



Klassenverhältnisse (1984)

Serge Daney Strauberne

En aften på Centre Pompidou, omgærdet af nysgerrige museumsgæster, vagabonder og sikkerhedsvagter, mødtes nogle medlemmer af SI (“Straub Internationale”) på samme måde som de første kristne, hvis disse, for de led martyrdøden, havde startet en omrejsende filmklub. Takket være Franz Kafka (som i øjeblikket hyl-des på Centre Pompidou) kunne de nemlig se forpremieren på Jean-Marie Straub og Danièle Huillet’s seneste film, som er inspireret af *Amerika*.

Amerika/Klassenverhältnisse er filmens tyske titel. To ord: Det længste og mest marxistiske af dem betyder “klasseforhold”. Og da ord er, som de nu engang er (temmelig underfundige), kom denne aften netop til at handle om “klasse”. Men klasse forstået som en skolelærers klasse; en klasse, man kan gå om eller (som mange og stadigt flere gør) pjække fra. Det ville dog være en klar fejltagelse i dette tilfælde. Som to nonkonforme pædagoger gjorde Strauberne nemlig et skønt nummer ud af at sno sig gennem spørgsmålene (troskyldige, vidende og drilske) fra aftenens publikum. Mens museets rengøringsdamer

(klasseforhold forpligter) gjorde rent i biografen, og sikkerhedsvagterne (idem) talte sammen over deres walkie-talkier, stod Straub og Huillet og talte om filmkunst. Og som det lyder hos Renoir, er det sådanne ting, der “går tabt i dag”.

Straub har aldrig haft økonomisk succes (måske en lille smule takket være *Chronik der Anna Magdalena Bach*, 1967), men hans film har ofte skræmt folk væk. At tage livtag med filmkunsten og diskutere den på hans måde – med *body and soul* – ligger uendeligt fjernt fra dagens vage teorier om “den gode kommunikation” og “målgrupper”, som de kalder det i showbiz. For svært, for nært.¹ Desuden har Strauberne den opsætsighed aldrig at ville præsentere deres arbejde som marginalt, men – bemærk nuancen – som en minoritet.² De befinder sig *ikke engang* i en ghetto, men fra deres ståsted holder de fast i filmkunsten som en ariadnetråd. Falsk jøde (men dette problem har han viet et triptykon til), landflygtig (fra Metz til Rom via München) og militærnægter (grundet Algierkrigen i 1959, benådet i 1971): Jean-Marie Straub, født i 1933, er ifølge ham selv “for gammel” (et af hans ledemotiver) til *ikke* at tale om sine film som en ældre herre. Nok er han fattig, men hans film (der i lige så høj grad er Danièle Huillets) er som børn, der, som fattigfolk siger, “har alt, hvad de behøver.” Strauberne (og særligt Huillet) ved, hvad hver en cent, lire eller mark er værd, og hvor pengene kommer fra og går til. Deres ordentlige forståelse for “klasseforhold” begynder slet og ret med at have forstand på prisen for *god kvalitet*. Og det er netop, fordi den nuværende filmindustri ikke længere forstår dette, at den er truet af inflation og opblæsthed. Straub-Huillet er (ligesom Godard, Duras eller Rohmer) filmkunstnere par excellence (jeg undgår bevidst at anvende ordet *auteurs*) i en tid, hvor billedets og producentens rolle er forvitret. For dem betyder det at producere både at producere deres liv og værk, eller, mere beskedent sagt, deres arbejde og arbejdskraft.

Ovenstående er ikke et retorisk forbehold for endnu engang at beskrive Strauberne og deres film som “uundværlige”,

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“strengt asketiske”, “sublime, men kedelige” eller “rene og hårde”. Det er sket alt for tit. Der ligger desuden så meget afsmag i den måde, man taler om “de rene” på, for meget had mod den illusion, den slags mennesker vækker i os, som om de selv (det vil sige uden os) har valgt deres livs mange modsætninger (helgenerne er utilnærmelige, vi kan kun møde dem fra tid til anden, deraf SI). Siden 1962 har de skabt ni spillefilm og fem kortfilm, der – om vi vil det eller ej – konstituerer et *værk* (tag Dem i agt for dette ord: Der vil blive skabt mange flere smukke film, men hvem kan med sikkerhed sige, at der også vil blive skabt flere “værker”?)

I sidste ende har Strauberne tiden på deres side. Ikke fordi de pludselig skulle gå hen og blive populære (selvom *Amerika/Klassenverhältnisse* er deres mest tilgængelige film), men fordi den afstand, de meget tidligt tog fra “filmverdenen”, og den skæbnesvangre ensomhed, som rammer dem, der “kun stoler på deres egne evner”, er ved at blive almen blandt yngre filmskabere, der i dag, det vil sige sent i deres karrierer, er letsindige nok til at ville nyde godt af *auteurs* romantiske aura og “ytringsfrihed” uden at have taget sig tid til at hærde sig mod, hvad dette indebærer. Strauberne spildte ikke tiden, de tog den (sikkert fordi de var to). Og hvis der denne aften i den triste mezzanin i Centre Pompidou var noget stærkt i det, de sagde; noget, som stadig stiller spørgsmål til verden gennem filmkunsten, var det, at de altid har lagt deres stolthed i aldrig at ville få noget til gengæld.

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Noter

(1) Serge Daney laver et spil på ordlyden af det franske “tard” (sent) og det engelske “hard” (hårdt) og refererer desuden til filmen *Trop tôt/trop tard*.

(2) Daney refererer til Gilles Deleuze og Félix Guattaris bog *Kafka for en mindre litteratur* (1975).

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The Straubs

One evening, amidst a group of the curious, the beggars, and other security guards, some members of the S.I. (the “Straubian International”) got together like early Christians who, before suffering martyrdom, might have founded a traveling cine-club. Thanks to Franz Kafka (currently honored at the Centre Pompidou), they were attending an advance screening of Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet’s latest film, inspired by *Amerika*.

Amerika / Klassenverhältnisse is the German title of the film. Of the two words, the longest and the most Marxian means “class relations”. And – words being words, often playful – this evening was indeed about “class”. But as in a class an educator might teach, a class you might repeat, or one (like many, more and more) you might want to skip. You would be wrong to do so. Non-conformists but good teachers, the Straubs, threading their way through the (naïve, expert, or irritating) questions from their audience that night, performed a brilliant act. While the Pompidou cleaners cleaned the projection room (class relations oblige) and the security guards talked on their walkie-talkies

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(idem), they talked cinema, and as we say with Renoir, these are “rare things” nowadays.

Straub has never enjoyed success (a little perhaps with *The Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach*, 1967), but his films have often frightened some. This way of taking on cinema without compromise – *body and soul* – is simply too distant from the soft communication theories and systematic audience targeting that are talked about in the world of show business. Too hard, too simple. On top of that, the Straubs have had the malice never to present their work as “marginal” but – it’s a nuance – as minority. They are not even in a ghetto, but from where they are, they hold on to cinema like Ariadne’s thread. A false Jew (but he devoted a triptych to that issue), a true exile (from Metz to Rome via Munich), a conscientious objector (because of the Algerian war of independence in 1959, amnestied in 1971), Jean-Marie Straub, born in 1933, is “too old” (one of his leitmotifs) not to talk about his films gracefully. He’s the one that is poor, but his films (and they are Danièle Huillet’s too) are like children who, as poor people say, have “all they need”.

There’s not a centime, lira, or mark that Straub (and especially Huillet) do not personally know the provenance, circulation, and usage of. A good understanding of “class relations” begins by a simple understanding of the value of money. And it’s precisely because current cinema has lost sight of this that it is threatened by inflation and bloating. Straub-Huillet (like Godard, Duras, or Rohmer) are the cine-artists par excellence (I purposely don’t say “auteurs”) of this era where the roles of the image and of the producer have vanished. Producing for them is to produce both their life and their art, or, more modestly, their work and their workforce.

All this is not some caveat before introducing, once more, the Straubs and their cinema as “indispensable”, “rigorous and ascetic”, or “sublime but boring”. This has

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been done too many times. Plus, there is too much resentment in the way we talk about the “pure ones”, too much hate for the illusion they give us to have chosen by themselves – meaning without us – the contradictions of their existence (saints are impossible to be with, one can only meet with them from time to time, hence the S.I.). Then, since 1962, the nine full length features and the five shorts constitute – whether we want it, or wanted it, or not – a body of work. (Beware of this little term: there will be many more beautiful films but who can tell if there will be other “bodies of work” of cinema?).

Finally, time is on the Straubs’ side. Not because they could suddenly become very popular (although *Amerika/Klassenverhältnisse* is their most limpid film), but because the distance they’ve put, very early on, between themselves and the “world of cinema” and the solitude of those who count “on their strength alone” are becoming the common and inevitable fate of younger filmmakers who today (meaning very late in the game), would have the frivolity to want to benefit from the romantic aura and the “freedom of expression” of the auteur without having had the time to harden themselves on what that means. This time, the Straubs (perhaps because it’s the two of them) didn’t waste their time seizing it. And if that evening, in the gloomy mezzanine of the Centre Pompidou, there was something really strong in what they said, something that still questions the world through the means of cinema, it’s because they have invested all their pride in thinking that nothing will never be owed to them.

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Translated from French by Laurent Kretschmar and Andy Rector.
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