

Summertime France as Ethno-Sociological Experiment: Finding the Extraordinary in the Ordinary in Jacques Rozier's *Du côté d'Orouët* (1969)



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Abstract: This article provides an original close reading of Nouvelle Vague filmmaker, Jacques Rozier's major contribution to the representation of the summer holiday in post-war French cinema, *Du côté d'Orouët* (1969, released 1973). It analyses how Rozier's comedy provides a unique sociology of changing gender and class structures, after the confrontations of May '68. It suggests that the work is a forgotten masterpiece that has too often been overlooked in favour of Rozier's own heritage as a figure from the Nouvelle Vague or in preference for work from more familiar contemporary directors who were working with the popular film stars of the period (a world that Rozier himself eschewed). Against that mainstream tradition of cinema, the deliberately minor, quasi ethnographic or sociological work of Rozier invented an original social-fiction which captured the trials and tribulations of the lower middle class youth who had gained some freedoms compared to in the 1950s, but who remained economically and culturally marginalized. Yet this group are not patronized by the filmmaker's method which prefers empathy with its subjects, a position supported by Rozier's powerful photography of the Atlantic ocean.

Keywords: Jacques Rozier, *Du côté d'Orouët*, *Adieu Philippine*, Summer, holidays/vacations, provincial France, social class, lower-middle class, comedy, realist aesthetics, youth and leisure, ethnographic film, found footage and amateur film, Pierre Bourdieu.

Résumé : Cet article propose une lecture originale du film de Jacques Rozier *Du côté d'Orouët* (1969, sorti en 1973), contribution majeure du cinéaste de la Nouvelle Vague à la représentation des vacances d'été dans le cinéma français d'après-guerre. Il s'agit

d'analyser comment la comédie de Rozier fournit une sociologie unique de l'évolution des structures de genre et de classe, après les affrontements de Mai 68. Cette étude suggère que ce film est un chef-d'œuvre oublié, trop souvent négligé, éclipsé par l'héritage de Rozier en tant que figure de la Nouvelle Vague et par les œuvres d'autres réalisateurs contemporains travaillant avec les stars du cinéma populaire de l'époque (un monde que Rozier lui-même évitait). À l'encontre de cette tradition cinématographique dominante, le travail délibérément mineur, quasi ethnographique ou sociologique de Rozier a inventé une fiction sociale originale qui a su capter les épreuves et les tribulations de la jeunesse de la classe moyenne inférieure qui avait certes gagné quelques libertés par rapport aux années 1950, mais qui restait économiquement et culturellement marginalisée. Pourtant, cette jeunesse n'est pas traitée avec condescendance, grâce à la méthode du cinéaste qui préfère l'empathie avec ses sujets. Cette prise de position est d'ailleurs rendue manifeste par les puissantes photographies de l'océan Atlantique réalisées par Rozier.

Mots-clés : Jacques Rozier, *Du côté d'Orouët*, *Adieu Philippine*, été, vacances, France provinciale, classe sociale, classe moyenne inférieure, comédie, esthétique réaliste, jeunesse et loisirs, film ethnographique, *found footage* et film amateur, Pierre Bourdieu.

THE French film director Jacques Rozier remains best known today for his debut film *Adieu Philippine* (1962) because of its powerful contribution to the Nouvelle Vague school. It was widely celebrated at the time for contributing to the promotion of the new cinema that was dynamic, real, and engaged with contemporary themes. After all, famously, it is a photographic still from the work – a picture of the two young women actors waving from a sailing boat on holiday in Corsica – that the *Cahiers du cinéma* selected for the cover of its own special issue that it dedicated to the Nouvelle Vague in December 1962. This was a perfect snapshot image of youthful zest for life with the young women clad in swim wear waving enthusiastically to the beach while keeping their balance by holding the mast of the pleasure boat. Also, by 1962, when the new wave's initial *force de frappe* had concluded, it was the same cover-still that evoked a bittersweet nostalgia associated with finding long lost holiday photographs, once prized possessions that had been subsequently filed and forgotten in old unopened albums. Relooking at the cover of the magazine, it is as if the young women are already waving goodbye to a different epoch of filmmaking.¹

While there is only one well known scholarly work dedicated to Rozier's career as-a- whole, the critical attention garnered by *Adieu Philippine* has grown over the years of commemoration of, and discussion

1. The same image is repeated for the cover of one of the key much later histories of the new wave (Marie, 1997).

on, the meaning of the Nouvelle Vague (Burdeau, 2001).² Rozier's presence in reproductions of group photographs of the new generation of filmmakers is often spotted in this material. Notably this is found in the image of his participation at the 1959 'young cinema' conference at La Napoule, near Cannes, that was recorded in *Arts* magazine at the time.³ Similarly, it is repeated in the literature that Jean-Luc Godard lavished praise on *Adieu Philippine* when it was first released, while a little later on François Truffaut included his admiring review of the work in his collected *The Films in My Life* (Truffaut 1975, 1980: 324-325). Let me note next that Truffaut had worked with Rozier on the promotional trailer for *Adieu Philippine* and Rozier had done set-documentary films for Godard's *Le Mépris* (1963). More recently, Antoine de Baecque has described Rozier's first work as one of the most beautiful films of the young cinema of the early 1960s, while Jean Douchet has emphasized its thematic consistency with works from Godard, Agnès Varda, and Eric Rohmer (de Baecque, 1998: 133; Douchet, 1998: 125). And, rightly so. Rozier's portrayal of a young television technician, his life and loves, in the months before conscription into national military service has aged well with time. The director's original intention to capture the ordinary daily life of young people remains authentic and his depictions of the nascent media industry in early 1960s Paris have only gained in historical relevance as the years have gone by. Michel Marie is wise to underline the film's importance in his work on the new wave movement when stating that Rozier's film was "le chef d'oeuvre du naturel" that the *Cahiers du cinéma* critics had dreamt of (Marie, 1997 : 84).

It is also the case that Rozier's work was one of the few films to be able to shed any contemporary light on the French experience of the war of decolonization in Algeria which was for the most part entirely restricted from public representation by a regime of strict government censorship (Stora, 1992; Frey, 2014: 138-146). Rather cleverly, on multiple levels, Rozier's *Adieu Philippine* managed to circumvent this restriction. Firstly, his storyline openly emphasized the subject of conscription and the presence of the Algerian war was signalled fully in an initial on screen text which alerted viewers to the regulations of the censor. Secondly, Rozier reflected the looming presence of the war in the work through a series of suggestive visual metaphors. Thus, we are invited to see the Corsican hills as a reference to the similar mountain terrain across the Mediterranean in North Africa. Similarly, when the concluding images of the work show the conscript taking a ship from Corsica to report for duty in Marseille one is equally encouraged to compare this image with the equivalent image

2. The relative lack of interest in Rozier in academic circles is only slowly changing. My own interest in his work is foreshadowed in Hugo Frey, *Nationalism and the Cinema in France* (2014); while important new work is found in the analysis of Gilles Chamerois (2016 cited herein) and with the recent doctoral thesis of Ernest Tremper, *Memory, Language, Utopia: Deferred Idylls in Three Films by Jacques Rozier* (2021).
3. See *Arts* (27 May 1959) 'Dossier Nouvelle Vague'.

of the military boats which were regularly deploying young conscripted troops from France to fight in Algeria. In the diegesis of the film Rozier shows a man leaving Corsica but this image-idea stands for the poignant moments of when a military ship departs for a war zone.⁴ Let me underline that these were precisely the scenes that were in fact occurring across the southern French ports between 1954 and 1962 and that were only years later ‘published’ in cinema in Bertrand Tavernier’s remarkable historical documentary, *La Guerre sans nom* (1992). Thus, in *Adieu Philippine*, Rozier was able to speak relatively openly on young Frenchmen’s and Frenchwomen’s experience of waiting to go-to-war while all the time avoiding any explicit images that may have raised the attention of the censor. The film was however not released to the public because of technical production difficulties on the sound of the film until 1962 when the worst of the war for the French conscripts had stopped. Nonetheless, the immediate legacies of decolonization remained ‘hot’ even if conscription to national service no longer meant a direct combat role for soldiers.⁵

IN *Du côté d’Orouët* (1969, released 1973) Rozier tells of how three Parisian young women take a late summer vacation at one of their families’ holiday homes on the western, Vendée, coast, around Saint Gilles Croix de Vie. The eponymous village of Orouët is located nearby and features throughout as an inland spot to visit. Joelle (Danièle Croisy), Caroline (Caroline Cartier) and Kareen (Françoise Guégan) sunbath, eat holiday food, drink cider, read magazines and try to relax. Shortly after their arrival on the coast one of their male, Paris office work-life superiors, Gilbert (Bernard Ménez) arrives suggesting that he is visiting family nearby, although it is self-evident that he wants to spend time with the young women, especially the one who he manages in the office and who he has developed romantic feelings for. Scenes of gentle comedy punctuate the film often at the expense of Gilbert who is relentlessly teased by the young women and who is clumsy and maladroit, while always trying to impress through his abilities to perform as an attractive young man (to be suave, to be sporty, to be a skilled chef in the kitchen). Rozier sets off Gilbert’s failed efforts to perform a conventional heterosexual masculine role against a local sailing type, Patrick (Patrick Verde), who is both more physically attractive, dynamic and confident, and able to gallop on a horse and pilot a sail boat which he owns. In between the sections of gentle comedy Rozier enjoys showing off the final days of the summer in

4. For further readings on this aspect see the ground-breaking work of Mani Sharpe, “Screening decolonisation through privatisation in two New Wave films: *Adieu Philippine* and *La Belle Vie*” (Sharpe, 2017: 129–143).

5. See for example discussion on the continued importance of a colonial ideology on the extreme right and its role in the growth of the Front National in “Questions of decolonization and post-colonialism in the ideology of the French extreme right” (Flood and Frey, 1998: 69–88).

western France through images of the beach and sky, as well as the site of the ocean waves from the window of the holiday house.

Not a lot happens really. The young people sun bathe, mess around on deckchairs, go to the local creperie or visit the inland countryside, to repeat the very slow and loose plot. In short, throughout the 150 minutes of the picture, the set piece moments of comedy and pathos are framed by lots of naturalistic summer holiday material. Rozier organizes this late summer narrative through inter-titles of a diary marking the days in September when the story takes place. He films the material through extended passages without marked editing (with no or very little montage) in an extremely naturalistic style which I will come back to shortly in this article. In fact, *Du côté d'Orouët* is arguably the perfect summer seaside movie – entirely about and located through – the idea of showing life out of the city and the experience of sea and sunshine at that most poignant moment of the summer during its gradual eclipse, when the beginnings of the first glimmers of the new season are also peaking through. Jean-Michel Frodon who clearly admired the film suggested that this kind of work was unable to find an audience in the early 1970s because the seriousness of the times (the oil crisis; the end of years of economic growth; and the culmination of the violence of the Vietnam war) wanted more weighty material. Or, as he explained, there was a desire for bigger subjects than “de flirts et de bisbilles entre trois jeunes femmes et deux hommes sur une plage vendéenne” (Frodon, 1995: 358).

Re-viewing of *Du côté d'Orouët* fifty-years after its completion merits a more nuanced consideration. It is in discussing *Adieu Philippine* in *Arts* in 1962 that Rozier offers us a new key to re-engage with *Du côté d'Orouët*. Therein he complained that the film critics had not all appreciated his film because he had wanted to give a visual-narrative space to a social class that was rarely seriously addressed in filmmaking: the people who anyone would meet on every street corner in France. Rozier continued to explain that in fact it was the ordinary, working/lower-middle class, people that were precisely the group that he found the most interesting to make films about. He expanded:

Évidemment, ils ont de petites moustaches, ils poussent des voitures d'enfants le dimanche au Bois de Boulogne et vont en vacances à Saint-Brévin-les Pins ou à Castelnaudry dans la famille, et sans doute existera-t-il quelques esthètes qui trouveront le film ordinaire puisqu'il représente des gens ordinaires (Rozier qtd in Douchet, 1997: 219–220).

For information, the town of Saint-Brévin-les Pins is about a ninety-minute car journey from the village of Orouët. However, what is more important here than literal questions of geography is Rozier's avowed

commitment to social class, his ambition to giving the right to representation in the cinema of the ordinary people, by which he means working class and lower middle class groups. Furthermore, it is in *Du côté d'Orouët* that Rozier continued this defence and celebration of this social group. Whereas in *Adieu Philippine* the summer holiday section of the film worked as a metaphorical mode to address national conscription and war, in *Du côté d'Orouët* he makes the idea of the summer vacation as experienced by the ordinary people his exclusive subject. Yes, on one level, following Frodon, the second major work by Rozier is just a very good light comedy. However, as I will adumbrate further in this article, on a deeper level again, it is also Rozier's outstanding contribution to the quasi-documentary representation of the modes and dispositions of the ordinary people as they experienced late summer leisure circa 1969.

In *Du côté d'Orouët* Rozier therefore tracks the contemporary documentary film movement as espoused by figures such as Jean Rouch (*Chronique d'un été*, 1961) and Chris Marker (*Le Joli mai*, 1963). On the one hand, *Du côté d'Orouët* is a light dramatic comedy. On the other hand, it is a detailed examination of the habitus of the lower middle class. In *Du côté d'Orouët*, Rozier is a sociologist or ethnographer as much as he is a comedian. In other words, Rozier pulls together moments of work that nod to a classic comedy (of a Pagnol or a Tati), while all the while exploiting a cinematography of social realism that looks to socio-ethnography, as well as of course Italian neo-realist cinema which also he admired greatly. To be clear, his work was a fiction: compared to a Rouch, Rozier worked with actors; he invented a story-world; and he used colour, sound and lighting to paint this world. However, he selected a sociological subject (youth on a summer-holiday); an under-represented social group (the lower middle class); he cast unknown actors; and very importantly he encouraged them to talk for themselves in the roles they had been given. He avoided montage in favour of allowing very long scenes of semi-open conversation to flow naturally. Only the loose plot and the comedy episodes generated by the dramatic situation punctuated this method and they were created out of the normal social experience of informal flirtations and group interaction. In this way fact and fiction were entirely blurred in the making of the work. For example, recalling *Du côté d'Orouët* Rozier remembers that a scene in which Gilbert/Ménez expresses his frustration with being teased was a direct response from Ménez to his own experience of the making of the film. Rozier mused:

Tous les interprètes sont d'ailleurs très proches de leurs personnages respectifs. La préparation du repas, il suffisait de la tourner en continuité. La mise en scène est plutôt intervenue au moment du montage. Quand Gilbert pique une crise de nerfs et casse des assiettes, c'est très proche de la réalité: il était devenu un peu le toutou de ces demoiselles,

qui l'appelaient Nénesse, le taquinaient tout le temps (Rozier qtd in Burdeau, 2001: 42).

Du côté d'Orouët is a unique work. Neither full documentary nor outright commercial comedy it always hovers between the two and, true to Rozier's response to the critics of *Adieu Philippine*, at its core there is the representation of the people you would meet on any street corner or for that matter on any small-town holiday beach at the end of summer. We are in the territory of invented documentary and from my perspective, with *Du côté d'Orouët*, Rozier was filming as a contemporary of Pierre Bourdieu who was at this same time far more systematically theorizing class, power, influence and habitus in works such as *Les Héritiers* (with J.C. Passeron) and *Un art moyen* (for example, Bourdieu and Passeron, 1964; Bourdieu, ed., 1965). My point is not to claim here that Rozier was influenced directly by Bourdieu or his sociology. Instead, it is to indicate that the director was working on similar social questions through his cinema. Clearly what is different is that Rozier couched his sociology as a comedy and not as a social science or a formal documentary film. His mode is dramatic improvisational filmmaking and not theoretical research. Remarkably Rozier invented a cinema where documentary and drama played off and with each other. The subcategories of each format blurring together to achieve the powerfully telling account of the summer holiday. This hybridity is what made Rozier's work difficult to interpret when it was first released and precisely why today it is an absolutely fascinating and important window on its own time and place. Certainly, this synthesis of ultra-realism (documentary) and genre work (comedy) was also always an ambition for the Nouvelle Vague circa 1958 and one can see Rozier's film as a late flourishing of this ambition. Indeed, it was a profound deepening of the idea in its long length, languid exposition, and attempt to look 'natural' while all the while being entirely intellectually conceived. Furthermore, Rozier was arguably also loyal to the deepest origins of the Nouvelle Vague. Not only did he continue the new wave ambition and tropes, but he also reached back to the social survey mode that had first conceptualized the term, Nouvelle Vague. Let us recall that it was Françoise Giroud who had originally employed 'Nouvelle Vague' to describe her journalistic-sociological survey of young people, their lifestyles, aspirations and views on the world (Giroud, 1958). In microcosm *Du côté d'Orouët* revisited precisely this terrain to record and capture a portrait of the young. In other words this is a film out of its own time, which was rather the earlier Nouvelle Vague era, – yet one with the necessary ambition of engaging with its own social context precisely because of the purpose to address the present day conditions of 'ordinary' France.

What then does Rozier's film have to say about its subject? What sociology of the ordinary people does Rozier conclude on in this work?

Rozier is not a didactic filmmaker but rather he allows his portrayal of the young in summertime to seep into the viewer's consciousness rather than for us to be told what to think. We learn, or at least witness, three fundamental aspects: (1) the ambiguous traces of the May '68 conflict; (2) a representation, an image, of the 'ordinary people' – broadly defined here as Parisian, white collar, lower middle-class youth; and (3) a comparison between this everyday human experience and the natural environment of the Atlantic coast. Let us next unpack further and in turn each of Rozier's conclusions.

(1) Through his film Rozier suggests an ambiguous legacy of the youth revolt of May '68. Across the work none of the protagonists refer to the youth revolt of the previous year and each of the youths acts and seems entirely apolitical. The world outside the holiday home is far away and leisure time holds seemingly no space for political debate or reflection. Similarly, the context of the cold war and the American hot war in Vietnam that are contemporaneous to the holiday are entirely overlooked by Rozier and his actors. The young French shown in the film have the luxury of enjoying a summer holiday without much anxiety at all which contrasts with Rozier's underlying thesis in *Adieu Philippine*. Times have changed and there is something reassuring about seeing the young having a fun time with each other by the seaside. Rozier therefore implies that at this time and for this group the clouds of war are long gone. In addition, this group were not students and they represent a youth (18-30) who had *not* been explicitly politicized one way or another. Nor for that matter are the characters the trend seekers flocking to watch films like Michael Wadleigh's rock documentary record, *Woodstock* (1970). White wine is the only drug shown in the film and although some of the girl's clothes evoke something of the counter-culture they are clearly the shop purchased, respectable versions, of the fashion. Holidays on the Atlantic coast were not going to become 'happenings' for the young French you would meet on a street corner (according to the director). As such Rozier asserts the presence of a lower middle class that is unaffiliated to the *avant garde* culture or to any political radicalism. Most young people did not go to university in this period and the four young holiday makers are a powerful reminder that the majority of Western Europeans were not engaged in explicitly radical politics but were rather building careers and making new family groups.

Nonetheless, there are also important signs that conventions and power dynamics have changed or at least are changing through the course of the last month of the summer. Certainly, the film is suggestive of new gender power structures in its depiction of the interactions between the girls and Gilbert. Now that the young women and their male superior are away from Paris (and off work), it is the women who become in charge of

the man who has the power over them in much of the rest of their daily lives. They now host him in their ‘home’ and he is the one made to perform for them. This is not only displayed in the works underlying plot and the scenes in which Gilbert is teased but through the women’s physical control of Gilbert who is often pushed around, touched by them, as opposed to him touching them, and manipulated to where they want him (he is literally made to camp in a tent in the garden outside the house rather than share the space in the house proper). Such inversions of power speak to the growing feminist movement which was developing in France both before and after May ’68 and is exemplified in film by the mid-1970s in work such as Delphine Seyrig’s documentary masterpiece, *Be Pretty and Shut Up*. The dynamic and playful wit of the women in Rozier’s work also reveals the man’s relative foolishness and thereby all the more indicating the inappropriate power structures at work in the normal economy of the year back in the office in Paris where the male is constituted as a leader. The film therefore shows a subtext close to what Rod Kedward has identified as the carnivalesque nature of the youth revolts of ’68 (Kedward, 2000: 227-239). By which I mean that in this film the summer holiday pause represents more than a holiday, it is also a space in which everyday roles are inverted and the radicalism of May ’68 is open to be re-staged just a little once again. This is a perspective that Rozier himself underlines in the burlesque nature of some of the comedy and in the repeated dwelling of his camera on a weather-beaten statue of Pan that sits in the front garden of the holiday home. For example, in an extended passage of physical comedy, the girls and the boy lose control of the live eels they have bought to cook for dinner. Long and short slippery fish squiggle over the kitchen floor as Gilbert tries to gather them in and the young women shriek and scream. Later in an echo of this earlier section, as discussed above and noted by Rozier in his memory of the making of the film, Gilbert makes himself drunk and is unable to finish making a full fish meal to any kind of satisfaction. To repeat, the women let him into their domestic space and he is unable to take any control there at all. It is the complete inversion of the power he is able to display in the professional work environment.

Yet Rozier is more subtle an observational filmmaker than a purely anarchic or festive one. As the film progresses, and the summer season elapses, his sympathies seem to grow closer to Gilbert. After a final comic scene, Gilbert leaves in despair and one of the women regrets their treatment of him, while another states quite boldly that without him their holiday would have been nothing much at all. In an especially wistful passage of the film, they spot one of his tent pins has been left behind and in tribute to him they leave it behind outside the house as a memento for years to come.⁶ Moreover, in the final minutes of the film, which return to Paris

6. The same scene is identified as being at the heart of Rozier’s poetics in the nuanced and persuasive work by Gilles Chamerois, “Vacance: Vacancy and vacation in the films of

it is Gilbert who seems to have something of the last laugh by showing off to a new potential girlfriend that he had shared his summer holidays that year with three women (and rather amusingly selects steak frites to eat for lunch instead of fish, which he declares he has gone off). In summary, Rozier is the gentlest of radical filmmakers here, a position in line with his observational fascination with the ordinary rather than any explicit revolutionary position. His work taps into and exposes the post May '68 gender power dynamics and explores the inversion of the traditional conservative mode. However, his conclusion is to restore the pre-existing order. This was arguably simply down to his realism too as the spirit of May '68 fast elapsed and converted into the dominant liberalism of the 1970s. The gender politics of the film are similarly shaped in more conservative direction than one may always imagine with the introduction of the successful male figure, Patrick. Patrick attracts two of the women and establishes a conventional romantic rivalry between them; although to add nuance this abates when the women leave the holiday home to return to Paris. Rozier's male role model is an important foil for the comic Gilbert to run up against but he is also a rather one-dimensional stereotype.

Generally speaking, Rozier is also conservative in his work's uncritical evocation of nostalgia. Rozier's nod to Proust in the title of the work (*Du côté de chez Swann*) raises the importance of time and memory in the film. The world of the summer holiday house represents a moment of life and history that is timeless: never changing when compared to the speed of daily city life or political turbulence and social-economic change. For Rozier summer holiday time is a period of timelessness as he shows the girls exploring the holiday house which has not changed much at all over many years. There remains the sparse old fashioned furniture, an ancient clock which chimes, and the sound of the sea metronomically lapping nearby. Under the stairs there are old things from past times that the young women excavate and play around with, as well as the decrepit Pan statue outside. In the house itself the young women return to more childish state as they genuinely play around with each other and no longer maintain adult formalities. If the summer holiday represents a chance to witness a microcosm of socio-political power of gender, class and economy after May' 68, then it also means a return to innocence and childhood, a domain where linear time is less important than the circular repetition of rituals of play and enjoyment associated with the traditions of being by the seaside. Note again that the women leave a memento of their stay on the side of the house when they depart, making it as much a living museum as standard holiday home. Local regional cuisine is not only sold based on cultural geography but also precisely because it is deemed unchanged, authentic, coming straight from the past to the plate. Rozier's

Jacques Rozier" (Chamerois, 2016: 106–107).

world of the summer-break is that of the return to better days or at least to repeat what is familiar and re-assuring. Intriguingly, to repeat, Rozier portrays Gilbert as having no connection to the nostalgia of seaside cuisine and it is his final failure in the kitchen that precipitates his departure and slowly also the conclusion of the film. Thereby Rozier shows that Gilbert's lower middle class status means he does not 'know' a nostalgic history of the Atlantic coast and so he has no skill set to function successfully there. At the seaside this is disempowering for him while back in the city such things are meaningless again and he is able to invent his own history of that summer, one that can impress and edit out his social humiliation. By showing Gilbert's social condition the film invites the viewer to think more thoroughly on how class and role performance work, what it really means to come from one social group and not another. This is the politics of Rozier's film and his agenda to engage with the everyday life of the society around him. Rozier shows us what class position teaches us and how that is played out in social interaction. This occurs all the time but it is rarely visualized and represented for audience evaluation.

(2) The work holds up a unique sociological mirror to the lower middle class. What Rozier shows is the daily social experience of the growing number of French who no longer fitted into a distinct traditional working class identity, yet were nonetheless not a full part of the middle class (Royant, 2012: 80). In fact, his setting is seemingly sociologically typical for the holiday experiences of 1960s and 1970s modernizing French. Thus economist Jean Fourastié suggests that in this time of the growth of holiday making: 20% of French took holidays in either a second home or a rented property; and that 42% went to their parents or to friends. Exactly then as is reflected in the film that claims the mantle of showing the normal modes. Gilbert who is technically camping in *Du côté d'Orouët* is also confirmed as 'statistically typical' in the same survey data which noted that 15% spent time 'camping'. The long sections of the work that show the young people doing not very much other than being together and messing around adds to the quality of the work. Rozier re-creates low key leisure time to show how much fun it can provide and also maps in the specific details of this experience: joking around, eating together, café visits, sunbathing, walking, romantic flirting, and some amateur sport (horse riding/sailing). The women talk about food and as the film progresses the meaning of their relations with the two men. Patrick (the perfect man) is always dressed well in sailing sports clothes, a uniform of a kind which indicates some greater confidence and competence than Gilbert (who over-dresses on one occasion). None of the characters engage in the more upper bourgeois hobby of shopping or participating in a cultural or arts event. The ordinary stuff listed above is enough. Let me underline this work was not a formal documentary. What Rozier delivers is a reconstruction of a social scenario for a large number of people in France in the later

1960s and maps into place a careful range of details and power relations that suggest a pattern of experience, including how class equates to social skill and opportunity (see above). This world is neither especially good nor particularly bad for these people yet it is marked with the micro-details of everyday experience as reimagined and improvised by director and crew. Rozier's film works here as a poetic-imagination of a cinema vérité documentary work; it is a qualitatively detailed and informative reconstruction of a social group as exemplified in four created characters and their experience of each other during the seaside holiday. The deep observational, ethnographic, claims of the film are probably why audiences were not so engaged. We tend to want to experience film as fantasy rather than as a research mirror on our own lives. An edited entirely comedy version of the work may have found a more extensive audience but this was not Rozier's methodology (*Du côté d'Orouët* is not *Les Bronzés* 1978, dir. Leconte).

As noted earlier in this essay, nuances and telling details are revealed in the film. For example, not all the ordinary people have the same economic power or resources. Thus, Gilbert is maybe a successful lower middle class office manager in Paris but it is the young woman who has access to a resource such as the second family holiday home on the coast. This embodiment of class subtleties marks the film and allows Rozier to offer a historically resonant picture of his terrain. As its title suggests, the question of place and social geography is quite as important as a standard description of a class. Neatly deployed throughout the film is the comedy of metropolitan versus provincial coastal western France. For example in a particularly memorable and funny scene, the Parisians have all spotted the amusingly named village of Orouët and the girls have made fun of it. However, when they arrive dressed up for an evening out, all there is to discover is a few farm houses and not much else. Rozier allows his audience to see both sides. On the one hand, coastal-rural western France is very different from the capital city and its entertainment culture is almost non-existent, ridiculously exaggerated in trying to copy more high-end resorts with a 'casino' (e.g. Monaco; *Le Touquet et al*). Instead in reality it is limited and old fashioned. On the other hand, the Parisians are expecting too much and are naïve to imagine that the facilities they are familiar with can be replicated in this provincial space. This is a divide that is further underlined in the costumes used in the film. The local fisherman wear-warm work clothes and for them the sea is a site of economy and labour (fishing), while the tourist-visitors consistently wear bright and modern leisure clothes or swimwear. In this staging Rozier underlines that summer does not mean holidays and fun for the local population: instead, it is a time of work and business, whereas for the young visitors it is an opportunity to show off their new fashions and to display their bodies on the beach. Tellingly at the end of the film the woman who runs the creperie is shutting down the café to return to a boulangerie in Rennes. It is an important

snippet of information about the economy of a seaside town and its reliance on the tourist season. Through such details Rozier shows that not everyone is quite as economically equal as the neutral landscape of the beach may quite suggest. Some people have access to second homes; others work hard lives from the resources of the sea; and some again are entirely reliant on the seasonal economy of tourism. One might note finally here that others again do not have access at all to any of the worlds shown by Rozier in his film and do not feature in it at all. One thinks for example of those struggling to eke out an existence in the *bidonvilles* that had grown up around Paris.⁷ Others again who were ‘invisible’ because they were ‘confined’ to official camps that housed Algerian migrants across the south coast of France (Jordi and Hamoumou, 2003).

Let me next note that Rozier’s eye for the lower middle class social-strata was itself still relatively unusual: he was pioneering in offering storytelling about this group. Compare him to for example a contemporary director, Claude Sautet, and for instance his *Les choses de la vie* (1970, the adaptation of a novel by Paul Guimard). Although the film also narrates a love-triangle, it is set among the international jet set Parisian haute bourgeoisie. Therein the protagonists live in smart apartments and stroll about near harbours with yachts. They have cars and don’t use trains or the metro (which is shown by Rozier in a Paris sequence at the end of his work). This is completely different social terrain to *Du côté d’Orouët* which instead focusses on small dingy sail boats, local farmers loaning out their riding horses, and the down at heel creperie. As noted above, Rozier’s film also includes local people from the small holiday town most of who are fisherman working for a living from the sea. Rozier’s casting decisions of course add to this aesthetic. The film has no ‘stars’ and it is the debut feature of Ménez, who was not from an acting or arts family. In summary, Rozier’s far too often overlooked film is a significant contribution to cinema’s role as a sociological barometer of post-war France. Where *Adieu Philippine* measured the temperature of the tensions of the war in Algeria, *Du côté d’Orouët* invented a new social cinema for France that aimed to capture a vision of the emerging petit bourgeoisie. This is not the popular terrain of the standard representations of the working class hero in the mode of the Jean Gabin films of the 1930s. However, it was also distinct from the likes of Sautet’s work or that of Claude Lelouche’s *Un homme et une femme* (1966) or the Catholic middle class world of Grenoble seen in Eric Rohmer’s *Ma nuit chez Maude* (1969). There was also of course none of the explicit militancy of the Left in the film that was being pursued in Godard’s work from around this time. However, what Rozier achieves is case study fieldwork on the experience of a lot of French and West Europeans in the later 1960s and 1970s where class structures

7. For early campaigning sociology on this aspect, see Hervo and Charras, 2022.

were reshaping into an expanded, if ill defined, ‘lower middle class’, that remained nonetheless precariously positioned in terms of both the economic pressures it was always exposed to and lacking in cultural power of the historically established and secure elite social groups.

Rozier’s insights merit much greater recognition from scholars and critics precisely because he was able to ‘show’ his social subjects without too much explicit exposition or any didactic position other than a general empathetic tone. Moreover, his languid slow film style neither exploited nor spectacularized its subject but rather allowed it to breathe and to show the everyday banality of the youth without much economic glamour.

(3) Rozier posits that social experience is situated in a natural environment – the geography and ecology of the Atlantic coast. Throughout the work Rozier captures powerful images of the coastline and the sea to place between his sections of ethnographic description and narrative advance. In so doing it seems to me that Rozier suggests that there is the banal social order of human experience and the profound environmental (what we might call today ecological) rhythm of nature itself.⁸ This aspect is first established through the almost permanent sound of the tide in the film and glimpses of the Atlantic from the holiday home windows. It is developed by some of the film’s few examples of demonstrable montage when Rozier cuts directly from the comedy to view the empty space of the ocean or the expanse of the beach. These passages not only punctuate the social drama but they equally set out the importance of nature itself compared to the everyday modern human existence of the characters. They set in context the failures of Gilbert to show off his masculine prowess and implicitly compare his struggles with the timeless beauty and poetry of the natural order. In this film, the summer is not only a time of social disorder and reorder, but it is also a pause to experience the utterly dramatic force of the environment. *Du côté d’Orouët* does not claim to be a celebration of western France (indeed it also gently mocks the provincial in the mode described above) yet it is one of the best works to show off that region’s natural beauty and the force of the ocean. Rozier captures the stunning power of water, sand, sea, wind and light, in each of these passages to great effect. Against the mundane and the everyday world of the holiday home (sociologically observed), Rozier shows us something more powerful and stunning when he films the ocean and its shore. It is in these passages that the work moves out from its enclosed invented-documentary space to something different again. The lives of the protagonists are suspended temporarily and the audience is invited to experience the visual pleasure of the photography of nature. The first montage cut to ‘show’ the Atlantic is incredibly powerful after the extended passages of

8. The importance of the sea is emphasized greatly in the analysis pursued in Sylvain Coumoul “La Mer monstre”, in Burdeau (ed.), 2001: 87–91.

quite claustrophobic interactions between the characters and relatively plotless descriptions of their everyday encounters. Rozier is not a mystical cineaste and there is no sacred aspect to this material. Rather it aims to genuinely capture the ordinary but equally amazing effect of coastal panoramas and the space where land and sea meet. What is interesting is that these pauses, the insertions of landscape/seascape are polysemic. They may speak of the eternal truths of the human experience or they may contrast the triviality of that same experience with the idea of the force of nature. Or differently again, they may stand for the tourist's gaze that lower middle class people were fascinated in and exploited in the growth of what Bourdieu defined as the typical lower middle class hobby of amateur photography. Let me note that Gilbert does not claim expertise as a photographer precisely because Rozier's drama needs Gilbert to be maladroit, to not have an expertise to show off any skill in whatsoever and photography is exactly what his social group were fond of and 'good' at. Visually speaking the same images offer beauty and a chance for the audience to reflect on the social comedy sequences that have preceded them. There is a meditative aspect to the material not unlike that found in the later work of Marguerite Duras on the Normandy coast in her *Baxter Vera Baxter* (1977). For all of these reasons Rozier's first cut from the endless conversations of the girls and Gilbert to the water's edge and the Atlantic sky is a truly memorable moment in cinema.

IN short, Rozier shows a great facility to mine the social-political stakes of his times without ever taking an explicit political position of his own. Watching *Du côté d'Orouët* in 2021 means plenty of Rozier's social realism style (free moving camera work, informal dialogue, intradiegetic sound, subject selection) feels now very familiar because of our knowledge of later works from for example the Dardennes brothers, or Rozier's closest cinematic British cousin, in my opinion, Mike Leigh.⁹ Yet we must acknowledge that in 1969 his work was highly original and the Rozier aesthetic of blending realist fiction with imagined sociological fact in *Du côté d'Orouët* was ground breaking. The work is an experiment on mixing comedy with ultra-real sociological observation. For precisely these same reasons the work is open to criticism. Fiction is suggested as truth, imagined ethnographic observation that is entirely invented (or at best improvised) was framed by a story-working script, the sociology of a struggling class and gender group is repeatedly aestheticized by the landscape photography of the ocean. In other words, Rozier's works search for the authentic is in many aspects almost entirely inauthentic because after all it is constructed and not just found and observed. And, yes, it is

9. The social comedy meets documentary realism sentiment is also oddly suggestive of the BBC television comedy, 'The Office' (Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant, 2001). Remarkable to then discover that Rozier had teamed up again with Ménez in the 1970s to make an observational television comedy for Antenne 2 that is set in a marketing company office, *Marketing Mix* (Rozier, 1978). Therein the Ménez executive figure is named 'Maginot'.

ideological too in its selections, emphases and omissions. Artificially composed ‘found footage’-sociology is neither hard sociology nor is it original found material. Nonetheless, for me, *Du côté d’Orouët* is a masterpiece in and of its own terms. For all of its potential failings and frustrations, Rozier created an entirely new form of cinema and did give the ordinary people his image of themselves. His hybrid aesthetic set in play a fascinating experimental space which was edited and framed but also allowed space for free speech, real physical encounters between people, and the sharing of a typical experience with an audience. It holds on screen forever one idea of the summer holidays that the majority of North West Europeans were experiencing in the mid to late twentieth century. It captured this world with its own ‘honesty’, or better to say empathy, because Rozier’s ethnography is never horribly cruel. Certainly, the work feels like a last hurrah of the Nouvelle Vague search for realism and new genre blends: a very long epilogue to better known work from Truffaut and Godard that could not find an audience in 1973 because it was too late. In fact, it is also the case that Rozier invented a form of cinema that chimes more with today than yesterday. In its hybridity and engagement with the aesthetics of homemade film, found footage and or street digital film and photography, *Du côté d’Orouët* anticipated the twenty first century formats of camera phones, youtube channels, and the like. To conclude, Rozier makes us laugh at our own experiences and we should be grateful for that as well.

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