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# Jean-Luc Godard and Francois Truffaut: The Influence of Hollywood, Modernization and Radical Politics on their Films and Friendship

Caroline Glenn

Clemson University, [carolinecaglenn@gmail.com](mailto:carolinecaglenn@gmail.com)

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JEAN-LUC GODARD AND FRANÇOIS TRUFFAUT: THE INFLUENCE  
OF HOLLYWOOD, MODERNIZATION AND RADICAL POLITICS  
ON THEIR FILMS AND FRIENDSHIP

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Graduate School of  
Clemson University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Masters of Arts  
History

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by  
Caroline Catherine Anne Glenn  
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Accepted by:  
Dr. Alan Grubb, Committee Chair  
Dr. James Burns  
Dr. H. Roger Grant

## ABSTRACT

During the late 1950's the French film industry's hard-won financial stability during the Occupation and liberation years had all but disappeared. Combined with the dwindling, unpredictable nature of French audiences, the multi-star, literary adaptation dramas French studios produced were no longer reliable. In response to these dilemmas a transformation took place in French cinema. Known as the *nouvelle vague* (or French New Wave), the movement was largely, but not completely, a reaction to France's declining film industry. The nation as a whole was undergoing significant change and growth during the 1950s. From the Algerian conflict, the Fourth Republic's collapse and the return of Charles de Gaulle to the Americanization of France and the emergence of increased consumerism, the political climate and cultural context of France in the 1950's is equally as important as the situation of France's film industry in explaining the congruence of circumstances that produced the *nouvelle vague*. This essay will examine these underlying causes and their ability to influence cultural conceptions before going on to examine the two directors seen to spearhead this movement, François Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard, whose friendship began in the *ciné-clubs* of postwar France. Both men contributed heavily to the revolution taking place in cinema during the late fifties, which provided a foundation for the modern cinema. Unlike their films and theories, their relationship and rapport has failed to be fully examined. Truffaut and Godard, their close personal and professional relationship and its eventual disintegration was ultimately the result of the ideological conflicts of the period which had, as a result, not only the calamity of a friendship but their different approaches to filmmaking.

## **DEDICATION**

For my father, Garland D. Glenn II, who imparted his wanderlust and love of history to me at a young age;

For my mother, Lahneen Alicia Glenn, who taught me to follow my heart and the importance of good grammar;

And, for my husband, Matthew Ryan Prestridge, with whom life is always an adventure and never, ever ordinary.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My deepest thanks and gratitude go to Dr. Alan Grubb, Dr. James Burns and Dr. H. Roger Grant for the many hours they contributed into the preparation of this thesis. The expertise of all three has been invaluable and Dr. Grubb, in particular, has devoted a great deal of time and effort into helping me develop my topic from a seminar paper into a master's thesis. He was always available for my questions and gave generously of his time and knowledge, pointing me towards the right film, source or theory. Dr. Burns, through his classes on film history, taught me the invaluable skill of how to study this fascinating medium from the perspective of a historian as well as an artist. Dr. Grant, who brings passion and life to his lectures, showed that out of despair come some of the worlds most beautiful and interesting inventions.

I am especially grateful to my wonderful husband, Ryan, who has supported me every day of this journey.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

For the fourth time in its existence, the French film industry after the Second World War was in serious trouble. During the late 1950's the film industry's hard-won financial stability during the Occupation and liberation years had all but disappeared. The French attended the cinema in increasingly fewer numbers with each passing year, and this trend, according to Alan Williams, "moving in tandem with the steady rise of the nation's television sets" continues until the present.<sup>1</sup> With their market contracting in France and throughout the rest of Europe, big budget quality productions were less and less likely to turn a profit. Combined with the growing unpredictability of French audiences, the old formulations of multi-star, literary adaptation dramas were no longer as reliable as they had once appeared. The transformation of French cinema that came about as a response to these new dilemmas coincided with a dramatic sociopolitical crisis in the nation at large: the crucial 1958-1959 film season took place during the creation of the Fifth Republic under the leadership of Charles De Gaulle.

This transformative phenomenon known as the *nouvelle vague* (or French New Wave) was largely, but not completely, a reaction to France's declining film industry. Although, as Alan Williams asserts in his book *A Republic of Images*, France was the birthplace of cinema and by the 1950's was being surpassed by several other countries, there are additional non-industry factors that contributed to the emergence of this new

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Williams, *Republic of Images: A History of French Filmmaking* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 327.

approach to filmmaking.<sup>2</sup> Various political, societal and cultural factors would appear within the context of New Wave films. In addition to France's waning and diminishing film industry, the nation as a whole was experiencing serious growing pains during this decade. These will be discussed at greater length in the second chapter and include the Algerian conflict, the failure of the Fourth Republic and the return of Charles de Gaulle, the Americanization of France or growing influence of America and American culture and the emergence of increased consumerism and materialism, along with the overturning of traditional moral beliefs and conventions of sexuality. In this regard it is equally as important to examine the political climate and cultural context of France in the 1950's as well as the film movement itself in an attempt to obtain a more complete understanding of the environment that produced the *nouvelle vague* and why it had such a profound impact on both the industry and society.

This essay will examine these contributing situational causes and their ability to influence cultural conceptions as well as the circumstances that surrounded the emergence of the resurgence of the French film industry before going on to examine several directors and their works, namely François Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard. Following a detailed discussion of the major contributors and their works, the commentary will study their lasting impact on the field in an attempt to explore and explain the circumstances that produced them. Finally, this essay will also attempt to

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<sup>2</sup> In his book *A Republic of Images*, Alan Williams traces the history of the Cinema, with a special focus on France's massive contributions to the medium. He asserts essentially that France was the birthplace of film and moving pictures especially in the first section, "French Cinema Dominates the World Market."

elucidate the methods in which these directors determined to deal with their past and present experiences through a radical film movement.

Given the depth, significance and variety of the New Wave, much about the movement and its members still remains unexamined. Broad survey histories necessarily condense this period and its primary figures into simple summaries, while texts devoted to the French cinema or to the New Wave in particular, such as James Monaco's *The New Wave*, Roy Armes' *French Cinema*, and Alan Williams' *Republic of Images*, though they offer quite different perspectives on the New Wave, all end up privileging those directors who had begun as critics for *Cahiers du cinéma* before they turned to filmmaking itself. For James Monaco, the New Wave is essentially five filmmakers, François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Claude Chabrol, Eric Rohmer, and Jacques Rivette. In his view, despite their differences, he believes this group shares "a basic attitude towards the art of film which unites them from the majority of their predecessors" by employing the medium as a "fascinating way to discover the world."<sup>3</sup> He argues that it is their "urgent curiosity" and quest to understand the world around them that stand out in their collective efforts.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, he is fairly unconcerned with defining the movement as a school or outlining its dates more than in discussing the political or social forces that shaped it.

Film historian Roy Armes, on the other hand, divides New Wave-era France into clusters of renewals coming from various new groups of directors. For him, however, New Wave directors have to come directly from criticism; hence, he too regards the

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<sup>3</sup> James Monaco, *The New Wave: Truffaut, Godard, Chabrol, Rohmer, Rivette* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

*Cahiers du cinéma* filmmakers as the only pure members. Arnes avoids explaining the New Wave as either a historical or critical term. Williams does a more complete job, especially for such a large survey history, in undertaking the near impossible task of synthesizing almost a century of French filmmaking into one text. He also establishes the key influences on them and classifies the most important directors as the ‘reformists’ (these include Louis Malle, Claude Chabrol, and François Truffaut) in contrast to those he sees as more marginal directors such as Eric Rohmer or radical ones like Jean-Luc Godard.

All these film scholars help in their different ways to demonstrate the significance of these new directors, their themes, and their production techniques, but they generally fail to grant adequate space to the cultural context of 1950s France, the history of *Cahiers du cinéma*’s participation or the resulting films’ unusual narrative tactics. Richard Neupert attempts to remedy this reduction of ‘newness’ into a “tidy list of representative traits culled from a few canonical films and directors” by offering a more in-depth study of the era “while remaining focused on the *Cahiers* directors as exemplary representatives of New Wave filmmaking.”<sup>5</sup> The early enthusiasm for the cinema exhibited by a new generation of young critics, bent upon becoming filmmakers themselves, prompts real enthusiasm in his own narrative of the New Wave. The introduction and initial chapter entitled “Where did the Wave Begin?” provide a much-needed cultural background. Indeed, the significance of the bonds established early on between them in their passion for the cinema and critical writing about it constitutes a

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave Cinema* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2007), xvi.

major discussion of the New Wave's unique identity in film history. Never before, he notes, had critical writing about film and filmmaking played so decisive a role in influencing how films might be made. Nuepert's account makes palpable the creative ferment that emerged from their different and competing points of view about what cinema could be. He is particularly interested in a historical poetic approach that reexamines how the New Wave has been variously defined by and for film studies and what the *nouvelle vague* really means today.

In addition to large survey histories of the movement historians have also taken to outlining the *nouvelle vague* as an artistic school. Such is the approach of Michel Marie in his book *La nouvelle vague: Une école artistique*, or of Genevieve Sellier, who thoroughly dissects the period in terms of gender roles and cultural preconceptions about masculinity. In her book *Masculine Singular*, Sellier is trying to take the gender discussion even further by connecting the portrayal of men and women in these films to the social relations and gender identities of its era.<sup>6</sup> She wants to prove that they are reflecting a changing dynamic but, paradoxically, at the same time not changing at all. What was going on and being felt at this time she argues was portrayed through their films. She explores the implications of masculinity within national film culture, and shows how the French New Wave was formed as a political protest by men (in particular the *Cahiers* critics and young filmmakers) against the growing women's rights movement that blossomed in the 1950s in France. In the introduction Sellier indicates that one of the limitations of contemporary French film studies is their collective failure to adequately

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<sup>6</sup> Genevieve Sellier, *Masculine Singular: French New Wave Cinema*, trans. Kristin Ross (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008).

discuss gender. She then explains that in her study will focus on how the important questions of gender, especially masculinity, was so important for the formation of the French New Wave. A philosophy whose focus remains centered on the notion of the *auteur* or director as sole genius is for Sellier the first indication of the significance given to men as the arbiters of French cinema culture. This is the problem Sellier identifies throughout *Masculine Singular* as she seeks to support an assertion that French cinema was designed as a reaction to the advances women were making during this period.

These are critical issues, for it is important to possess a working understanding of the movement in order to properly appreciate how a socio-political history of the period coincides with the events leading up to the New Wave. Its lasting impact on the film industry is also easier to assess when coupled with such an understanding. As such I will seek to define for the reader a concise, but thorough, comprehension of the *nouvelle vague* in the first chapter. This will include various definitions from historians like Susan Hayward (who maintains a broad characterization of the term) to Michel Marie (who contends it was an artistic “school”) and to those in agreement with James Monaco (who confines the group solely to the *Cahiers du Cinéma* critics). Furthermore, since the movement was firmly grounded in film criticism it will also be necessary to examine the essays and theses of the *Cahiers du Cinéma* that proved both influential and doctrinal to the future filmmakers. The first chapter will employ a historiographical approach to examining the ideas and theories that formed an extemporaneous manifesto for the New Wave while also tracing its early origins in cinéclubs and film journals.

In an attempt to differentiate the movement from those based purely on style or content, it will be necessary to consider various social, political and economic factors that occurred in tandem. Despite the numerous publications on the advent of the fortieth and fiftieth anniversaries of the *Cahiers du Cinéma* and the New Wave, the need remains for a more detailed approach to these situational triggers. In both these instances articles, books and commemorative editions sought to celebrate the occasion while continuing to enrich the “dialogue” on the group’s filmmaking, such as the collection of essays in *Cinema Journal* during the summer of 2010. Still, even with such perspective on the group’s revolutionary impact, these essays continually lacked an adequate exploration of the political triggers and events during the 1950’s to the movement. Even those issues that included a discussion of this context mention it only in passing so as to concentrate more on artistic practices they employed, the changing gender roles in their films and the group’s announcing the advent on a new generation. Few if any of these essays discuss the Algerian Conflict and the return of De Gaulle to power with more than a few passing comments. As such, my second chapter will attempt to fill in critical discourse on the New Wave and its directors by taking a deeper interest in the political climate of the era. For while the New Wave was partly a rebellion against established filmmaking methods (or what the *Cahiers du Cinéma* critics deemed the *cinéma du papa*), their dismissal of their predecessors was not only a generational revolt but it also represented a reaction to the changing political and social landscape of France.

A further topic that has yet to be exhausted is the interaction between the various figures that spearheaded the movement. While several works coming out in the decades

following the height of the New Wave took advantage of the time passed and examined more complete careers of individual directors (such as Richard Brody's *Everything Is Cinema: The Working Life of Jean-Luc Godard*), few examine these filmmakers in regards to each other. There was a great interplay between writers-turned-directors of this period that has failed to be fully explored. The most notable –and perhaps most important and telling– of these is arguably the tumultuous relationship between Francois Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard. As such, the third chapter will seek to explore Truffaut and Godard, their close relationship and its eventual disintegration as a result of the ideological conflicts of the period which had, as a result, not only the calamity of a friendship but their different approaches to filmmaking.

## CHAPTER TWO

### WHAT IS THE NOUVELLE VAGUE?

The *nouvelle vague* had initially applied to the generation who came of age and was formed culturally and politically after the Liberation. This was the sense bestowed upon it by the weekly *L'Express* in a cover story in October 1957. According to the magazine, the 'new wave' was the group that would soon shape the France of the second half of the Twentieth Century. What, the magazine asked, did these youths want? Who were they? Who would lead them, and would these leaders finally change the way the nation was governed? In the second half of 1958 *L'Express*, which was modeled after the American weekly magazines *Time* and *Newsweek*, awarded itself the title of 'journal of the nouvelle vague,' clearly anticipating that whatever the answers the members of this group would buy the magazine that catered to them. But the magazine's commercial hype reflected a real, wholly justified sense that profound transformations had occurred in the nation since the end of World War II. Population growth, long a national obsession, had finally turned positive and was accelerating. The country's GDP was at a rate more than double what it had been a decade earlier. The recent prosperity and demographic transformation were however inextricably linked with profound social change, which many citizens found unsettling.

Histories of the cinema all agree that the New Wave represents a radical break in filmmaking: it spread new ways of producing films (cheaply, quickly, outside the mainstream); it popularized the use of lighter technologies; it made more 'realist' aesthetics fashionable; and it introduced a new generation of directors, stars,

cinematographers, producers and composers to the world. Also, it significantly transformed the way in which people saw and analyzed the cinema, in particular “establishing the centrality of the cinematic auteur as the supreme creative force.”<sup>7</sup> It is seen as a vital period in the history of French cinema. As if from nowhere, films now regarded as classics – *Les Quatre cent coups* (1959), *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959) and *À bout de souffle* (1960) – burst onto the scene in the late 1950s and early 1960s. As highly personal films made on extremely low budgets, they changed (at least for a time) the ways in which French films were made, produced and perceived. Calling the New Wave the “best known French film movement of the post-war period,” Ginette Vincendeau proceeds to observe that it constitutes a “critical standard against which French cinema has been judged ever since.”<sup>8</sup> Even Susan Hayward, who seems more skeptical of the *Cahiers* group being the definitive New Wave members than other critics, acknowledges that it “forced a reconsideration of production practices” and a “democratization of the camera” which would go on to allow “formerly marginalized voices and peoples into filmmaking.”<sup>9</sup>

The New Wave also had an enormous impact on the international scene. Along with films by Italian directors like Michelangelo Antonioni and Federico Fellini, or those by Swedish filmmaker Ingmar Bergman, French New Wave films constitute, in the view of many film authorities, one of the defining moments in the wave of self-reflexive

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<sup>7</sup> Peter Graham eds, *The French New Wave: Critical Landmarks*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 2.

<sup>8</sup> Ginette Vincendeau, *Stars and Stardom in French Cinema*, (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2000), 111.

<sup>9</sup> Susan Hayward, *French National Cinema*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 235.

cinematic modernism that emerged in the 1950s and 1960s. They were, as Jean-Luc Godard put it, “both cinema and, at the same time, the explanation of cinema.”<sup>10</sup> Even more broadly, the New Wave has frequently been taken as the virtual embodiment of an innovative, low-budget, cinema of youthful directors. Indeed, in the eyes of Vincendeau, the very term “designates a ‘freer’ approach to film, outside traditional production and stylistic norms (professionalism, studios, literary sources, large budgets, stars), an approach which privileges spontaneity and the individual expression of the auteur-director.”<sup>11</sup> It is primarily this last aspect, the director as “auteur,” that in the course of the 1960s and 1970s, influenced filmmakers the world over, which will be discovered further in chapter 4.

Up until now there has been relatively little disagreement about the importance of the New Wave, but critics are not always in accord when it comes to classifying either its traits or members. For example, while most commentators feel that the New Wave faded after the early 1960s, Susan Hayward posits two distinct movements in its evolutions. She notes that following the ‘first’ New Wave (1958-1962) there emerged a ‘second’ more political New Wave (1966-1968).<sup>12</sup> Nor do critics always agree about which directors can effectively be labeled ‘new wave.’ Some commentators, like James Monaco, author of one of the first books in English about the *nouvelle vague*, tend to confine the term to the directors at the nucleus of the phenomenon. Often referred to as the Young Turks, this group (namely Jean-Luc Godard, François Truffaut, Eric Rohmer,

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<sup>10</sup> Jean-Luc Godard, *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, (Paris: Belfond, 1996), 109.

<sup>11</sup> Vincendeau, 109.

<sup>12</sup> Hayward, 205.

Jacques Rivette and Claude Chabrol) all worked together on the influential film journal *Les cahiers du cinema* before launching their careers as directors. At the other end of the spectrum, Alan Williams uses the term rather broadly to designate what he calls “a brief period of upheaval and innovation in the late 1950s and early 1960s.”<sup>13</sup> Still, most critics take their stance somewhere between these two extremes but agree that the New Wave was clearly a “vast, unprecedented changing of the generational guard.”<sup>14</sup> Suddenly, one generation of filmmakers eclipsed their predecessors. “I don’t think that it had ever happened before or after in the history of cinema,” observed director Louis Malle, “that a group of directors in their mid-twenties suddenly broke through and took over.”<sup>15</sup>

Emerging at a remarkable rate in the late 1950s, young directors also challenged established modes of making and producing films. Such modes were particularly rigid in postwar France, where cinema remained a carefully guarded fortress still governed by rules and institutions established during the Occupation. Two principal organizations controlled filmmaking: the COIC (Comité de l’organisation des industries du cinéma) or, as it became known after the war, the CNC (Centre national de la cinématographie) and the IDHEC (Institut des hautes études cinématographiques), a professional school. The CNC was placed in charge of an important economic mechanism of state support of film by which a portion of each film ticket sold would be reinvested in future French film production. In this carefully controlled climate, anyone who wanted to make a film had to first obtain an official document, much like a union card. The most conventional way of

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<sup>13</sup> Williams, 328.

<sup>14</sup> Naomi Greene, *The French New Wave: A New Look*, (London: Wallflower Press, 2007), 5.

<sup>15</sup> Louis Malle, *Malle on Malle*, ed. Philip French, (London: Faber and Faber, 1993), 31.

obtaining such a card was through long term apprenticeships served with established directors. Another route to becoming a director was carved out after the war: one could learn the craft by making short films – which were mainly documentaries and customarily shown before the feature presentation. This second option was the one most often followed by the Left Bank directors or the ‘first generation’ of the New Wave.

The Young Turks effectively rejected both of these methods. Fueled by a youthful passion for the cinema, they did not have the patience for a long apprenticeship, especially ones connected to directors they may not have admired. Summing up their attitude, a brash Claude Chabrol deemed such an apprenticeship utterly useless. “Everything you need to know in order to direct,” he declared as a young critic, “can be learned in four hours.”<sup>16</sup> For while in fact most of the Young Turks, with the exception of Chabrol, did make short films, it was primarily their experience and understanding as film critics that prepared them for their future roles as directors. The path they chose was clearly an unorthodox one given the highly rigid climate of the 1950s. But the young critics of *Les cahiers du cinéma* were also explicit about what they saw as the inseparability of writing about films and making them. “By acting as a critic,” Chabrol said, “one winds up discovering a method, an aesthetic. In the end . . . a personal aesthetic.”<sup>17</sup> In a similar vein, Godard the same year insisted that there could be no better preparation for making films than writing and thinking about them. “All of us at Cahiers,” he declared during the course of one important interview, “saw ourselves as future directors. Going to *ciné-clubs* and the Cinématèque was already a way of thinking

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<sup>16</sup> Claude Chabrol quoted in Greene, 7.

<sup>17</sup> Claude Chabrol, “Entretien,” *Les Cahiers du cinéma*, 138 (December) 1962: 2-18, 3.

cinema and thinking about cinema. Writing was already making cinema because, between writing and filmmaking, there is only a quantitative, and not a qualitative, difference . . . As a critic I already considered myself a filmmaker.”<sup>18</sup>

Their methods were therefore in sharp contrast to those of their elders and in particular the prestigious films of those adhering to the so-called ‘Tradition of Quality.’ This category was mainly associated with established, and as the Young Turks saw them, “ageing” directors who had begun their careers before the war or who had made their first films during the Occupation. The highly regarded films within this classification were typically marked by lavish sets and costumes, the presence of glamorous stars given to highly theatrical performances and based on carefully crafted scripts that fit into traditional genres. The Young Turks had already made their antipathy for the Tradition of Quality well known before they made their own filmmaking debuts. Beginning in 1954, in the pages of *Les cahiers du cinéma*, they had launched what would become a sustained attack on the films of their elders. Scornfully deeming the Tradition of Quality an old-fashioned cinema or what they termed *le cinéma du papa*, they decried it for a variety of reasons: for its dependence on literary scripts, its theatrical artificiality and its divorce from contemporary reality. According to them it was a cinema made by “skilled craftsmen – not by inspired artists who were responsible for every aspect of the film and who put their very souls into the work,” and they called for a replacement of these films with those that would be as personal, as individual, as novels.<sup>19</sup> Further, they insisted that directors were as much the ‘authors’ of their films as writers were of their novels. Godard

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<sup>18</sup> Godard, 284-5.

<sup>19</sup> Greene, 9.

declared that, “The only films I like are those that resemble their authors.”<sup>20</sup> They also promoted a cinema that would exploit all the resources of the cinematic language and not simply dialogue.

Not surprisingly, in virtually all these respects, early New Wave films offered a sharp contrast with those of the Tradition of Quality. In so doing, they also established what might be seen as an aesthetic style of their own. Pointing to the all-important role of the author-director, they juxtaposed sound and image in new way and emphasized the role of editing and camerawork. Clearly, many of the choices embraced by New Wave directors were dictated by economic necessity as much as ideological conviction. For example, unable to film in the costly studios used for productions of the films of the Tradition of Quality, New Wave directors shot their films in the streets of Paris, making use of natural light and ambient, diegetic sound. Similarly, unable to afford hiring established film stars, they used unknown actors whose “naturalistic acting and gift for improvisation contrasted greatly with the theatrical declamations of an older generation of performers.”<sup>21</sup> Naomi Greene in her study notes that at the same time they were proclaiming a break from the rigidly formal theatricality of earlier films, their choices “implied a changed relationship to reality.”<sup>22</sup> For instance, Truffaut in 1959 observed the fact that they were forced to make do with one take meant that their films lacked “the usual icy perfection of French films” even as they “touched the public by their

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<sup>20</sup> Godard, 190.

<sup>21</sup> Greene, 9.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

spontaneity.”<sup>23</sup> In this manner he felt they “captured more of the truth, the truth of the streets, the truth of performance and the actor” for while “one reaches a profound truth by a superficial one and sophisticated cinema had lost even superficial truth.”<sup>24</sup>

Truffaut’s insistence on the notion of inherent truths (both superficial and profound) underscored a critical dimension of the New Wave. For the phenomenon was not only about new modes of production or changed filmmaking techniques, or even its conception of the director’s role as complete auteur. At its core lay an overarching need to draw close, much as the highly regarded Italian neo-realists had done before them, to reality itself. It was precisely the absence of reality or truth that the Young Turks found so sorely lacking in the Tradition of Quality. “The shared trait that united all those at Cahiers,” states Jean Douchet, “was based on a postulate: it is necessary for a film to tell the truth about the world.”<sup>25</sup> While this obviously assumed different roles for each director, for the Young Turks as a whole it relied heavily on translating to film the realities of everyday life: the nature of relationships, the desires and aspirations of French youths, the pace of life in Paris. For older directors the search for ‘truth’ often relied heavily on the roles of history and memory whereas the Young Turks – despite their different approaches – agreed that the search for ‘truth’ meant breaking down the barriers that had long divided documentary and fiction. Godard even declared that the New Wave

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<sup>23</sup> François Truffaut, *Truffaut by Truffaut*. ed. Dominique Raboudin, trans. Robert Erich Wolf, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1987), 45.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Jean Douchet, *French New Wave*, trans Robert Bonnono, (Paris: Editions Hazan/Cinémathèque française, 1999), 193.

could partly be defined by his generation as “a new relationship between fiction and reality.”<sup>26</sup>

### ***Ciné-clubs and Film Journals***

The film culture of the late 1940s helped to ignite the fervent *cinéphilie* that came to characterize 1950s Paris. The intense love of cinema (or *cinéphilie*) experienced by this generation of young people was at the very heart of the New Wave. If one end of the New Wave was defined by “a new relationship between fiction and reality,” the other could be characterized by a “nostalgia for a cinema that no longer exists.”<sup>27</sup> The Young Turks were all deeply engrossed in this nostalgia and injected their intense *cinéphilie* with an extensive historical and critical awareness of film. Filled with allusions to other films, with homages to beloved directors, littered with shots and techniques that kept audiences aware that they were watching a film, their works embodied the self-reflexivity that has often been seen as the core of cinematic modernism. Naomi Green, in her book *The French New Wave*, remarks that it is “above all this self-reflexivity – this alliance of what Godard called “art and the theory of art” – that gives the New Wave its decidedly modern dimension.”<sup>28</sup>

Never before had filmmakers been so aware of their place and role in the whole continuum of film history. As Godard declared, “We are the first filmmakers who know that Griffith exists. Even Carné, Delluc, and René Clair did not have any real critical or

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<sup>26</sup> Godard, 315.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Greene, 13.

historical training when they made their first films.”<sup>29</sup> Two institutions in particular that took shape in the immediate postwar period fueled the historical awareness that Godard was referring to: the first was the French Cinémathèque, founded by Henri Langlois, and the other was the extended networks of film clubs or *Ciné-clubs*. The unparalleled flourishing of film culture that took place during the immediate postwar period in France grew out of the *ciné-club* movement, which was dominated by André Bazin. An influential film critic and theorist, Bazin also co-founded the film journal *Cahiers du Cinéma* in 1951 (which had evolved from an earlier publication called *La revue du Cinéma* or *Cinema Review*). The vibrant new film culture, which Bazin and others inspired, saw the increased role of the Cinémathèque Française, the explosion of new film journals and the popularity of alternative film festivals such as the ‘Festival du film maudit’ (literally translated as the festival of ‘cursed films’) in Biarritz 1949. Around these outlets different groups of young critics coalesced, and an eager audience arose, drawn especially from the new intellectual middle classes. This *cinéophile* ferment was unique to France, as was the level of passion, not to say aggression, expressed in the writing of the new critics of film, such as François Truffaut in his article “A Certain Tendency in French Cinema,” Robert Benayoun in “The Emperor Has No Clothes,” and Gérard Gozlan in “The Delights of Ambiguity – In Praise of André Bazin.”

Freed from the wartime restrictions limiting public meetings, these film clubs reflected the climate of cultural ferment, marked by hopes of political and social renewal, as the nation emerged from the claustrophobic years of the Occupation. Offering a

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<sup>29</sup> Godard, 286.

window into worlds long hidden from French eyes, the *ciné-clubs* helped fuel the growing sense that cinema was not merely a popular form of entertainment but, as Eric Rohmer put it, “the classical art of the twentieth century.”<sup>30</sup> Underscoring the role these clubs played in terms of the New Wave, French film historian and critic René Prédal goes so far as to suggest that “without the *ciné-club* movement, there would doubtlessly not have been a *nouvelle vague*, because it was the clubs which created the sense of waiting, the aspirations . . . that the films of 1958-1960 would fulfill.”<sup>31</sup>

Both the Cinémathèque and the *ciné-clubs* did far more than just show films. That is, they felt it was their mission to teach viewers how to appreciate and analyze the unique nature of cinematic language. Imbued with a pedagogical mission, both the Cinémathèque and the *ciné-clubs* showed a wide variety of films that could often not be viewed elsewhere: silent classics, avant garde films, scandalous films, French and American films that had long been banned, and Italian neo-realists dramas. After the war the previously banned or heavily edited films played prominently in French theatres and *ciné-clubs*. Between 1946 and 1955, young cinephiles such as Eric Rohmer, François Truffaut, and Jean-Luc Godard, among scores of others, immersed themselves in movie-going but also in the parallel activities that made ‘cinephilia’ so rich in France. Furthermore, they also engaged in a variety of other film-related activities. They sponsored journals where film devotees could articulate their own ideas, organized debates, set up film forums and even festivals. For example, in July 1949, one of the

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<sup>30</sup> Eric Rohmer, *The Taste for Beauty*, trans Carol Volk, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 61.

<sup>31</sup> René Prédal, *Le cinéma français depuis 1945*, (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1991), 61.

leading *ciné-clubs Objectif 49* (headed primarily by the film critics André Bazin and Alexandre Astruc) organized an important film festival in Biarritz. It was initially designed to be in opposition to the popular festival held annually in Cannes in that it highlighted important works that, for various reasons, were not to be shown in the regular cinema and not scheduled for viewing at Cannes. Perhaps more importantly, however, the festival in Biarritz enabled the future Young Turks an opportunity to see themselves as a new generation of film enthusiasts and critics by providing a forum where they could meet and discuss and forge friendships.

Naomi Greene remarks that it is generally agreed that the first truly important essay of the group written by Bazin is his ‘Ontology of the Photographic Image,’ which represents “the starting point of the meditation on film that stretched from the immediate postwar period to the pages of *Les cahiers du cinéma* in the 1950s and, ultimately to the films of the New Wave.”<sup>32</sup> Bazin’s 1945 work centered on an issue that is at the philosophical heart of the New Wave movement: the relationship of cinema to reality. In exploring this fundamental issue, Bazin does not refer to prior film theories but rather to two important French thinkers of the postwar period, namely Jean-Paul Sartre and André Malraux.<sup>33</sup> Like Sartre, Bazin focused on the very nature of phenomenal reality, or more precisely, on the ways art captures and expresses that reality. Much like Malraux, Bazin conceives of the notion of ‘stages’ in the history of art and shares Malraux’s romantic view of art. According to Bazin, photography represents a new stage in artistic ‘realism’

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<sup>32</sup> Greene, 19.

<sup>33</sup> Greene contends that this essay is often seen as the beginning of a new era in film theory, thereby drawing on current philosophical thought rather than precedent in the field.

because it relies solely on a mechanical means to reproduce reality. This representation of the world renders the photograph wholly 'objective.' He notes that, "For the first time, between its originating object and its reproduction there intervenes on the instrumentality of a nonliving agent."<sup>34</sup> Painting, on the other hand, he says, is "always in fee to an inescapable subjectivity" in that the reality reproduced in a painting has inevitably and unavoidably been filtered through the artist's hand and mind.<sup>35</sup> Viewed in this context, Bazin asserts "the cinema is objectivity in time" and that for the very first time "the image of things is likewise the image of their duration, change mummified as it were."<sup>36</sup> Film, unlike painting, has the ability to present reality honestly and without bias because it is not being recorded by man but by a machine. However, Bazin also remarks that depending on how the man operates this machine determines whether or not this representation of raw reality is achieved. Towards the beginning of his essay, Bazin cites a remark by Malraux that will end up being the crux of this subsequent argument. He says, "Cinema, is nothing other than the most developed principle of plastic realism that [first] appeared in the Renaissance."<sup>37</sup> But Bazin says cinema "is also a language."<sup>38</sup>

Bazin had an almost messianic view of what film criticism should do and his best works, according to Alan Williams, grew out of a "philosophical and religious quest for totality."<sup>39</sup> Further, Williams asserts, this resulted in Bazin's essays leading double lives:

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<sup>34</sup> André Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol I*, ed and trans Hugh Gray, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 13.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 14-15.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 16.

<sup>39</sup> Williams, 309.

when they were written they were not meant as objective theorizing but as actively engaged criticism with a definite political bent; after his death, however, they came to be widely seen as the ideal of realist cinema theory. “He was and remains,” Williams explains, “the cinema commentator who could best elucidate coherent theoretical support for his ongoing engagement with the history of the medium. The critical force which he achieved may be seen in the way his evaluations of films seem accepted verities today: most modern film criticism is still profoundly Bazinian.”<sup>40</sup>

Although it was Bazin who first conceived of the idea of a ‘cinema of authors’ in his 1946 review of Orson Wells’ *The Magnificent Ambersons*, it was Alexandre Astruc who took Bazin’s critical notion and expanded it in his landmark essay *La Caméra-Stylo* two years later. This essay, whose full title is *The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: The Caméra-Stylo*, appeared on March 30, 1948, in the publication *L’Ecran français* (a leftist journal which had grown out of the clandestine pamphlet begun during the Occupation) on.<sup>41</sup> Although this was perhaps his most famous accomplishment, Astruc was also a journalist, critic, filmmaker and founding member of *Objectif 49* and *Les Cahiers du cinéma*. Astruc, like Bazin, rejects the notion that the language espoused by films is purely a visual one characterized largely by the use of montage and editing. Although he does not share Bazin’s aversion to montage on moral or polemical grounds, he is careful to point out that it does not constitute the specific language or what he calls the idea of a film. Film, he insisted, expresses thought, its primary notion is time passing so it has to

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> *L’Ecran français* was a leftist journal that had grown out of the clandestine pamphlet begun during the Occupation.

follow something – it can represent any kind of reality, and it will become “a form in which and by which artists can express their thoughts, however abstract they may be ... this is why I would like to call this new age of cinema the *caméra-stylo*.”<sup>42</sup> This, he says, is the fundamental problem of cinema for “The cinema of today is capable of expressing any kind of reality.”<sup>43</sup> And, he goes on, “By making a tangible allusion, the cinema can really make itself the vehicle of thought.”<sup>44</sup>

According to Astruc it would soon be possible “to write ideas directly on film without even having to resort to those heavy associations of images that were the delight to the silent cinema ... To suggest the passing of time, there is no need to show falling leaves and then apple trees in blossom.”<sup>45</sup> Nor, he says, can a film be equated with its script. Here he challenged the important role accorded to a well-crafted script in the Tradition of Quality, and affirmed his belief that “cinema will gradually break free from ... the immediate and concrete demands of the narrative, to become a means of writing just as flexible and subtle as written language.”<sup>46</sup> As this remark suggests, Astruc is not only concerned with the language of film but with its status as art, and with the all-important role of the director. This means that for the director “the cinema is quite simply becoming a means of expression, just as [in] all the other arts have before it, and in particular, painting and the novel.”<sup>47</sup> Indeed, pressing this point he asserts “it will be

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<sup>42</sup> Alexandre Astruc, “The Birth of the New Avant-Garde: La caméra-style,” in Peter Graham and Ginette Vincendeau ed. *The French New Wave: Critical Landmarks*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan. 2009):??-??, 32.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>45</sup> Astruc, 1968. p19.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>47</sup> Astruc, ed. Graham, 32.

possible for the cinema to produce works which are equivalent, in their profundity and meaning, to the novels of William Faulkner and André Malraux, to the essays of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus.”<sup>48</sup> On this critical point he elaborates:

This of course implies that the scriptwriter directs his own scripts; or rather, that the scriptwriter ceases to exist, for in this kind of film-making the distinction between author and director loses all meaning. Direction is no longer a means of illustrating or presenting a scene, but a true act of writing. The film-maker/author writes with his camera as a writer writes with his pen.<sup>49</sup>

Thus, for Astruc, it was of paramount importance to posit that the cinema was undergoing the process of becoming a new means of expression on the same plane as painting and the novel. Several years before Truffaut argued the same thing, Astruc asserts that the scriptwriters should also direct the films themselves because the differences between the author and director have become meaningless. He concludes this notion by posing the question, “how can one possibly distinguish between the man who conceives the work and the man who writes it?”<sup>50</sup>

In this way, as Marie notes, Astruc’s article was both significant and prophetic in that he anticipates the films that were to come and in his essay there appeared the “first affirmations of the *film auteur*, while refuting the constraints put in place by the popular cinema” with its “demands for entertainment and distractions” of the masses.<sup>51</sup> Astruc’s critical theories on the *camera-stylo* and Bazin’s notion of realist cinema provided an

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Michel Marie, *The French New Wave: An Artistic School*, trans Richard Neupert, (Cornwall: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2003), 33.

important foundation from which Truffaut, Godard and the other *Cahiers* critics and New Wave directors would build their new *auteur* cinema.

### ***Cahiers du Cinéma* and The Young Turks**

Astruc and Bazin were not alone, however, in attempting to illustrate the importance of the director in filmmaking for several others would follow the notions set forth in Astruc's essay one important example being Eric Rohmer's "Cinema: the art of space." Published in *Le revue de cinema* under his birth name Maurice Schérer, the future director defined cinema as the art of space and added that "the expressive value of the interplay of dimensions or the displacement of lines on the screen's surface, can be the object of rigorous attention."<sup>52</sup> He proposed that it was time to examine the unique ways in which cinema uses space while simultaneously rejecting earlier notions (such as those of Astruc and Bazin) that revolved around the techniques of montage or editing.

According to Rohmer,

It is not, as André Malraux stated, because the motion picture is a means of reproduction and not of expression, but rather because the technique of using a sequence of shots helps reinforce the expressive nature of each one. It does so, for example, by making slight movements perceptible (the batting of an eyelid, the clenching of a fist) or by allowing the viewer to follow trajectories of movements that actually extend far beyond his visual field. Compared with theatrical space, cinematic space would thus be defined by the narrowness of its visual surface and the breadth of its place of action. The director must therefore determine not only the interior of each shot according to a certain special concept but also the total space to be filmed.<sup>53</sup>

Rohmer also challenged the highly literary films of the Tradition of Quality, much like Astruc albeit for rather different reasons. For Rohmer such films have initiated visual

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<sup>52</sup> Rohmer, 19.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

clichés that must now deciphered. These viewers, he insisted, must be more acute observers. Instead of only “interpreting visual signals [and] understanding the reason for each image,” he argued one must perceive how spatial relations and movements can convey thought and emotion.<sup>54</sup> The problem, he concluded, was that “in learning how to understand, the modern moviegoer forgot how to see.”<sup>55</sup>

Rohmer’s essay, despite being densely analytical and philosophical, foreshadowed one of the central notions proposed by the Young Turks in their attempt to elucidate the specific nature of filmic language, namely, *mise-en-scène*. As articulated by the young critics this term seemed to denote the ways in which a given work used elements specific to film: the placement and movement of the camera, the organization of beings and things within each frame, the movement within each frame and from shot to shot. Deemed the ‘very essence’ of a film by Bazin, the *mise-en-scène* was defined by *Cahiers* critic Fereydoun Hoveyda as “nothing other than the technique that each *auteur* invents in order to express himself and establish the specificity of his work.”<sup>56</sup> Of the various definitions of terms proposed over the years, it is perhaps Jaques Rivette’s essay that most clearly echoes the ideas put forth by Rohmer’s 1948 essay. In his review essay he disagreed with the American producer and distributor Otto Preminger who put the *mise-en-scène* above themes and instead praised those directors who “believe first in their

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>56</sup> Fereydoun Hoveyda, “Sunspots,” in Jim Hillier ed, *Cahiers du Cinéma 1960-1968: New Wave, New Cinema, Reevaluating Hollywood*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986): 135-145, 142.

themes and then build the strength of their art upon this conviction.”<sup>57</sup> Rivette defines *mise-en-scène* as a “precise complex of people and decors, a network of relations, a moving architecture of relationships somehow suspended in space.”<sup>58</sup> The article, moreover, is a careful critique of the 'Tradition of Quality' genre whose reliance upon the script had led to films being constructed without due attention to modes of seeing, thus failing to utilize and develop a truly cinematic language related to space and the construction and role of *mise-en-scène*. Several years after this publication, Rohmer's notions of cinematic space would be folded into those set forth by fellow *Cahiers* writer Francois Truffaut as belonging to the all-important director.

Following more than a year of revisions and deliberation, Bazin and fellow *Cahiers* editor Doniol-Valcroze decided to finally publish Truffaut's highly polemical article, “A Certain Tendency in French Cinema” in January 1954.<sup>59</sup> In this article Truffaut attacked the Tradition of Quality films for their “faithfulness” to the original text and their inclination to invent equivalent scenes when those in the text were deemed to be “unfilmable.”<sup>60</sup> Truffaut then went on to outline several other problematic qualities as well as clearly advocating the removal of cinema from the screenwriters' jurisdiction. He argued that by reinstating the directors' authority the focus would shift back to technique, creative process and original narrative. Truffaut also qualified this assertion by noting

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<sup>57</sup> Rivette, Jacques. “L'Essentiel” in Jim Hillier ed, *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1950s: Neo-realism, Hollywood, the New Wave*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986): 132-135, 134.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Marie, 33. This extensive revision process is known today thanks largely to the work done by *Cahiers* historian Antoine de Baecque and is cited as such in various compendiums as well as in more narrow works such as Marie.

<sup>60</sup> François Truffaut, “A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema,” in *Movies and Methods*, ed, Bill Nichols, (Berkeley: University California Press, 1976), 224-237. Originally published as “Une certaine tendance du cinéma français,” *Cahiers du Cinéma*. No. 31 (January, 1954), 15-29.

that the change could only be assured if the authority was given selectively to those directors who were *auteurs*. The reservations held by the editors at *Cahiers* was their concern over Truffaut's scathing tone and vicious attacks on well-established directors whom they still admired. Bazin and Doniol-Valcroze were leftist Christians, the former a Catholic and the latter originally Protestant. A further critic, Pierre Kast, remained deeply involved in leftist politics after having participated in the French Resistance during his youth. Kast, for one, was "very opposed to this tract" seeing it as being launched by what he thought were the "hussars of the new right wing."<sup>61</sup> While it would be a mistake to overly simplify these political positions, which continued to evolve throughout the 1950s, there was a perception by some of what they termed the "Hitchcocko-Hawksian" tendency within *Cahiers*, which they saw as belonging to the conservative right. This perception played a decisive role in the very violent attacks that the directors of the first New Wave features had to endure from the bulk of extreme left-wing Marxist and surrealist critics, who supported a rival journal *Positif*.<sup>62</sup>

Despite such reservations, Truffaut's innovative ideas were published and widely disseminated through *Cahiers* and his concepts eventually became known as the *politique des auteurs*, or rather the *auteur* theory.<sup>63</sup> Truffaut's article, however, marked the departure point for the *auteur* theory and various other aesthetic positions, which became crucial to the New Wave movement. This *auteur* theory was particularly central to the

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<sup>61</sup> Marie, 34.

<sup>62</sup> Budniakiewicz, Thérèse, "Positif" *SubStance*, Vol 3 No. 9, Film (Spring, 1974): 159-166, 159. Raymond Border and Robert Benayoun from *Positif*.

<sup>63</sup> Robert Sklar discusses this theory in his book *Film: An International History of the Medium* as does both Naomi Greene and Richard Neupert as the notion that directors can be the "chief creator" or author of a film as well.

young group of critics-turned-directors often known as the Young Turks. The Young Turks – a group comprised of Claude Chabrol, Jean-Luc Godard, Jacques Rivette, Eric Rohmer and François Truffaut - began by working together at *Cahiers* before launching their careers as film directors. Their working in the *Cahiers du Cinéma* served as a sort of preparation for their becoming filmmakers, all the more so in that the Young Turks blatantly rejected conventional ways of entering the field, such as proper schooling or some kind of apprenticeship. Determining that their status as *cinéphiles* was sufficient enough to make films, Godard highlighted their position when he remarked that “to me, there is no difference between making and thinking about movies.”<sup>64</sup> Chabrol too openly supported this feeling that the traditional methods of entering the field were completely useless as he made clear when he declared that “everything you need to know in order to direct can be learned in four hours.”<sup>65</sup>

Chabrol’s dismissive remark highlighted the group’s complete rejection of past practices, from the established modes of entering the industry to the traditional methods of film production. These revolutionary ideas not only extended their credo, it also distinguished their filmmaking. It was, Naomi Greene notes in her book *The French New Wave*, precisely this innovative attitude, this fracture with past filmmaking techniques that launched the New Wave.<sup>66</sup> They were creating films in response to the previous filmmaking methods of the postwar period and not in accordance with them. As such,

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<sup>64</sup> David Sterritt, ed, *Jean-Luc Godard: Interviews*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), 96.

<sup>65</sup> Greene, 6.

<sup>66</sup> For a descriptive outline of New Wave Practices see Michel Marie’s *The French New Wave: An Artistic School*, especially chapter four “A Technical Practice, an Aesthetic.”

their films tended to be marked by location shooting, limited retakes, small budget productions, and the incorporation of young unknown actors rather than ‘stars.’ In their films they endeavored to eradicate the widening “gap” between cinema and reality, and as a result, their films tended to be intensely personal while still reflecting their period.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Marie, 32.

## CHAPTER THREE

### CHANGING IDEALS AND BORDERS

As the Young Turks filmed their first features in the late 1950s, they capitalized on the fortunate congruence of circumstances that marked the moment of their popularity: the marriage of modern filmmaking technology and post-war urban modernization. De Gaulle's return to power in 1958 symbolized both the harrowing end of French colonialism in Algeria and the increasing economic prosperity following the prolonged post-war recovery and political flux. John Ardagh has described this period as being one in which France seemed to be making "a leap straight from the late eighteenth to the twentieth century."<sup>68</sup> The late 1950's and 1960s were in fact crucial transitional years for France, and Paris reigned during this period as the city where a modern post-war society materialized. Living new lives in new apartment buildings surrounded by new consumer goods Parisians also now had a new wave of filmmakers to immortalize them and complete their transformation into modernity.

Following the Second World War, the French film industry desperately struggled to regain its prewar standing. Having been devastated by yet another world war fought on French soil, coupled with a lengthy foreign occupation, and the aftermath of Vichy and uneasiness about collaboration, the country sought to rebuild the various segments of French life. As a result, France underwent substantial changes in the 1940's not least of which was a political uneasiness that culminated in the failure of the Fourth Republic and the return of Charles de Gaulle in 1958. As Richard Neupert notes in his book *A History*

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<sup>68</sup> John Ardagh, *The New French Revolution: A Social and Economic Survey of France 1945-1967*, (London: Secker and Warburg, 1968), 9.

of the French New Wave Cinema, it is imperative to recognize how the “demographics, economics and cultural climate of France developed during this era” in order to better understand the movement’s emergence and the context in which it was formed.<sup>69</sup>

New Wave films emerged at a time when France was experiencing considerable change on several fronts. First, the period was “shadowed” by the “bitter and divisive struggle” to maintain control of Algeria in a war lasting from 1954-1962 and in which over one million Algerians died in pursuit of independence from France, following the previous loss of Indochina in 1954.<sup>70</sup> These events were the determining factors leading to the ultimate dissolution of the Fourth Republic, which from its outset had been marked by political instability and weakened by its failure to solve the problem of decolonization, particularly the status of Algeria, which most Frenchman saw not as a colony but as part of France. It was in this era of turmoil and insecurity that de Gaulle was reinstated as the President of France, much as he had been after World War II, possessing extensive military support following the May 1958 Crisis. Also known as the Coup of 13 May, this event was a putsch that took place in Algiers. It had the impact of restoring de Gaulle to power while also laying the groundwork for the Fifth Republic.<sup>71</sup> The changes that took place during this time allowed for the favorable conditions that led to the New Wave movement in the French film industry.

Additionally, France experienced in the 1950s the development of increased consumerism and greater affluence as well as a shift toward urban living, which brought

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<sup>69</sup> Neupert, 5.

<sup>70</sup> Greene, 10.

<sup>71</sup> For a more detailed discussion of de Gaulle’s return to power and the May 1958 Crisis see *Rebirth: A History of Europe Since World War II*, especially pages 426-442.

with it a reassessment of long-standing moral values and traditions. As France recovered from the war the populace was able to afford such consumer luxuries such as cars and televisions, and became intensely influenced by mass culture, which frequently came from across the Atlantic. This development, often referred to as ‘Americanization,’ was marked by increased individual consumerism and the rapid growth of modernization.<sup>72</sup> The increased ownership of televisions and cars meant that the population’s attitudes toward leisure and entertainment were changing with their possessions; specifically, along with the growth of more urban environments their acquisitions prompted a move away from assuming the need to go out for services and entertainment and instead expecting them to be delivered at home. According to Colin Crisp, these changes were one of the more significant factors in the “steadily growing pressure on cinema throughout this period to transform itself from a popular community activity to a more private and elitist art form.”<sup>73</sup> The 1950’s saw an increase in spending related to the individual and the home and a decrease in spending related to public activities and to the community. As sales of two major consumer products, the automobile and the television, rose throughout this period they marked a more general change in the lifestyles and the spending habits of the French people. For example, people were now able to take longer vacations, attend more events, go to more restaurants and buy more luxury items. For the film industry their increased disposable incomes led to a decrease in the number of

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<sup>72</sup> For a more complete discussion of this see Kristen Ross’ book *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*.

<sup>73</sup> Colin Crisp, *The Classic French Cinema: 1930-1960*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 73.

moviegoers and ticket sales.<sup>74</sup> In short, what even in small towns was once a community activity was now starting to become a more individualized pastime, especially as more people were able to view films at home on their televisions. The industry's failings in the face of this emerging consumer society would eventually lend itself to the criticism and revision of filmmaking ideas found in the *Cahiers du Cinéma*.

### **Postwar Politics in France – de Gaulle's Return and the Algerian War**

According to M. Malézieux in his article "The Fifth Republic," it was ministerial instability (as France has a multi-party system) coupled with the weakness of the parliamentary executive that broke down the Fourth Republic.<sup>75</sup> He also notes these governmental weaknesses or problems were merely outward causes of the public's dissatisfaction with an institution ill-adapted to the requirements of a representative regime. Like the Third Republic before it, the Fourth Republic fell because the French were "a profoundly divided people living in a terribly dangerous universe."<sup>76</sup> While the Algerian conflict may have been what set events in motion, it does not account for the whole story. There were several other fundamental issues that the government had been unable to solve – the unsoundness of republican institutions, unstable political coalitions, and weak leadership. But historians generally agree that the Algerian Conflict was the preeminent cause of the Fourth Republic's collapse, as it was a bitter war that tore apart an already fractious and weakened political system. The Algerian Conflict also finally brought about the return of Charles de Gaulle, who assumed an executive position and

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<sup>74</sup> Neupert, 8-9.

<sup>75</sup> M. Malézieux, "The Fifth Republic," *The American Journal of Comparative Law*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (Spring, 1959): 218-227.

<sup>76</sup> General Charles de Gaulle in a broadcast on June 13, 1958.

was able to win the favor with both civilians and the military, which gave him the opportunity to introduce his own brand of government. De Gaulle introduced a presidential model as opposed to the Fourth Republic's fractious, unstable parliamentary one. He created the office of a president who had more centralized power and would be elected by popular vote every seven years. While the term of office resembled that of the Third Republic, unlike the Third Republic, in DeGaulle's Republic he as the president enjoyed enormous power. This was a major, if controversial, change in governance in France, not unprecedented of course but one that rejected the political practices of the Third and Fourth Republics.

Historian Richard Vinen observes that there were three separate developments in the 1950s that combined to cause the dissolution of the Fourth Republic. In addition to the amnesty laws of 1951 and 1953 which, after the postwar liberation purge, allowed Pétainists increasingly to return to public life, Poujadism emerged from an anti-tax protest in southwestern France to become suddenly a major political party that won 52 seats in the legislative elections of 1956.<sup>77</sup> This sudden emergence of Poujade and his anti-tax movement not only upset the political balance but also was particularly damaging for the notables of provincial France since it attacked the local institutions from which they had derived their power. As a final point, Vinen notes, the war to maintain a French Algeria destabilized the already shaky Fourth Republic. Among growing numbers of European settlers, army personnel and their supporters in mainland France there was a

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<sup>77</sup> Richard Vinen, "The Fifth Republic as Parenthesis? Politics since 1945," *Modern France*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003): 74-102, 81-82. This topic is further explored in Vinen's work *Bourgeois Politics in France, 1945-1951*, which provides insight into the inner workings of the Fourth Republic.

consensus that the regime was “too weak to take effective measures in North Africa.”<sup>78</sup> Already a crippled institution, the Fourth Republic was not able to form a consensus on how to deal with Algeria.

Thus, it is hardly surprising that the Algerian situation resulted in a number of crises, or that it posed a serious threat to the already precarious stability of the Fourth Republic. Prior to the Second World War, France was a major colonial power; indeed the possession of colonies seemed especially important after its “victory” in World War I. France’s colonial territories became even more important to Vichy following German occupation during World War II, and certain colonies were critical to de Gaulle and the Free French. However, after the war maintaining its colonial holdings proved a difficult task. This was not a challenge France alone faced since most of the world’s colonies eventually came to desire and achieve independence in the following decades.<sup>79</sup>

Nonetheless, independence movements plagued most French colonies in the postwar years, and in Algeria, which for the French enjoyed a special status, there were VE day 1945 riots by Algerian nationalists in Sétif, riots that were brutally repressed by the French army.<sup>80</sup> According to Alistair Horne, the “impact [of the sétif insurrection] on Algerians was incalculable and ineradicable,” for it inaugurated years of vicious conflict.<sup>81</sup> However, the first major war of decolonization France encountered took place not in Africa but in French Indo-China. There Ho Chi Minh, a Communist with a pre-war

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Tony Smith, *The French Stake in Algeria, 1945-1962*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 19.

<sup>80</sup> Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria, 1954-1962*, (New York: New York Review of Books, 2006), 25. However, for a full description of the events see pages 23-28.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 27.

record of anti-colonialist struggle, led an independence movement (widely known as the Viet Minh) against France. The lingering guerilla war that followed was a war the French army was unprepared to fight and led, after Dien Bien Phu, to the withdrawal of France. It was Prime Minister Pierre Mendès, who would later be called upon to deal with a secular/surrender situation in Algeria, who signed the peace agreement on 20th July 1954 known as the Geneva Accords.<sup>82</sup>

Pierre Mendès-France thus effectively ended French domination of Indo-China, and France spared itself further bloodshed by granting independence to both Morocco and Tunisia in 1956.<sup>83</sup> However, Algeria was different; for Algeria had many French nationals (the *pieds noir*, French who had settled there) and for many French Algeria was not a colony but a part of France itself. Confronted by the nationalist movement, the FLN, a savage war therefore ensued, a war that claimed hundreds of thousands of lives (18,000 French and 250,000 Algerian Muslims, many of whom were killed by the FLN itself). This war, the *guerre sans nom* as it has been called, led to the fall of the Fourth Republic and eventually the independence of Algeria from France.

The problems France faced in Algeria were many and complex, too great for a political system already weakened by its own internal problems. The Fourth Republic had been set up mainly to protect France from the Communist threat that followed the Second World War, where the French Communist Party, thanks to its role in the Resistance, emerged as a major party. When this threat waned in the mid-fifties, (especially after Stalin's death in 1953,) the danger it posed became less intense. Thus, according to

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 67-68.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

Vinen, the Fourth Republic having focused on building its political fortifications to survive an attack expected from the left became vulnerable when the attack ultimately manifested itself on the right and centre.<sup>84</sup>

So what was intrinsically different about Algeria that caused France to cling so obstinately and tenaciously to it? Historian Tony Smith addresses this critical question in his book *The French Stake in Algeria, 1945-1962*. There he notes what he calls a ‘colonial consensus’ that was really the “collective conscience of the French political elite in regard to colonial issues.”<sup>85</sup> More than just economic or strategic interests, Smith asserts that it was the primacy of the colonial consensus in the Fourth and Fifth Republic, that is the belief in maintaining the French Colonial empire but, in particular, France’s special and historical relationship with Algeria, that blocked any concession to Algerian interests. “At the heart of colonial consensus,” Smith notes, “was the conviction that French decadence was responsible for the loss of the overseas empire and so the colonies must be held, for to acquiesce in the termination of empire, especially in the loss of Algeria, would be a final symptom of a national loss of virility.”<sup>86</sup> Essentially it came down to a belief that Algeria must remain permanently part of France (as indeed it was constitutionally), and the protection of a large settler population of close to one million, which had political representation, that furthered this stance.

The settler problem was not secondary, for this settler population (the  *pied noirs* ) was both large, (it comprised nearly 1/10<sup>th</sup> of the inhabitants of Algeria in 1954) and

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<sup>84</sup> Vinen, 83.

<sup>85</sup> Smith, 23.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 172.

extremely outspoken. They viewed any concession to Algerian nationalism as a personal attack to their position and a threat to Algeria's union with France.<sup>87</sup> In May 1958 this population was driven to extreme measures, establishing links to right-wing organizations and disgruntled army officers and organizing a mass strike in Algiers. On May 13, they invaded the governor general's building and called upon General de Gaulle to set up a Government of Public Safety to save French Algeria. Having been absent from the political arena for years, de Gaulle had made no public statement about Algeria and although he was believed sympathetic to the officers, he remained in fact cautious about associating with the organizers of the coup. Those in favor of a French Algeria simply assumed his support for their cause without de Gaulle ever having committed himself to it. Vinen supposes that while de Gaulle "probably believed" that Algeria should remain connected to France, it was not the most critical concern to him; what was of primary importance to him was the manner in which he returned.<sup>88</sup>

The period of de Gaulle's return, the establishment of the Fifth Republic and the insurrection in Algiers that brought about the two is taken as the backdrop for Jean-Luc Godard's second feature film, *Le Petit Soldat* (*The Little Soldier*, 1962). Despite being shot in April and May 1960, the film positions itself as a record of these events in 1958, two years prior. The film begins on May 13, 1958, the date of the attempted putsch in Algeria, and tells the story of Bruno Forestier, a French deserter living in Geneva.<sup>89</sup> After getting involved with the French National Bureau, he is ordered to assassinate an

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<sup>87</sup> Robert Gildea, *France Since 1945*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 24-27.

<sup>88</sup> Vinen, 83.

<sup>89</sup> During this period French men were required to register for the draft and serve for three years.

Algerian sympathizer and member of the FLN in order to prove his loyalty. Meanwhile, he meets and falls in love with a woman, Veronica Dreyer (Godard's future wife Anna Karina), whom he later discovers works for the opposite side. Following his failed assassination attempt, Bruno resolves to escape to Brazil but Veronica is reluctant to accompany him. Men working for the Algerian side capture Bruno on route to his getaway, torturing him for information. For example, handcuffing Bruno to a tub they burn his hands and hold his head under water in order to extract a phone number. Between torture sessions they discuss love and politics, Bruno is considered to lack ideals "so resisting is stupid," and is eventually released.<sup>90</sup> With the Algerian war as its backdrop and the scenes of torture, Godard's film was banned in 1960. It would not be until screened until after the war in 1963, and by that time its importance had passed.

Interestingly, this film is one of the few times Godard formally sets his narrative in an earlier period. In fact, he openly rejected the notion of making films about the past in a 1960 interview. He says, "Why not make something current, why do you have to consider present events as something taboo? A film is out of date when it doesn't give a clear picture of the era it was made in."<sup>91</sup> Considering it "indecent" to even make a film about the resistance, Godard must have considered these events as relevant in 1960 as they were in 1958. "I spoke of what concerned me, a Parisian in 1960, belonging to no party," Godard said at the time. "And what concerned me was the problem of war and its

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<sup>90</sup> *Le Petit Soldat*, directed by Jean-Luc Godard (1960; location: distributor, year), DVD.

<sup>91</sup> Tom Milne, trans and ed., *Godard on Godard*, (New York and London: De Capo Press, 1972), 26.

moral repercussions."<sup>92</sup> Indeed his concern with war and the justification of killing in the name of war that began with *The Little Soldier* would continue to surface in subsequent films such as *Les Carabiniers (The Rifleman, 1963)* and *For Ever Mozart (1995)*.

However, despite *The Little Soldier* taking the controversial war in Algeria as it's setting, Godard's true anti-war film is widely considered to be *The Rifleman*, which tells the story of two peasants, Michelange and Ulysses, who are drafted into war upon the King's orders. They are promised all the riches that they find during the course of the war, but the film ends tragically with the peasants being shot following the King's defeat. The film takes place in a hypothetical time and place; Godard's attempt to fictionalize war demonstrates a desire to discuss war on a more general level, without seeing it within the framework of a conflict between particular nations. By taking it out of such a context the film ignores the "ideological justifications of different wars in order to emphasize the similarity of the use of violence" and the horror and pointlessness of war. "If *Les Carabiniers* had no success in Paris," Godard commented, "it's because people are worms. You show them worms on the screen, they get angry. What they like is a beautiful war à la Zanuck. For three hours they kill lots of Germans. Then they go home happy, heroic. Real war, they don't want. It isn't war that is disgusting, it's ourselves. People are cowards."<sup>93</sup>

The 'real war' that took place between France and Algeria is precisely what Alistair Horne discusses in his book *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria, 1954-1962*. Horne notes the extent to which the unnecessary aggression, hostility and malice of this conflict

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 178.

<sup>93</sup> *Réalités*, September 1964.

prolonged the bloodshed and ultimately undermined the social cohesion and ethical values of both nations. These themes surface in Godard's films about war, especially the conflicting morality apparent, for example, in *The Little Soldier* where both sides are revealed to practice torture. Of course, Godard deals more with existential questions such as the ethics of torture, indicated by the film's voice-over narrator who describes torture as "monotonous and sad," rather than the specific politics of this war.<sup>94</sup> Algeria was messy, especially since, as Horne asserts, it was not only a colonial struggle but also as a serious socio-political struggle within Algeria, a disturbing political and moral crisis within France and the beginning of the lengthy North/South confrontation which continues to the present. Making the point abundantly clear, Horne repeatedly asserts that far from being a religious war, although the conflict between the Muslim/Christian aspects did play a significant part, the Algerian War was essentially a war of national liberation.<sup>95</sup>

Following de Gaulle's return to power, it became increasingly clear, to de Gaulle at least, that only a complete withdrawal from Algeria would comply with his desire to modernize the French military, stabilize the country, and preserve France's influence in the world.<sup>96</sup> The consequence, according to Alistair Horne, was the "double-talk" de Gaulle exhibited in his dealings with the army. The army assumed he intended to maintain a French Algeria, which was no longer the case. But while he may have consciously tried to conceal this fact from the French people, he was also, in Horne's

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<sup>94</sup> Quoted in *Le Petit Soldat*.

<sup>95</sup> Horne, 50-54.

<sup>96</sup> Vinen, 84.

view, deceiving himself in thinking that “time would wait upon him while he found the correct formula” to impose peace.<sup>97</sup> The concluding two years of struggle between France and Algeria would in fact prove to be “little more than a pre-ordained script” with events such as ‘the week of the barricades’ in 1960 and the failed ‘generals’ putsch’ of 1961 sealing the fate of *Algérie française*.<sup>98</sup> In fact, there was not enough time and never the perfect solution for imposing peace on the resistance movements, and de Gaulle came to see that France would have to recognize Algeria’s right to independence. De Gaulle had hoped that a peaceful solution would serve to link forever Algeria and France. But soon it became abundantly clear that the only solution was a negotiation of the war’s end, which came with the Evian Accords, in March 1962 granting both an immediate ceasefire and ending the bitter eight-year struggle.<sup>99</sup>

### **Postwar French Culture: The Generation of Marx and Coca-Cola**

Unlike Godard, who made two films which obliquely criticize the Algerian War, Truffaut ultimately avoided politics both on and off screen. Yet other changes in France would surface in films by the young directors of the New Wave, namely the increasing influence of American culture, urbanization and the rise of a new middle class. Also, economic conditions changed enormously in the postwar period. For, as Vinen notes, if the Fourth Republic was “a period that saw extreme political crisis, it also saw extreme

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<sup>97</sup> Horne, 381.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 349. The ‘week of the barricades,’ or *La semaine des barricades*, was in insurrection in the Algerian capitol of Algiers in late January 1960 in which civilian *pieds-noirs* threw up barricades in the streets and occupied government buildings. The ‘generals’ putsch’ in April 1961 was a failed coup d’état intending to overthrow de Gaulle and cancel the government’s negotiations with the FLN. It also marked the turning point in the official attitude of the Algerian war.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 463.

economic successes.”<sup>100</sup> These were in fact “the thirty glorious years,” three decades of unparalleled growth and prosperity. Population increased from 40.5 million to 52.6 million in the years between 1946 and 1975, which was a number equal to the country’s growth for the previous 150 years.<sup>101</sup> Moreover, there was a dramatic shift from the countryside to cities, with urban dwellers for the first time outnumbering rural populations. This rapid increase in population was reflected in both rapid urbanization and a problem of overcrowding, since “the level of housing stock manifestly failed to keep pace with demand” from people migrating to the cities.<sup>102</sup>

Gildea remarks that in the space of a generation the economic and social structure of France changed beyond all recognition. The true consequences of such a change are lost if the change is only looked at in terms of statistics, numbers and figures. For the character of France itself changed, as France had long been a country dominated by its peasantry and its rural population. At the beginning of the Second World War 45 percent of the population lived in rural communes (defined as having 2,000 inhabitants or fewer). Quite apart from numbers, the character of agriculture changed, for agriculture modernized and became industrialized at an astonishing rate, and agricultural production doubled between 1945 and 1976.<sup>103</sup> This modernization of agriculture enabled France to feed her rapidly growing population and even to export significant amounts of foodstuffs, although, ironically, the “success in [agricultural] production drove down prices and

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<sup>100</sup> Vinen, 19.

<sup>101</sup> Gildea, 93.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 95.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 102.

spelled catastrophe for a large proportion of the farming population.”<sup>104</sup> This was because these changes favored larger farms and the independent farmers who remained were obliged abandon mixed farming and autarky for market orientation and specialization. Such changes opened up further conflict between those who had successfully adapted, those who were seeking to adapt, and those who had neither the ability nor the inclination to adapt.<sup>105</sup>

Historian Richard Kuisel, in his book *Capitalism and the State in Modern France*, characterizes this renovation of the French economy a product of the modernization and the development of a neo-liberal economy. Kuisel emphasizes the gradual acceptance by the French of central planning and “economic management,” which occurred during the years spanning the wars.<sup>106</sup> These developments, as Kuisel makes clear, brought with them fundamental changes in men’s minds, and national desire to overcome backwardness as France strove to compete with other resurgent capitalist economies. According to Kuisel, this was not an entirely new development, for the nation moved towards a mixed, managed and dynamic economy with some “prescient individuals anticipate[ing] the trend as early as 1900.”<sup>107</sup> Early reformers like as Albert Thomas and Etienne Clémentel had tried after World War I to press modernization on the rural economy, but the French were much more willing to listen to the partisans of scientific

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid. Gildea notes that the application of science to agriculture transformed the practice of farming. It threatened to make certain practices obsolete and with them innumerable farmers and their livelihoods.

<sup>106</sup> Richard Kuisel, *Capitalism and the State in Modern France: Renovation and Economic Management in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), ix.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 272.

management and market expansion after the Second World War when change was no longer optional but necessary.

The motivation for change was the perceived need not to let France outstripped by other advanced industrial nations. Thus, between 1900 and 1950 France moved away from a cautious traditional economy to a dynamic, managed economy because the planners convinced the leaders of the state and private enterprise that only a managed economy would enable France to compete with more advanced capitalist states. The success of the French economy, according to Kuisel, stemmed from the public's willingness to accept government guidance as a principal factor.<sup>108</sup> The result was the cooperation of industry, labor and the public at large, a policy that in fact had been promoted by the Vichy regime. But although Vichy had attempted to implement "more sweeping controls and more state intervention," the true turning point, Kuisel argues, occurred in the years 1944-1949 with the creation of state institutions for planning, along with a modest nationalization and commitments to modernization by government and private enterprise.<sup>109</sup> Significantly, Kuisel notes, after Liberation the provisional government did not disregard all of the measures introduced by the wartime leaders, but maintained, in modified form, some of Vichy's experiments in economic matters while it introduced others of its own. Two important factors of a market economy, prices and wages, which had come under state control in 1939, were never freed completely thereafter. From this point on, Kuisel demonstrates there was a drive to "provide

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid, ix. Reduced to its simplest forms, this is Kuisel's thesis and the objective of his book. In doing so he explores all aspects and spends a significant portion of writing on failed attempts and false starts, for which there are too simply many to mention here.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 279.

economic stability, growth and social justice” that effectively encouraged economic management to promote state intervention at the expense of the traditional, liberal approach to both French economy and society.<sup>110</sup>

These changes produced “profound social change, which many citizens found unsettling.”<sup>111</sup> First, the nation’s rural population was in decline, along with the small towns that had been a foundation of conventional French culture. The traditional bourgeoisie, both grand and petite, was “weakened by the rise of American-style big business, big banking and mass merchandising.”<sup>112</sup> Many formerly successful bourgeois families now found themselves in the precarious position of being downwardly mobile and threatened by the prospect of having to enter the ranks of the salaried middle classes. Small shopkeepers were rapidly turning into a rarity, replaced by supermarkets and being forced into adopting salaried, management positions. Many of these people were better off materially than their parents had been before the war but they often displayed a sense of “rootlessness that came along with this emerging mass society.”<sup>113</sup>

Another development was the influence – seen by many as a threat - of American mass culture. This perplexed and divided many, especially French intellectuals, challenging the idea of the superiority of French culture. As the French came to grips with both the virtues and the vices of Americanization during the turbulent the postwar decades, she was not alone. Practically every country in Western Europe fell under the immense cultural, economic and political influence of the United States in the 1940s and

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid, 275.

<sup>111</sup> Williams, 329.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

1950s. Victorious and prosperous, America seemed to be the model that the rest of the advanced capitalist world should follow. The “American way of life,” as it was styled, entailed the purchase and possession of mass-produced consumer goods and the cultural value attached to material possessions. But in no country was there as vigorous and as intense a debate about the suitability of the American model and this “pursuit of abundance” as in France, and the French cinema was no exception.<sup>114</sup>

New Wave directors sought ways to reconcile this clash of American and French cultures in their films. Revering Hollywood as the pinnacle of cinematic genius, Truffaut and Godard repeatedly paid homage to American directors such as Alfred Hitchcock, Nicholas Ray and Orson Welles in their early films. Godard displays this infatuation with Americanism in *Breathless* through Michel Poiccard (Jean-Paul Belmondo), the film’s protagonist and petty car thief. Michel is literally and symbolically in love with American culture; he steals an Oldsmobile with the license plate ‘USA’ and habitually traces his mouth with his thumb, imitating his idol Humphrey Bogart. He is even in love with an attractive American ingénue, Patricia Francini (Jean Seberg), who considers herself a writer but is forced to sell the New York Herald Tribune on the side. Yet the Franco-American relationship is more than just a Parisian boy in love with a Yankee girl (or rather, in Godard’s case, a Franco-Swiss in love with American cinema), since Godard is equally as concerned and fascinated with the youth that came of age during this era. As the sixties wore on Godard lost his love of Americanism and Hollywood, but his friend

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<sup>114</sup> Richard Kuisel, *Seducing the French: the Dilemma of Americanization*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 231.

Truffaut never did, and indeed Truffaut's but his interest in the 'youth of today' only grew more intense.

Seven years after *Breathless* Godard filmed *Masculin-féminin* (*Masculine-Feminine*, 1966), developing one of his most sustained reflections on the modernization of France and the emerging youth culture of the 1960s. Broken up into fifteen episodes, or 'precise facts' as he calls them, the film focuses on Paul (Jean-Pierre Léaud), a would-be intellectual recently released from mandatory military service, and Madeleine (Chantal Goya), a rising pop singer. A relationship between Paul and Madeleine develops, which Godard uses to facilitate a series of extended dialogues between the film's various characters on topics such as politics, consumerism, relationships and pop culture. In an interview between Paul and Elsa, a teen magazine's new 'Miss 19,' the audience is privy to the thoughts and desires of a young French woman. Godard aptly titles this scene "interview with a consumer product" for as the interview drags on, Elsa becomes increasingly uncomfortable with questions about politics or sexuality. Eager to discuss her new role as 'Miss 19,' her degree, and especially her car, she gushes about America and her views on American women, who she says get to live very fast and very free, but she grows reserved as the subject changes to socialism, birth control or which wars are raging. At times she even refuses to answer these questions.

*Masculine-Feminine* is a comment on French youth in the 1960s, a youth culture caught between politics and consumerism. Paul, Madeleine and their friends Catherine, Elisabeth and Robert belong to the rebellious youth that would revolt in '68 but who also bought into the expansion of consumerism and material culture of the Gaullist Republic.

What ties them together is their life in the present, in the ephemeral signs of the everyday. The film's famous intertitle or catchphrase 'The film could have been called the children of Marx and Coca-Cola' is most obviously referring to Paul, who considers love the center of the world, and Madeleine, who superficially sees herself at the center, but equally anticipates Godard's later political shift to Marxism, particularly Maoism. Whereas Godard eventually withdrew from commercial cinema, seeing it as indulgent and bourgeois, Truffaut was able to balance the American influence within his later films and produce a synthesis of styles.

Still, this struggle Godard and Truffaut faced reflected a general concern within the intellectual community, but also among the French public, about the influence of American culture and economic ideas on French national identity. Kuisel writes, "America was a challenge [and] as the French came to understand the challenge, the question they asked themselves was how to attain American prosperity and power and yet keep what they believed was French."<sup>115</sup> The gradual temporizing of anti-Americanism in the 1960s, and even more in the years that followed, reflected the fact that mass consumption was increasingly an accepted part of the French landscape itself. Although de Gaulle personally held American consumer culture in contempt, he too pursued economic and social policies that, in the context of the spectacular growth in Western European economy raised the purchasing power of French households with remarkable speed.<sup>116</sup> In the end, according to Kuisel the "French seem to have won the battle on how to change and yet remain the same" for "Americanization has transformed France – has

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<sup>115</sup> Kuisel, *Capitalism*, 3.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*, 233.

made it more like America – [but] without a proportionate loss of identity.”<sup>117</sup> The result has been an apparent merging of the two seemingly disparate cultures, for while there might be a McDonalds on the Champs Elysees, the French held that there has been no loss of the grandeur of things in which the French culture reigned supreme, like French haute cuisine.<sup>118</sup>

This cultural dynamic has interested Kristin Ross, who in her postmodernist account of this phenomenon explores similar trans-Atlantic socio-political discourses, connecting the two stories of American-inspired modernization and decolonization in her panoramic assessment of the period. In her view, France transformed rapidly from a “rural, empire-oriented, Catholic country into a fully industrialized, decolonized and urban one.”<sup>119</sup> Ross posits the peculiar and surprising effect decolonization had on the French, arguing that colonial loss actually served to increasingly push France towards ‘middleclassness’ and the middle class to ‘inwardness,’ or greater concern about themselves than colonial possessions, even one so intensely connected to the metropolitan as Algeria. That is to say in her view as France progressed through the fifties and sixties, as she lost her colonies, her farming communities and her ties to pre-war society, she gained a greater interest and enthusiasm for modern, middle-class luxuries. Ross explains,

I want to suggest that in the roughly ten-year period of the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s in France – the decade that saw both the end of the empire and the surge in French consumption and modernization – the colonies are

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 237.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture*, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996), 4.

in some sense 'replaced,' and the effort that once went into maintaining and disciplining a colonial people and situation becomes instead concentrated on maintaining a particular 'level' of metropolitan existence: everyday life.<sup>120</sup>

By examining both the rise of the postcolonial outlook and the advent of consumerism congruently, the intriguing aspect of her argument simply lies in the attempt to explain one in the context of the other. In this way Ross juxtaposes two outwardly unrelated aspects of postwar France in arguing that the country experienced rapid and persuasive change when the French redirected the energy once spent on national identity and empire into modernizing France herself.

Furthermore, Ross describes modernization as the withdrawal of the middle class into the consumer economy, and the expansion of this consumer class into a new middle class, one which retreats into “newly comfortable domestic interiors, to the electric kitchens, [and] to the enclosure of private automobiles.”<sup>121</sup> This changing landscape soon became the object of intense criticism for Godard in films such as *2 au 3 choses que je sais d'elle* (*2 or 3 Things I Know About Her*, 1966) and *Weekend* (1967). In contrast to Godard's earlier works which revere and pay homage to the American cinema and lifestyle, *2 or 3 Things I Know About Her* displays a complete disillusionment with a consumerist and capitalist society. The film posits itself as twenty-four hours in the life of a contemporary French woman as well as a treatise on a section of Paris, the fashionable 20<sup>th</sup> Arrondissement, where new, high-rise apartment buildings were going up.

Housewives in these new Parisian suburbs, such as protagonist Juliette (Marina Vlady),

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 77.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 11.

were resorting to prostitution, not out of desperation, but rather they turned to the profession to keep themselves in the consumer goods necessary for modern life.

In *Weekend* Godard continues his critic of consumer culture by dramatizing how possessions become part of a ruthless chase for status. He employs the automobile, at once “the illustration and the motor” of the society of consumption, as an allegory for materialism as a whole.<sup>122</sup> The people in *Weekend* are so defined by their cars that even the slightest impact or fender-bender is treated as an act of war. For example, in the opening scene, protagonists Corinne (Mireille Darc) and Roland (Jean Yanne) look out onto the parking lot of their apartment and watch the driver of a blue Mini viciously beaten for accidentally damaging another’s headlight. In another instance, Roland backs into a neighbor’s car denting the fender and igniting an all-out brawl involving paint, a tennis racquet and a shotgun. Godard is attacking the bourgeoisie and their greed, which he views as a symptom of materialism – as when Corinne, narrowly escaping a deadly car crash, screams in agony for the loss of her Hermes handbag. He even goes so far as showing how this consumerism supersedes the bonds of family and marriage; in fact, the film centers on Corinne and Roland’s plan to kill both her parents and collect her inheritance. *Weekend*, as Colin MacCabe notes, “is clearly made by someone who has reached a position of total disgust and rejection of his own society.”<sup>123</sup> It is against this society that Godard and his fellow student comrades in May 1968 revolted.

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>123</sup> Colin MacCabe, *Godard: A Portrait of the Artist at Seventy*, (New York: Faber and Faber, Inc., 2005), 200.

This new bourgeoisie grew out of the rapidly shifting landscape that included development of large-scale industry, the industrialization of commerce as supermarkets and department stores drove out smaller, local shopkeepers, urbanization, and the growth of bureaucracy both in public and private spheres. The decline of the bourgeois who owned his own business (regardless of size) and handled the family fortune or *patrimoine*, was mirrored by the rise of the salaried middle-class who relied on income from a highly paid job as opposed to any family inheritance or privately generated funds. Situated somewhere “between organized capital and organized labor,” these new social/economic groups or *cadres* are defined as a type of manager, fitting into the business world as a middleman between the owner and the worker.<sup>124</sup> Gildea defines these *cadres* of a modernized economy as operating in a new and pivotal position because of their intellectual ability and education followed by a degree of responsibility or “delegated authority within the business to supervise and organize work.”<sup>125</sup> As such he notes that ideologically they sought a middle ground between capitalist anarchy and collectivist tyranny,” seeing themselves as “arbitrators of social peace” and “heralds of modernization.”<sup>126</sup>

The creation of a new societal class is merely a singular consequence of the exceptional changes that took place in France following the Second World War. Against this backdrop of political instability, economic transition, military engagements, decolonization and a renewed national identity, the members of the Nouvelle Vague

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<sup>124</sup> Gildea 108.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 109.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

initiated yet another revolution in 1958, which promised a transformation of the cinema. Attacking the traditional narratives, and cinematic structures and nearly every component of the big-budget studio feature, these directors sought to explore the current dynamics in mid-century France and tackle the modern middle class “everydayness” that their generation was experiencing. It was an attempt to impart both the atmosphere of the time as well as a reflection of the degree to which various political, social and economic elements were in a state of flux.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### GODARD AND TRUFFAUT: THEIR FRIENDSHIP, THEIR FILMS, AND

### THEIR FALLOUT

“What shall I say?” This: *Les Quatre Cent Coups* will be a film signed Frankness. Rapidity. Art. Novelty. Cinematograph. Originality. Impertinence. Seriousness. Tragedy. Renovation. UbiRoi. Fantast. Ferocity. Affection. Universality. Tenderness.”<sup>127</sup>

-Jean-Luc Godard

*A bout de souffle* “is probably the masterpiece of films shot in real interiors and locations.”<sup>128</sup>

-François Truffaut

Following the outstanding success of *Les Quatre Cent Coups* (*The 400 Blows*, 1959) and *A bout de souffle* (*Breathless*, 1960), the careers of Truffaut and Godard moved in markedly different directions. In a way, this divergence of their paths was inevitable. Theirs was a friendship rooted in a common *politique*, in a passionate love for the movies and a mutual desire to become film directors. As such, it was a relationship based upon a shared passivity, in an ability to derive pleasure from the same fantastical objects and to entertain the same dreams of success. Once they became filmmakers the basis for this friendship was jeopardized. It was no longer a question of Godard and Truffaut reacting in similar ways to the same objects, but a matter of actively searching themselves to discover the nature of their attachment to the movies. As their subsequent careers have borne witness, the two friends soon found that they had very different things to say about cinema. As Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell note in their book *Film*

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<sup>127</sup> Godard, 121

<sup>128</sup> François Truffaut, *Correspondance 1945-1984*, ed Gilles Jacob and Claude de Givray, trans Gilbert Adair, (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000), 394.

*Art*, “Truffaut and Godard usefully define the poles of the New Wave. One proved that the young cinema could rejuvenate mainstream filmmaking; the other that the new generation could be hostile to the comfort and pleasure of ordinary cinema.”<sup>129</sup>

### **From the Cinémathèque To Cannes 1959**

According to an interview with Truffaut in 1963, the two Young Turks met for the first time in 1948 at the *cinémathèque* on the Avenue de Messine, and at the Latin Quarter film club, which held its sessions on Thursday afternoons at the Cluny-Place Theatre.<sup>130</sup> There Truffaut met Godard. My first memory of Godard, Truffaut noted in the 1963 interview, was that he didn’t wear glasses; he had curly hair and was very handsome, with very regular features.<sup>131</sup> This is the same Godard seen in Rivette’s *Le Quadrille* (1950) and Rohmer’s *Charlotte et son steak* (1951) where he plays the male lead. In contrast, Antoine De Baecque suggests Truffaut and Godard became ‘friends in cinephilia’ much later at Eric Rohmer’s Ciné-Club du Quartier Latin in 1949. When and where they first met one another was something the two men could never quite agree upon but what is certain is that they met and built their friendship around the cinema. Furthermore, they did so at a time when French audiences were seeing for the first time the extraordinary Hollywood films they had been denied during the Occupation. And it was largely around those films that the *Cahiers*’ young Turks formed their aesthetic or ideology of the *politique des auteurs*. Remembering the initial stages of their friendship, Godard recalled:

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<sup>129</sup> David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2000), 525.

<sup>130</sup> François Truffaut, in Jean Collet, *Jean-Luc Godard: An Investigation into His Films and Philosophy*, (New York: Crown Publishers, 1970), 168.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

What held us together as intimately as a kiss – as when we used to buy our pathetic little cigars on emerging from the Bikini cinema on Place Pigalle or the Artistic, from a film by Edgar Ulmer or Jacques Daniel-Norman (oh Claudine Dupuis! Oh Tilda Thamar!), before going to burgle my godmother’s apartment to pay for the next day’s movies – what bound us together more intimately than the false kiss in *Notorious* was the screen, nothing but the screen, It was the wall we had to scale in order to escape from our lives, and there was nothing but that wall, and we invested so much of our innocence in the idea of that wall that it was bound to crumble beneath all of the fame and decorations that lay ahead.<sup>132</sup>

Truffaut, whose family effectively deserted him and Godard who had repeatedly scandalized his family, two men from completely different backgrounds, drifted through the streets of Paris together watching and discussing movies. They sought to escape their lives and produce new ones on the big silver screen. They chased the cinema with a fervent determination; it formed and forged them both. However, though Godard later became more radical in his filmmaking techniques, it was “Truffaut who struck the first blow against mainstream French cinema critically and again Truffaut who managed to shoot *The 400 Blows* and win acclaim before helping Godard get *Breathless* off the ground.”<sup>133</sup>

François Truffaut was born out of wedlock in Paris in 1932 and promptly sent to a wet nurse before his maternal grandmother took him in. After her death in 1940, the eight-year-old came to live with his mother and her new husband, who frequently passed him off for the son they had lost at birth. Truffaut, understandably, maintained a strange and strained relationship with both his mother and stepfather. As a neglected child he was desperate for his mother’s affections, and his early life was so painful that he seldom spoke of it. He did, however, provide a semi-fictional account in *The 400 Blows*. The

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<sup>132</sup> Godard in Truffaut *Correspondance*, ix-x.

<sup>133</sup> Neupert, 162.

similarity between the life of the director and his protagonist as well as numerous correlations between the events represented in the film and those in Truffaut's own childhood suggest the film's highly personal nature. Truffaut himself remarked in an interview at Cannes in 1959, the footage from which is included in *Deux de la vague* (*Two in the Wave*, 2010), a documentary directed by Emmanuel Laurent, that the film is "somewhat autobiographical" but is not based on his personal experiences but drawn from those of others.<sup>134</sup> This is obviously somewhat misleading.

In the film, Truffaut traces the story of the adolescent Antoine Doinel, whose character and experiences in fact parallel those of the director himself. Like his on-screen double, Truffaut frequently found himself in trouble for stealing and mouthing off; but unlike Antoine, Truffaut had the fortune to discover a surrogate father figure in André Bazin. Through his passionate love of movies, Bazin first encountered the young Truffaut at ciné-club meetings and generously accepted responsibility for him when young François was incarcerated in an institution for juvenile delinquents. Bazin enabled Truffaut to channel his energies into the one area that became a sort of religion for him, the cinema. French historian Jean-Michel Frodon refers to most of Truffaut's early experiences in the cinema as substitutions for a lack of home life, with the ciné-clubs and meetings with the *Cahiers* group acting as substitutions for family get-togethers:

"Truffaut found his true family in the cinema."<sup>135</sup> Truffaut himself furthered the myth of himself as a 'child of the cinema' by stating that his true parents were André and Janine

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<sup>134</sup> *Deux de la Vague*, directed by Emmanuel Laurent (2010; New York: Lorber Films, 2010), DVD.

<sup>135</sup> Jean-Michel Frodon, *L'âge moderne du cinéma français: De la nouvelle vague à nos jours*, (Paris: Flammarion, 1995), 47.

Bazin. He also claimed that his only real education was the movies: “When I say I never had any schooling, well, I did have . . . Everything I know I learned through cinema, out of films . . . at the Cinémathèque!”<sup>136</sup>

It was Bazin again who stepped in to rescue him when Truffaut, in his early twenties, deserted the French army on the eve of his deployment. From there he began writing criticism for *Cahiers du cinéma*. Soon his savage attacks on mainstream French film productions gave the magazine’s editors pause. They fretted particularly over the monumental essay “A Certain Tendency of French Cinema” for several months before finally publishing it. Despite his sharp criticism, the young critic’s anti-social behavior concealed a profound ambivalence about the French filmmaking establishment, as, for example, when after denouncing the Cannes film festival throughout the 1950s, he became a member of its jury in 1962.

Perhaps the earliest and most interesting sign of this ambivalence was his marriage to Madeleine Morgenstern on October 19, 1957. The daughter of French producer and distributor Ignace Morgenstern, her dowry enabled Truffaut to establish his own film company, Les Films du Carrosse, and immediately embark on the production of a narrative short, *Les Mistons*. Angry over his continued attacks on mainstream French cinema, Truffaut’s father-in-law challenged him to make his own feature and prove that he could do better. The result was *The 400 Blows* which became an instant success and was awarded a *prime à la qualité* (an award subsidy given by the Centre National de la Cinématographie or CNC) and made a profit ten times its budget. Even more

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<sup>136</sup> François Truffaut, *Truffaut by Truffaut*, ed. Dominique Raboudin, trans. Robert Erich Wolf, (New York: Harry N. Brams, 1987), 33.

significantly, minister of culture André Malraux chose Truffaut's film to represent French cinema at the 1959 Cannes Film Festival where it won the festival's prize for best direction. Godard in *Arts* wrote a triumphant piece praising his friend and fellow critic for having "led . . . the fight for the auteur" and declared, "We have won by gaining acceptance of the principle that a film by Hitchcock, for example, is as important as a book by Aragon."<sup>137</sup>

Truffaut's first feature signified the beginning of a *cinéma jeunesse* in France. It was an extremely personal film. For example, like his on-screen alter ego Truffaut invented an outlandish excuse for playing truant. Rather than Antoine's lie regarding his mother's death, Truffaut told the teacher that the Germans had arrested his father. The narrative, as Robert Sklar notes, is primarily concerned with "the past, as history, memory or autobiography" serving to highlight Truffaut's own youth.<sup>138</sup> Truffaut seems to have delayed applying the pro-Hollywood critical position he and others had advanced at *Cahiers* until he was a more seasoned filmmaker. He did not try that complex fusion of French settings and the American genre film he was to attempt in *Shoot the Piano Player* (1960), *The Soft Skin* (1964), *Fahrenheit 451* (1966), and *The Bride Wore Black* (1968) until his second feature. Postponing for the moment, therefore, the arduous task of incorporating Hollywood formulas into a Gallic style, Truffaut turned to a more familiar subject and, like many novices before him, began his career with a chronicle of his own youth. The overarching conservatism that characterized *The 400 Blows*, despite its overall

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<sup>137</sup> Quoted in *Deux de la vague*.

<sup>138</sup> Robert Sklar, *Film: An International History of the Medium*, (New York: Harry Abrams, Inc. Publishing. 1993), 369.

rejection of the *cinéma du papa*, has led numerous commentators to declare that it is Jean-Luc Godard's film *Breathless* rather than Truffaut's film that is the truly representational film of the New Wave. Those who maintain this position argue that Godard's film captures the true essence of the era by allowing spectators the opportunity for "identification and fantasy."<sup>139</sup> It is a film with abundant allusions to Hollywood commercial cinema and *film noir*, while simultaneously employing techniques that opposed customary narrative styles through the innovative use of jump cuts and hand-held shooting methods. Thus, in the minds of many critics, Truffaut may have been first, and his attack on earlier French filmmakers scathing, but it was Godard's film that proved more representative of the group.

Born in Paris on December 3, 1930, Jean-Luc Godard had a vastly different childhood than Truffaut. In fact, Godard himself acknowledged, "I had more than plenty until I was fifteen. More than anyone. It was very different than Truffaut, for example."<sup>140</sup> Godard was born into a large, wealthy Protestant family with a strong Franco-Swiss background. His father Paul was a physician licensed to practice in France, England and Switzerland and his mother, Odile, was the daughter of an important French banker. When World War II broke out the Godard family was on vacation in Brittany, but managed to return to their home in Switzerland where they would weather the war. During this time Godard became a naturalized Swiss citizen. Growing up, cinema was not a topic of conversation or an accepted past time. His biographer Colin MacCabe remarks that apart from the considerable impact of *Gone with the Wind* (1939), whose

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> MacCabe, 18.

“discussion about its immorality reigned for memorable days,” the cinema in his family remained in “ the realm of the forbidden.”<sup>141</sup>

After the war Godard returned to Paris in 1946 but failed to complete his studies. Instead, like Truffaut, he became a delinquent. Frequently stealing from family and friends he was eventually discovered after pawning several of his grandfather’s first-edition copies of Paul Valéry poems. His thievery was quickly exposed given that the poet, a longtime family friend, had personally inscribed each book. He also pawned his grandfather’s Renoir painting – all of which reveal his wealthy, privileged background. Following this Godard retreated back to his family in Switzerland. But when he turned eighteen, Godard returned again to Paris in 1949, this time to undertake studies at the Sorbonne in anthropology.<sup>142</sup> During this time, Godard became a regular at the Latin Quarters ciné-club and the cinémathèque (later known as the Cinémathèque Française, where Henri Langlois built one of the largest film archives in the world throughout the 1930s and 1940s and where he also screened carefully curated playlists). Along with Rohmer and Rivette Godard founded the *Gazette du Cinéma*, which published several issues between May and November 1950.<sup>143</sup> Between the years 1952-1954, he wrote for *Cahiers du Cinéma* (and also a for small magazine called *Les Amis du Cinéma*), often using the pseudonym Hans Lucas, the Germanic version of his name (perhaps to keep his parents from knowing his true activities while supposedly studying at the Sorbonne).

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>143</sup> Monaco, 112.

In the wake of the fireworks that attended “A Certain Tendency in French Cinema,” Godard’s critical work during the fifties took a backseat to Truffaut’s. Monaco notes, contrasting these two, that, “Godard was more elliptical, more personal, and altogether less strident. But he was often more reasonable and judicious.”<sup>144</sup> Whereas Truffaut’s critical position could be clearly and coherently discerned in a single essay, early on, Godard’s struggle with the essence of cinema is stretched out over four abstruse pieces. Struggling to define his approach to cinema, these four essays form a series of manifestos written over a period of six years. These are “Towards a Political Cinema” (*Gazette du Cinéma* 3: September 1950); “defense et illustration du decoupage classique” (*Cahiers* 15: September 1952); “What is Cinema?” (*Les Amis du Cinéma* 1: October 1952); “Montage, mon beau souci” (*Cahiers* 65: December 1956). The last article was directed at Bazin and is an important foretelling of his eventual break with Bazinian theory and movement towards Brechtian theory and a more political stance, characteristic of his later work in the sixties. While Godard wrote articles before Truffaut, he was never able to express himself as easily as Truffaut and as such did not enjoy the same recognition.

Again, biographical details of the two filmmakers are telling of the movement and their differences. For while Truffaut, like so many others, had to contend with the mandatory draft during the Indochina conflict in the 1950s, Godard invoked his Swiss nationality to avoid French military service.<sup>145</sup> During this time he traveled with his recently divorced father through North and South America, and, after a brief return to

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> MacCabe, 83.

Paris, he went back to Switzerland where he obtained a job as a laborer on the Grand Dixence dam. With the wages from this job Godard was able to finance his first film, a documentary in 35mm about the construction of the dam called “Operation Béton” (1954). As he had hoped, the company purchased the film for publicity purposes and Godard quit his job to pursue his love of cinema. Shortly afterwards he made a second short film entitled “Une Femme coquette” (1955) in Geneva before returning again to Paris. In the years 1956-1959 he would, in the same fashion as Truffaut and the other Young Turks, devote his life to writing film criticism and making short films. During this period he directed three short films: “Tous les garçons s’appellent Patrick” (1957) from a script by Rohmer; “Charlotte et son Jules” (1958), which was Jean-Paul Belmondo’s film debut; and “Histoire d’eau” (1958), which he reworked from footage Truffaut originally shot. Of “Tous les garçons s’appellent Patrick,” Truffaut wrote, “[i]t exhibits maximum strength in its pace, and minimum sloppiness in its form.”<sup>146</sup>

At this point Godard was the only member of the Young Turks who had directed a feature film. When Truffaut screened his breakthrough film, *The 400 Blows*, at Cannes in 1959, Godard sensed that he could possibly parlay some of Truffaut’s fame into helping him garner his first full-length film project and asked Truffaut for the screenplay they had collaborated on a few years previously. To Truffaut he wrote, “If you’ve got the time to finish in three lines the idea of the film begun in the metro Richelieu-Drouot (those were the days) . . . I can do the dialogues.”<sup>147</sup> The script itself was based on a story

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<sup>146</sup> François Truffaut, *The Films of My Life*, trans Leonard Mayhew, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1994), 317.

<sup>147</sup> Quoted in MacCabe, 110.

that had captivated the tabloids of France in 1952 of a small-time criminal Michel Portail, who had spent a fanciful summer with an American girl on the Côte d'Azur and shot a motorcycle policeman while on the way to visit his dying mother. Although Truffaut sold him the script and closely followed its production, this was very much Godard's film. "Truffaut and Chabrol loaned me their names," he explained. "Because of their names as 'advisors,' it was easy to find financing, but that was the extent of their participation."<sup>148</sup>

*Breathless* was very different from *The 400 Blows*; and it suggests that for all their shared dream of directing films and their friendship, they would eventually part. Their inaugural films are, in fact, quite different. Truffaut had employed a professional crew and a refined script, co-written with the screenwriter Marcel Moussy. He fulfilled his own promise that the new French cinema would be "even more personal than an individual and autobiographical novel, like a confession, or a diary."<sup>149</sup> The story that Godard told in *Breathless* was as universal as those the Hollywood studios had produced, but for him this was the point: the story became personal only through his approach to it. Godard composed the film's actions and dialogue during the shooting. The script was less important than the filmmaking. David Thompson writes, "[N]o one remembers seeing a full script. Instead, it was pages or bits of paper and delivered sometimes day by day."<sup>150</sup> Godard himself revealed in an interview with *Cahiers* in 1960 that, "I had written the first

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<sup>148</sup> Eugene Archer, "Nonconformist on the crest of a 'New Wave,'" *New York Times* (1923-*Current File*), Feb 5, 1961. X7.

<sup>149</sup> Truffaut in an interview with *Arts* in 1957 – Quoted in Ronald Bergan. *François Truffaut: Interviews*. University of Mississippi Press. 2008, xi.

<sup>150</sup> Thompson, 328.

scene (Jean Seberg on the Champs-Élysées), and for the rest I had a pile of notes for each scene.”<sup>151</sup>

Scouring his memory of the numerous films he has seen at the Cinématèque he littered his own *film noir* story with references – cinematic literary, and personal – that gave *Breathless* an entirely individual essence. Godard, in fact, consistently and deliberately harked back to earlier films, particularly the *film noir* genre and Hollywood thrillers. As Richard Roud put it, “*À Bout de Souffle* was modeled much more on *Scarface* and other American thrillers than on any direct knowledge Godard had of the underworld milieu.”<sup>152</sup> As a critic he had been devoted, like the *Cahiers* auteurs, to the American style, particularly to directors like Nicholas Ray and Alfred Hitchcock; as a first-time director he felt the urge to pay homage to them. The male protagonist Michel Poiccard in *Breathless* models himself on the American gangster hero, Humphrey Bogart, and Michel appropriates one of Bogart’s (or Bogie, as he calls him) mannerisms by tracing the outline of his lips with his thumb. Godard follows up the homage in the film’s final scene where Patricia, staring at the camera, makes the same gesture before twirling around to a fadeout.

The film is remarkable in other ways as well and, again, very different from Truffaut’s. Godard shot the film in a free-form way. His cameraman, Raoul Coutard, had a documentary background and Godard drew on Coutard’s experience to shoot on the street, without lights and little in the way of a crew or crowd control. Essentially Godard, “good Bazinian that he was,” worked with a small team, which allowed for “the

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<sup>151</sup> Godard in *Cahiers* interview – Hillier, 60.

<sup>152</sup> Thompson, 329. *Scarface* (1932) is a film by Howard Hawks.

possibility of capturing reality on the run.”<sup>153</sup> This is seen strikingly in the shot of Michel and Patricia as they wander up and down the Champs-Élysées. Coutard sat with his camera in a delivery cart that had a hole cut in the front, while an assistant pushed it and Godard discreetly followed. In this approach the automobiles and the other people in the scene almost seem to compete for our attention, as does the inclusion of both the dialogue and the road noise into the diegetic sound. During the film’s final scene, as Michel lies in the street, suffering a fatal bullet-wound, crowds from a nearby restaurant pushed up to within inches of the actor while the camera rolled. A set photograph shows the production, cramped within a small crowd of onlookers. Before dying, he tells Patricia, who has witnessed the scene, that she is *déqueulasse* (a slang term meaning disgusting). The film ends with a close-up of her uncomprehending face as she asks the meaning of *déqueulasse*.

In the editing room, Godard was even more audacious, displaying “a kind of contempt for his flimsy story and the whole scheme of narrative or moral development.”<sup>154</sup> Obligated to cut his film from two and a half hours down to ninety minutes, he simultaneously refined and degraded his film by disregarding traditional standards of continuity as he chopped away at scenes to keep only the moments he liked. Although perhaps not as noticeable to today’s audience, Godard’s contemporaries would have been attuned to the break in classical editing and would surely have found this technique to be both startling and unexpected. The jagged results of his editing techniques produced “a kind of visual jazz,” as though the film came to life while the

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<sup>153</sup> MacCabe, 115.

<sup>154</sup> Thompson, 329.

celluloid unspooled.<sup>155</sup> Godard himself admitted that this was deliberate and that he “was out to attract attention . . . to end the old tradition in a spectacular way.” In this he succeeded, for in a seven-week Paris run in the spring of 1960, more than 250,000 tickets were sold and *Breathless* went on to win the Prix Jean Vigo (a French national award given annually to a filmmaker for their independent spirit) and to make a profit of fifty times its budget. And from there it went on to become an international sensation, Roger Angell in *The New Yorker* in February 1961 writing that Godard’s film “confirms the men of the New Wave as the makers of a powerful new tradition in the art of film.”<sup>156</sup>

### **The Years of Friendship and Struggle**

In the autumn of 1959, having completed their first films, Godard and Truffaut began looking towards their second ones. Based on the evidence at the time, one would have judged Truffaut the more political filmmaker. Monaco, for instance, remarks that *The 400 Blows* seemed to make a minor but effective political point about the treatment of children in contemporary society, while *Breathless* is more concerned with “the panache of its hero” and is now even best remembered for its stylistic innovations rather than for its social or political commentary.<sup>157</sup> By the time they had completed their second films, however, their politics had clearly diverged.

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<sup>155</sup> Richard Brody, *Everything is Cinema: The Working Life of Jean-Luc Godard*, (New York: Metropolitan Books. 2008), 59.

<sup>156</sup> Roger Angell, The Current Cinema, “THE CURRENT CINEMA ALL HOMAGE,” *The New Yorker*, February 11, 1961, 102.

<sup>157</sup> Monaco asserts in his book that Truffaut, contrary to general belief, did in fact have political sentiments, even if they were not overtly displayed in his films as Godard’s came to be, and makes the case for a “politics of intimacy,” which begins with the smallest political unit or ‘groupuscule.’ Truffaut, he contends is consumed with micro-politics whereas Godard took on the more obvious macro-politics.

Initially, then, it seems more logical to see Truffaut as more radical in his political outlook. After all, Truffaut had gone AWOL during the Indochina conflict and it was Truffaut, not Godard, who signed the famous “Manifesto of the 121” urging French soldiers to desert rather than fight in the ongoing Algerian War. The manifesto, it would seem, expressed his own indignation in that it denounced torture, criticized the army’s actions, supported deserters, and demanded freedom of expression.<sup>158</sup> By expressing his solidarity and support of those against the Algerian War, Truffaut effectively placed himself in opposition to the new Gaullist government and in danger of imprisonment. His actions attracted attention from both sides and Truffaut’s public repositioning of himself across the political spectrum earned him a new respect from his former enemies at the leftist film journal *Positif* and letters of encouragement and congratulations from others on the left but also incited his old, conservative friends at *Arts* to attack him as anti-French.<sup>159</sup> This seemingly brave public stance secretly, however, actually unnerved him. He wrote to Helen Scott on October 1, 1960 fearful of the consequences and deeply concerned over his future in filmmaking:

All of this has plagued me of course and prevented me from concentrating on my work. If I spoke English, I would seriously consider trying my luck in America but I have a terrible complex about languages; there would also be possibilities in Italy, where I have lots of friends. I’m simultaneously discouraged – because every day there are new charges and threats and my shady military past as a deserter will no doubt be exploited by right-wing papers – and stimulated, for it is enough for me to be prevented from making films and all my doubts on the subject are removed . . . Will I have to leave France to shoot my next film?<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Antoine de Baecque and Serge Toubiana *Truffaut: A Biography*, trans Catherine Temerson, (Alfred A. Knopf: New York. 1999), 165.

<sup>159</sup> Neupert, 191.

<sup>160</sup> de Baecque. *Truffaut: A Biography*, 165.

Fortunately, within weeks of this letter, campaigns in the French and international press were successful in lifting any sanctions against signers of the manifesto. But although Truffaut no longer faced any charges, his commitment against the Algerian war proved significant in that it provided him legitimacy as a left-winger while it revealed a deep grudge on his part (which also earned him respect from the left) against General de Gaulle and the France of the early sixties. “A country that can say yes to de Gaulle,” he wrote Helen Scott, “is a country that doesn’t give a damn whether culture disappears or not, hence that doesn’t give a damn about my films.”<sup>161</sup> The events of 1960 explain a great deal of why Truffaut reacted so vehemently to Gaullist interference later in the 1960s in the Cinémathèque despite the seemingly apolitical nature of his public posture and his films.

Godard was quite different. With the Algerian war raging, Godard’s second film, *Le Petit Soldat* (*The Little Soldier*), openly criticized the war and was promptly banned in France and in French territories overseas. Although the public would have to wait three years for the chance to see the film, it was enough that Godard centered his narrative on the major political issue facing France in 1960 that caused controversy. The film itself actually adopts something of an apolitical tone and sounds rather indifferent to the events in Algeria themselves. Just when the audience anticipates Bruno will discuss his role as a secret agent or the ongoing terrorist attacks he turns to art (a Paul Klee print), literature (Jean Cocteau) or love (wondering whether Veronica’s eyes are the grey of Velázquez or Renoir). The film’s politics are decidedly convoluted; refusing to take sides Godard

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid, 166.

posits his native Geneva as a neutral location and his protagonist Bruno to lack ideals. Still, many of the motifs he displays later in his career in more obviously political films, such as posing problems without solutions and offering bits and pieces of truth rather than concrete analysis, are already seen here. “Asking questions,” Bruno confesses, “may be more important than finding answers.”<sup>162</sup> Of the film Godard later indicated:

Politics are talked about in *Le Petit Soldat*, but it has no political bias. My way of engaging myself was to say: the nouvelle vague is accused of showing nothing but people in bed; my characters will be active in politics and have no time for bed.<sup>163</sup>

His politics in the film are, as Monaco says, “muddy at best.”<sup>164</sup> In fact, Bruno’s monologue at the end of the film, where he suggests that it is ideals one should defend and not borders, is a catalog of countries and his opinions thereof. He likes America because of her cars and Germany because of Beethoven, but he detests Arabs because he dislikes the desert and Colonel Lawrence. In this way *Les Caribiniers (The Riflemen)* is widely considered his true anti-war film, but his reputation as a political filmmaker was really established with *The Little Soldier* and it was widely acknowledged that “Godard is the only political intelligence of the New Wave.”<sup>165</sup>

Truffaut’s second film, *Shoot the Piano Player*, and Godard’s, third *A Woman is a Woman*, are both marked by an extreme self-reflexivity rather than politics or social commentary, as they deliberately evoke specific cinematic genres even as they transform them in radically new ways. While *Tirez sur la pianiste (Shoot the Piano Player)* is a

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<sup>162</sup> Quoted in *Le Petit Soldat*.

<sup>163</sup> Neupert 17.

<sup>164</sup> Monaco, 49.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

highly calculated and uneasy mix of several genres, *Une femme est une femme* (*A Woman is a Woman*) is largely a pastiche of American musical comedies of the 1950s. Both films showed the intense *cinéphilia* of the two directors.

In *Shoot the Piano Player* Truffaut left behind his personal history, and most audiences and critics found the film less substantial than his first. The influential Bosley Crowther, for example, was certain that Truffaut had “gone haywire” with the material for this film.<sup>166</sup> This reaction was not accidental. For instead of replacing the adolescent *bildungsroman* with a more mature subject, he risked deliberately alienating the audience he had created with his first film. This was deliberate on Truffaut’s part. “This time,” he declared, “I wanted to please the real film nuts and them alone, while leading astray a large part of those who liked *The 400 Blows*.”<sup>167</sup> The latter, said Truffaut, comprised “a public which I dreaded most in the world . . . and I really wanted to send them all packing.”<sup>168</sup>

In order to free himself from this audience, Truffaut took his script from an American novel, which he transported to France.”<sup>169</sup> In doing so he was repeating the exercise that Godard had already worked successfully in *Breathless*. The choice of such material by both directors was obviously a continuation of their rejection of the Tradition of Quality films as well as their shared love of the American cinema. Truffaut’s first two films, though seeming quite different, were in another way similar. For whereas *The 400 Blows* had dealt with many of the preoccupations of his own upbringing, *Shoot the Piano*

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<sup>166</sup> Bosley Crowther, rev. of *Shoot the Piano Player*, *The New York Times*, 24 July 1962, 42.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

*Player* was an attempt to deal with those other parents who had so effectively formed him, the cinema/actors/directors of Hollywood.

Truffaut's need to come to terms with his American filmmaking predecessors was the most important factor in the development of his early career. For excluding *Jules and Jim* and *Stolen Kisses*, all of his early films were modeled on a particular Hollywood genre. *La Peau douce* (*The Soft Skin*) was a contemporary reworking of the romantic melodrama, *Fahrenheit 451* was a science-fiction epic, *The Bride wore Black*, with its mysterious woman and *Mississippi Mermaid*, a thriller, were homages to Alfred Hitchcock. Except for *The Soft Skin*, all of these early films were adapted from American novels, and thus, as James Monaco has pointed out, Truffaut's early career can be divided between the largely autobiographical films of the so-called Antoine Doinel series cycle (which follow the young protagonist of *The 400 Blows* as he matures into adulthood, marriage and fatherhood) and the Hollywood genre cycle that transposes American plots to France. In this last respect, *Tirez sur le pianiste* (*Shoot the Piano Player*), his second film, is remarkable because it is simultaneously a psychological melodrama, a passionate romance, a tale of childhood, a crime thriller and, essentially, a tragedy, which is what prompts Antoine de Baecque and Serge Toubiana to suggest that Truffaut's "true New Wave film" is in fact *Shoot the Piano Player*.<sup>170</sup>

As the film opens, its protagonist, Charlie Kohler (Charles Aznavour) is playing a piano in a honky-tonk Parisian bistro. Subsequent scenes reveal Charlie cares for his mischievous younger brother, Fido, and sleeps with the amiable prostitute who cares for

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<sup>170</sup> de Baecque. *Truffaut: A Biography*, 157.

him. One night Léna, the pretty young waitress at Charlie's bistro who has secretly been in love with him, manages to seduce him. Léna soon reveals that she knows Charlie's tortured past: of having been a renowned concert pianist with a beautiful and loving wife, Thérèse. In a long flashback sequence, Léna narrates that former life. The flashback sequence reveals that Thérèse helped launch her husband's career by sleeping with an important impresario and when Charlie learned of this betrayal he treated her coldly, prompting her to jump to her death from an open window. Her suicide causes Charlie to give up his promising career to assume his current existence. Returning to the present, the film turns into a thriller as gangsters who have had a run-in with Charlie's delinquent older brothers kidnap Fido. Léna and Charlie go in search of them. In the course of a shoot-out between Charlie's older brothers and the gangsters, Léna is killed. In the film's last scene, Charlie is back at the piano in the honky-tonk bar.

The film is deeply unconventional, Truffaut himself remarking that it "seemed to contain four or five others." That is, it might have been a typical film noir drama (the narrative was in part inspired by a detective story by American novelist David Goodis), a romance about Charlie and Léna, or perhaps a story about Charlie and his wife, Thérèse, or a film about an adolescent Fido (in a similar manner to his wildly successful *The 400 Blows*), or even a family melodrama about Charlie and his brothers. Instead, it proclaimed itself to be a disturbing mix of all these possibilities. While the film failed, Truffaut insisted that its disparate nature was completely intentional. He wrote:

What I sought above all was the shattering of a genre (the detective film) by a mixture of genres (comedy, drama, melodrama, psychological film, thriller,

love film, etc). I know that the public hates nothing more than changes in tone but I've always been passionate about changing tone.<sup>171</sup>

And also: "When the film went in one direction," said Truffaut, "I cut and launched it into another . . . As soon as one interpretation seemed to prevail, I destroyed it – to avoid the spectator's intellectual comfort as well as my own."<sup>172</sup> In this even if the film is not successful, he expresses the New Wave's challenge, even defiance of film conventions.

Like *Shoot the Piano Player*, Godard's *A Woman is a Woman* also destroys genre conventions. However, whereas Truffaut accomplished this with the combination of so many different genres, Godard focuses on only one: the American musical comedy. In an interview with *The New York Times* in February 1961 Godard explained how he came to this decision. "Chaplin once said," he noted, "comedy is life in long shot, and tragedy is life in close-up. I decided to make a comedy in close up. It is tragic-comic."<sup>173</sup> By exaggerating and playing off the traits of such films, Godard pushes what he deemed the notion of genre to foreground as the film transforms itself into both "cinema and the explanation of cinema."<sup>174</sup>

In contrast to the narrative intricacies of *Shoot the Piano Player*, the plotline of *A Woman is a Woman* is fairly simple. A young striptease performer, Angela (played by Anna Karina, whom Godard married in March 1961), lives in a Parisian neighborhood with her boyfriend Emile (Jean-Claude Brialy) and dreams of getting married and having a baby. Godard summarized the situation by saying; "Angela wants a baby right away.

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<sup>171</sup> Truffaut, *Correspondence 1945-1984*, 112.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid*, 144.

<sup>173</sup> Archer, X7.

<sup>174</sup> Godard, 99.

Like many women, she might have suddenly wanted to go to Marseille, to have an expensive new dress, or a chocolate éclair or something . . . a sudden yearning which she would rather die than leave unsatisfied.”<sup>175</sup> Unfortunately, Emile is reluctant to share her dreams for wedded bliss and they quarrel. Unhappiness prompts Emile to seek solace in a prostitute; likewise an unhappy Angela sleeps with Alfred (Jean-Paul Belmondo), a friend who is in love with her in order to get pregnant. The couple eventually reconciles and in order to ensure that Emile might be the father of any possible baby, they make love. When their lovemaking is over Emile tells Angela that she is ‘*infâme*’ (infamous or terrible). She replies that she is merely ‘*une femme*’ (a woman). Looking directly into the camera, Angela winks theatrically before turning off the bedside lamp as a musical score plays in the background.

Like Truffaut’s *Shoot the Piano Player*, Godard’s second feature surprised and disappointed the public; it also surprised and disappointed critics. This was especially since *A Woman is a Woman* reworked the musical even more drastically than *Shoot the Piano Player* did *film noir* and neither film resembled their first, popular features. In an interview with *Cahiers*, even Godard admitted that, “[i]t may be an error, but it’s an attractive one. And it matches the theme, which deals with a woman who wants a baby in an absurd manner whereas it is the most natural thing in the world.”<sup>176</sup> On the other hand, the film has a strong autobiographical dimension in that it can be read as a love letter from Godard to the film’s star, his future bride, Anna Karina. And as for Truffaut it showed his affection for and the influence of American films, for it was a high-budget

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<sup>175</sup> Godard, 166.

<sup>176</sup> Godard, 182.

musical comedy pastiche, in color and in Cinemascope, a self-conscious homage to the American musical comedies that Godard loved as a young critic and the American influence, the Americanization so prevalent in postwar France.

Godard directed *A Woman is a Woman* with a radical blend of realism and artifice, applying editing techniques that were even more disruptive than those of his first feature. Furthermore, he blamed himself for having mixed the genres of music and melodrama, the moods of artifice and realism and the tones of comedy and tragedy. He also blamed the distributor for an advertising campaign that sold the film as something it was not – a complaint that would resurface later on with his film with Brigitte Bardot *Le Mépris*. Truffaut, however, offered a harsher and probably more accurate explanation of why the film failed to please the general public. In an interview in *Cahiers* (December 1962), Truffaut blames Godard's unconventional methods. "If one plays with sounds and image in a too-unconventional way, people yell, it's an automatic reaction," Truffaut said. "They ripped up the seats in Nice because they thought that the equipment in the projection booth was bad." Clearly Truffaut thought Godard's experiments were ill-suited to the material: "People expected to see a nice, classical story. A girl, two boys, a neighborhood in Paris . . . The very story one expects to be told classically. They were flabbergasted."<sup>177</sup> Truffaut's scathing analysis of Godard's film highlighted several essential differences between the two. For while Truffaut always thought of anticipating public reaction, Godard thought solely of making the films as he saw fit. Truffaut's

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<sup>177</sup> From *Cahiers du cinéma* December 1962. Quoted in Brody, "Auteur Wars," *New Yorker*, April 7, 2008: 55-65, 60.

prudence was a commercially well-founded response to the recent fortunes of the New Wave, even if he was now forsaking his earlier convictions.

In the early sixties the films of these young directors suffered serious commercial setbacks. Godard's *A Woman is a Woman* was only the most recent in a long series of disappointments. Truffaut's *Shoot the Piano Player* barely broke even; Chabrol's last three films (*Les Godelureaux*, *A Double Tour* and *Les Bonnes Femmes*) had all been flops; Jacques Demy's *Lola*, along with a spate of films by the *Cahiers* group had all fared poorly with the public. Since the New Wave lacked any official doctrine or manifesto, never possessing more than the most tenuous cohesion, there were many who predicted its early demise. The French press, which had made much of the new directors' extraordinary early box-office successes, broadcast these failures as evidence that the New Wave had been overhyped and run its course. Truffaut acknowledged the practical reasons for the French industry's skepticism: "At the beginning there was an excessive euphoria, then a moderate euphoria, and now a certain distrust, which is not at all abnormal when you consider that the 'New Wave' has not had a real financial success for a year and a half." Truffaut remarked, "For eighteen months the film industry has been awaiting an indisputable success, that is, a film that would please both the critics and the public."<sup>178</sup>

In various publications a discussion took place between Truffaut and Godard over what the New Wave was and how to rescue it from its seemingly premature demise. From the evidence provided in their earliest features it is more than plausible that

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<sup>178</sup> *France-Observateur*, October 19, 1961.

Truffaut and Godard started to move apart even at the beginning stages of their careers. As early as 1962 there were signs that the unity that characterized both their criticism and their early films was beginning to break up under the weight of having to make movies rather than write about them. Not surprisingly, one of the first casualties of their disintegrating friendship was their common attitude towards the supremacy of Hollywood. For Truffaut, the only way for the New Wave to reach mainstream audiences was to adapt more fully the Hollywood formulas that he and his colleagues had championed at *Cahiers*. For Godard, however, the historical and critical orientation that defined the New Wave was a contradiction. (“At the moment that we can do cinema, we can no longer do the cinema that gave us the desire to do it.”<sup>179</sup>)

Godard, looking beyond immediate fortunes of filmmakers searching for their niche, deemed the New Wave a historical phenomenon of which “*Cahiers* was the nucleus.”<sup>180</sup> He viewed it as being born of its distinctive relation to the history of cinema and for him the cinematic canon defined by Hitchcock and Hawks was a point of departure, a perfect archetype that could never be achieved. It was also not to be imitated but employed only as inspiration. For Truffaut as well the *Cahiers* group was defined by its historical orientation, but he intended this in a completely different manner. He claimed that their cinematic canon provided a set of formulas to follow, and he stressed that the commercial prospects of the directors in his circle depended on their willingness “to continue to pretend to tell a mastered and controlled story which is meant to have the

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<sup>179</sup> *Cahiers du cinéma*, December 1962. Quoted in *Godard on Godard*, 232.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid*, 216.

same meaning and the same interest for the filmmaker and for the spectator.”<sup>181</sup> Truffaut looked to the masters, these earlier *auteurs* for answers; Godard’s view of these masters was quite different. In a clip from Laurent’s documentary *Two in the Wave* (2010) Godard says, “In my other films, when I had a problem, I asked myself what Hitchcock would have done in my place. While making ‘Pierrot,’ I had the impression that he wouldn’t have known how to answer, other than, ‘Work it out for yourself.’”<sup>182</sup> Truffaut, in contrast, actually blamed the failure of Chabrol’s 1960 film *Les Bonnes Femmes* for being unwilling “to imagine how Hitchcock would have undertaken a film like *Les Bonnes Femmes*” before going on to describe the film that Chabrol should have made, calling it *The Shopgirls Vanish*. The editors of *Cahiers* summarized Truffaut’s remarks in a telling caption: “Let’s Imitate Hitchcock.”<sup>183</sup> And Truffaut indeed put this artistically conservative thought into action by packaging a series of interviews with Alfred Hitchcock into a book, a labor of love that would take him four years.

Having established individual reputations during the early sixties, and as their aesthetics continued to evolve, their styles became less and less congruent. This divergence signaled the beginning of enormous changes in French cinema, culture and society but also hinted at the eventual collapse of their friendship. It was not just their films that were so dissimilar; they were no longer as personally close as they had been as critics. Godard acknowledged this fact in an undated postcard he sent Truffaut in 1962:

We never see each other any more, it’s completely stupid. Yesterday I went to see Claude [Chabrol] shoot, it was terrible, we had nothing to say to each

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<sup>181</sup> *France-Observateur*, October 19, 1961.

<sup>182</sup> Quoted in *Deux de la vague*.

<sup>183</sup> *Cahiers*, December 1963.

other. Like in the song: in the pale light of dawn there isn't even any friendship. We've each taken off for our own planet and we no longer see each other in close up but only in long shot.<sup>184</sup>

“Each [of us] remained faithful to himself,” said Truffaut in 1973, “but in so doing, he distanced himself from the others.”<sup>185</sup> Reflecting on the highly divergent individual careers that came into focus in the early 1960s, he suggested that it was often the third film of a director that “marks the start of a career.”<sup>186</sup> Clearly this is not true of all directors of the New Wave, but in speaking specifically of himself and his friend Godard, it most likely is the case. As Truffaut points out, both *Shoot the Piano Player* and *A Woman is a Woman* were highly personal, perhaps even self-indulgent, works born out of the euphoria of 1959-1960. The films that followed would not only be a “reconsideration of the other two” but also “a return to control” and the beginning of their different careers.<sup>187</sup> Truffaut’s *Jules and Jim* and Godard’s *Vivre Sa Vie (My Life to Live)* left no doubt that the directors were gifted young men but major players ready to assume their place within the filmmaking industry.

At the same time though, these films made clear the distance the two directors had traveled since their debuts. The “amorality” of *Jules and Jim* may have harked back to earlier New Wave features, but its highly literary script, period details and star presence all suggested that Truffaut had embarked on a new path. As for Godard, leaving behind what he termed the film-obsessed dimension of his first films with *My Life to Live* (“our

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<sup>184</sup> Quoted in *Deux de la vague* and also printed in de Baecque, *Truffaut: a Biography*, 189.

<sup>185</sup> François Truffaut, *Le cinéma selon François Truffaut*, ed. Anne Gillain. Paris: Flammarion. Page 37.

<sup>186</sup> François Truffaut: An Interview François Truffaut and Paul Ronder *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Autumn, 1963), 3-13, 7.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

first films,” he said, “were purely the work on *cinéphiles* . . . I thought in terms of attitudes purely cinematographic”) he began the series of films that would chart the rapidly changing social landscape of France in the 1960s and include its radical politics.<sup>188</sup> With the arguable exception of *Alphaville*, his sole foray into the world of science fiction, the tremendous nostalgia for an earlier cinema that had fueled his first three films would not return.

Truffaut, on the other hand, moved in a different direction. Shortly after the release of *Shoot the Piano Player*, Truffaut seems to have buckled under the pressure generated by the commercial cinema when he admitted that he regretted the chaotic style in which the film was shot (it was, he says, “a grab bag”) and seems to have decided that loyalty to the Hollywood style he admired necessitated more than an occasional scene shot in homage to the great directors.<sup>189</sup> Instead of working in the spontaneous manner he had done, Truffaut decided, “the film would have been better if I had a firmer idea at the outset.”<sup>190</sup> In each of his subsequent films, he worked carefully to present a solid story line and believable characters. *Jules and Jim* and *The Soft Skin* may contain innovative techniques in editing but in both films Truffaut goes to some lengths to achieve the narrative coherence absent from *Shoot the Piano Player*. From this point on Truffaut’s films would reside in an established genre, and take full consideration of their future audiences.

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<sup>188</sup> Godard, 287.

<sup>189</sup> "Entretien avec François Truffaut," Dan Cukier and Jo Gryn, *Script 5* (April 1962): 5-15; rpt. in *Focus on Shoot the Piano Player*, ed. Leo Braudy (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall). 12.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*

Deemed Truffaut's masterpiece by many, *Jules and Jim* told the story of a woman, Catherine (Jean Moreau), who refuses to decide between two lovers, Jules and Jim. Godard considered it Truffaut's "first real film," much like that of *A Woman is a Woman* for him.<sup>191</sup> Truffaut himself explained his development:

In *Les Quatre Cents Coups* the subject was so important that the film passed slightly into the background . . . I wanted to make some formal discoveries, a desire I satisfied with *Le Pianiste*. *Jules et Jim* is in that measure a synthesis of the other films it's simultaneously a great subject that sweeps you away – one you never regret having chosen throughout filmmaking – and it's a creative venture that inspires ideas that are at the same time formal and moral, visual and intellectual.<sup>192</sup>

This third feature film echoed the Tradition of Quality which he had famously attacked. Even *Variety* noted in 1962 that Truffaut was now part of the industry he had so recently criticized. Yet he did not simply slide back into conservative commercial cinema, despite moving closer to conventional narrative techniques. Instead, Truffaut effectively constructed a new position for himself within French cinema by reformulating the historical costume drama in New Wave terms. *Jules and Jim* depicted characters more sympathetic than those of the postwar cinema, lacked sociopolitical analysis, was more sexually explicit and possessed an overall sensibility that was "appealingly adolescent."<sup>193</sup> David Nicholls, too, sees this film as a sign of a changing Truffaut: "Watching *Jules and Jim* we are also watching the end of the New Wave... Truffaut's direction becomes more conventional, more 'classical.'"<sup>194</sup> That Truffaut, however, would work in this well-trodden domain demonstrated the extent to which he still saw

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<sup>191</sup> Godard, 181.

<sup>192</sup> Monaco, 57.

<sup>193</sup> Williams, 351.

<sup>194</sup> David Nicholls, *Francois Truffaut*, (London: B.T. Batsford, 1993), 36.

himself as a reformer of commercial cinema rather than a revolutionary as Godard was to become.

Godard, in fact, seems never to have looked back from the exciting and innovative style he had used in creating *Breathless*. Continuing on the same course upon which he had begun with that film, in his subsequent works he set out to do a catalog of the American genre film. *A Woman is a Woman* resembled a Vincent Minnelli Hollywood musical, *Vivre Sa Vie* a dissection into parts of the weepie and *Band of Outsiders* an exploration of the possibilities in mixing Bob Fosse and the gangster film. Of all the movies Jean-Luc Godard directed in his early career, *Contempt*, his famous film with Brigitte Bardot, appears the most traditional. Unlike *Breathless*, *The Little Soldier*, *Pierrot le Fou* or *A Woman is a Woman*, it does not try to defamiliarize an American genre. Nor is it an attempt to blend the documentary techniques of *cinéma vérité* with those of narrative cinema. In each of the above films one of the two major strains that would clearly emerge in Godard's later work dominates the text: in the films of the first group the self-conscious use of conventions from America becomes a means through which the nature of the filmmaking activity can be examined; in the second series explicit social issues become the subject matter of the film, anticipating Godard's overt political works of the late sixties, *La Chinoise*, *Weekend*, and *Le Gai Savoir (Joy of Learning)*, and eventually leading to the director's removal from the arena of commercial cinema.

In their separate way, both Truffaut and Godard expressed a growing awareness of the complex relationship into which they had entered when they aligned themselves

with Hollywood and Bazinian theory. But this growing self-consciousness in time produced distinct effects in the works of each director. While Truffaut moves closer to identification with the classic narrative cinema, Godard moves further away from identification and closer to analysis. Truffaut's fifth feature, for example, was *Fahrenheit 451*, an English language film obviously designed to capture an American audience and to succeed as a 'Hollywood' movie. Godard's sixth feature, *Contempt* was however a film that takes as its subject matter the relationship between Hollywood producers and the European cinema. Truffaut's next feature, *The Bride Wore Black*, was intended as an imitation of Hitchcock, and was therefore very subservient to the commercial ethos of the American cinema. Thus, where Truffaut's recognition of the workings of the classical Hollywood content encourage him to imitate it, Godard's growing sophistication about the American industry inspired him to make films where he actually was critical of how it functioned. This is most obvious in a film like *Contempt*, which is about the movie industry itself, but is equally the case in films such as *Pierrot le fou*, *Alphaville*, and *Made in USA*, in which several genres themselves are exposed and dissected. Though both directors' films still represented an 'essai' on the nature of cinema, and for both that was still Hollywood, they were diverging in their views on the subject.

As the decade wore on their differences, although not expressed overtly, were deepening. The two still continued their friendship and defended other New Wave directors, as in the controversy over Rivette's *La Religieuse* (1966), based on Diderot's

scandalous novel, which brought the group together a public battle.<sup>195</sup> Truffaut's company, Les Films du Carrosse, even produced Godard's *Two or Three Things I Know About Her*, prompting him to write an article full of admiration for Godard entitled "Two or Three Things I know About Him" in which he declared:

He is not the only director for whom filming is like breathing, but he's the one who breathes the best. He is rapid like Rossellini, witty like Sacha Guitry, musical like Orson Welles, simple like Marcel Pagnol, wounded like Nicholas Ray, effective like Hitchcock, profound like Bergman and insolent like nobody else. There's cinema before Godard and cinema after Godard.<sup>196</sup>

At this point Truffaut still holds Godard in high esteem, and his sentiments were reciprocated, for in an article published in *L'Avent-Scene du Cinéma* in May 1965, Godard recollected his friendship and noted that Truffaut was the "only filmmaker increasing in seriousness."<sup>197</sup> Nevertheless, as the sixties wore on and Godard became more political, indeed more radical in his politics, their friendship suffered. In 1967, with a newfound interest in Maoist doctrine, Godard filmed *La Chinoise*, a "quasi-Brechtian, quasi-cartoonish and severely self-critical political mask, about five youths who play at revolution and end up committing murder."<sup>198</sup> Then, later that year, Godard directed *Weekend*, his outcry against the bourgeoisie with its famous a seven-minute tracking shot of highway carnage and closing title cards reading "End of film/End of cinema." He then

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<sup>195</sup> Rivette had originally titled his film *La Religieuse*, but modified it in the wake of the controversy that led the government to ban it for a year after being screened at Cannes. The new title, *Suzanne Simonin, La Religieuse de Didero*, emphasized that the film was based on a novel and offered a fictional portrait of convent life.

<sup>196</sup> Quoted in *Deux de la vague*.

<sup>197</sup> Godard, 211.

<sup>198</sup> Brody, "Auteur Wars," 61.

announced that he would no longer be making movies. The two men had reached a point of parting in film aesthetics as well as politics.

### **1968 : Towards a Political Cinema and the End of a Friendship**

In the late sixties as criticism mounted, especially among French youths, towards the Gaullist regime, both directors critically found themselves on the front lines with *Cahiers du Cinéma* in opposing the regime – first in opposing the 1966 banning of their friend Jacques Rivette’s *La Religieuse*, which Godard saw as another instance of the Gaullist government’s repeated attacks on creative freedom, and then in protesting Henri Langlois’s dismissal from the Cinémathèque Française in February 1968. Yet this would be the extent of Truffaut’s engagement. Where the previous films of the New Wave directors reflected their times and joint outlook on the future of cinema, the times now caused them to go into different directions, each defining cinema in his own terms. As Truffaut’s peers were compiling the famous “Estates General of the French Cinema” following the Events of May, he would refuse to become directly involved. Truffaut would also reject the opportunity to participate in the creation of the Society of Filmmakers launched by Pierre Kast and Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, his former colleagues at *Cahiers*. He justified this position by saying:

I feel solidarity with Rivette, Godard, and Rohmer, because I like them and admire their work, but I don’t want to have anything to do with Jacqueline Audry, Serge Bourguignon, Jean Delannoy or Jacques Poitrenaud. The fact of having the same profession is meaningless to me if admiration and friendship don’t come into play.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> de Baecque, *Truffaut: A Biography*, 245.

Godard, meanwhile, had thrown himself completely into unbridled leftist activism, directing several “ciné-tracts” and commissioning works that he transformed into experimental and militant films like *Un Film comme les autres* (*A Film Like Any Other*) or *Le Gai Savoir* (*Joy of Learning*), both in 1968. Having already declared the end of cinema the year before in *Weekend*, he was now working to further extricate himself from the mainstream. He told interviewers from a German film cooperative, “One must give everything up. One must change one’s life . . . One must completely change oneself and that is very difficult.”<sup>200</sup> In transforming himself he was destroying his good name “to quickly become unknown,” he declared, “is much better anyway.”<sup>201</sup> This same year Truffaut returned to the Antoine Doinel series with *Stolen Kisses*.

The Langlois Affair completed the demise of their friendship. On February 9, 1968 Henri Langlois, the director of the Cinémathèque Française, where young people gathered, was ousted and replaced by a man named Pierre Barbin, an obscure and relatively inexperienced film-festival organizer. For French youths and cinema enthusiasts Langlois was a culture hero. Truffaut and Godard would stand shoulder to shoulder in this protest. Known teasingly as “the godchildren of Henri Langlois,” they would rally the former *Cahiers* collaborators along with hundreds of the world’s best artists, writers and filmmakers into aggressive political activism.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Quoted in Brody “Auteur Wars,” from August 1968, Jean-Luc Godard, interview by members of the Frankfurt Film Coop, *Film* (Velber), April 1969.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid, *Cinéma vu pour vous*, Centre d’initiation au cinéma, no. 5, p. 10, Locarno, 1968 [CS].

<sup>202</sup> Peter Wollen, “Who the Hell is Howard Hawks?” *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (SPRING 2002): 9-17, 12.

Reactions to Langlois' dismissal were fierce, violent and practically instantaneous. The morning after Barbin took over, Langlois's friends began in shifts to send out scores of telegrams from the post office on rue Clément Marot, near the *Cahiers* offices, to gather the signatures of both French and foreign directors. Shortly after lunch they issued a motion to "all friends of cinema to show solidarity with any actions that might reverse the arbitrary decision."<sup>203</sup> In merely a day, forty filmmakers, including Abel Gance, Truffaut, Godard, Jean Renoir, and Robert Bresson, had withdrawn permission for their films to be shown at what was quickly dubbed the Barbinothèque. Soon dozens more directors would soon join them, including Charlie Chaplin, Roberto Rossellini, Fritz Lang, Howard Hawks, Richard Lester, Carl Dreyer, Orson Welles, and Jerry Lewis.<sup>204</sup>

On February 14, several thousand people crowded the Trocadéro, in front of the Palais de Chaillot, where films were shown, to physically protest Langlois' removal. Truffaut and Godard, together in the front lines, could count themselves amongst those wounded from the confrontation in that "baton-wielding police officers clubbed Truffaut on the head" while Godard's glasses were damaged in a scuffle.<sup>205</sup> The confrontation lasted for forty-five minutes before it was broken up by police. At its end Godard declared, "each spectator must find his own means of sabotaging the screenings."<sup>206</sup> In an effort to combat the protestors, Malraux, the Minister of Culture, issued statements condemning the institution's "administrative inefficiency, the problem of decaying film

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<sup>203</sup> de Baeque, *Truffaut: A Biography*, 236.

<sup>204</sup> Brody, *Everything is Cinema*, 321.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid. 321-322.

prints in storage, the failure to catalogue and locate prints,” and he charged that Langlois had failed to compromise on financial issues of regulating his administration.<sup>207</sup>

Malraux’s justifications fell on deaf ears. There were more demonstrations, more police violence, more petitions signed. At one rally, Jean-Pierre Léaud, the actor who had played Antoine Doinel in Truffaut’s *The 400 Blows*, gave a speech urging the crowd on.

As the protests dragged on into April, Malraux backed down and set up an advisory committee to find a compromise. On April 22nd, the general assembly of the Cinémathèque convened and, with the tacit approval of Malraux, voted to reinstate Langlois, though Malraux pulled the government’s representatives from the assembly and cut its funding to a minimum. The Cinémathèque was henceforth free to pursue its own policies, but was also ‘free’ of government funding for the purpose of conservation.”<sup>208</sup> The Cinémathèque was “snatched back from the jaws of the state,” but at the cost of losing over 1 million francs in government funding. Still, the protests proved successful in uniting France’s cinéastes while establishing a line against government interference in the film world, especially the control exercised by the Centre National de la Cinématographie (CNC).

Less than two weeks after the Cinémathèque reopened, there were student demonstrations on the streets of Paris and by May 20th nearly ten million students and workers were on strike. The country was virtually shut down. While the Langlois Affair had little to do with the general strike, for many French people it nonetheless seemed the dress rehearsal for the violent, ecstatic, and amazingly brief revolution of May ’68, or

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<sup>207</sup> Sylvia Harvey, *May ’68 and Film Culture*. (British Film Institute, 1980),15.

<sup>208</sup> Harvey, 15.

what came to be called *les événements de mai* (the events of May). Truffaut himself observed that, with “the passing of time, it seems obvious that the demonstrations for Langlois were to the events of May ’68 what the trailer is to the feature film coming soon.”<sup>209</sup> Of course he wasn’t only referencing the student protests but the cancellation of one of the world’s most well-known film festivals, the Cannes Festival, whose cancellation he had played a significant part in. In this, however, his actions differed from Godard’s, for while he called for the cancellation of the festival, Godard’s target was the cinema itself.

The same night that the student’s took to the streets, the 21<sup>st</sup> Cannes Film Festival opened with a new stereophonic 70mm print of *Gone with the Wind*, in homage to Vivien Leigh who had passed away the previous year. Ironically, as the audience admired Atlanta smoldering away in Technicolor, France found herself in the midst of its own civil war. In the streets of Paris student protesters confronted the police across barricades. On Saturday May 18<sup>th</sup> jury president Louis Malle, Truffaut and Godard along with several others, including Milos Forman and Roman Polanski, interrupted the screening to express solidarity with the students and strikers. After breaking for lunch, the conference moved into the La Grande Salle, where Spanish director Carlos Saura’s film “Peppermint Frappe” was due to be screened. When the festival organizers tried to continue without disruption, Saura, the film’s star Geraldine Chaplin, Truffaut and Godard all tried to stop the screening from taking place by holding onto the curtain as it was being pulled back. “The whole thing was quite funny,” Polanski remembers. “The curtain was huge, and

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<sup>209</sup> Richard Roud, *A Passion for Films: Henri Langlois and the Cinémathèque*, (Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, MD. 1999), vi.

there must have been a very powerful motor, because they were hanging off it like grapes.”<sup>210</sup>

Later in the Salle Jean Cocteau at the Palais du Festival, Godard, Truffaut and Polanski faced an increasingly hostile crowd. Newsreel footage of the event shows Godard before a mass of cameras and microphones, lamenting the apolitical nature of the films submitted for the festival jury’s consideration: “There isn’t a single film showing the problems of workers or students today,” he shouted. “Not one, whether by Forman, by me, by Polanski, by François, not one! We’re late! Our student comrades set an example when they got their faces bashed in a week ago!”<sup>211</sup> An uneasy Truffaut is seen standing next to Godard as he barked at one defender of the festival, “I’m talking to you about solidarity with the students and the workers, and you’re talking to me about tracking shots and close-ups!”<sup>212</sup> The following day the *New York Times* reported that Cannes “officially closed today in a gesture of solidarity with the students and striking workers of France”<sup>213</sup>

In retrospect their disintegrating friendship is visible in these news reels and the interviews they gave. As de Baecque notes, “But in the images of the Cannes Festival mutiny, it’s clear the two mutineers are not on the same wavelength.”<sup>214</sup> Truffaut believed in cancelling the festival simply because it seemed ludicrous to continue with the crisis taking place; Godard, however, having already turned radical, was determined

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<sup>210</sup> Tobias Grey, *Variety*, Flashback Cannes 1968, May 8, 2008.

<sup>211</sup> Quoted from *Deux de la vague*.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Special to The New York Times. "CANNES OFFICIALS CLOSE FESTIVAL." *New York Times* (1923-Current File), May 19, 1968.

<sup>214</sup> Quoted from *Deux de la vague*.

to show solidarity with the students by aligning himself with their leftist beliefs. Further, he emerged from the events with a dogged intent to transform his films, to abandon fiction features in favor of small-scale, overtly political films – films which were so obscure and difficult for spectators “unversed in the arcane of *gauchisme* and in the director’s increasingly flamboyant and aggressive cinematographic style” to understand.<sup>215</sup> For the first time he would consciously criticize mainstream commercial filmmaking on political and ideological grounds and propose his work “as a radical alternative.”<sup>216</sup>

Then events of 1968 demonstrated that, for the first time, it was possible to act politically within a cinematic context. Film was an important part of the system of communication set up in Paris during the student strikes; and, just as a beginning of sorts was marked when the cinéastes took to the streets in defense of Langlois in February, the climax of the turbulent spring is arguably the closing of the Cannes festival on Saturday, 18 May. The vision of Truffaut, Godard and their fellow cinéastes dangling from the curtains in protest provides a wonderfully cinematic image of the struggle against Hollywood. It is, of course, more symbolic than substantive. There was an attempt to reorganize the means of productions and distribution of French film in the succeeding months, through the actions of the general committee that took the name “Etats’Généraux du Cinema,” but neither Godard nor Truffaut took a large part in these discussions. Truffaut, however, did not feel solidarity with the cause, citing his friendship with Jean Vilar, the director of the festival, he made it clear that if there was only to be a choice

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<sup>215</sup> Monaco, 390.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

between supporting the “proletarian riot police and the rich kids intoxicated by revolutions,” then he was on the side of the police.<sup>217</sup> Godard occupied himself with shooting *Un Film comme les autres (A Film Like Any Other)* before leaving in late June to shoot *One Plus One* (a montage of footage centered on the Rolling Stones) in London where he remained intermittently throughout the summer.

These events shook France and one should not underestimate how many people were convinced that a revolution was in the making, as students and police clashed on the streets of Paris and as the entire work force came out in a paralyzing general strike. Even Charles de Gaulle, fleeing Paris on 29 May to confer secretly with the army on the Rhine, seemed to falter. But the huge right-wing demonstration of 30 May and the crushing right-wing victory in the June elections marked the end of any genuine prospect of dramatic change. De-Gaulle’s re-election in June 1968 coupled with his landslide victory implied a deeply conservative core still resided within French society. As Charles Drazin notes, the individualism of the New Wave directors struck a chord with the revolutionary spirit of May ’68. But it also masked a much darker truth, that after nearly ten years they remained out of tune with the mainstream film industry and their audiences. An important decision therefore lay ahead of them in the wake of these events. They could either “head into a cul-de-sac, or attempt a *modus vivendi* that would bring them into the mainstream,” that is, as Truffaut was to do, join the mainstream or, like Godard, being “constitutionally wayward,” chose the former route.<sup>218</sup> For Godard would make a series

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<sup>217</sup> MacCabe, 250.

<sup>218</sup> Charles Drazin, *French Cinema*, (New York: Faber and Faber Inc., 2011), 348.

of highly polemical films that espoused his militant politics but, eschewing conventional narrative, held little appeal for everyday audiences.

In intellectual terms, what is remarkable about Godard in 1968 is that within a decade he had travelled from a position of pure classicism (using established genres and an accepted language to address an established audience) to one of pure modernism (deconstructing established genres and grammars to address an ideal audience). Godard and Bazin share one fundamental belief: both view cinema as an instrument of truth able to pierce and breach the veil of appearances. Truffaut recognized this shift in Godard. “He is engaged with another kind of cinema,” he wrote. “He feels that since May ’68 it’s impossible to make the same kinds of movies and he resents people who still do. I’ve made my choice, my thoughts are perfectly clear, I want to make normal films, it’s my life.”<sup>219</sup> Furthermore, he planned on continuing to make these sorts of films that “involve either telling a story or pretending to tell a story – there’s no difference.” Truffaut espoused relatively traditional concepts of narrative cinema and made clear, especially through his interviews with *Cahiers* throughout the 1960s, that he rejected any sort of pressure that would have him embrace certain ideas of modernism. “Deep-down [sic] I’m not ‘modern,’” he tells an interviewer, “and if I pretended to be so it would be artificial.”<sup>220</sup> He also refused to take any sort of political stance, whether in his film or in his personal life, following the student uprisings. Even before the Events of May, in an interview with *Cahiers du cinéma* in 1967 he discussed this position:

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<sup>219</sup> de Baecque, *Truffaut: A Biography*, 298.

<sup>220</sup> Hillier, 109.

I'm well aware that in troubled periods, the artist feels himself wavering and it tempted to abandon his art and place himself at the service of a specific, immediate ideal. It's the discrepancy between the frivolousness of his task and the seriousness of history's events that haunts the artist; he wishes he were a philosopher. When these kinds of thoughts come to my mind, I think of Matisse. He lived through three wars and served in none; he was too young in 1870, too old in 1914, a patriarch in 1940. He died in 1954, between the war in Indochina and the Algerian war, and had completed his life's work: fish, women, flowers, landscapes, with sections of windows. The wars were the frivolous events in his life, the thousands of paintings he left were the serious events. Art for art's sake? No. Art for beauty's sake, art for the sake of others. Matisse began by comforting himself, then he comforted others.<sup>221</sup>

For him, the artist (a term he rarely used and never with reference to himself) must defend his own cause before any other, which he saw as the cause of artistic freedom. He thus effectively removed himself from the political arena of Godard, and possibly even from that of the artist to the entertainer. His subtle differentiation between the courses the two filmmakers took is illustrated in the following excerpt: "Once Langlois was reinstated, we could get some sleep again and go back to our own work," and he went on, "The Cinémathèque *affaire* effectively had made militants of us all, but not necessarily political militants."<sup>222</sup>

The hardening of their positions and deepening differences is also revealed by a scene Anne Wiazemsky witnessed in June 1968. In a meeting at the office of Truffaut's Les Films du Carosse in Paris, she recalled,

Jean-Luc had a fight with Truffaut in front of me. Jean-Luc wanted to stop the Avignon festival . . . Truffaut took up the position of Pasolini, who had said, "I can't be for the bourgeois students against the working-class National Guardsmen." Truffaut said, "I will never be on the side of the sons of the bourgeoisie," which is how he saw the students.

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<sup>221</sup> de Baecque 134.

<sup>222</sup> Roud, ix. Truffaut's foreward.

As Wiazemsky remembered, Godard “really got angry: ‘I thought you were a brother, you are a traitor.’ That was their breakup.”<sup>223</sup> There had always been political differences at the heart of the Hitchcocko-Hawksian group: Rivette was never a rightist, and the younger members teased Rohmer for his support of de Gaulle, but at the time it was just the cinema, not politics, that mattered, whereas now, for Godard, in the wake of what happened in May, politics took precedence over the cinema and personal relations.

Truffaut was not the only person from whom Godard disengaged himself in June 1968. At this time Suzanne Schiffman, a script-girl and assistant director, severed her work relationship with Godard, having not only worked with him for eight years but also enjoyed a friendship since their Cinémathèque days.<sup>224</sup> She recalls that, “He was the one real genius we had. But our collaboration stopped in 1968 when he became a wild revolutionary. When Godard saw me, he changed sidewalks on the Champs Elysées because I’d sold out to capitalism.”<sup>225</sup> The theatre director Antoine Bourseiller, who had supplied the apartment where Godard had filmed *Les Chinoise* and who had put the film on the program at Avignon, recalled that Godard ran into his wife on the street and told her, “We will never see each other again. I am saying adieu to you, and to Antoine. I don’t want to see you anymore, because you are actually still in the capitalist system, I will not see you again.”<sup>226</sup> Even the filmmaker and critic Luc Moullet, who Godard had

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<sup>223</sup> Her recollection is quoted from Brody “Auteur Wars,” 62. Interview with the author 2003.

<sup>224</sup> Suzanne Schiffman met Truffaut and Godard, along with the rest of the *Cahiers* critics in the early 1950s. Despite working with both men, after 1968 Schiffman continued collaborating only with Truffaut, first as a script girl, then assistant director and, from *Day for Night* (1973) until his final picture *Confidentially Yours* (1983), as a co-screenwriter.

<sup>225</sup> Peary, Gerald. MOVIES Schiffman: From Script Girl to Director [Home Edition]. Los Angeles Times (pre-1997 Fulltext) [Los Angeles, Calif] 25 Sep 1988: 34.

<sup>226</sup> His recollection is quoted from Brody, “Auteur Wars,” 65.

known since the mid-1950s, said, “In June 1968, we saw that Godard’s views were different than from before May.”<sup>227</sup>

Godard still sought a cinematic outlet for his new views and his films as a result in the period following these events reflect one of the central contradictions of the politics of the left: the dilemma of the bourgeois intellectual revolutionary who, though thoroughly committed to radical politics, is prevented by his class and role from participating - except existentially - in the struggle, the dilemma of the ‘unoppressed’ white, male, middle-class, middle-aged professional becoming a radical or revolutionary. Again, Godard himself recognized this. In an interview he described his evolution as follows:

I was raised in a bourgeois family, and then I escaped. I went to the Sorbonne for one hour, and that was enough. I still had to escape this bourgeois family, so instead of going to LSD or marijuana I got into show business. Then I discovered – and it took me fifteen years – that show business was even more bourgeois family than the one before. So I tried to escape it again, at first just by feelings and instincts. I just wanted to be free to do what I wanted, but even in show business you can’t do what you want. So although I was a bourgeois, I was an oppressed bourgeois. (Of course, if you compare that to being in a ghetto or being a peasant in South America, it’s a very privileged situation to be oppressed in show business.) Then, after fifteen years of being a bourgeois fighting other bourgeois, when the May-June events arrived I was ripe to make a break with what I was. It can’t be done in just one day – it’s going on, and it will go on until my death. Probably, my son will continue it.<sup>228</sup>

Godard was experiencing a growing discontent with the traditional means of cinematic production and distribution, of linear narrative, which prompted him to search for a ‘return to zero.’ We can only change society, he concluded, by changing everything, by rethinking everything.

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid, 68.

<sup>228</sup> Monaco, 224.

Godard in this endeavor teamed up with a young literary and film critic, and left-wing fanatic, Jean-Pierre Gorin, whom he had met as early as 1965. Together they called themselves the Dziga-Vertov group, in honor of the Soviet filmmaker whose films displayed unconventional camerawork and leaned towards a documentary presentation. In this attempt to make films “collectively,” Godard sought to break with the auteur theory. While all of the films are ‘signed’ by the Dziga-Vertov collective, in point of fact, these films never included more than two people and were wholly Godard’s work. Only when Gorin took over more of the work (including filming much of *Tout va bien*), after Godard’s motorcycle accident in June 1971, as Gorin says, “basically all I have done comes from Jean-Luc’s previous work and that why some of our last films are considered highly Godardian, even though I made them.”<sup>229</sup> The irony was that in attempting to widen the basis of the authorship of his films, to make political films while ‘depersonalizing’ them, Godard only succeeded in “discovering a filmmaker who was even more Godardian than himself.”<sup>230</sup> “I had a need,” Gorin says, “to go back into his early work and even discover some aspects of his work that he had not discovered himself.”<sup>231</sup>

Godard and Gorin worked constantly, talking and studying together, and making films, from *British Sounds* (1969), *Vent d’est* (1969), *Luttés en Italie* (1970), to *Vladimir et Rosa* (1970). Much of their work, however, remained unfinished and in the realm of experimentation and incomplete. For example, in February 1970 they went to Palestine to

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<sup>229</sup> Monaco, 221.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

film *Jusqu'à la victoire* (*Till Victory*). Working on the footage intermittently over a five-year period, the film was reportedly only finished and complete in 1975. In an interview in 1974, Gorin had suggested that if the film ever were completed it would have to be more “a film on how to film history,” than a film concerning the Palestinian situation, which no longer resembled the state of affairs when they were shooting. Any film they constructed would invariably be misleading. Gorin continued, “One of the interesting things about the film is our impossibility to edit it, but I think we’ve found some kind of creative possibility to reflect on the impossibility of editing the material.”<sup>232</sup> That an audience for such films was limited goes without saying.

When *Tout va bien* (1972), starring Jane Fonda, premiered in 1972 many critics, eagerly awaiting the return of the old Godard, welcomed it. This film offered both a critical assault on the film industry as well as a satire on Godard’s earlier concessions to that industry. Whereas his film *Contempt* had expressed this contempt in tandem with his passionate love of cinema, ten years later this had developed into contempt coupled with a partial self-loathing. His profuse, but perverted, references to *Contempt* in the opening sequence make clear this will not be a similar film. “To make a film you need money,” a voice comments at the beginning. Perhaps still mindful of the checkbook that Prokosch brings out in *Contempt*, whenever he hears the word ‘culture,’ Godard shows a close-up of an unseen hand signing the numerous checks that cover a film’s expenses – cast,

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

script, etc – before eventually arriving at the biggest one of them all, the stars' salary.

“And what do you need to attract the stars?” asks the voice. “Usually a love story.”<sup>233</sup>

This makes way for the film's protagonists Yves Montand and Jane Fonda, walking along the edge of a creek, but rebelling against the conventional expectations of a glamorous staging, they are filmed in long shot so that the audience scarcely discerns the stars. Godard continues the deliberate mockery by having Fonda, whom Roger Vadim once famously dubbed the 'American Brigitte Bardot,' reprise Bardot's celebrated opening scene from *Contempt*. “Do you love me?” she asks. “Yes, I love your eye,” Montand replies. “I love your mouth . . .” The familiar catalogue of assets follows. In *Contempt* Bardot's body is suffused in luminous, multi-color lights, as the camera lingers over her limbs, but in *Tout va bien* Fonda's body is cloaked beneath dark, manly clothing. No longer merely de-sexualising the image, Godard further subverts the star's image, while questioning the act of filmmaking itself.

As much as Michel Piccoli had been an alter ego for Godard in *Contempt*, Yves Montand plays a film director who now makes commercials. During a brief break from shooting, Montand addresses the camera explaining the nature of his creative compromise. His confession is reminiscent of Godard's own. He had started out as a screenwriter during the New Wave. “Already a long time ago, all that. A very long time ago.” Even before May 1968 he had grown tired, he says, of making 'art films,' but the troubles served to stir a political commitment, albeit ambivalent: “Active in May? Yes, and no. Like everybody else. It was both serious and not serious at the same time.” Once

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<sup>233</sup> Quoted from *Tout va bien*.

fervor subsided, he had the opportunity to make a thriller based on a David Goodis novel (a direct and vindictive reference to Truffaut) but it seemed more honest to make commercials than to dress up sell-out as art. “Excuse me, I must get back to the coalface,” he comments, returning to shoot a pair of go-go dancers for his latest commercial.

As its ironical title suggests, *Tout va bien* (everything is fine) depicts a culture where the stand-off of opposing forces, whether workers, bosses or politicians has produced a new status quo. While the conclusion contains Godardian cynicism, the film still implies that May 1968 remains a significant turning-point, albeit one that has little effect beyond enhanced political commitment. More significantly *Tout va bien* signified Godard’s trenchant renunciation of a medium that he now deemed “a tool of bourgeois complacency.”<sup>234</sup> In his own life he left Paris for Grenoble in the year of the film’s release, his marriage to Anne Wiazemsky having recently ended. He soon took up with a woman he had met in far-left circles named Anne-Marie Miéville (whom he continues to work with and live alongside to the present), and with Miéville he established the alternative production company, Sonimage. While in Grenoble, in a kind of self-imposed exile, he created a series of video essays that explored the relationship between the media and society, such as *Ici et ailleurs*, a reworking of the footage shot in Palestine, *Numéro Deux* intended as a sequel to *Breathless* with Georges de Beauregard, and *Comment ça va*, a series of stories centered in a left-wing newspaper. Godard’s work

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<sup>234</sup> Drazin, 350.

implied that the cinema was too ensnared in the compromises of entertainment industry to provide an effective medium for political engagement.

While Godard simply rejected the cinema and turned his back on the industry, his former *Cahiers* colleagues found they could build solid careers within the bourgeois framework of the 1970's by continuing to hone themes for which they had become known. Chabrol's thrillers and Rohmer's character studies were all well received and familiar commodities. Truffaut, however, demonstrated more diversity in his films, though his films frequently teetered on the edge of the autobiographical. As a group, as they neared middle age, these directors offered audiences the counterpart to the *tradition de qualité* cinema that they had attacked decades ago, only now the basis for this tradition was the *auteur* film. This was the kind of filmmaking that Godard's alter ego in *Tout va bien* would certainly have dismissed as 'a sell-out dressed up as art.'

While Godard's withdrew from mainstream cinema after 1967 Truffaut became more prolific. His 1973 film, *La Nuit américaine* or *Day for Night*, about the life of a crew while making a film, defines well their differences in filmmaking and its relation to life, perhaps including politics.<sup>235</sup> In fact, it can be seen as a delayed riposte to Godard's attack on the commercial cinema in *Contempt*, the action of which it closely parallels. In this film Truffaut played the director in front of the camera as well as behind it, illustrating that the film's most important theme is the complex parallels between the real-life actors, the characters they play in *Day for Night*, and their roles in the movie-

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<sup>235</sup> This is a term used in French cinema for the old practice of shooting night scenes in filtered daylight common practice in old Hollywood and a clear reference to Truffaut's love of American cinema.

within-the-movie. The plot of *Meet Pamela*, the fictional film within the film, is a vintage movie melodrama: A young man brings his bride home to his parents' country estate, where she and his father fall in love, the triangle ends in tragedy when the bride's car drives off a cliff and her husband shoots his father in the back. Through this scenario Truffaut demonstrates the connections between the scripted situations and the actors' lives off screen. Alexandre (Jean Pierre Aumont), who plays the father, says at one point that he has died twenty-four times in films and never once had a natural death. Ironically, near the end of shooting *Meet Pamela*, he is actually killed in a traffic accident. In reiterating his belief that life imitates art, this theme is extended throughout *Day for Night*. Alphonse (Jean-Pierre Leaud), who loses his bride in *Meet Pamela*, loses his real-life girlfriend, as she runs off with an English stuntman; Julie (Jacqueline Bisset), who has an affair with an older man in *Meet Pamela*, is in fact married to a much older man, the psychiatrist who helped her through her nervous breakdown. Their lives have become indistinguishable from movie clichés.

Intending to deglamorize movies by exposing the various efforts that contribute to the manufacture of illusions, *Day for Night* ends, ironically, as an inescapably romantic tribute to the filmmaking process. One long tracking shot sums up the crazy, chaotic activity of moviemaking: As Ferrand approaches the studio, four people walk in and out of the frame before he has crossed the street; the set designer shows him the blueprint for one of the sets, the producer comes to inform him that he will have only seven weeks to complete the film, the hairdresser asks him to approve a wig for one of the actresses, and the prop man brings him a sample of guns for the climactic scene. In any hour Ferrand is

confronted with half a dozen crises: he must choose the right gun for his hero, coax a stubborn and wayward cat into a scene, and decide how to rewrite the scripts for an unexpectedly pregnant actress or readjust the shooting schedule to stay within the budget. Each problem solved is a minor triumph. For Truffaut the work is itself obviously just as meaningful as the results. In *Day for Night* he celebrates the process of transforming experience through art.

Ferrand, like Truffaut, lives for the movies and at night has a recurrent monochrome dream about what appears to be a horrific childhood experience. It turns out to be a memory of stealing cherished stills of *Citizen Kane* from a cinema foyer. The recurrent nightmare of the director depicts a young boy who walks alone at night toward a locked movie theatre and manages to filch some publicity stills from Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane*. In a sense, this dream is an emblem for the entire film. For *Day for Night* it is less a film about the impermanence of human relationships than about the permanent effect films have on us. Truffaut said of it,

*La Nuit américaine* revolves around one central question: 'Are films superior to life?' It gives no definite answer. For there can be none. No more than there can be to that the other equally persistent question: "Are books superior to films?" One might as well ask a child which parent he prefers.<sup>236</sup>

Truffaut's work, and in particular this film, is built on the eternal paradox near the center of the artistic experience. Just as the film tradition created both the fantasy and the documentary movies, the world can be viewed realistically or imaginatively. Though illusion and truth are essentially different, they need each other to exist. In this film,

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<sup>236</sup> François Truffaut. *Day for Night*, [the complete script of the film] / François Truffaut ; translated by Sam Flores, (New York: Grove Press: distributed by Random House, 1975). vii

Truffaut is implying that film is the most appropriate medium for expressing the point of union between reality and imagination. “Films are more harmonious than life,” he advises the young actor Alphonse, played by Léaud. “There are no bottlenecks in films, no dead time. Films keep rolling forward, like trains, you understand, like trains in the night. People like you and me, you know, are only happy in our work, our work in the cinema.”<sup>237</sup>

Somewhere along the line Truffaut decided that the cinema was the most important thing in his life; it was certainly more important to him than politics or political ideology. It is perhaps for this reason that even his film about filmmaking, *Day for Night*, presents itself with such seamless insistence upon the importance of narrative disclosure. In arguing that ‘the show must go on,’ Truffaut takes a decidedly more Hollywood position than do the other ‘metafilms’ which precede it, namely Godard’s *Contempt*. Like Godard, Truffaut takes the occasion of his examination of the filmmaking activity to display its essential corruption, but unlike Godard, he decides in the end that the movies are worth all the effort. Godard, by the late sixties, is not so sure any more. More than anything else in his work, it is this repeated insistence by Truffaut in each of his films that the movies really are magical which makes him a child of Hollywood. This fascination with movie making is as evident in the loving way in which Truffaut records the very machines with which he works, as the origin of that fascination is obvious from the title which he gives to his film about film – *La Nuit américaine*. Perhaps the best description of how Truffaut became completely engulfed within the Hollywood aesthetic

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<sup>237</sup> Quoted from *La Nuit américaine*.

comes from his old friend Godard with whom he once had so much in common. “It isn’t by accident,” says Godard,

that *Day for Night* won the Oscar for best foreign picture; it is, in fact, a typical American film. . . . I think they rewarded the film because it hid so well, at the same time that it pretended to be exposing it, that which the cinema perhaps really is: a magic trick about which we know almost nothing.<sup>238</sup>

But Truffaut’s acceptance of a position within and his promotion of mainstream production are not new to Godard who almost a decade earlier had expressed the first signs of contempt for his friend when he wrote of one of their excursions in 1965:

A hot Saturday in July, we set off from the Place Clichy . . . the most beautiful square in Paris, so François insisted . . . we bought cigars next door to Atomic . . . then went on to the Pax-Sèvres, where my godmother gave me ten thousands francs, a month’s allowance in advance . . . François’s great dream then was to live in the Hotel Truffaut, Street ditto, but they weren’t in the same district . . . a unique address which no postman will ever read . . . even in a novel by Giraudoux, whom he likes less than Balzac, and he’s right . . . *Truffaut, Paris* . . . but François can take heart . . . from hundreds of millions of spectators . . . in Chile, Singapore, Montreal, Yokohama, Helsinki . . . he sells damn well abroad . . . how is it that shyness and tenderness go hand-in-hand . . . that technique is the sister of emotion.<sup>239</sup>

Already in this statement beneath an undeniable friendship – buying cigars together, the affectionate relaying of his friend’s romantic dreams for an address, a touching literary reference, reveling in his successes, acknowledging the sweetness of his shyness – there appears ominous ripples of jealousy and contending views of film and filmmaking: Truffaut “selling well,” his name circulating around the world. But by May 1973, having seen *Day for Night*, Godard can no longer bring himself to bear the touch of Truffaut’s tenderness, no longer find his impertinence original, no longer keep up the appearances of niceties that had characterized their friendship in the previous years.

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<sup>238</sup> Godard, *Une Vrai Histoire*, 76.

<sup>239</sup> Godard, 211.

Godard, in fact, initiated hostilities at the end of May 1973, right after the Cannes film festival. When he saw *Day for Night* he was exasperated and could not resist letting his old friend know immediately. On June 1<sup>st</sup>, he mailed Truffaut a four-page letter in which he denounced both the film and the filmmaker. He demanded that Truffaut, in effect, make amends for the movie by putting up the money for him to make a film in response. The infamous letter Godard sent began, “Yesterday I saw *La Nuit américaine*. Probably no one else will call you a liar, so I will. It’s no more an insult than ‘fascist’, it’s a criticism.”<sup>240</sup> Then Godard gets to the point. Using the tone of a formal request, he asks him to enter into co-production on his next film, *Un simple film*. Godard complains that the money “reserved” for him went into big-budget films by Truffaut, Malle, Ferreri, Rasmussen, and others, thus insinuating that they were indirectly preventing him from making his kind of films. “Because of the problems of Malle and Rasmussen who produce expensive movies (like you),” he wrote, “the money that was reserved for me has been swallowed up by the Ferreri (that’s what I mean, no one prevents you from taking the train, but you prevent others) and I’m stuck.” “Considering *La Nuit américaine*, you ought to help me, so that the public doesn’t get the idea we all make films like you.” He ends with more of a challenge than an opportunity for discussion, “If you want to talk it over, fine[.]”<sup>241</sup>

“Instead of an extended hand,” Godard effectively “proffered both a slap and an outstretched palm.”<sup>242</sup> Brody argues that there are subtleties in the letter which, while

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<sup>240</sup> Godard to Truffaut in Truffaut, *Correspondence 1945-1984*, 383.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid*, 384.

<sup>242</sup> Brody, *Everything is Cinema*, 368.

certainly accusatory, reveal that it was also “a plea and a nostalgic wink of complicity, an extended hand as well as, plainly and simply, a sketch for a film.”<sup>243</sup> This eluded Truffaut, as if Godard’s approach to Truffaut was tactless, Truffaut’s response was equally so: “Godard poorly read the man, but perhaps Truffaut poorly read the letter.”<sup>244</sup> Truffaut answered by giving vent to fifteen years of pent-up grudges in a furious twenty-page letter. His response begins,

Jean-Luc.

So as not to oblige you to read this disagreeable letter to the end, I begin with the essential: I will not enter into co-production with your film.

Second, I’m sending back to you the letter you wrote to Jean-Pierre Léaud: I read it and think it’s obnoxious. And because of that letter I feel the time has come to tell you, at length, that in my opinion, you’ve been acting like a shit.<sup>245</sup>

Godard’s letter for Léaud was enclosed in an unsealed envelope, allowing Truffaut the opportunity to inspect it before delivery. It too was a request for money, further outraging Truffaut who considered it wholly indecent to ask a younger man for financial help. Truffaut admitted in his letter that he still had some affection for Godard and that, despite what he termed Godard’s political “posturing,” he thought that Godard had “changed quite a bit” recently.<sup>246</sup> He confessed that, had it not been for the enclosed note to Léaud, he would have been inclined to welcome the letter.

Instead, he dredged up a plethora of accusations, which he discusses at great length. Citing numerous instances where he had helped Godard, he called him “both

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid, 369.

<sup>245</sup> Truffaut to Godard, in Truffaut, *Correspondance 1945-1984*, 385-386.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

jealous and envious,” despite his own desire to maintain their friendship. He brought up offhand remarks from years past that had stung him, along with decades-old charges of Godard’s attempted seduction of actresses (“I am enumerating all this to remind you not to forget anything in your truthful film about cinema and sex.”) He reproached Godard for not showing up at events he had promised to attend (“Like Sinatra, like Brando, you’re nothing but a piece of shit on a pedestal”) and for having given the recipe for a Molotov cocktail in one of his militant films, *Vent d’est*.<sup>247</sup> Truffaut added an unsparing critique of *Tout va bien*, which he found “disheartened and cautious,” compared with *Breathless*.<sup>248</sup> He blamed “that famous trendy Left which runs the gamut from Susan Sontag to Bertolucci” for giving Godard an outsized sense of importance. The letter concluded with a defiant challenge: “Now, anything that can be said, which is why I conclude as you did: If you want to talk it over, fine.”<sup>249</sup>

Truffaut had responded with extraordinary vehemence, but also with an extraordinarily coherent understanding of Jean-Luc Godard’s personality. He was a brilliant artist, he said, but one whose sadomasochistic narcissism was often unbearable to even his closest friends. Indeed, he reproached Godard not necessarily for his politics but for the behavior that went with them: “Anyone who has a different opinion from yours is a creep, even if the opinion you hold in June is not the same one you held in April.”<sup>250</sup> He admitted that he remained concerned for him: “[O]ne Saturday, there’s an announcement that you’re going to speak on the radio with Monod. I stay in the office to

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

listen to it, in a sense just to know what you've been doing."<sup>251</sup> He had even contacted Jean-Luc following the motorcycle accident, but, he now affirmed, "they were no longer kindred spirits"<sup>252</sup> He closed his letter with a quote pointedly chosen to criticize Godard's highly politicized work from the Dziga-Vertov Group. The line came from *The Diary of a Country Priest*, the novel by Georges Bernanos and the film by Robert Bresson: "If, like you, I had forsaken the vows of my ordination, I would rather it had been for the love of a woman than for what you call your intellectual development."<sup>253</sup>

Truffaut was distressed over the matter and called André Bazin's widow, Janine, to tell her about their break-up. She later wrote him a long, warm letter where she said that he "sounded equally devastated by Jean-Luc's letter and the one you wrote in response." She went on, "I don't know if he can understand that your insults are as great as your pain, as your friendship for him" and added that Godard "must be unhappy and he doesn't have the same way of being unhappy as others."<sup>254</sup> She was perceptive as to their differences, noting that Godard's "insults are insults that come from the head" whereas Truffaut's "come from the heart, from [his] morality of the heart."<sup>255</sup> The distance between Godard and himself was not a personal matter for Truffaut, but the result of fundamental aesthetic, economic and ideological choices.

Following these letters the two men would never again speak. "Godard," de Baecque's writes in his biography of Godard, "had seen Truffaut but a single time since

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> de Baecque, *Truffaut*, 300.

<sup>253</sup> Truffaut, *Correspondance, 1945-1984*. 385-91.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

the 1973 rupture and it was by chance in a New York hotel: ‘François refused to shake my hand. We saw one another again on the sidewalk waiting for a taxi, and he pretended not to see me.’<sup>256</sup> While the rupture is not made public during the 1970s, there were allusions to it from each side, especially on Godard’s part, as when Godard in an interview with *Télérama* in 1978 remarked, “I think that François absolutely does not know how to make films. He made one that truly corresponded to him, and then it stopped there: afterward, he only told stories. . . Truffaut is a crook who passes himself off as an honest man, which is the worst thing.”<sup>257</sup> The ‘stories’ Godard patronizes Truffaut for were films displaying more traditional, linear narratives, as opposed to the disjunctive, political essays Godard now viewed as worthy of pouring his talents into. In another instance Godard branded Truffaut as “hopelessly bourgeois” and declared that “his movies were as trivial as anything trickling out of the Hollywood factories.”<sup>258</sup> Truffaut’s view of Godard was equally telling of their differences. “Godard is exasperated,” he declared, “because what he really wants to be is a thinker, a political man. He longs to be a man of reason and he suffers because he is not. Jean-Luc suffers because of the uselessness of films in ameliorating the human condition.”<sup>259</sup>

Although Truffaut did not openly break with Godard, his correspondence reveals that his amiable public veneer concealed no lessening of anger towards him. Whereas Godard, growing lonely and isolated in his exile, longed for the companionship of his old

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<sup>256</sup> Antoine de Baecque, *Godard: Biographie*, (Paris: Grasset, 2010), 572.

<sup>257</sup> Quoted in Brody, “Auteur Wars,” 64.

<sup>258</sup> GUY FLATLEY. "So Truffaut Decided to Work His Own Miracle." *New York Times* (1923-*Current File*), Sep 27, 1970, 32.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*

comrades of *Cahiers*, Truffaut remained estranged. In the summer of 1980, Godard invited Truffaut, Chabrol and Rivette to his estate in Rolle for a roundtable discussion of their latest films, *The Last Metro*, *Horse of Pride* and *Merry-Go-Round* respectively. These films coincided with the Parisian release of Godard's *Sauve qui peut* (*Every Man for Himself*), and he thought the time was fitting for a reunion of sorts.<sup>260</sup> Truffaut, however, responded angrily to Godard, refusing him any opportunity to show off and suggested that Godard could make an autobiographical film entitled "Once a Shit, Always a Shit."<sup>261</sup>

That same year *Cahiers du Cinema*, shedding its own leftist leanings, interviewed Truffaut for the first time in thirteen years. Having endured Godard's attacks in silence, Truffaut used the opportunity to retaliate. "Even at the time of the New Wave friendship with him was a one-way street," Truffaut said. "One had to help him out at all the time, to do him a favor and wait for a low blow in return." Clearly, he had not forgotten the anger that had seized him in 1973. In the *Cahiers* interview he repeatedly came back to the subject of Godard and even made fun of himself for doing so: "If you really want to keep talking about Godard, we could even turn it into a book – 'Yes, indeed, I said, 'Godard'!'"<sup>262</sup> Nonetheless, Truffaut continued to see Godard's films and collect press clipping concerning his projects, while also highlighting and annotating the cruel remarks he made about his former cohorts. Suzanne Schiffman remarked, "Francois had had it. He'd accepted all the bad things Godard had said about him in the newspapers, but one

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<sup>260</sup> Truffaut, *Correspondance 1945-1984*, 362.

<sup>261</sup> Truffaut to Godard, in Truffaut, *Correspondance 1945-1984*, 368.

<sup>262</sup> Brody, "Auteur Wars," 64.

day he remarked, 'I don't want to see Godard anymore.' But he still went to see Godard's films."<sup>263</sup> Which is exactly why, despite their parting, there continued a tacit dialogue between them. For Godard then, Truffaut became, even at a distance, as crucial a reference as he had been when they were close. Thus, the ending of his film *Every Man for Himself* refers to the ending of Truffaut's *The Man Who Loved Women*, and in *Passion* he alludes to *Day for Night*.

In 1988 fifteen years had passed since the infamous letter that had confirmed the end of their friendship and collaboration. Truffaut had died four years earlier from a brain tumor. Thus, there would be no reconciliation, but after Truffaut's death Godard continued imagining their early friendship as one that could not naturally lead to antipathy. In his foreword to *François Truffaut: Correspondance*, Godard opens by recalling the era of their collaboration and deep friendship:

The article in Arts, no. 719, from 22 April 1959, which read "We have won," and then a little further on ended with ". . . for if we have won a battle, the war is not over." I wrote that article, as pleased as Athos was at one of D'Artagnan's exploits. Our victory was the fact that *Les 400 Coups* had been selected to represent France at the Cannes Film Festival.

He goes on:

Why did I quarrel with François? It had nothing to do with Genet or Fassbinder. It was something else. Something which, fortunately, had no name. Something stupid. Infantile. I say fortunately, because everything else was becoming a symbol, the sign of itself, a mortal decoration: Algeria, Vietnam, Hollywood, and our friendship, and our love of reality. The sign, but also the death of that sign. . . We were devoured by Saturn. And if we tore each other apart, little by little, it was for fear of being the first to be eaten alive. The cinema had taught us how to live; but life, like Glenn Ford in *The Big Heat*, was to take

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<sup>263</sup> Peary, 34.

its revenge. . . François is perhaps dead. I am perhaps alive. But then, is there a difference?<sup>264</sup>

It would seem from his writing that Godard might have longed for reconciliation. Having been viciously rebuffed in 1980, the opportunity to compose an introduction to Truffaut's correspondence provided space for Godard to apologize, explain and put the conflict behind him. Of course, it would also contain the vitriolic letters written between them, which were made public for the first time. So the two most celebrated New Wave directors remained estranged.

In fact, despite his longing to recall the earlier period of collaboration and friendship in the cinema, Godard could only bring himself to honor Truffaut the critic, not the filmmaker. He hailed the critic: "There was Diderot... Baudelaire... Elie Faure... Malraux... then François... there was never any other art critic." He praised the critic's audacity if not his consistency: "He didn't hesitate to cast the first stone... I don't know whether he continued... one can't do everything... taking on other people's sins before his own." But he derided the filmmaker: "We knew that a film had to be made alone... but we were four... so it took us some time to admit it... then some of us recanted... in our case, the screen was the judge."<sup>265</sup> The screen, Godard implied, had "judged Truffaut guilty of a kind of perjury."<sup>266</sup> The intensity, the constancy, and the fanatical unity of purpose of the seminal years of the New Wave had become for Godard an object of nostalgia but the memory of these things did not bridge their differences.

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<sup>264</sup> Truffaut, *Correspondance 1945-1984*, ix-x.

<sup>265</sup> Quoted from Godard's *Histoire du Cinema*.

<sup>266</sup> Brody, *Everything is Cinema*, 481.

In retrospect it is evident that Godard's '68 solution, which was to abandon the traditional circuits of distribution, was the exact opposite of Truffaut's determination to make commercially viable films. The bitterness of their exchanges is not simply the result of closeness of their friendship but also of their profound disagreement over their joint heritage. "When I began in this profession, I probably needed to be recognized," Truffaut confesses. "But now, all I want is for my movies to be successful enough – covering their cost – to permit me to keep making films."<sup>267</sup> Similarly, for Godard the driving force behind him was the desire, the compulsion to make films. Of *Contempt*, his only American picture, he said that it "proves in 149 shots that in cinema as in life there is no secret, nothing to elucidate, merely the need to live – and to make films."<sup>268</sup> Except, "where Truffaut applies himself to the task of making our own civilization fit a classical framework, Godard – more honestly – seeks a rationale for our age from within itself."<sup>269</sup> Godard's more political bent, foreshadowed from even his first critical essay titled "Towards a Political Cinema," his rejection of the more popular filmmaking that Truffaut excelled, at and his desire to make films 'revolutionary' and politically engaged created a rift in their relationship that even the 'tenderness of youth' could not overcome. Godard eventually came to believe that his films needed to provide an audience with socio-political commentary; Truffaut eventually came to believe that his films ought to provide an audience with entertainment. In the end they still, as in '68, found themselves on opposite sides of the barricades.

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<sup>267</sup> Insdorf, 33.

<sup>268</sup> Godard, 201.

<sup>269</sup> Hillier, 43.

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