitzgerald are just two of many possible examples of writers that attempted to creatively collaborate with Hollywood and other studios.

From the 1950s on, this panorama changed significantly. In a time close to when Alexander Astruc wrote his essay on *camera-stylo*, writers such as Samuel Beckett, Peter Weiss, and Marguerite Duras emerged to introduce two movements. On one hand, there was a desire to create dramaturgical inventions for the screens that led them to write scripts and radio plays. Writing, at that point, was gradually transformed, leaving its isolated tower of solitary work to seek a sensitive dramatic-visual interaction using new media techniques. On the other hand, some of these writers, such as Weiss, Duras, and Alain Robbe-Grillet, and others like Pier Paolo Pasolini, Goerges Perec, and Peter

Handke went on to experiment more directly as filmmakers. Writing in that period was no longer restricted to a pen (to a *stylo*) or a typewriter. Rather, literary writers opted to move between pages and frames, between images on paper and images on screens.

The focus of my presentation is this group of six writers and filmmakers, and of course, with no intention of elaborating a detailed analyses of their work. Although these writers had quite different styles, I will focus on the points they had in common. Whether in their books, films, or plays, they always flirted with physical and territorial borders, as well as with language boundaries and friction zones in media.

Within this broad generational panorama, I propose **three** major themes that allow us to understand these authors as a group. The first theme is the relationships between **writing and media**. For the second theme, I will briefly describe the importance of **scenery and location**. For the third and last theme I will gradually show the transformation of a "literary project" where, from Beckett to Handke, the writer moves from intellectual to **performance writer**.

1. Writing and Media

According to German media theory, especially seen in the works of Friedrich Kittler and Vilem Flusser, there is always a floating relationship between writing, literature, and media. In his book about the transition from a literary age to a technical one, Kittler analyses the influence that an early 19th century description and literacy system - as a technical standard - had on consolidating German Romanticism aesthetics. To contrast, he shows how the advent of the typewriter influenced the aesthetics of attention and the free flow of associations between ideas and "worldly sounds".

Flusser asked himself about changes in the relationships between images and writing in the 1980s, when electronic media and computer language establish a new

relationship between writing and the design and creation of surface feelings, both grammatically and visually. If, for Flusser, writing is characterized by lines and iconoclastic thought, which from its inception rejects images, then the age of image and writing programming announces the end of writing and the role of intellectuals.

Kittler and Flusser remind us that writing - and literature - is contaminated by historical tendencies and technological standards. The script, as a practice and media power, is at the heart of this debate. Most of the six selected writers share part of this experience. Beckett and Handke, for example, wrote several plays for radio. Duras and Robbe-Grillet gained notoriety in their collaborations with Alain Resnais in films such as *Hiroshima mon amour* and *L'anné derniere à Marienbad*. As a young poet, Pier Paolo Pasolini discovered film in the script and dialogues of *Nights of Cabiria* directed by Felini. Peter Handke collaborated on three of young Wim Wenders' films. In the 1970s Beckett moved from dramaturgy to theater to write the script for *Film* as well as several scripts for television.

These writers wrote as spectators and sought, whether through their books, scripts, or films, a relationship between images and writing that inevitably goes through cinema. On one hand, they take typical literature experiments to the screen, like: the lyrical images and dialectic dialogues of Marguerite Dura; the dramatic emptiness of Beckett's and Robbe-Grillet's characters; the collages and chronicle of Peter Weiss; the pursuit of poetic cinema of Pasolini; the relationships between narrative, chance, strict rules, and the inspiration in hypnosis of Georges Perec, and the pursuit of narrative mechanisms based on happenings and presence that marks the style of Peter Handke.

On the other hand, their fascination for cinema enabled this generation to bypass the mimetic project of literary realism. In this sense, it is worth remembering how

Kracauer used the cinema apparatus to show a possible "redemption of reality," which had previously simply emerged without meaning. All these writers are seemingly inspired by a kind of cinema ontology to help them renew and overcome the mimetic dilemmas of writing. They sought a romanesque reality devoid of the semantic weight of words. It was not only about experimenting the language inside words as a pure entity, but about contaminating the word with forms and images and pieces of cinematographic reality.

The style of writing and reading meshed with the cinematographic experience, as if literature itself came alive through the script. When filming these subjects, they simply write: they write with, inside, against, and comparing other medias, and in this back and forth they begin to treat writing itself as a media. When writing in more literary and traditional manners, they often sought genuinely cinematographic images and instances.

2. Scenery, space, and location

When taking on the role directing, these writers always emphasized narratives that interacted directly with space. Beckett, for example, emphasized closed claustrophobic spaces that corner the subjects and therefore suggest subjective exhaustion. The space between the stage and the cinematographic or television space are abstract, on the edge of an implosion that never happens.

In the works of other filmmakers, we see a certain purity with regards to locations. In Alain Robbe-Grillet's first film release, *L'immortelle*, for example, the scenery of Istanbul is amply explored, inserting characters and actors as statues in a living city. Marguerite Duras and Pier Paolo Pasolin also filmed in other countries, as is the case of *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* that was filmed in Jerusalem, or the scenery of Indochina seen in *India Song* by Duras. And if literature and travel have always been connected, in the 1950s the words transmitted the experience of the places

using letters, words, and descriptions that took the reader-spectator to the location.

The narrative, dramatic, and visual connection with location is also linked to day-to-day observations and small acts like those captured by the reports of Peter Weiss in the streets of Stockholm, or by the descriptions of Paris streets in the film, *Un homme qui dort* by Georges Pérec. In Peter Handke's first film, *Chronik der laufenden Ereigniss,* he inserts daily routines and the city using television flow as if it were a film being watched by TV viewers.

The experience with location, on the other hand, leads us once more to "reality redemption," in the way Kracauer emphasized the specificity of cinema. The preeminence of space gradually moves to novels and plays through various patterns. The main protagonist in Georges Pérec's book, *La vie, mode d'emploi*, is a building in Paris. It is a fixed location that mimics a puzzle through which the characters move about over the years. As if the building was a privileged place for observing the world, a static place that allows the cinema spectator to experience privileged spatial-temporal displacement.

In his book, *Short Letter, Long Farewell*, Peter Handke narrates the story of a writer travelling in the United States. It describes uninhabited, broad, non-places inspired by Edward Hopper paintings and John Ford westerns. In this manner, Handke created a style of prose that falls between road movie and a type of road book. Years later, when dialoguing with scenic experiments of post-dramatic sceneries, Handke approached the painter Paul Cézanne and created a spatial description that produced a sense of location presence. According to him, space and narrative come close to the *Ding-Bild-Schrift*, or *Thing-Image-Writing* dynamic where relationships with materiality, writing, and painting were no longer differentiated. This style of the dramatic preeminence of space can also be observed in the works of directors and writers like Wim Wenders, Straub-Huillet,

Tarkovski, Antonioni, and W.G. Sebald, among many others. In any way, it is a spatial-temporal experience facing photography and cinema that migrates between pages, paintings, and films, and distances itself from a mimetic narrative of space.

3. **Writing and performance**

In very distinct manners and using various styles, these writers were always involved in public political debates and aesthetic controversies. Beckett, Robbe-Grillet, Duras, Peter Weiss, and Pasolini interacted directly with the post-war context where the resistance, Fascism, and Nazism were still present ghosts blatantly debated. In this context, they acted above all as writers and intellectuals spreading their ideas using newspapers as their main media for interfering in public spheres.

It is curious how their acts received special comments when they appeared in films they directed. When Pasolini, for example, appeared in *Decameron*, he is carrying a quill and laughs at what he writes (or films). In *Transeuropaexpress*, Alain Robb-Grillet appears on a train as the writer and screenwriter telling the story of the film and recording it while arguing with his producer and assistant. In *Le camion*, Marguerite Duras reads with Gerard Depardieu the script of the film we are watching that shows only lyrical and poetic scenery. She plays and represents herself as the writer and screenwriter.

This self-representation diagnosis for Peter Handke is more along the lines of what Erika Fischer Lichte calls a "performance shift." In his early 20s, Handke went to Gruppe 47 at Princeton dressed as a Beatle in bangs and sunglasses, and accused the older german writers of descriptive impotence. Soon after, he launched his play entitled *Offending the Audience*, which did not display drama but rather an aggressive relationship between actors and their audience that reaffirmed the co-presence between actors and spectators, the corporality of the scene, and the refusal to create aesthetics

using the senses. In this context, it is worth remembering Handke's Austrian heritage, the influence of the Vienna Group, and the use of word games directly inspired by Wittgenstein.

In the second phase of his career, Handke, even in his novels, continued to summon the present act of reading, scenes, spectators, the body of the scene, and writing and reading instants where literary materiality and the contact between writers, characters, and readers was not sustained by any dramatic arc. In this performance shift, the voice becomes material, present, immediate, and as concrete as the rocks on location.

Final Considerations

It is curious to verify that the enemies and critical movements of young Truffant, Goddard, and other collaborators in *Cahiers du Cinema* in the late 1950s were the very screenwriters that had reputations as authors. The so-called author controversy in that context refuted the screenwriters - and literature - as the creators of cinema and emphasized mise-en-scène as the almost sacred element of authorship. Today, after decades of controversies, we can see the consequences of those positions more precisely. First, was the construction of a critical and academic canon that gave priority to directing and mise-en-scène above other elements, which are still considered more technical. Only recently in the late 1990s, has the field of Screenwriting Studies submitted research that showed the impact of screenwriters on cinema history and aesthetics.

On the other hand, part of what I attempted to present was that generational sharing occurred between *Nouvelle Vague* filmmakers and the writers-screenwriters analyzed here. In this selection it is worth remembering how Godard and Truffaut not only started their careers as writers and critics, but also have a literary approach to the

films they direct. In general, both writers and filmmakers brought modern aspects to the debate at the time, and were in favor of not adding one more hierarchy to the arts.

To sum up, the script enabled a privileged doorway to these relationships between writing and performance shifts. When we advance to contemporary documentaries and the debate on devices we realize that the debate about cinematography, literature, and drama in the 1970s already had a certain and similar influence that still reverberates today.