

# IN FOCUS: The French New Wave at Fifty

Pushing the Boundaries

## Introduction

GINETTE VINCEDEAU, editor

The year 2009 was awash with fiftieth anniversary celebrations of the French New Wave, from the French consulate in Hong Kong to the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Ciné Lumière in London to the Vieille Charité in Marseille and the Cinémathèque Française in Paris, and many other places in between. Festivals, retrospectives, and conferences commemorated what has become *the* landmark film movement in French cinema, widely seen as “an alternative cinema that was personal, radical and independent” whose effects “are still with us today.”<sup>1</sup> As these words (culled from the Irish Film Institute program—but I could have picked any number of other sources) make clear, the dominant tone has been one of celebration. It is with this in mind that I approached the contributors to this In Focus feature. All are recognized experts on the French New Wave and on this period of French film history through their publications, but all share the desire to challenge our vision of the movement, or at the very least to push the boundaries beyond the recognized canon of filmmakers—traditionally understood as comprising two groups, one around the *Cahiers du cinéma* (François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Claude Chabrol, Eric Rohmer, and Jacques Rivette), the other the “Left Bank” filmmakers Alain Resnais, Agnès Varda, and Chris Marker.

Not that there is not a lot to celebrate about the French New Wave. Undoubtedly the *nouvelle vague* represented a break in filmmaking practice at the turn of the 1960s, introducing new ways of making films outside the mainstream industry, spreading the use of lighter technologies, ushering in an entire new generation of directors, stars, cinematographers, producers, and composers. It also, significantly, revolutionized the way people saw films and the way they wrote about them, in particular popularizing the *politique des auteurs*. This familiar

1 Irish Film Institute, “The French New Wave,” [http://www.irishfilm.ie/cinema/season2\\_07.asp?SID=176](http://www.irishfilm.ie/cinema/season2_07.asp?SID=176) (accessed December 30, 2009).

“legend,” or “myth” in Antoine de Baecque’s terms,<sup>2</sup> whose gods are François Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard, surrounded by the other directors mentioned above, has been remarkably successful at perpetuating itself. This is in part due to the fact that most are still making films fifty years later (and in many cases films that still matter), as are many of the stars concerned—Jeanne Moreau and Jean-Pierre Léaud, to name but two. The brilliance, charm, and freshness of the films is clearly another important factor. For each new generation of film students and cinephiles, the modernist yet elegiac black-and-white visions of Paris offered by *Breathless* (*À bout de souffle* [Jean-Luc Godard, 1960]) and *Cléo from 5 to 7* (*Cléo de 5 à 7* [Agnès Varda, 1962]); the cruel yet ardent sexual games of *Paris Belongs to Us* (*Paris nous appartient* [Jacques Rivette, 1960]), *Shoot the Piano Player* (*Tirez sur le pianiste* [François Truffaut, 1960]), *Les bonnes femmes* (Claude Chabrol, 1960), and *Jules et Jim* (Truffaut, 1962); the sincerity and intensity of *The 400 Blows* (*Les quatre cents coups* [Truffaut, 1959]) and *Hiroshima mon amour* (Alain Resnais, 1959), all come as a fresh revelation. In short, these films of fifty years ago have a nonchalance and modernity that is still sexy and “cool” today.

Wittingly or not, the New Wave directors were adept at perpetuating their own legend through a trick of historiography. Central to this is the famous polemical article by François Truffaut titled “A Certain Tendency in French Cinema,” originally published in *Cahiers du cinéma* in January 1954,<sup>3</sup> in which Truffaut ferociously attacked French mainstream cinema, and in particular the somber melodramas and costume films of the so-called Tradition of Quality. The article spearheaded a veritable campaign by Truffaut and others such as Godard and Chabrol to denigrate mainstream French cinema and position themselves as the figures of renewal. This classic avant-gardist strategy, aimed at creating a “distinction” (in Pierre Bourdieu’s terms) within the French cinematic field between the new generation and the rest, was successful not only in promoting the new filmmakers as both critics and cineastes, but also in creating a historiographical vacuum around the New Wave. For a long time, and to a large extent still today, the French cinema of the 1950s and 1960s, beyond the canonical New Wave titles and a few select older auteurs (Jacques Tati, Jean-Pierre Melville, Robert Bresson, Jacques Becker), has remained terra incognita. Moreover their strategy also ensured that the canon of New Wave titles proper remained more or less confined to their own works and those of a select group.

Since the early 1960s, writing on the New Wave has been many-layered: in addition to several anthologies of texts written by the New Wave critics turned practitioners, there have been auteurist works on individual directors from the 1960s onwards, followed by Marxist critiques in the 1970s, before academic publications started gathering momentum in the 1980s and 1990s, peaking in 1998 shortly before the movement’s fortieth anniversary.<sup>4</sup> That year saw the publication of three important French books

2 Antoine de Baecque, *La nouvelle vague: Portrait d'une jeunesse* (Paris: Flammarion, 1998).

3 Although the article (originally published in the January 1954 *Les cahiers du cinéma*) has been translated and anthologized previously, a new and more accurate English translation (by Peter Graham) can be found in *The French New Wave: Critical Landmarks*, ed. Peter Graham and Ginette Vincendeau (London: British Film Institute, 2009), 39–63.

4 For an extended discussion of writing on the New Wave, see Ginette Vincendeau, “Introduction: Fifty Years of the French New Wave: From Hysteria to Nostalgia,” in Graham and Vincendeau, *The French New Wave*, 1–29.

on the New Wave: Michel Marie's concise but authoritative *La nouvelle vague: Une école artistique*, Antoine de Baecque's sociological study of *La nouvelle vague: Portrait d'une jeunesse*, and Jean Douchet's *Nouvelle vague*, a lavishly illustrated glorification of the movement by one of its former practitioners. Marie and de Baecque, followed in 2002 by Richard Neupert's substantial study, *A History of the French New Wave Cinema*, did much to increase our knowledge of the movement in terms of its place in the French film industry and French culture, and consolidated its position in the academic syllabus.<sup>5</sup> Yet while these seminal works certainly deepened our understanding of what the New Wave meant, they did not fundamentally challenge its basic premises or corpus. Strikingly, although the issue of who was "in" and "out" was the subject of lively debate right from the beginning, the movement has continued to be identified with a relatively narrow cadre of filmmakers. However, as these insights have been absorbed, the last few years have seen a new generation of scholars turn the spotlight on the New Wave in a number of fresh and different ways.

Once the euphoria of the celebrations has passed, the fiftieth anniversary of the New Wave is an excellent opportunity to give pride of place to these new approaches that both stretch the boundaries of what we think of as "the French New Wave" and challenge some of the basic tenets, even clichés, associated with it. It is particularly apt that two of the present scholars come from the United States and two from France. Both American scholars, Richard Neupert and Vanessa Schwartz, highlight the importance of situating the movement in the context of its relationship with America. Extending the work from his now classic *A History of the French New Wave Cinema*, Neupert here shifts the focus away from the Left Bank/Right Bank Parisian microcosm to look at the American reception of the New Wave. By meticulously trawling through *Time*, *Newsweek*, and the *New York Times*, Neupert shows the shifting parameters the American press applied to the films and reveals how the New Wave canon at the time, both in France and across the Atlantic, differed somewhat from what we know it as today; in particular, he illuminates the importance and topicality of Jean-Pierre Mocky and his zeitgeist film *The Chasers* (*Les dragueurs*, 1959), rarely mentioned by historians of French cinema and certainly never part of the New Wave canon. As in her 2007 book *It's So French! Hollywood, Paris and the Making of Cosmopolitan Film Culture*,<sup>6</sup> Vanessa Schwartz shows the crucial importance of Franco-American cinematic relations, but here applied to the transatlantic factors that predated and permitted the success of the New Wave; in the process she shows how the canonization of Chabrol, Truffaut, Godard, and others as harbingers of modernity has occluded the importance of earlier movies, whether they are auteurist works such as Varda's *La Pointe-Courte* (1954) or the popular movies of Brigitte Bardot, as well as later films such as those of Jacques Demy.

5 Michel Marie, *The French New Wave: An Artistic School* (*La nouvelle vague: Une école artistique* [1997]), trans. Richard Neupert (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003); Antoine de Baecque, *La nouvelle vague: Portrait d'une jeunesse* (Paris: Flammarion, 1998); Jean Douchet, *French New Wave* (*Nouvelle vague* [1998]), trans. Robert Bonnono (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 1999); and Richard Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave Cinema*, 2nd ed. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002).

6 Vanessa R. Schwartz, *It's So French! Hollywood, Paris, and the Making of Cosmopolitan Film Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

While Neupert and Schwartz draw on industrial as well as cultural history parameters, the two French scholars Geneviève Sellier and Philippe Mary revisit the New Wave through a methodological turn away from the dominant French aesthetics and auteurist approaches, turning instead to, respectively, gender and cultural studies, and sociology. Sellier here extends the groundbreaking gender critique of the New Wave made in her book *Masculine Singular: French New Wave Cinema*<sup>7</sup> by considering two little-examined films, *The Games of Love* (*Les jeux de l'amour* [Philippe de Broca, 1960]) and *Tonight or Never* (*Ce soir ou jamais* [Michel Deville, 1961]), in the light of the French tradition of *libertinage*. She thereby reveals the widespread gender imbalance and misogyny that, in these films as in better-known ones, is hidden by their apparent modernity, and also how the French reception of the films betrays the same mind-set in the culture at large. In his book *La nouvelle vague et le cinéma d'auteur. Socio-analyse d'une révolution artistique* (as yet untranslated into English),<sup>8</sup> as well as in this article, Philippe Mary reexamines the way in which the cultural field of the New Wave was constructed as “new” by its practitioners, from industrial, historical, and sociological perspectives. In particular, he offers a novel way of understanding how filmmakers like Truffaut and Godard made the specific aesthetic choices that have become their trademark and evolved their public persona, not in a traditional biographical sense but in terms of their cultural and social positioning at a precise moment in time, linking their practice also to new developments in other arts.

Altogether the four essays provide an object lesson in shifting historical paradigms. Whether they look at new objects (Sellier, Neupert, Schwartz) or illuminate familiar ones through a new lens (Mary, Sellier), all writers show that we urgently need to extend the familiar New Wave corpus to new filmmakers (Mocky, de Broca, Deville, Demy, Bardot) and include new film titles, that we have to revise the classic periodization of the New Wave beyond the accepted span of 1959–1963 (or in some readings 1965) to include both films made in the 1950s and later in the 1960s, and that we must, especially, rethink the relationship between the New Wave and popular French cinema. They also demonstrate our need to understand the novelty of Godard, Truffaut, and others not as some innate artistic quality or stroke of luck, but as a complex interplay of personal and industry circumstances and the efforts—both conscious and unconscious—of young *male* filmmakers to grasp and represent inevitable historical change, especially in relation to women and the new sexual mores, while still retaining control of the production and aesthetic process. In all these respects, Neupert, Schwartz, Sellier, and Mary do not in these essays so much provide a backward glance at the New Wave as convincingly demonstrate fertile new avenues for studying it. \*

7 Geneviève Sellier, *Masculine Singular: French New Wave Cinema* (*La nouvelle vague, un cinéma au masculin singulier* [2005]), trans. Kristin Ross (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

8 Philippe Mary, *La nouvelle vague et le cinéma d'auteur. Socio-analyse d'une révolution artistique* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2006).

# The New Wave's American Reception

by RICHARD NEUPERT

That the New Wave films immediately provoked huge enthusiasm is manifest in their significant critical and/or box office success and in the enormous amount of press reaction they elicited.

Ginette Vincendeau<sup>1</sup>

Along with most of the arts in France, the cinema spent a long postwar period in the doldrums. But when De Gaulle came to power, his government announced that it did not intend to send good screen subsidies after the same old bad ideas. . . . Suddenly the New Wave was rolling, and on the crest of it dozens of ambitious young *cinéastes* went surfboarding to success.

*Time*<sup>2</sup>

**N**ews and summaries of the impressive gains by a new generation of New Wave French directors began very early on in the mainstream American press. While young scholar Noël Burch contributed a serious, even scathing overview of 1959 and its Cannes Film Festival winners for *Film Quarterly*,<sup>3</sup> observers in the popular press soon added their own more upbeat perspectives on the films and personalities that seemed to be capturing so much attention around the world. By the fall of 1959, when the first of the year's French films arrived in the United States, even *Time* magazine featured a story explaining and assessing what they boldly called *Les Vagueistes*. *Newsweek* followed suit, while *The New Yorker* and *New York Times* regularly reviewed New Wave films and included interviews with major stars and directors as the young French talents came ashore for their first publicity tours. By the winter of 1962, a canon of New Wave figures was solidly in place, so much so that *Esquire* began an article on "Paris in the Sixties: The Great Upsurge" with caricatures of high-profile, core participants hanging out at a café: Alain Resnais, François

- 1 Ginette Vincendeau, "Introduction: Fifty Years of the French New Wave," in *The French New Wave: Critical Landmarks*, ed. Peter Graham and Ginette Vincendeau (London: British Film Institute, 2009), 6.
- 2 "Cinema: New Wave," *Time*, November 16, 1959, 119.
- 3 Noël Burch, "Qu'est-ce que la nouvelle vague?" *Film Quarterly* 13, no. 2 (Winter 1959): 16–30.

Truffaut, and Jean-Luc Godard are all there, alongside actors Jeanne Moreau, Jean-Paul Belmondo, and Françoise Brion, seated just across from Françoise Sagan. According to *Esquire*, “The New Wave is the most exciting art form of the Sixties, an integral part of the intellectual and cultural life that keeps Paris supreme among the world’s great cities.”<sup>4</sup> This new Paris was populated by a young, creative generation, and Americans were eager to engage with its lively trends and learn more about the participants. In many ways, the American fascination with “cosmopolitan Frenchness,”<sup>5</sup> from Audrey Hepburn’s Givenchy fashions to the Kennedys’ new French chef in the White House, was symptomatic of an era when France meant style and elegance.<sup>6</sup> However, the casual, contemporary behavior and dialogue in New Wave movies seemed to give another, more direct and less pretentious peek into “being French.”

The New Wave’s scope, quality, and meaning differed from place to place, as only a portion of the most important films gradually reached eager world audiences. But in the United States, the New Wave was particularly significant. The U.S. perception and understanding of the New Wave, however, was also shaped by absences and gaps. Since American critics and audiences did not have ready access to many of the movies, social forces, or personalities who made up the French *jeune cinéma* (young cinema), their New Wave quickly became an even narrower roster of directors here than was the case in France. The United States contributed to a condensed perception of the movement that, for better or worse, went on to shape how many understood the French New Wave from the first days and ultimately for years to come.

American interest in the New Wave was immediate. The *New York Times* pounced upon the phenomenon early in June of 1959, informing readers that “[t]he New Wave” (*La Nouvelle vague*) as they are termed, is getting a tremendous play in the French press. Apart from the fact that most of them are friends, ex-film critics, under 30, wealthy (through family, marriage, or inheritance), ambitious, and like to make low-budget films with little-known actor friends and top cameraman Henri Decae, there is very little binding them together as a school or movement.<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, in addition to signaling Decae as a vital member, they also mention Jean-Pierre Mocky among key participants. We will return shortly to Mocky to show how fluid even the succinct American summary of the New Wave remained. The notion of youthful outsiders making inexpensive films was quickly expanded upon by *Time* that fall when the two Cannes award winners, *Black Orpheus* (*Orfeu Negro* [Marcel Camus]) and *The 400 Blows* (*Les quatre cents coups* [François Truffaut]) arrived. *Time* contributed to the myth of the struggling young artists, emphasizing that Camus could only shoot his movie on days when he had enough money for film stock, and that he slept on the beach to save on hotel expenses. They also relied on information from the French Film Office, such

4 David Schoenbrun, “Paris in the Sixties: The Great Upsurge,” *Esquire*, February, 1962, 134.

5 Vanessa R. Schwartz, *It’s So French! Hollywood, Paris, and the Making of Cosmopolitan Film Culture* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 7.

6 See Gaylyn Studlar, “Chi-Chi Cinderella: Audrey Hepburn as Couture Counter-Model,” in *Hollywood Goes Shopping*, ed. David Desser and Garth Jowett (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 159–178.

7 Cynthia Grenier, “Noted in the French Film Capital,” *New York Times*, June 7, 1959.

as the fact that thirty first-time directors had just shot popular features in the past twelve months, thus setting the stage for an assuredly bright future for these young filmmakers. *Time* also celebrated Louis Malle's "low-cost smash," *The Lovers* (*Les amants*, 1958), which was only then coming to American screens.<sup>8</sup>

Magazines like *Time* and *Newsweek* proved crucial for preparing a large potential audience for the subsequent New Wave films. While *Newsweek's* reviews remained a bit more restrained, *Time* focused upon the bold eroticism and lack of moralizing in the young French films: "The new French films are frankly sexy. . . . They are also *Nouvelle Vaguely* romantic in love scenes, which they often shoot through peculiar filters in a tricky way. . . . The French seem to enjoy such youthful excesses." But *Time* also concentrated on an aspect that bothered *Variety* as well as censors: these films were populated by a youth that was blatantly amoral, with an ethical vacuum at the core of the movies.<sup>9</sup> Yet, as *Time* points out, *Les Vagueistes* have their principles: "They hate commercialism."<sup>10</sup>

*Time* also managed to add impressive interpretations to these casual new movies, proving that despite their lack of professional credentials these undisciplined young directors warranted serious critical attention equivalent to that granted Ingmar Bergman or other modern European auteurs. For example, the *Time* review of *Les quatre cents coups* acknowledges that the director is "an unknown" but then concentrates on Antoine in the now-famous Rotor ride: "Searching for freedom, he scrambles along the walls upside down. The machine, he discovers, has repealed the natural law that keeps his feet on the ground. It has robbed him of all relationship to the true center of things. The child in the centrifuge stands for modern man in the society he has made." *Les quatre cents coups* suddenly fits the existential angst of 1950s French literature, with a film by the unknown Truffaut granted the respect due a Jean-Paul Sartre novel. Further, *Time* takes a surprisingly modern perspective on the movie's final freeze-frame: "Bewildered and heartsick, [Antoine] turns back to face life, society, the audience. . . . The spectator is personally accused of everything that has happened to the boy." *Time* concludes that the young Truffaut has mature control of his medium and avoids stock characters; even the pathetic parents are stuck in "the relentless, centrifugal round of daily life."<sup>11</sup>

Within the year *Time* would go on to champion *Hiroshima mon amour* (Alain Resnais, 1959), "the acknowledged masterpiece of the New Wave,"<sup>12</sup> and then the following year *Breathless* (*À bout de souffle* [Jean-Luc Godard, 1960]), which receives one of the most articulate reviews in a string of intelligent assessments of the New Wave and its cultural context: "*Breathless* is a cubistic thriller that has an audience because half a century of modern art and movies have rigorously educated the public eye. . . . Godard

8 "Cinema: New Wave," 119.

9 For more on the industry's concerns, see Richard Neupert, "Dead Champagne: *Variety's* New Wave," *Film History* 10, no. 2 (1998): 219–230.

10 "Cinema: New Wave," 119.

11 "The New Pictures," *Time*, December 14, 1959, 96.

12 "Love in a Mass Grave: *Hiroshima mon amour*," *Time*, May 16, 1960, 88.



has achieved a sort of ad-lib epic, a Joycean harangue of images. . . . The hero . . . behaves like a personification of Gide's *acte gratuit* ("an action motivated by nothing . . . born of itself"), and his story can be seen as an extemporization on the existentialist tenet that life is just one damn thing after another." Further, the review signals the jerkiness of the editing: "The trick also distorts, rearranges, relativizes time—much as Picasso manipulated space in *Les Femmes d'Alger*." <sup>13</sup> Godard's intertextuality is echoed by the *Time* reviewer, who situates *Breathless* within the lofty arts of literature and painting.

While *Time* delivered insightful, well-informed reviews, *The New Yorker* lent a number of in-depth review articles to the topic. Janet Flanner, writing under the pen name Genet, regularly kept *New Yorker* readers updated via her "Letter from Paris" column. During the summer of 1960, she points out the censorship threats to several New Wave films that have not yet received permits for export to the American market, especially Roger Vadim's "shoddy, queasy modernization" of *Dangerous Liaisons* (*Les liaisons dangereuses*, 1959). But she also reinforced many of the attributes that would become so linked to this generation of filmmakers "with brand-new camera eyes" and "fresh, realistic, compact, and stimulating technique." "What these young directors have shown best is what they know best—the anarchic, spasmodic, lawless, and rebellious lives of certain modern young French. In these films, the shortcut to romance is sex."<sup>14</sup> Whether it was the "ugly attractiveness" of Jean-Paul Belmondo, the power of the unknown youngster Jean-Pierre Léaud, or the amoral allure of Jeanne Moreau, the American press quickly became fascinated with the recurring figures in this most exciting of French cultural moments. Occasionally, the reporters expressed hope that a similar youth movement might spring up in American cinema. *Time* writes in 1960 that "a lively New Wavelet of cinematic creativity is rolling across the U.S. and gaining momentum." Their evidence is *Pull My Daisy* (Robert Frank and Alfred Leslie, 1959), *The Savage Eye* (Ben Maddow, Sidney Meyers, and Joseph Strick, 1960), and *Private Property* (Leslie Stevens, 1960).<sup>15</sup> Unlike later homages offered by *The Graduate* (Mike Nichols, 1967) and *Bonnie and Clyde* (Arthur Penn, 1967), these gritty, low-budget films are shown to be as daring in structure, content, and mode of production as some of the best of the New Wave.

However, while the New Wave's reception may have been very positive, with core members and traits well covered by the popular American media, only a fraction of the New Wave films played in the States, and many of those only reached major markets with established art houses. Fortunately, subsequent distribution on college campuses in 16mm prints extended the reach slowly and steadily for many years to come. Among the New Wave films to play here, some, like Jean-Pierre Mocky's *The Chasers* (*Les dragueurs*, 1959), were initially assessed as crucial titles, alongside movies such as *Orfeu Negro*, *Hiroshima mon amour*, and eventually *Cléo from 5 to 7* (*Cléo de 5 à 7* [Agnès Varda, 1962]). Within the *New York Times*, *Les dragueurs* is cited as exemplary in that it is filling "the best movie houses in Paris" but has been attacked with a "thumping

13 "Cubistic Crime: *Breathless*," *Time*, February 17, 1961, 62.

14 Genet, "Letter from Paris," *New Yorker*, August 16, 1960, 91, 92.

15 "New Wavelet," *Time*, May 23, 1960, 69.



reprimand for ‘immorality.’”<sup>16</sup> Later, their review labeled it “inventive, striking fare,” with a “direct and stark” presentation of sexual activity, mentioning that *Les dragueurs* was but one ripple in the “inundation” coming from the New Wave.<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, Mocky would soon vanish from most subsequent accounts of the New Wave, but inclusion here is significant and should not be all that surprising. Jean-Pierre Mocky and his first feature film embody many of the pertinent traits for most historical definitions of the movement. These 1959 and 1960 *New York Times* articles justify taking a closer look back at *Les dragueurs*.

*Les dragueurs* premiered in Paris in April 1959, just before Truffaut and Resnais triumphed at Cannes that year. Jean-Pierre Mocky is clearly part of the *jeune cinéma* generation. Born in 1929, a year after Jacques Rivette and a year before Claude Chabrol, he began not as a critic but as an actor, who moved into directing his own first feature film, which he cowrote with three acquaintances. It was accomplished thanks to a young first-time producer, Joseph Lisbona, who formed his own tiny production company and served as assistant director on Mocky’s feature. The film was shot mostly on location. The music was composed by the relatively new Maurice Jarre, and the cinematographer was Edmond Séchan, who had gotten his start with Louis Malle on *Silent World* (*Le monde du silence*, 1956). It also costarred Charles Aznavour as a timid young man, anticipating his role several years later in *Shoot the Piano Player* (*Tirez sur le pianiste* [Truffaut, 1960]), as well as Nicole Berger, just before she performed in Godard’s *All the Boys Are Called Patrick* (*Tous les garçons s’appellent Patrick* [1959]).

*Les dragueurs* fits all the usual story, and style traits of the New Wave. As Philippe Mary’s recent book points out, New Wave films “present contemporary society as it is lived . . . and [with] a freer sexuality.”<sup>18</sup> Yet Mary, like many historians of the movement, never mentions Mocky, even though the title of his film captured the sexual mores of the moment so well that *dragueur* became a new term for young men on the prowl, hunting for easy sexual prey. Among those few who mention the film, Susan Hayward acknowledges *Les dragueurs* for exposing the neuroses caused by the new sexual aggressiveness of this generation, torn between cruising and romantic love.<sup>19</sup> Geneviève Sellier also points to *Les dragueurs*: “Beneath Mocky’s recognizable style . . . the New Wave theme of suffering masculinity can be found, along with, behind the comic camouflage, a very strong misogyny.”<sup>20</sup> Admittedly, this is among the more sexist offerings of the era, though the film also shows that the protagonist, Freddy (Jacques Charrier), is on a sort of mission to break women’s hearts in order to prove how miserable and lost he himself has become. *Les dragueurs* only earned \$24,000 during its three-week first run in New York (roughly the equivalent of Varda’s *Cléo de 5 à 7*). Nonetheless, the film clearly made fans of some subsequent young filmmakers, and one shot in particular of Freddy flirting returns in *The Graduate*.

16 Grenier, “Noted in the French Film Capital.”

17 A. H. Weiler, “Rootless French,” *New York Times*, May 3, 1960.

18 Philippe Mary, *La nouvelle vague et le cinéma d’auteur* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2006), 12.

19 Susan Hayward, *French National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1993), 261–262.

20 Geneviève Sellier, *Masculine Singular: French New Wave Cinema (La nouvelle vague: Un cinéma au masculin singulier* [2005]), trans. Kristin Ross (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 112.

While Mocky is said to be “unclassifiable” by some French historians,<sup>21</sup> Claire Clouzot suggests he was initially a great hope of the New Wave before going in his own direction. In fact, Mocky was an active participant in the New Wave era. For instance, he explained to *Le film français* at the infamous Cannes Festival of 1959: We must “eliminate all the dead weight the cinema drags behind it”<sup>22</sup> including overly melodramatic and clichéd stories and “Tradition of Quality” production norms. He urged young filmmakers to shoot silent like the neorealists and compose their wild sound tracks later because it was more economical and more creative. In 1960, he even became his own producer, establishing Balzac Films, following the models recently established by Louis Malle, Claude Chabrol, and François Truffaut. Mocky is thus an illustrative player in this vast movement and a unique figure in French cinema, directing over forty feature films and scores of television shows. The *New York Times* of 1959 reminds us that Jean-Pierre Mocky warranted attention at this time, though the writer-director who later made so many mocking comedies soon vanished from the New Wave radar. Very quickly, *Hiroshima mon amour*, *Les quatre cents coups*, *À bout de souffle*, and *Jules et Jim* (Truffaut, 1962) became the canonical touchstones of the New Wave in the American press.

While movies like *Les dragueurs* were initially tagged as important, there were many others that never got even that limited window of attention. Jacques Rozier’s *Adieu Philippine*, which was labeled the “paragon of the *nouvelle vague*” by *Cahiers du cinéma* and graced the cover of their famous *nouvelle vague* issue in 1962,<sup>23</sup> was one of many films never distributed in the United States during the New Wave era. While its producer, Georges de Beauregard, managed to bundle the English-language distribution rights for *Adieu Philippine* in with *A Woman Is a Woman* (*Une femme est une femme* [Godard, 1961]) and *Lola* (Jacques Demy, 1961) for the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States, *Adieu Philippine* never received a commercial release in America. It only premiered in New York ten years later, in 1973, so for many international audiences it was never seen as part of the wave of new French films. Other important components of the New Wave missed here include Pierre Kast’s *Le bel âge* (1959), *A Game for Six Lovers* (*L’eau à la bouche* [Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, 1959]), Anna Karina in *Tonight or Never* (*Ce soir ou jamais* [Michel Deville, 1961]), and Marcel Hanoun’s stunning *A Simple Story* (*Une simple histoire*, 1958), which was so highly praised by Burch. Clearly, the New Wave experienced and summarized in the United States differed markedly from that in other nations.

By 1963, the attention granted the New Wave filmmakers within the American press had narrowed to concentrate on Truffaut and Godard. In the time between the limited first run of some New Wave films and the eventual publication of James Monaco’s important *The New Wave: Truffaut, Godard, Chabrol, Rohmer, Rivette*,<sup>24</sup> these

21 Bertrand Tavernier, “La modernité n’est pas née avec la nouvelle vague,” in *Que reste-t-il de la nouvelle vague?* ed. Aldo Tassone (Paris: Stock, 2003), 290.

22 Quoted in Richard Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave Cinema*, 2nd ed. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007), 39.

23 “Rozier, Jacques,” *Cahiers du cinéma* 138 (December 1962): 81.

24 James Monaco, *The New Wave: Truffaut, Godard, Chabrol, Rohmer, Rivette* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

directors, and scores of their comrades from the *jeune cinéma*, continued to churn out films, so their relevance only increased. The French New Wave remained close to the heart of cinema studies in the American market, but its reception reminds us that film history shifts continually across time and across markets, as well as from article to article and book to book. Happily, *la nouvelle vague* continues to elicit an enormous amount of press and interest. \*

## Who Killed Brigitte Bardot? Perspectives on the New Wave at Fifty

by VANESSA R. SCHWARTZ

Let us begin by contemplating an image of Brigitte Bardot, the most famous woman in the world when the New Wave was taking shape fifty years ago. The image comes from Jean-Luc Godard's *Contempt* (*Le mépris*, 1963) and is of a bloodied and lifeless Bardot sprawled in a red Alfa Romeo (Figure 1). This image of her violent death not only reminds us of the New Wave's deep discomfort with Bardot's celebrity at the time, but also serves as a marker of a greater historiographic unease with Bardot more generally within Film Studies. Her career and films have been largely sidelined in favor



Figure 1. A bloodied and lifeless Bardot sprawls across a red Alfa Romeo in Jean-Luc Godard's *Contempt* (*Le mépris* [Les Films Concordia, 1963]).

of a narrative that has overplayed and privileged the history of the New Wave; Bardot becomes important only insofar as she starred in the films of directors such as Jean-Luc Godard who then self-consciously offered visual unpackings of her enormous celebrity while (perhaps unwittingly) contributing to furthering it. Louis Malle, in *A Very Private Affair* (*Vie privée* [1962]), explicitly treats the issue of celebrity by having Bardot play a character so trapped by her own fame that she even suffers one of the earliest paparazzi “death by flashbulb” murders depicted on the screen.

Now that the New Wave is by some accounts “officially” fifty, perhaps, like a wise middle-aged person, it can be sober and mature enough to admit its excesses and exaggerations, its *partis pris*, and, finally, come to terms with who “it” murdered to get ahead. In particular, I am interested in bringing together recent feminist reevaluations such as Geneviève Sellier’s in *Masculine Singular: French New Wave Cinema* (which has recently underscored the New Wave’s troubled relationship to women, gender, and sexuality) with broader historical contextualizations that shed light on certain aspects of the marketing of French film about which we ought to know more—marketing that made the New Wave possible in the first place—and in reintegrating film audiences when we are thinking about the New Wave’s history.<sup>1</sup>

The first step in coming to terms with middle age is to stop lying about it. We now accept that, while the term “nouvelle vague” was first used by Françoise Giroud in the pages of *L’Express* in 1957 in relation to an article about the youthful postwar generation, it had nothing to do with the cinema. Critic Pierre Billard coined the term in relation to film in the pages of *Cinéma 58* when he made a list of forty filmmakers under forty. The year 1959 has become the benchmark date for the birth of the Nouvelle Vague because Claude Chabrol released *Le beau Serge* and *Les cousins* in February/March of that year, and because during the Cannes Film Festival, Truffaut’s *The 400 Blows* (*Les quatre cents coups*) won for Best Director, Marcel Camus’s *Black Orpheus* (*Orfeo Negro*) won the Palme D’Or, and Alain Resnais’s *Hiroshima mon amour* played then as well, making it seem as if something was happening in French cinema. But 1959 has also been pinpointed because it was in that year, during the Cannes festival, that UniFrance Film (the French Film Export Association) gathered a group of filmmakers and critics at La Napoule, near Cannes, hoping they would proclaim that they collectively stood for a new and unified vision of film. They could agree on nothing more than that films should be an act of personal creation and that filmmaking was a vocation rather than a profession. In some measure, these two points of agreement have stuck as vital aspects of the New Wave’s notion of “auteurism,” although the problem of whether there is any unified artistic expression in the French New Wave seemed then, as much as now, to be a hopeless cause. Yet, despite all historical evidence to the contrary, ever since its “declaration,” the New Wave has been constituted retrospectively, primarily by its films and by filmmakers, such as Truffaut, Rivette, and

1 Geneviève Sellier, *Masculine Singular: French New Wave Cinema* (2005), trans. Kristin Ross (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008). This is something with which Ginette Vincendeau has also been preoccupied. See especially, “L’ancien et le nouveau: Brigitte Bardot dans les années 50,” in *CinémaAction 67, Vingt ans de theories féministes*, ed. Reynaud Bérénice and Ginette Vincendeau (Paris: Cerf/Corlet, 1993). See also Vincendeau’s chapter on Bardot in *Stars and Stardom in French Cinema* (London and New York: Continuum, 2000, 2004). Rebecca DeRoo is also working on a book on Agnès Varda, feminism, and the New Wave.

Godard, who in reality may share more by life circumstance, having gone from writing for *Cahiers du cinéma* to making films, than they share as filmmakers.<sup>2</sup>

A more recent trend in the interpretation of the New Wave has been to see it as a cultural historical phenomenon rather than as an aesthetic school.<sup>3</sup> From this perspective, such anniversaries as the fiftieth are especially meaningful. Context and networks of filmmakers become as significant as the films themselves. Thus, the fabrication of the New Wave as a label (like “French Champagne”) in another time and place, by the domestic and then the international press at places such as film festivals like Cannes, becomes a particularly influential set of events in the history of the New Wave. Further, government programs, such as the advance on receipts designed by the Centre National de la Cinématographie, are as important as the style of the films and other directorial choices.

Whatever one’s methodological inclination, each of these narratives could use refreshing. For those scholars committed to a film- and style-centered narrative (in which the originality of the New Wave resides in a cinematic vision of a writer-director who shoots on a small budget, on location, using natural lighting, with intrusive camera techniques using a mobile camera, with mostly amateur actors, to name just a few elements in the familiar litany) it might be time to simply recognize once and for all that Agnès Varda’s 1954 *La Pointe-Courte* might be the inaugural New Wave film. Set in a fishing village in Southwest France, it features two parallel stories alternating between ethnographic footage of life in the village and the difficult relationship between a couple. It played, outside the competition, at Cannes in 1955. Although Varda is no longer ignored in histories of the New Wave, she is uncomfortably deemed a mother or godmother of the movement despite the fact that she is only four years older than Truffaut and a mere two years older than Godard. Some argue Varda belongs not with the New Wave but rather with the associated but separate Left Bank School. Alain Resnais, after all, worked as an editor on the film, and in many ways she had more in common personally and politically with Resnais and Chris Marker than she did with Truffaut. That said, her second, full-length film made eight years later, *Cléo from 5 to 7* (*Cléo de 5 à 7*), has been much more often comfortably assimilated into the New Wave canon of films than her first film. *La Pointe-Courte* thus seems to have been officially forgotten in a way that suggests that to remember it would give too much credit, too early, to someone other than Truffaut and then, of course, we would not now be marking fifty years of the New Wave but rather pointing to its real age of fifty-five years. We may have missed the boat.

The newer cultural historical approach is untroubled by *La Pointe-Courte* because it is not dependent on the aesthetics of a particular film; instead, it awaits a precise

2 For the book that most quintessentially characterizes this approach, see Michel Marie, *The French New Wave: An Artistic School* (1997), trans. Richard Neupert (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003). For two recent overviews of the field, see Naomi Greene, *The French New Wave. A New Look* (London: Wallflower Press, 2007); and Ginette Vincendeau, “Introduction: Fifty Years of the French New Wave: From Hysteria to Nostalgia,” in *The French New Wave: Critical Landmarks*, ed. Peter Graham and Ginette Vincendeau (London: British Film Institute, 2009), 1–30.

3 Antoine de Baecque, *La nouvelle vague* (Paris: Flammarion, 1998); Jean-Pierre Esquenazi, “À bout de souffle et la société de la nouvelle vague,” in *Les cinémas européens des années cinquantes*, ed. Jean-Pierre Bertin-Maghit (Paris: AFRHC, 2000); and Richard Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave Cinema* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002).

moment in time: Giroud's generational proclamations, followed by the Cannes Festival of 1959. And so 1959 remains more relevant to this way of thinking about the New Wave. The cultural historical approach is safe in its anniversary declarations. Yet, if the new reigning paradigm does not disturb such easy notions as "the New Wave" itself and only becomes another means to continue to consecrate Truffaut and Godard and *Cahiers du cinéma* at the expense of a more complete albeit more complex history, perhaps then it is not revisionist enough. The New Wave created a long-term legacy that allowed for the canonization of a certain French cinema within elite circles so that fifty years on we find it worthy of commemoration. But fifty years ago, its very emergence was due as much to the remarkable run of a blatantly commercial export market-oriented cinema that preceded and coincided with it as it was to the more familiar narrative of the influential writings of *Cahiers du cinéma* and the films of those already mentioned. If Varda's film troubles those committed to a film-driven narrative by giving us 1954 and *La Pointe-Courte* as a new first film, let us briefly turn back the dial of time in order to reexamine film history in the late 1950s in order to revise the cultural historical narrative. In this version, we will see what happened before women and popular culture were sent to the morgue. My hope here is to make clear that much French film history of the 1950s and 1960s remains unwritten—even as there seems to be no end to biographies of Godard.<sup>4</sup>

In January of 1958, the cover of the American photo weekly *Look* proclaimed that Brigitte Bardot was conquering America, a year and a half before the spring of 1959 (Figure 2). But even then Bardot did not, as has been often recounted, suddenly erupt

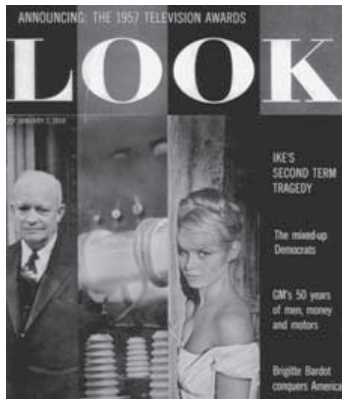


Figure 2. A year and a half before the proclamation of the New Wave, *Look* magazine proclaimed that Brigitte Bardot was conquering America (Cowles Magazines, 1958).

on the American screen at the end of 1956 with her explosive and natural performance as Juliette in *And God Created Woman* (*Et Dieu . . . créa la femme* [Roger Vadim]). Her way had been paved by bureaucrats and paparazzi.

In 1955, the French Film Office in New York, a branch of UniFrance Film, the French Film Export Association, established itself. The thriller *Les diaboliques* (Henri-Georges Clouzot, 1955), followed by *Rififi* (*Du Rififi chez les hommes* [Jules Dassin, 1955]) played in the United States for months, as no French films had before. French films lagged only behind English films in the number of foreign films released in America. The Museum of Modern Art also held a major retrospective of French films that year for high-brow audiences, while *Rififi* became the first foreign film to play at drive-ins.<sup>5</sup>

4 Recently, for example, Richard Brody, *Everything Is Cinema: The Working Life of Jean-Luc Godard* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2008), and forthcoming will be another biography of Godard by Antoine de Baecque.

5 For more on this, see Vanessa R. Schwartz, *It's So French! Hollywood, Paris, and the Making of Cosmopolitan Film Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

Bardot hit the market in America just as films such as *Les diaboliques* and *Rififi* proved that not all foreign films were art films. Bardot was spontaneous, youthful, mobile, and hedonistic. Perhaps most significantly, her fame did not simply rest on the quality or popularity of the movies she made. She was aided and abetted by the growing media presence of what would eventually be known as paparazzi photography, especially manufactured around the international glamour of the Cannes Film Festival, starting in the mid-1950s. François Nourissier, who wrote an early celebrity portrait of Bardot, noted she was the opposite of the great old Norma Desmond-like movie stars: “She’s someone you’d meet. Instead of the glorious old car, a Simca sports car . . . the oh so modern and hip woman.”<sup>6</sup>

By the time *Et Dieu . . . créa la femme* was released in 1956, Bardot had already been cast in sixteen films and had been heavily promoted in the materials of UniFrance Film as France’s “youngest actress.” In one of their newsletters from 1955, Roger Vadim, her husband and the director of *Et Dieu . . . créa la femme*, was already promoting her as “the young girl of today. I know her well. . . . When she acts, she invents nothing. She drives her own car in Paris with more confidence than a cab driver[.]”<sup>7</sup> These qualities were to become the great clichés of Bardot’s film persona: her youth, modernity, mobility, confidence, and freedom. Bardot “moved” and thus was no pinup who acted but rather a moving picture star who could also be stopped long enough to be photographed. Her peripatetic quality contributed greatly to her exportability. And exportability gave French film a wide international commercial boost before the New Wave emerged—whether one chooses to date it in 1954, 1957, or 1959.

Her persona offscreen immediately became as important as her on-screen roles. Her first starring role was in *Manina, la fille sans voile* (Willy Rozier, 1952), the English title of which, *The Girl in the Bikini*, overlapped with the familiar image she cultivated as a young starlet on the beaches in Cannes between 1953 and 1957, where she appeared yearly. By 1956, Bardot was already listed in one magazine as the top star in Germany, even before the release of *Et Dieu . . . créa la femme*, which the UniFrance Film people claimed was due to her popularity in the photographic press rather than her films.

The reception history of *Et Dieu . . . créa la femme* is too vast to detail here except to note that it was not particularly well received in France, except by the *Cahiers du cinéma* critics such as Truffaut, until it broke box-office records in the United States. I emphasize this point because I want to suggest that to better understand the development of French film in these years and the French New Wave in particular, we also need to look outside the French context. French filmmakers and the French government were hard at work rather successfully developing their export market in Europe, Latin America, Francophone countries, and nowhere more than in the United States, it turns out, in the period from 1953 to 1960. This prepared the way for the arrival of the New Wave in France and abroad by an aggressive film export unit in UniFrance and by the mechanism of the festival in Cannes, through which France assumed the role as arbiter of international film culture.<sup>8</sup>

6 François Nourissier, *Brigitte Bardot* (Turin: Grasset, 1960), 24.

7 *UniFrance Film infos* no. 36 (August–September 1955): 6–9.

8 See especially chapter 2 of *It’s So French!*



If I have in some measure been suggesting that the New Wave rode in on the coat-tails of a wave of film that preceded it but may have had nothing to do with it other than that it was French, a closer look at Bardot's comedies may, in fact, force a reconsideration of the singular artistic originality of the New Wave as well. Bardot made several films around the time of *Et Dieu . . . créa la femme*. The comedies, especially *That Naughty Girl* (*Cette sacrée gamine* [Michel Boisrond, 1956]), *Please, Mr. Balzac* (*En effeuillant la marguerite* [Marc Allégret, 1956]), *The Bride Is Much Too Beautiful* (*La mariée est trop belle* [Pierre Gaspard-Huit, 1956]), and *Une parisienne* (Michel Boisrond, 1957), are now mostly forgotten outside France; comedies are in any event among the most neglected genres of study, especially after the silent era and especially those made outside the Anglophone world. These films not only familiarized audiences with Bardot via the screen but also served as occasions for magazine articles depicting her life. All the films were, like the canonical New Wave films, concerned with contemporary society; they relentlessly featured such things as television sets, jukeboxes, and modern apartments with newfangled decor.

Because of the limits of space, I will focus only on the opening moments of *Une parisienne*, directed by René Clair's former assistant, Michel Boisrond. It begins with a black frame over a jazz sound track until Bardot bursts onto the screen driving down



Figure 3. Bardot bursts onto the screen driving down the Champs-Élysées in a red convertible, in Michel Boisrond's *Une parisienne* (Les Films Ariane, 1957).

the Champs-Élysées in a red convertible (Figure 3). She is filmed up close, probably with a shoulder-mounted camera positioned in a car driving alongside. In effect, it seems the camera may well have come off the tracks and certainly was already out of the studio and into the Parisian streets long before Jean Seberg was seen selling the *International Herald Tribune* along the same Parisian thoroughfare in *Breathless* (*À bout de souffle*; Godard, 1960). Although today we may require careful archaeologies to reconnect the popular films of Brigitte Bardot to the emergence of the New Wave in France,

at the time critics made this the standard narrative. To wit, in 1962, *Esquire* magazine explained that “Bardot was the spark of a great fire which began to flame in the late Fifties and which has become known as La Nouvelle Vague.”<sup>9</sup>

The boom in the commercial fortunes of French film internationally and especially in America provided by the popular cinema of Brigitte Bardot would soon go bust. While cinephiles may cherish the contributions of the New Wave—and it is fair to say it inspired a generation of new filmmakers around the world—general audiences would have little of it. For as much as the New Wave seemed to be celebrated upon its arrival, by 1965 UniFrance Film, for example, was beside itself with the current state of French film. In its annual report, it noted that “[i]f it wants to survive, French film has to change back and to draw the spectators of tomorrow, the mass audiences, it has

9 David Schoenbrun, “Paris in the Sixties: The Great Upsurge,” *Esquire*, February 1962, 82–84, 134–135.

to be accessible to all. . . . [W]e need to make films that are designed for the general public, but which preserve the trace of French taste.”<sup>10</sup> As much as French government officials today may claim the New Wave as part of the French *patrimoine*, in the 1960s, only a few years after its launch, they fretted about the way it had seemed to kill the broad audience for French film.

Into this breach came filmmaker Jacques Demy. Of course, he was already very much on the film scene. His first two features, *Lola* (1961) and *Bay of Angels* (*La baie des anges* [1963]), could have become part of the canon of New Wave films had he not gone on to make the films he did afterwards which have relegated him to minor status. Yet in 1963–1964, when he made *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* (*Les parapluies de Cherbourg*), a candy-colored film that was entirely sung, starring the beautiful young Catherine Deneuve, those concerned with film commerce in France saw a possible renewal in Demy. To some extent they were correct. He was given enormously positive treatment by French film officials and won the Palme d’Or at Cannes in 1964.

Demy is one of the most interesting and important filmmakers working in France during the same period as the New Wave whose life and work have not been given their full critical consideration in ways that have been integrated into our thinking about the New Wave.<sup>11</sup> Once he is studied more completely, we will be able to rethink and broaden our approach to this period in film history and also de-center the *Cahiers du cinéma* crowd. Unlike so many of the New Wave directors, Demy was not a film critic; he began as a young man with a fascination for animated films. The son of a garage owner from Nantes, his movies drew from his provincial background. They were mostly set outside Paris: Cherbourg, Rochefort, and Nantes were settings for modern life in his France. Early on he worked with the great ethnographic filmmaker Georges Rouquier; that influence can be seen in Demy’s short film about the clog-makers of the Val de Loire. Unlike the other New Wave filmmakers, he actually moved to Los Angeles and made a film about that city, in English, called *Model Shop* (1969). He also made a film in England starring the pop star Donovan. Demy made many musicals and in this way contributed to the history of that popular genre (as opposed to Godard’s *A Woman Is a Woman* [*Une femme est une femme*, 1961], which is a cinematic reflection on the American musical). His films connected with other popular idioms as well: fairy tales (*Donkey Skin* [*Peau d’âne*, 1970]), comedy (*A Slightly Pregnant Man* [*L’événement le plus important depuis que l’homme a marché sur la lune*, 1973]), and comics (*Lady Oscar*, 1979). Aside from the fact that Demy has been tainted by the idiom of popular films, his films were also primarily vehicles for actresses. His men were often gay icons: sailors, the dancer George Chakiris, or Jean Marais as the king in *Donkey Skin* in silver platform boots sitting on a white pussycat throne. He later asked feminist questions such as “What would

10 UniFrance Film Annual Report (1965), cited in Robert Cravenne, *Le tour du monde du cinéma français* (Paris: DIXIT, 1995), 241.

11 A recent article by Rodney Hill, “The New Wave Meets the Tradition of Quality: Jacques Demy’s *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*,” *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 1 (Fall 2008): 28–50, is a welcome treatment of Demy. Unfortunately, it does not so much question the definition of the New Wave as attempt to determine to what extent Demy does or does not fit the paradigm. I am suggesting, instead, that Demy’s work forces us to rethink the paradigm. There are two biographies of Demy: Jean-Pierre Berthomé, *Jacques Demy et les racines du rêve* (Nantes: Atlanté, 1982); and Camille Taboulay, *Jacques Demy* (Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma, 1996).

it be like if a man were pregnant?” and turned the reigning Latin lover of the 1970s, Marcello Mastroianni, into that man on-screen. Demy worked well past the years of the New Wave. By looking at Demy, we can reevaluate the meaning and significance of the New Wave not only in its own time but also by considering its relation to the longer history of French film after the wave had clearly passed. If adding Demy allows us to follow the wave across time, it also serves as a reminder that the current study of the New Wave has cut it off from the popular cinema to which it was clearly tied.

Our understanding of French film in the 1950s and 1960s, especially outside France, has been telescoped unnecessarily into a narrative about the New Wave, and we have been held prisoners to the articulate pronouncements of its most celebrated practitioners such as Truffaut, who was filmmaker and propagandist in one. The New Wave’s eloquent proponents accomplished a good many things: they championed new practices in filmmaking, codified new modes of narrative, and empowered a young generation who imagined themselves as artists when they made films. Moreover, they gave an enormous boost to those who wrote about film, helping to transform the amateur practice of cinephilia into a legitimate discourse of film criticism and in some ways laying the groundwork for institutionalizing Film Studies as we know it today. The concerned UniFrance report from 1965 cited above complained that only universities and university towns would book French movies after the New Wave. University courses on the New Wave have, at least, created a steady market for French film. Yet we must rethink the New Wave long enough to remember the audience and to try to understand their love of Bardot and Demy. \*

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## French New Wave Cinema and the Legacy of Male Libertinage

by GENEVIÈVE SELLIER

**A**s I have shown in my book *Masculine Singular: French New Wave Cinema*, numerous first films made in France between 1958 and 1962 were perceived by audiences and critics alike as innovative and modern because they were made by young people for young people, with small budgets and young, unknown, or little-known actors to convey a feeling of authenticity.<sup>1</sup> The way these films were centered

1 Geneviève Sellier, *Masculine Singular: French New Wave Cinema (La nouvelle vague: Un cinéma au masculin singulier)* (2005), trans. Kristin Ross (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

around the affective and sexual relationships between the protagonists was also seen as a trademark of the new cinema.

The popular cinema of the time valorized men in terms of their social, professional, and family identity but relegated women to the traditional roles of wives and mothers, roles to which all proper young women were supposed to aspire. Outside this limiting framework, there was no salvation. Prostitutes, *demi-mondaines*, actresses, singers, kept women: the range seems wide, yet in the end it is extremely limited, harking back to the Judeo-Christian dichotomy of the virgin and the whore. The few brave filmmakers who tried to offer more complex female figures were often rewarded with humiliating commercial failure.<sup>2</sup> The New Wave was perceived as a breath of fresh air, and not just because it marked a generational changeover. To be sure, its young male characters, often representing the filmmaker's alter ego, strut, talk, drink, and pick up girls with a new kind of freedom which had appeared with the Liberation of France, while the young women, often students, no longer live at home or feel their horizons bounded by marriage. And yet, contrary to received opinion that New Wave cinema expressed both artistic modernity and a throwing off of moral constraint, the films were crisscrossed by contradictory currents linked both to the elitist and masculine nature of this cinema and to specific French cultural traditions. For example, what has rarely been remarked upon is that this "freedom" of tone is also part of a cultural heritage which can be traced back to Marivaux and Choderlos de Laclos, and which resurfaces in French vaudeville and boulevard comedies, as in the prewar films (and plays) of Sacha Guitry. For want of a better term, I shall call this phenomenon "male libertinage," in which love relationships are considered as a game, wherein the object of desire is also an adversary who must be defeated at the same time as the reader/audience is made to laugh. Here, the word "conquest," meaning success with women, takes on a literal meaning. This male tradition of libertinage takes into account, to a certain degree, the female Other, who is not reduced to the status of mere object, nor to that of a figure alienated by social conventions. Nonetheless, the struggle is not on equal terms, if only because it is staged by a male author. At the end of the 1950s in France, women's emancipation was becoming a key issue for the younger generation, as was shown in a survey published by Françoise Giroud in 1958.<sup>3</sup> But this development aroused as much fear among young men as it did hope among young women. The new filmmakers of the New Wave, who asserted themselves on the cultural scene at the beginning of the 1960s, were caught up in these contradictions, but the fact that they were almost all young males created an asymmetry which has not always been taken into account by critics and scholars.

In this article I propose to analyze from this point of view two first films released in June 1960 and September 1961, respectively: Philippe de Broca's *The Games of Love* (*Les jeux de l'amour*) and Michel Deville's *Tonight or Never* (*Ce soir ou jamais*). Both are low-budget, intimist films centered on love affairs, with new actors. They were directed by men, but—and this was exceptional for the period—in each case a woman was involved in the writing of the script. Both are comedies dealing with male-female

2 Noël Burch and Geneviève Sellier, *La drôle de guerre des sexes du cinéma français, 1930–1956* (Paris: Nathan, 1996).

3 Françoise Giroud, *La nouvelle vague. Portrait de la jeunesse* (Paris: Gallimard, 1958).

relationships in a “modern” manner, presenting premarital sex as commonplace. Michel Deville and Philippe de Broca are not perceived as auteurs strictly speaking, but unlike most of the 150 young people who made a first film in France between 1958 and 1962, they went on making films prominent enough to earn the directors a place in film history of the last fifty years.

**Les jeux de l’amour.** Claude Chabrol produced *Les jeux de l’amour* from a screenplay by Geneviève Cluny, a young actress who had a small part in his film *The Cousins* (*Les cousins*) in 1958: she is the young woman who comes to see Paul at the beginning of the film because she is pregnant and to whom he gives money for an abortion—one of the rare allusions in French films of the period to this taboo subject. Cluny’s screenplay was entirely rewritten by Daniel Boulanger and de Broca, and she receives no screen credit. As she told *Libération* in January 1960, her idea was “[a] very classic case: after a love affair has ended badly, this girl decides to have a child all on her own, just to have a goal in life, with no thought of marriage.” However, after Chabrol entrusted the direction to de Broca, assigning Daniel Boulanger to develop the script, the result was “a very pretty story but there’s not much of mine left. Chabrol, de Broca and Boulanger are men and they can’t understand that a woman on her own could want to bear a child.”<sup>4</sup> Here we have a typical example of the way women are excluded from the creative process, both in form (she does not receive credit for the original story) and in substance: the story of a woman who wants a baby “for herself” becomes the story of a woman who wants a child by her lover, as though a woman’s desire for a child were unthinkable independently of her love for a man. Godard used the same story for *A Woman Is a Woman* (*Une femme est une femme*, 1961), and Cluny this time was credited, though Godard made the version rewritten by Boulanger.

The plot of *Les jeux de l’amour* involves a triangular relationship between Suzanne (Cluny), her dashing but cynical lover Victor (Jean-Pierre Cassel), and his dull but faithful friend François (Jean-Louis Maury), who is in love with Suzanne. She wants to marry Victor and have his baby, but he won’t hear of it until, to force things, she pretends to accept François’s offer. *Les jeux de l’amour* was acclaimed by all newspaper critics, who saw it as a New Wave film without the usual faults—that is, without the usual cynical tone and amateurish mise-en-scène and direction of actors. For Louis Chauvet in *Le Figaro*, for instance, “here is the only cheerful, fanciful and in a word happy film the ‘new wave’ has given us to date.”<sup>5</sup>

The film’s opening sequence clearly shows Victor’s selfish behavior. He decides to go and buy expensive cuff links while Suzanne is waiting for him to eat the lunch she has cooked. The faithful François keeps her company. To her complaints about Victor, he protests, “He adores you!” But she replies, “Oh, there are times when I wonder. . . . I only ask one thing of him! . . . I want a child and I’ll have one!” When Victor comes back and finds Suzanne sulking, he pleads, “I am unforgivable, a pig, a pervert! . . . I know I’m a heel, I’m not afraid of saying it! I’m unworthy, unspeakable!

4 Geneviève Cluny, interview with Jacqueline Fabre, *Libération*, January 23, 1960.

5 Louis Chauvet, *Figaro*, June 3, 1960.

I can't understand why you keep me here!" He then starts to kiss her while a light, poetic music accompanies their embrace. The *mise-en-scène* here is complicit with a domination/submission pattern which authorizes attractive men to behave like pigs, since women forgive them. Complicity between the two men goes hand in hand with a rivalry which is also presented as part of the normal way of things: the love-struck friend covers for the fickle lover while lending a sympathetic ear to the woman's complaints. With its jubilant, punchy *mise-en-scène* that induces the audience to laugh at Suzanne's setbacks instead of sharing her exasperation, this opening sequence is a brilliant condensation of male-female behavior in the light boulevard tradition: Attractive men are egocentric, fickle, boorish, and exploitative, but irresistible to women; as for the women, they are good cooks and housewives, pragmatic and shrewd. They know how to get money out of rich men to support their true love. They complain about their lot for appearance's sake, but submit to that unwritten law which ordains that attractive men cannot be held to account.

The modernity of the film consists of condensing into a single female character three figures that until then had been kept separate in the boulevard play: the *demi-mondaine* who has lovers, the middle-class wife who made an advantageous marriage and bore children, and the romantic young virgin. Here, the heroine earns a living with her own antique shop, which is how she supports her artist-lover, but her ultimate goal is to make him her husband and the father of her children. Faithful to the boulevard tradition, the film presents Suzanne's desires as contradictory: Victor is the ideal lover, because he's light and seductive, while François, who wants to marry and have children with her, is too serious to be charming. This first sequence is programmatic: the film espouses the dominant male viewpoint, and will continue to do so until the very last shot of the obligatory happy ending. Victor finally surrenders against his will, and the audience feels sorry for him.

The way newspaper critics summed up this story revealed the degree to which they adhered to this male viewpoint. For example, Michel Aubriant in *Paris-Presse* wrote, "Suzanne wishes Victor could marry her but Victor doesn't like the idea. So Suzanne decides she's just going to make Victor jealous by flirting with his best friend. Victor finally marries her."<sup>6</sup> Remarkably, only Jean de Baroncelli in *Le Monde* mentions Victor's selfishness.<sup>7</sup> As for the only two female critics of the time, each in her own way "covers up" for the male protagonists. For instance, Paule Sengissen claims Victor reproaches Suzanne for becoming bourgeois, whereas in fact the character never invokes anything but his own personal comfort for refusing to get Suzanne pregnant!<sup>8</sup>

When Suzanne decides to break off with Victor, a long bedroom scene again demonstrates her inability to stand up to him: he gets back into bed with her, and her response, instead of kicking him out, is to turn away and sulk. Needless to say, she ultimately makes up with him in bed, but with a typically libertine answer: "Just because I have a little bastard lying next to me is no reason to deprive myself of the pleasure

6 Michel Aubriant, *Paris-Presse*, June 2, 1960.

7 Jean de Baroncelli, *Le Monde*, June 5, 1960.

8 Paule Sengissen, *Radio-Cinéma-Télévision*, June 19, 1960.

he can give me!” When Suzanne seems to have opted for marriage with François, she takes him to a nightclub, where she dances furiously while François is bored to tears and begs her to come away. A bit earlier, we have seen Victor dancing in the same club, just as furiously as Suzanne. Nothing could be more obvious: François is a wet blanket, and the only desirable man is the selfish Victor.

What is never dealt with in this film, any more than in Godard’s *Une femme est une femme*, is the issue of contraception. The problem of the women in both these films is having a baby, whereas for the majority of women in France the problem was how to avoid having babies at a time when both contraception and abortion were against the law. In this respect as well, a male viewpoint prevails.

**Ce soir ou jamais.** *Ce soir ou jamais*, written by Michel Deville and Nina Companeez and released in September 1961, is another good example of an early 1960s film by young people about young people. This time, the female screenwriter and dialogue writer, Nina Companeez, is credited alongside Deville. Companeez went on to write more films with Deville and became a director for cinema and television. She was scarcely twenty when she wrote *Ce soir ou jamais*—in other words, the age of her heroine—while Deville was only slightly older than she.

This film is not traditionally associated with the New Wave, even though the dictionary of new filmmakers published in *Les cahiers du cinéma* in December 1962 gives a rather flattering account of Deville’s work, comparing him to Jacques Becker. In the dailies and weeklies at the time, however, it was considered part of the New Wave. For example, Louis Marcorelles, in *France-Observateur*, exclaimed, “What joy to encounter a French comedy, the first film by a young director, worthy of its American model, admirably constructed, even more brilliantly directed.”<sup>9</sup> Thus Deville’s first film was perceived both as innovative with respect to the mainstream *cinéma de papa* and devoid of that amateurism increasingly associated with the New Wave. One year before Agnès Varda’s *Cléo from 5 to 7* (*Cléo de 5 à 7*), Deville and Companeez offered a story almost “in real time”: an evening among friends in a student’s apartment. Other original (and very New Wave) traits are the mobility of the camera, the use of available light only, and the editing, which alternates *plans-séquences* with shot–reverse–shot editing. Critics all praised this discreet virtuosity which seems to make light of the difficulties inherent in working with a small budget.

Laurent (Claude Rich), an art student, has invited friends for the evening, including Valérie (Anna Karina), his latest conquest. As he rehearses a show, she feels threatened by the star, Nicole (Eliane d’Almeida), and becomes aware of how much she loves the cynical and disconcerting Laurent. Determined to use every weapon to win him over “tonight or never,” Valérie decides to make him jealous by turning all her charms on Guillaume (Georges Descrières). When the friends have left, however, she realizes that Laurent has been pulling the strings all along to find out her true feelings. They confess their mutual love.

Interestingly, the opening sequence of both films includes a young woman preparing food (Suzanne in *Les jeux de l’amour*, Valérie in *Ce soir ou jamais*), and in both

9 Louis Marcorelles, *France-Observateur*, September 28, 1961.



cases, she is seen crying from peeling onions, while the man sits around doing nothing. These opening sequences are quite deliberate: the authors want to remind us of the characters' socially defined gender roles, which are meant to be self-evident. And in both instances, this reminder is meant to amuse spectators, male and female alike.

Here too, critics were blind to the gender imbalance. Marcorelles in *France-Observateur* even saw the woman as taking the initiative and coming out on top: "Valérie leads the dance, sulking when her boyfriend Laurent neglects her, trying to provoke him by flirting with another young man. In the small hours of the morning, order is restored."<sup>10</sup> Claude-Marie Trémois in *Télérama*, the only female critic for this film, was also the only one to stress the constant superiority of the male hero from a dramatic point of view: "The *marivaudage* begins with Valérie trying to make Laurent jealous. When the others have left, Laurent and Valérie have it out. . . . Laurent proves better at this game than Valérie. In the end, is he not the one who has been conducting the plot to suit himself, who has been pulling all the strings?"<sup>11</sup>

Trémois's reading of the plot is also the one that is closest to the film. We may therefore surmise that the shortsightedness of the male critics is linked to their reluctance to recognize the imbalance that the film maintains from beginning to end between the two main characters. The imbalance resides both in their dramatic roles and in the characters' social identity: the film never tells us what Valérie does (except peel onions and indulge in verbal sparring with "real actresses"), whereas Laurent is a graduate of L'École des Beaux-Arts and works for an advertising agency. Moreover, Laurent is cast in the role of the director, an alter ego of the filmmaker, who has organized the whole evening—inviting friends, summoning actresses, testing them for the lead role, and making the final choice (dismissing Françoise Dorléac!). In the film, the camera identifies with the judgmental gaze which the male friends focus on two inexperienced actresses who docilely obey Laurent's instructions. He pretends to be coming on to the actress he has chosen for the role, and it is in reaction to this calculated insult that Valérie attempts to seduce another man, taking him up to the bedroom on the mezzanine. When she comes down again, Laurent slaps her without a word. Yet she laughs and looks delighted, as if the slap were a proof of love. The entire evening is in fact a sham, with Valérie thinking she is manipulating Laurent to get him to confess his love, when the opposite is true, as Laurent explains to Valérie and the audience at the end of the film.

The *mise-en-scène* seems to make us a party to Valérie's viewpoint, but it is all the better to fool us with Laurent's own *mise-en-scène*. On the other hand, Valérie's behavior throughout the film has heavy infantile connotations: she threatens to jump over the banister, then to cut off her finger with a cleaver; each time Laurent puts an end to these childish displays in the manner of a weary or exasperated adult. Both roles are thus strongly gendered: the man is cruel and the woman capricious, as Morvan Lebesque puts it.<sup>12</sup> In other words, the male is associated with mastery, the female with powerlessness. This is all the more disturbing as the script was written by a woman,

10 Ibid.

11 Claude-Marie Trémois, *Télérama*, November 6, 1961.

12 Morvan Lebesque, *L'Express*, October 5, 1961.

who seems to have had no qualms about perpetuating the most traditional gender stereotypes.

In conclusion, it seems to me that these two comedies of love reaffirm the imbalance of gender roles on several levels. Both screenplays were written by women, but rewritten and directed by men. Both main actresses were less experienced than their male partners: neither Cluny nor Karina had any theatrical experience, contrary to Cassel and Rich. As for the critics, either they failed to mention the participation of women in the writing of the screenplay, or they attributed the qualities of the film to the director. In their presentation of the plot, they repeatedly neutralized or naturalized the male viewpoint, either by ridiculing the women's attempts to escape from male domination, or by characterizing them as irresolute, childish, and incapable of suiting their actions to their words. Instances of male boorishness or domination, because they elicit only risible reactions from the female characters, simply make the audience laugh and, in the final analysis, justify male superiority.

To this extent, we may say that the so-called renewal of the representations of male-female relations in these two New Wave films is simply a readjustment of male domination rather than an attempt to call it into question. Like most of the better-known New Wave films, *Les jeux de l'amour* and *Ce soir ou jamais* break with the staid, theatrical tone of the popular cinema of the time; they speak more directly about issues that concern young people, in particular sexual freedom and the different ways in which men and women experience it. However, in the absence of any substantial female participation in the creative process, the "modern" vision of love at the heart of these films offers glaring contradictions on the question of equality. They celebrate the (quasi) removal of obstacles between male desire and its objects, much more than the ability of women to impose their own desire. This limitation is totally in line with a society which would take another fifteen years to legalize abortion and thus finally enable women to control their sexuality. \*

*Translated from the French by Noël Burch.*

# Cinematic Microcosm and Cultural Cosmologies: Elements of a Sociology of the New Wave

by PHILIPPE MARY

Film historians in general assume that a *break* occurs at the beginning of the 1960s, with the appearance of the New Wave. The films of Jean-Luc Godard, François Truffaut, Claude Chabrol, Alain Resnais, and Agnès Varda<sup>1</sup> bring about considerable changes in film art. At this point film history is split into two parts—into a *before* and an *after* of the New Wave, an *old* and a *new* cinema.

**The Old and the New.** The old cinema is a “cinema of teamwork,”<sup>2</sup> a well-organized, professional cinema made by masters of decor and lighting, with its slick images. It is also a cinema of screenwriters, with well-known dialogue writers such as Jacques Prévert, Jean Aurenche, Pierre Bost, and Henri Jeanson adapting literary classics or novels by Simenon, virtuosos of the quotable line or the witty repartee. It is, as well, a “cinema of stars,” magnifying their images and reliant on their commercial attractiveness, which the popular press helps boost. And finally, it is a big-budget cinema, subject in part to the logic of production for a mass audience. This mode peaks in the “Tradition of Quality,” the “French Quality” style in which Marcel Carné, Jean Delannoy, Claude Autant-Lara, René Clément, Henri-Georges Clouzot, and so on, came into their own. This cinema also garners the most prestige: following as it does all the rules of the art, showing off the most celebrated stars at their best, it reaps awards at festivals and is admired by writers, including Sartre, then at the height of his fame.<sup>3</sup>

The new cinema, in turn, is the New Wave, the “young cinema” with its emblematic works: *The 400 Blows* (*Les quatre cents coups* [Truffaut, 1959]), *Breathless* (*À bout de souffle* [Godard, 1960]), *Paris Belongs to Us* (*Paris nous appartient* [Jacques Rivette, 1960]), *Les cousins*

1 Constance Capdenat, “Les enfants terribles de la New Wave,” *Vingtième siècle* 22 (1989): 45–51.

2 Yann Darré, *Histoire sociale du cinéma français* (Paris: La Découverte, collection Repères, 2000); and Jean Douchet, *La nouvelle vague* (Paris: Cinémathèque Française/Hazan, 1998).

3 Anna Boschetti, *Sartre et les temps modernes. Une entreprise intellectuelle* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, collection Le sens commun, 1985).

(Chabrol, 1959), *Hiroshima mon amour* (Resnais, 1959), and *Cléo from 5 to 7* (*Cléo de 5 à 7* [Varda, 1962]). It turns upside-down the values of the “Tradition.” The budgets are tight, the funding at times from personal sources, the producers at home in the avant-garde or with artistic documentaries. The shooting is hurried, the settings natural, the teams modest, made up of personnel who sometimes lack formal training or even qualifications but who are adaptable and inventive. The screenplays are written by the directors or their “pals” or else are improvised. The actors are often young, inexperienced, and sometimes bear a resemblance to the director. The films show the world as it is, streets at dawn, cafés, “young people” making a first road trip, a freer sexuality. The directors, young cinephiles formed by the cineclubs, in Henri Langlois’s Cinémathèque Française, and by *Cahiers du cinéma*, compete in freeing up the screenplay and in stylistic flourishes. They invent and innovate. They conquer new spaces. They renew the art of cinema.

In this respect the New Wave resembles other “artistic revolutions,” Impressionism or Surrealism, for example, in which nineteenth- and twentieth-century art took on “modernity.” In contrast to the academism of a cinema committed to the rules of craft and commerce, this film “movement,” elevated as such to the status of an “artistic school,”<sup>4</sup> will free cinema from its professional straitjacket (the cinema of “the professionally professional,” as Godard put it) and from its “aesthetic sclerosis.” It closes off the era of production and opens up the era of creation. Thanks to it, cinema enters an age of originality, uniqueness, and freedom.

The differences between these two worlds, “the cinema of the 1950s” and “the cinema of the 1960s,” are quite clear.<sup>5</sup> No need perhaps to outline them again. Godard doesn’t indeed shoot the way Delannoy does, Jean-Pierre Léaud doesn’t act in the manner of Gabin, Jean Seberg doesn’t even wear makeup, the images in *À bout de souffle* are, as Godard puts it, “all screwed up,” and they show the cafés of Saint-Germain-des-Prés instead of sets built by the brothers Douy, the great set designers of the French Cinema of Quality. Rather, we can set ourselves another aim, a simple one, built on a historical approach, and the only one that can constitute the New Wave as a real object of knowledge for the social sciences: to explain and provide reasons for this change by *revealing the social conditions of its possibility*. Defined this way, the project of a sociology of the New Wave is thus to articulate reality and the films.<sup>6</sup>

**Truffaut and the *Politique des Auteurs*.** In order to understand how sociology can contribute toward making this articulation more concrete, I will begin with the example of the *politique des auteurs*. The young critics of the *Cahiers du cinéma* (founded in 1951), the Young Turks—as the journal’s editor Jacques Doniol-Valcroze calls them—

4 Michel Marie, *La nouvelle vague. Une école artistique* (Paris: Nathan, 1997).

5 Jean-Loup Alexandre, *Les cousins des tricheurs. De la “qualité française” à la nouvelle vague* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2005).

6 Antoine de Baecque, *La nouvelle vague. Portrait d’une jeunesse* (Paris: Flammarion, 1998); Jean-Pierre Esquenazi, *Godard et la société française des années 1960* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2004); Philippe Mary, *La nouvelle vague et le cinéma d’auteur. Socio-analyse d’une révolution artistique* (Paris: Seuil, collection Liber, 2006); and Geneviève Sellier, *La nouvelle vague. Un cinéma au masculin singulier* (Paris: CNRS-Éditions, 2005).

led by Truffaut, develop a critical line they call “politique des auteurs.”<sup>7</sup> It is based on the idea that works considered great are those which derive from the stylistic originality of directors concerned about their independence and in possession of a personal or a distinct cinematographic vision, and who are thus the true authors of their works. It implies, moreover, two basic operations: first, the promotion of a cinema that corresponds to this principle and that fits the label “auteur cinema” (Renoir, Rossellini, Hawks, Hitchcock, Tati, etc.) and, second, the devaluation of the other cinema, that of the Tradition of Quality, judged unfit insofar as its directors are beholden to scriptwriters, set designers, and stars.

The radical “auteurism” of the *politique des auteurs* cannot be attributed to some general force passing at that moment through French society. Yet that doesn’t mean it has no cause. Rather, it depends on the “force field” of the field of cinema, itself inscribed in the global field of artistic power. Here the young critics are in a position of relative weakness: they wish to enter the field (a wish derived from their social status: most of them come from the cultured middle classes) yet they lack the necessary resources, in particular the long stretch of assistantship required by the professional organizations.<sup>8</sup> They position themselves logically against those who occupy the dominant positions, the Quality filmmakers who, by virtue of producing films that are at once expensive, profitable, and winners of prestigious festival awards, have the power, the money, and the art. But they also position themselves against that sector of cinephile critics, on the Christian Left or within the Communist Party, who tend to impose political or ideological principles on their judgments. There are at least two reasons for this: first, because that group, largely tied to left-wing intellectuals or party sympathizers, is biased in favor of the various professional organizations in which the unions affiliated with the all-powerful CGT (Confédération Générale des Travailleurs, the umbrella trade union organization) have a strong representation. Second, this is because in other cultural spaces, in particular those of literature and painting, whose position within the larger field of cultural production is especially powerful, “pure” readings have increasingly been gaining the upper hand over the weakening political or ideological readings.<sup>9</sup>

But this structure of oppositions alone does not explain in sufficient depth the positions of the young *Cahiers* critics (Chabrol, Godard, Rivette, Rohmer), especially when considered singly. Their causes can also be found in the dynamic of preferences formed in childhood and worked out in adulthood. Social origins and trajectories also impose their logic in forming and structuring discourses. The *politique des auteurs* is indeed a unified critical line, with sacralizations and profanations functioning as efficiently as any group logic.<sup>10</sup> And the Young Turks amplify their passion by sharing life

7 De Baecque, *Cahiers du cinéma. Histoire d'une revue*. 2 vols. (Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma, 1991); and Jean-Pierre Esquenazi, ed., *Politique des auteurs et théories du cinéma* (Paris: L'Harmattan, collection Champs visuels, 2003).

8 Darré, *Histoire sociale du cinéma français*.

9 Pierre Bourdieu, *Les règles de l'art. Genèse et structure du champ littéraire* (Paris: Seuil, 1992); and Pascale Casanova, *Beckett l'abstracteur. Anatomie d'une révolution littéraire* (Paris: Seuil, 1997).

10 Nathalie Heinrich, *L'élite artiste. Excellence et singularité en régime démocratique* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005).

as a sort of cinephilic bohemia, with the ambitions of these cultivated young middle-class people converging in the same games and the same transgressions. Yet while there is convergence in this crucial action—the young “artists” challenging the old “artisans” along a fairly unified critical line—divergences appear as well: the politique des auteurs can also be conceived as a critical line differentiated by an assortment of particular histories.

Of all the young critics making up the Young Turks’ front, it is Truffaut who takes the most direct and most violent action. The articles he publishes in *Cahiers du cinéma* (“A Certain Tendency in French Cinema” appears in 1954<sup>11</sup>) and in *Arts* show an appetite for the wounding attack, and the judgments he passes on the Quality directors are delivered as condemnations with no possibility of appeal. Yet the rage inside him at that time has much to do with his personal history.<sup>12</sup>

Like the other young critics at *Cahiers*, Chabrol or Rivette, with whom he is very close for a time, Truffaut comes from the middle class. His father is an industrial designer and a member of the Club Alpin Français with a passion for mountain climbing. His mother, a secretary at *L'illustration*, an important magazine during the interwar years, comes from lower nobility in decline and belongs to a cultivated middle class: she aspires to a bourgeois life by dressing well, going often to the theater and the cinema, and having a liaison with a young man who will later become a dentist. Truffaut’s maternal grandfather, Jean de Montferrand, is a senior editor of that same journal, where he has hired his daughter. His grandmother, who doesn’t work, cultivates a distinct bourgeois taste; she is a music lover, spending time in bookshops, reading extensively, and writing a novel (unpublished).

Having inherited from his maternal grandparents and from his mother a taste for literature and cultural activities, Truffaut might have followed through on this social rise in turn predicated on academic success. But it is his mother who blocks such a rise: the event that brutally transforms this trajectory is her becoming a single mother. As is required by that era’s norms, the family condemns her roundly. Forced to abandon the perspective of a good marriage, she marries a man in possession of less cultural capital than herself, and who, having thus made a profitable match, agrees to recognize the child as his own. But as a consequence the couple will relinquish rearing the boy: he is handed over to his grandparents, and this parental abdication is the first violence he is subject to.

When the couple retrieves the child, François, at ten, his mother inevitably sees in him the cause of her own social failure; very soon he becomes a victim of her resentment. The wounds inflicted by the mother take a variety of forms, as Truffaut’s first film, *Les quatre cents coups*, attests to: abandonment, contempt, emotional blackmail, and so on. The fallout will include the adolescent’s break with school and the beginning of a “career” as a passionate cinephile. He sees several films a day, takes notes, makes

11 François Truffaut, “Une certaine tendance du cinéma français,” *Cahiers du cinéma* 31 (January 1954); published in English in *The French New Wave: Critical Landmarks*, ed. Peter Graham and Ginette Vincendeau (London: British Film Institute, 2009), 39–63.

12 Antoine de Baecque and Serge Toubiana, *François Truffaut* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996); and Mary, *La nouvelle vague et le cinéma d’auteur*.

lists, keeps track and comments in notebooks in which he pastes reviews, programs, and photos stolen from movie theater lobby displays. He visits cineclubs with diligence and fervor, and is unbeatably erudite during the more or less formal battles the clubs stage. For a while he has plans to run his own club.

The ferocity of his attacks on the Cinema of Quality once he becomes a film critic has its operating principle in this destructive “rage” as well. He could laud and demolish with equal satisfaction. In questioning the ethics of the Cinema of Quality and idealizing the aesthetics of auteur cinema, he takes revenge for a double defeat. By inflicting a wound on the cinema of prestige (doubtless the sort his mother was fond of) and which may be symbolic of legitimate culture, and by saluting the modernity of a cinema conceived as an art, he at once goes against his mother and imposes himself upon society. Borrowing the concept from Freud but inflecting it so that the conflict thus resolved appears in its true origin, we could say that we have here a remarkable example of *social sublimation*.

The sociological approach thereby finds its form and its justification. It accounts for the forces that come into play so that a symbolic revolution—that of auteur cinema—can get underway, but does so without reductionism, by showing at once the structure of a microcosm (the space of cinema) and a cultural cosmology (the habitus of the young critics). If we outline the forces that structure the cinematographic microcosm and then backtrack to the social origins and the trajectories of the young actors on this revolutionary scene, it becomes possible to account for the stylistic variations by which their positions become individuated. In turn, it then becomes readily apparent that Truffaut’s “rage” is distinctly different from the sense of “modernity” in Godard, from the virtuosity of Rivette’s “pure readings,” from Rohmer’s double valorization of the aesthetic form and ethical exception, or from Chabrol’s at once aesthetizing and jejune flippancy.

**Godard, a Technical Auteur.** Let us consider a second example, one of the most emblematic films of the New Wave: Jean-Luc Godard’s *À bout de souffle*, a film always celebrated for its singularity and for its technical innovations.<sup>13</sup> But when it comes to accounting for this at once technical and stylistic dimension, commentators invariably evoke “the ideology of art”:<sup>14</sup> by being a modern artist, Godard is fundamentally “original” and “singular,” his art as “creation” is freed of all social determinants. Yet if there is any sense to be detected within a sociohistorical framework of the most *singular* artistic practices,<sup>15</sup> departing from such ideology we can instead conceive of *À bout de souffle* as a work resulting from an encounter of two logics, a logic of transformation of artistic fields in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and one of procedures specific to Godard alone, springing from his personal history.

13 Michel Marie, *À bout de souffle. Etude critique* (Paris: Nathan, 1999).

14 Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1992).

15 Svetlana Alpers, *Rembrandt’s Enterprise: The Studio and the Market* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).



The process of autonomization of literary fields, of painting, of theater or dance, proceeds by a bipolarizing of artistic production and cultural preferences.<sup>16</sup> On the one hand, a large sector of production develops in which works are strictly subject to the rules of commerce; on the other hand, there is a sector of limited production in which works deviate from economic requirements. On the technical level this process takes the spectacular form of the subversion of an art's rules, and comes to completion in the institutionalization of a form of technical anomie. As can readily be seen in the works of Picasso or Pollock, artistic legitimacy is granted to those artistic productions which break technically with the traditional forms of the norms of the profession and of academic excellence.<sup>17</sup>

It is in light of this process that Godard's shooting practice on the set of *À bout de souffle* should be understood. His heroic gesture entails inflicting serial violence upon the technical order. Through a series of magic acts the director demonstrates that he is situated in another world. In a simple move, without either negotiating or explaining, the young director can for instance dismiss the whole crew at the beginning of the day under the pretext that he does not have an idea. The first day, testifies his director of photography Raoul Coutard, he turned a page in his notebook and there wasn't anything there. So he said, "That's it. Done for the day." Just as Rembrandt performs the actions he will be painting to show that he is the master of his studio,<sup>18</sup> so Godard interrupts the staging on the spot the better to stage himself as the author. Through this demi-divine display he finds a way to straddle the contradiction specific to the field of cinema, between cultural legitimacy and cinematographic technicity.

He also *plays* the author's game, to borrow Sartre's formulation, through the spatial constraints he imposes on the shoot. Room 12 in the Hôtel de Suède, where the central scene takes place, is unusually narrow, and imposes thereby a surfeit of physical intimacy on the crew. Like the one-bedroom apartment where so many scenes of *Les quatre cents coups* are set, the room in the Hôtel de Suède is so small that the actors are the only ones who can move. In imposing such spatial constraints, the decor itself thus constrains the technicians, from the most indispensable ones (the director of photography holding the camera) who are forced to adapt (though this does not exclude their ability to invent) to those who are simply excluded. When at one point Godard dismisses the continuity girl, Susanne Faye, this one move fuses artistic and gendered violence.<sup>19</sup>

16 On literature: Alain Viala, *Naissance de l'écrivain* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1985); Bourdieu, *Les règles de l'art*; Anna Boschetti, *La poésie partout. Apollinaire, homme-époque (1898–1918)* (Paris, Seuil, collection Liber, 2001); Pascale Casanova, *La république mondiale des lettres* (Paris: Seuil, 1999); Gisèle Sapiro, *La guerre des écrivains (1940–1953)* (Paris: Fayard, 1999); and Louis Pinto, *Pierre Bourdieu et la théorie du social* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1999). On painting: Harrison C. White and Cynthia A. White, *Canvases and Careers. Institutional Change in the French Painting World* (London: John Wiley & Sons, 1965); and Nathalie Heinich, *Du peintre à l'artiste. Artisans et académiciens à l'âge classique* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1993). On theater: Christophe Charle, *Théâtre en capitales: Naissance de la société du spectacle à Paris, Berlin, Londres et Vienne* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2008). On dance: Sylvia Faure, *Corps, savoir et pouvoir. Sociologie historique du champ chorégraphique* (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 2001).

17 Jean-Pierre Sérés, *La technique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1994).

18 Alpers, *Rembrandt's Enterprise*.

19 Camille Gaudy, "Être une femme sur un plateau de tournage," *Ethnologie française* 38 (2008): 107–117.

Godard reinforces this auteurist logic by inventing ad hoc and unique technical devices. He thus replaces the camera dolly and crane with a rented wheelchair, enabling him to execute original traveling shots while cutting financial corners; he shoots a number of sequences on the Champs Élysées unbeknownst to the passersby, with the camera and cameraman concealed in a mailman's cart. Closer to a director of early television than to a film director, and far from indifferent to matters of technique—as his improvisations and inventions, his provocations, and his deviations show—the stance Godard takes vis-à-vis technique is fundamentally that of subversion and singularization. Following trajectories by and large already established in contemporary arts,<sup>20</sup> Godard thus becomes a *technical* auteur. In placing himself in the position of having a “monopoly on legitimate creative violence,” in making himself out to be a sole creator, he imparts violence to the order of the technicians. And as this symbolic accomplishment concerns a highly hierarchic and politicized social group (film technicians), he can be said to achieve (according to the logic of the artistic revolutions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) a break that is at once technical, ethical, and political.

Yet to provide a deeper explanation of Godard's strategies in his effort to legitimize cinema by means of an artistic “singularization,” it is necessary to take into account his social trajectory. Born into a prominent upper-middle-class family (his mother was the daughter of the founder of the Banque de Paris et des Pays-Bas while his father, a doctor, owned a major clinic in Switzerland), he absorbs from very early on the values of the most legitimate cultural production, but, unable to convert this embodied capital to institutional capital in the form of higher degrees, he must carry over his cultural investments onto less legitimate goods—which is what cinema represents at that moment.<sup>21</sup> He thus lives his passage from critic to director as an artistic and a heroic break, accomplished against the family's values and constituting a kind of symbolic theft. A renegade heir, he is thus predisposed to elevate the art of cinematography by antagonizing the film technicians. The violence of the technical subversion that he inflicts in his practice, much as he had inflicted it in the domain of theory when participating alongside Truffaut and Rivette in the *politique des auteurs*, is above all indicative of his class superiority; it also signals the pains of a tense life trajectory, with the threat of social decline always at hand. Showing his mastery of distance vis-à-vis all technical mastery, it ultimately also indicates his sense of his own artistic placement.

**A Symbolic Revolution.** Placed in a framework of double attention, to cinema within the space of artistic production on the one hand and to the position of the filmmakers in the social field on the other, the New Wave can thus be understood as a set of actions and operations by which the field of cinema has been able to gain genuine autonomy. The break achieved by this event is neither illusory nor overrated. It has indeed entailed a passing from one state of the field to another. The structure of that space was changed. What occurred in the world of cinema was much like what took place in literature and painting in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The

20 Nathalie Heinich, *Le triple jeu de l'art contemporain* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1998).

21 Pierre Bourdieu, *La distinction. Critique sociale du jugement* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, collection Le sens commun, 1979).

world of cinema finds itself in a new state: it has achieved a greater autonomy; more than before it is its own legislator; and the grip of professional, economic, political, and ideological powers has been weakened. Providing that the actions of the New Wave directors are considered in all their dimensions, dimensions that inevitably are economic,<sup>22</sup> technical, actorly, and thematic, we are able to grasp their revolutionary effect. True, there is still a commercial cinema, a cinema of stars, a cinema of sets and special effects, a genre cinema; but there also exists a cinema that situates itself counter to this dominant production and that is from now on called “auteur cinema.” This is not a genre;<sup>23</sup> rather it is a symbolic force which underlines the structure of cinematographic space so that it can take the form of an autonomous field, and so that it thereby confers upon cinema as a whole a greater legitimacy, increasing its value on the market of cultural and artistic goods. \*

*Translated from the French by Nataša Đurovičová.*

22 Pierre-Jean Benghozi and Christian Delage, eds., *Une histoire économique du cinéma français (1895–1995). Regards croisés franco-américains* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997).

23 René Prédal, *Le cinéma d'auteur, une vieille lune?* (Paris: Éditions du CERF, 2001).

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