

## Contemporary French Cinema Lecture 4 – 13 October 2020

### *8 femmes & Potiche*



**Director:** François Ozon, 2002 and 2010; **screenplays:** François Ozon (& Marina de Van for *8 femmes*), adaptations from the eponymous plays by Robert Thomas and by Pierre Barillet and Jean-Pierre Grédy.

**Cinematography:** Jeanne Lapoirie / Yorick Le Saux; **editing:** Laurence Bawedin / Laure Gardette; **music:** Krishna Levy / Philippe Rombi; **costumes:** Pascaline Chavanne.

**Leading parts:** *8 femmes*: Catherine Deneuve (Gaby), Isabelle Huppert (Augustine), Mamy (Danielle Darrieux), Pierrette (Fanny Ardant), Suzon (Virginie Ledoyen), Catherine (Ludivine Sagnier), Emmanuelle Béart (Louise), Firmine Richard (Chanel).

*Potiche*: Deneuve (Suzanne Pujol), Fabrice Luchini (Robert Pujol), Gérard Depardieu (Maurice Babin), Karin Viard (Nadège), Judith Godrèche (Joëlle), Jérémie Renier (Laurent Pujol).

**Awards:** many national (12 nom. at the 2003 Césars) and international nominations, winner of the Silver Bear for ‘exceptional artistic contribution’ awarded to the entire cast at the 2002 Berlin Film Festival, one Magritte (Best actor in a supporting role for Renier) in 2012.

#### **François Ozon**

Born in Paris in 1967. *8 femmes* is his 5<sup>th</sup> feature film, *Potiche* his 12<sup>th</sup>. Prolific filmmaker (18 films since 1998, shoots on average a film per year), regular collaborators: Laure Gardette, Pascaline Chavanne, Philippe Rombi, and actors and actresses (2 films and +) Catherine Deneuve, Charlotte Rampling, Ludivine Sagnier, Jérémie Renier, Fabrice Luchini. His protagonists are often women.

#### **QUESTIONS**

##### *The place of the spectator: identification and detachment*

‘At first sight, one might be tempted to think that they are aiming to induce detachment (...). Nevertheless (...), the point of view constructed is more complex, and the characteristic principle informing [these films] involves a contradictory relationship with the spectator, aimed at arousing a specific kind of pleasure. By integrating several models drawn from boulevard theatre – especially in crime comedies – these films simultaneously entertain several modes of addressing the spectator while finding in theatricality a way of reconciling them as to achieve coherence’ (Chabrol, 2015, pp. 516-517).

Ozon has explained that *Potiche* attracted a large audience outside of the French territories despite the specificity of certain allusions and cultural references, because it is a comedie that is both ironic and sincere (cited in Ginette Vincendeau, ‘Breaking the vase [*Potiche*]’, 2011).

Ozon has explained that theatricality promotes both the imposition of distance and also the establishment of belief.

With regard to *8 femmes*, he has said: 'I find the strongest effect comes from exposing the artifice that produces emotion. I think that emotion is most powerful when it is understood in terms of its mechanism'.

→ The effect of this type of cinema is twofold and contradictory, as found in theatre itself: on one hand, the shock induced by an exaggerated representation of the action through the story, and, on the other hand, the distance that is often introduced by a playfulness that establishes complicity with the spectator outside the story that is represented.

### 'Pop' cinema

'These films generally establish complicity with the spectator by drawing together references to popular culture in the form of selective inventories, thus providing an element of cultural anchorage that is privileged over the content of the story. (...) In this way, the film is turned into a "pop" object' (Chabrol, p. 517).

'Other films proclaim their kinship with popular American cinema by including quotations designed to appeal to cinephiles' (Chabrol, pp. 518-519).

→ Which quotations to French popular cinema do you find in *8 femmes* and *Potiche*?

→ Ozon thinks in terms of creating a 'star vehicle', recurrently calling upon the same actors. What do you think this concept means? Can you spot the constitutive elements of the Deneuve « vehicle », in particular in *Potiche*?

### Stereotypes and performance

'Stars are simultaneously the guarantee and the object of the experience [i.e. of the film]' (Chabrol, p. 520)

→ In what way(s) are the stars in *8 femmes* and *Potiches* the film guarantee and the object of the film?

→ How does Ozon generate confrontations between different styles of acting? To what end(s)?

## Bibliography

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