
On the Waterfront: Class Action and Anti-Colonial Engagements in Paul Carpita's "Le Rendez-vous des quais"

Author(s): Rosemarie Scullion

Source: *South Central Review*, Autumn, 2000, Vol. 17, No. 3, Cinema Engage: Activist Filmmaking in French and Francophone Contexts (Autumn, 2000), pp. 35-49

Published by: The Johns Hopkins University Press on behalf of The South Central Modern Language Association

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3190091>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

and The Johns Hopkins University Press are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *South Central Review*

On the Waterfront: Class Action and Anti-Colonial Engagements in Paul Carpita's *Le Rendez-vous des quais*

Rosemarie Scullion
University of Iowa

In October 1955, local police descended upon a neighborhood movie house in working-class Marseille where *Le Rendez-vous des quais* (The Rendezvous on the Docks), hometown filmmaker Paul Carpita's first feature, was premiering before an audience that had played an indispensable role in its making. Acting on orders issued by the Minister of Information,¹ several jittery gendarmes swept into the projection booth, snatched the film from projectors that were poised to be set in motion and scurried out of the theatre, leaving a crowd of dock workers and their families bitterly frustrated in their desire to see their own recently waged battle against French colonial policy memorialized on the silver screen.² A short time later, director Carpita was obliged to follow the same trail his confiscated film had just taken to Marseille's police headquarters, where investigators threatened the young schoolteacher-turned-clandestine filmmaker with arrest and imprisonment.³ Although Carpita and his collaborators ultimately escaped this fate, it would take over three decades to release *Le Rendez-vous des quais* from the clutches of one of the most totalizing censorship decrees to have struck a French fiction film in this period.⁴ Believed by many to have been tossed, quite literally, in the dustbin of history,⁵ the recovery of *Le Rendez-vous des quais* in the mid-1980s offered audiences the opportunity to view what some critics have described as a rare instance of French neo-realist filmmaking of the sort that breathed new life into post-fascist Italian cinema;⁶ others find that its low-budget, anti-establishment foray into the commonplace sites of daily urban life anticipates by just a few years France's own New Wave.⁷ What remains beyond question is that the film's February 1990 release conjured a long-forgotten history of anti-colonial activism by rank-and-file French workers at the height of the Fourth Republic's "pacification" campaign in colonized Vietnam, memories that brought into sharp relief a legacy of political repression and artistic censorship more readily associated with the authoritarian regimes that ruled wartime France than with their Republican successors.

Made on a shoe-string budget with amateur actors recruited from the community of dock workers whose experience the film

© South Central Review 17.3 (Fall 2000): 35–49.

represents, *Le Rendez-vous des quais* tells the tale of two young workers whose desire to marry is frustrated by chronic underemployment and the acute housing shortage that plagued many of France's urban centers in the aftermath of World War II. Set in Marseille in 1949, Carpita's love story unfolds against the backdrop of a massive strike that pits longshoremen against both private shipping interests of the day and the state power invested in the port authorities of Marseille, whose charge in this period included overseeing the orderly transport of soldiers and munitions to battle zones in Indochina. Although it became an especially bitter conflict,⁸ the actual 1949 Marseille strike on which Carpita based his film was only one of a number of work stoppages that erupted on French docks between the late 1940s and mid-1950s, some of which were directly aimed at obstructing not only national colonial policy, but at cutting off the American military aid that flowed through France in this period en route to Southeast Asia, where it bolstered French efforts to quell the Communist-led insurgency in Vietnam.⁹ To have brought Marseille's bustling port to a virtual standstill, and at a moment in the Cold War when East-West relations were settling into a deep freeze, was no small political feat for the dock workers of Marseille. Despite its ultimate defeat and the crushing reprisals that followed, this momentous event inspired great pride and a sense of accomplishment in Marseille's working-class community, whose members ran further risks in participating in the production of Carpita's film and in turning out in force for its clandestine debut in October 1955, five years after the strike had ended. It is thus not surprising that collective memory of this strike, and of the confiscated film that dramatizes it, would remain alive in Marseille's working-class quarters well into the 1980s, when a community activist, who as a youngster had been seated in the audience the day the film was seized, sought Minister of Culture Jack Lang's assistance in tracking down Carpita's long-lost film.¹⁰

The catalyst for the 1949 strike, which ultimately involved some twelve thousand longshoremen, was widely felt anger at the sight of dead and mutilated soldiers returning from Vietnam. In response to the stream of coffins that workers knew would be pouring off *Le Pasteur*, a French carrier whose arrival was expected in the port, they prepared to launch a protest movement against the war in Indochina by greeting the incoming ship with freshly painted graffiti calling for "La Paix au Vietnam" (Peace in Vietnam) and then refusing to reload the fresh supplies of armaments and to board the troops that the ship was slated to transport on its return voyage. As the first point of contact on the French mainland for military personnel returning from Vietnam, the docks of Marseille provided one of the only vantage points from which metropolitan civilians could actually see the mounting human and material costs of France's battle to retain control of over its prized Far Eastern possession. In his 1991 appearance on the French telecast *La Marche du siècle* (The March of the Century), Roger Manunta, the dock worker who played the lead role of Jean Fournier (the politically engaged brother of the lovelorn apartment hunter Robert), describes in plain-spoken but riveting terms the growing indignation he and his co-workers felt at the banalization of death that became a fact of daily life for Marseille dock workers as they watched the colonial war extend into its third year. Objecting to host Jean-Pierre Calvado's suggestion

that dock workers may not have been “very kind to them [the returning soldiers] and that they were insulted because they participated in this war,” Manunta retorts:

Ah no, no, no, no, on the docks, no . . . quite the contrary! I must tell you they got off as best they could, those who were invalid, and we gave them a hand getting down from the ships and everything. . . . In the beginning we helped them . . . but after that, soldiers got off [the ships] any way they could, and the dead were taken off the ships just any old way, like miscellaneous merchandise; there were rows of 7, 8, 10 caskets, they were thrown on the ground, stacked in warehouses, and it, it created a feeling of revulsion in the dock workers. Because, seeing our young people leave happy, content, all cheerful, they were going to do good things in doing their [military] service, and they came back in coffins that were unloaded like vulgar merchandise. So the dock workers made a decision, it was their way of helping the soldiers. And we refused to load munitions, canons, tanks, etc. [on ships], we decided no longer to load men and munitions for Indochina.¹¹

In his contributions to the panel discussion of this same telecast, historian Jean-Pierre Rioux underscores the strategic economic and military position Marseille docker workers occupied in the circuit of colonial exchange. He supports Manunta's view that he and fellow workers were among the first civilians to feel the effects of the war in Indochina, which by 1949 had drastically reduced shipments of rubber and other valuable raw materials that were helping to fuel France's postwar reconstruction. This decline in the flow of colonial booty to the mainland contributed significantly, Manunta recalls, to the underemployment that began depressing dock worker wages and producing very real hardships in Marseille's working-class community in the late 1940s, circumstances that Carpita foregrounds in *Le Rendez-vous des quais*. This erosion of living standards was difficult for dock workers to bear since, with the exception of the repressive Occupation years, they had seen a dramatic improvement in their working conditions as a result of the Matignon Accords, the agreement that ended the 1936 nation-wide sit-down strikes, introduced the 40-hour work week, and mandated two-weeks paid vacation, all gains that were restored to French workers after the Nazi defeat in 1944–45. The strikes that swept across France in the aftermath of the Left electoral victory in May 1936 had also yielded concessions that recognized the especially grueling nature of the labor dock workers performed and instituted reforms that compensated for the irregular rhythms of employment on the docks. New measures passed in 1947 offered wage guarantees that dockers had thus far not enjoyed. These gains would be threatened in the late 1940s as the French economy, and the shipping industry in particular, began to feel the pressures of decolonization and the contraction of maritime trade that accompanied it. Lay-offs and work speed-ups were the order of the day, becoming an all too painful reminder of the stressful conditions under which earlier generations of dock workers had toiled prior to the 1936 strikes, the memory of which Carpita pointedly evokes some twenty years later in *Le Rendez-vous des quais*.¹²

Carpita efficiently contextualizes the events that sparked the 1949 strike by introducing a flashback sequence in which he traces the developments that altered port activity in the years immediately following the Liberation. With family and friends gathered to celebrate the birthday of Jean Fournier's daughter, Danielle, one member of the party, Madame Jeanne, anxiously appends a wish for increased employment ("et que vous ayez plus de travail sur le port" [and let's hope you'll have more work at the port]) to the champagne toast and wishes of good health that Danielle's mother proposes as the group sits around a kitchen table in Jean Fournier's modest dwelling. Madame Jeanne's reminder of the material hardships she, her family and all other members of the dock worker community were suffering throws something of a wet towel on the festivities and prompts an internal monologue in which Jean Fournier gives voice to the disillusionment and despair he and his co-workers experienced as the hustle and bustle of postwar reconstruction gave way to a steady militarization of the cargo they handled. As the visual text flashes back to actual footage showing intensive commercial activity fading into images of tanks, canons, and munitions standing ready to be loaded onto ships, the elder Fournier brother explains:

It wasn't work that was in short supply right after the Liberation. I remember that things were on the move. I had work up to the eyeballs. The docks were still torn apart, but there was a whirlwind of activity. You didn't have to break your neck [to get work], it was normal to be hired every morning. There weren't enough tractors, cranes, hands for all of this work. It was hard work, of course, but we hoped we were moving toward something, something great. But this only lasted for two years, in spite of us. And then the work changed, becoming more scarce. [This portion of Fournier's narrative is accompanied by images of weaponry lining the port, and of soldiers bidding farewell, headed, one presumes, for Indochina]. We showed up at the personnel office not knowing whether there would be work. More and more bad feeling. "You must wait, and come back tomorrow." Sometimes we worked four days a week and forgot our difficulties, and then the next week, no work and the worries return. They call us the intermittently employed. . . . Huh . . . [it's more like] we're the intermittently jobless. Yea, right, "more work at the port." Madame Jeanne says this as easily as you say hello.¹³

Despite their recognition that the war in Indochina was reducing shipments, the dockers resolved to obstruct the implementation of the counter-insurgency campaign in Vietnam, which aimed not only to affirm France's control of this overseas territory, but to renew the flow of precious raw materials that had been yielding spectacular profits and fueling the modernization of the French economy since the late nineteenth century. While *Le Rendez-vous des quais* offers no indication that they were aware of the intensive exploitation of human and natural resources that had spawned Vietnam's national liberation movement, or that they were inclined to reach across racial and ethnic divides to express open solidarity with the colonized peoples of Vietnam, the dock workers were able to make connections between their own worsening economic plight and the state expenditures that were financing the massive military build-up taking place right

before their eyes. This drain on the national coffers was especially galling at a time when affordable housing and other basic services such as running water were sorely lacking in Marseille's working-class communities. In boldly contesting the war in Indochina, which might well have been seen to be serving their own economic interests, the strikers were, however, able to look beyond their own immediate concerns and to imagine a political order that no longer bowed to the exigencies of Empire, or subordinated the needs of the popular classes to the interests and ambitions of the country's ruling elites. However short lived, the 1949 strike effectively jammed the machinery of colonial exploitation by disabling one of its key components: the thousands of workers who stocked ships with the weaponry metropolitan France was arraying against Vietnamese rebels. The response of the French state to this defiance of central authority was, of course, swift, violent, and, in the end, masterful. Dock workers battled the C.R.S.¹⁴ on the docks while troops swarmed over their neighborhoods, driving home in brutally repressive terms the steep price to be paid for saying no to power. Three years later when Carpita set out to document the strike by casting its story in fiction, dock workers and families were still bearing the burden of their political choices and actions.

Asked in 1991 how it was that he came to play a leading role in *Le Rendez-vous des quais*, Roger Manunta explained:

I was very involved in the strike and with dock workers in this period and when Paul (Carpita) approached me . . . I got swept up in things because through this film, we were tracing the history of the port, of my life [as a dock worker], which I lived to the fullest. Although, it [the idea] did worry me a bit in the beginning.

In response to Jean-Pierre Calvado's probing on the reasons for his initial skittishness about participating in the film, Manunta recalls:

Well, because it was 1953, three years after the strike [and] I have to say that we dockers had suffered some terrible blows. The union was knocked flat on its back, it was very difficult to enter the port, we were overwhelmed by the C.R.S., by all of it, and I said to Paul (Carpita), this is insane, we won't be able to finish this film. He succeeded nonetheless in convincing us, in getting us excited [about the project], in communicating his enthusiasm, and my gosh, we were young, we wanted to show something, to prove something, and so we said "Let's go for it."

The dock workers' willingness to contribute to the making of *Le Rendez-vous des quais*, which they did without remuneration, attests not only to the dignity with which this community bore the consequences of the strike's defeat but to the workers' will to continue acting on the social, political, and cultural world when all signs pointed to the dangers of doing so. It is precisely this assertion of agency that makes Carpita's representation of working class identity and existence so compelling, leading one to wonder whether the image he projected of self-possessed and self-empowering workers was not as rattling, if not more, to

censors than the newsreel footage of barricade battles Carpita also included in his film and that prompted the board to call for its complete suppression.

The portrait *Le Rendez-vous des quais* sketches of working-class dignity and honor is all the more remarkable when one considers Noël Burch and Geneviève Sellier's claim that representations of proletarian life were few and far between in French film productions of the late 1940s and 1950s, a result, they surmise, of the cultural conservatism that held sway in France, especially beginning in 1950. With the exception of films such as Jacques Becker's *Antoine and Antoinette* (1947), mainstream French cinema of the immediate postwar era spurned the populist concerns that had found expression in the poetic realist works of Marcel Carné, Julien Duvivier, Jean Grémillon, and Jean Renoir,¹⁵ a number of which had also stirred the censor's ire in the months that preceded and followed the French military defeat in June 1940.¹⁶ However, one need only compare the atmosphere of gloom and doom that haunts poetic realism's often solitary and tragic figures with the spirited collective resistance mounted by Carpita's characters to appreciate the degree to which *Le Rendez-vous des quais* breaks with long-standing cultural stereotypes that cast the working class as a mass of weak-willed, dim-witted, hopelessly promiscuous, and fundamentally flawed beings incapable of mustering the wherewithal to improve their lot in life. The distance Carpita takes from the populist formulations of the prewar era is starkly evident if one contrasts the decadence and desolation that engulf the port and its inhabitants in Marcel Carné's *Le Quai des brumes* (*Port of Shadows*, 1938) with the rich and caring human relations that sustain community life in *Le Rendez-vous des quais*, even, indeed especially, when it finds itself facing economic and political duress. That Carpita and a number of his collaborators hailed from this milieu clearly sensitized them to the indignities the popular classes endured at the hands of social superiors and this understanding became a driving force in the making of *Le Rendez-vous des quais*. When asked by Jean-Pierre Calvado what message he wanted to his film to communicate to spectators, Carpita replied:

I am the son of a dock worker and my mother worked in a fish market. We are people of very modest means, it is the little people that you see on the screen in my film, the kitchens, all of it, I lived this [experience]. My father returning home with his lunch box because there was no work. I saw [my parents] through the eyes of a child, throughout [their] entire existence. My mother was a marvelous, wonderful, intelligent woman. Unfortunately, she was the eldest daughter in a large family and she went to work selling fish at twelve years old. Same thing for my father, he was a dock worker, then a sailor. I felt their lifetime of humiliation, and when I was able to get hold of a camera, you can imagine in what direction I turned it. When I'm asked what ideas [I wanted to express in this film], well I was defending the small people against social injustices, against their humiliation, and each time they raised their head to refuse [to be humiliated], my camera was ready to roll.¹⁷

In addition to countering class injustices, Carpita also bucked what Burch and Sellier demonstrate were the conservative, even misogynist cultural trends of his time by constructing female characters who assume an active role in organizing

their communities and who work collectively to counter the affronts they, too, endure in the workplace. The image Carpita projects of working-class women striving hopefully and purposefully to build a better life for themselves, their families, and their community is at great variance with postwar French cinema's dominant gender ideology which, Burch and Sellier show, worked diligently to ensure a "restoration of [the] patriarchal order" that the 1940 military defeat and four years of German occupation had seriously weakened in wartime France.¹⁸ Unlike Carpita, who enunciates a discourse on gender that, by 1950s standards, can be considered positively feminist, mainstream French cinema was offering moviegoers a Hollywood-esque fare of "tall voluptuous blonde" figures of femininity that were barely distinguishable from "inflatable dolls."¹⁹ It might even be said that the politics Carpita pursues in *Le Rendez-vous des quais* opens new class and gender fronts in the Franco-French wars which, historian Henry Rousso shows, were driven underground after World War II by Charles de Gaulle and the nationalist ideologues he set to work sublimating the deep social and cultural antagonisms that had divided Left and Right throughout the modern era.²⁰ These conflicts had become especially rancorous under the Occupation when right-wing collaborators profited from the Nazi presence to wreak vengeance on their prewar foes and to restore the authority of elites that had been boldly, and, for a time, successfully challenged during the Popular Front. In a very real sense one could even say the internecine struggles that very nearly tear the Fournier clan apart in *Le Rendez-vous des quais* symbolically enact the skirmishes that continued to erupt in France's postwar domestic sphere between the forces intent on promoting greater democratization of the society and those fighting to preserve a hierarchically ordered status quo. Rather than denying these differences of political vision and values, as Gaullist nationalists deemed necessary, Carpita brings them explicitly to play in the plot of a film that allows spectators to ponder some of the burning social issues of the day, including the legitimacy of France's colonial rule, French participation in the Cold War, the place of women in modern society, the enduring nature of class violence and oppression, the ethics of pursuing individual ambitions at the expense of one's broader community, and, most of all, the power of the state to deploy brute force in repressing opposition to the established order of things.

The conflict that drives *Le Rendez-vous des quais*'s narrative progression arises out of the circumstances in which the young Robert Fournier finds himself after he proposes marriage to Marcelle, a demure young woman who works the assembly line in a cookie factory not far from the port. Unlike his elder brother Jean, who followed his father's example in rising to a leadership position in Marseille's mammoth dock workers' union, Robert is somewhat adrift in his surroundings. Irregularly employed on the docks, he lives with his widowed mother, who endlessly worries about her youngest son's prospects for steady employment and the psychological toll his worries seem to be taking on him. Determined to find the housing that would allow him to marry Marcelle, Robert beats the pavement in search of his future, only to find that towering new constructions with comfortable apartments are priced well beyond his means. Despite his elder brother Jean's assurances that he and his wife Simone will help

him in time of need, Robert becomes a brooding, resentful, and increasingly self-centered individual who turns away from the solace of friends and family and shows no interest whatsoever in the organizing activities that absorb so much of his family's attention. The obstacles Robert Fournier encounters in his struggle to make an independent life for himself and fiancée eventually drive a wedge between Robert and Jean, who urges his younger sibling to look beyond himself to see that many others members of their community are enduring hardships identical to his own. But Robert is not moved by claims that the solution to his problems lies in what Jean sees as the only means workers have to combat their plight: collectively waged struggle against the social inequalities and injustice that are, he is convinced, the source of his brother's woes. Robert will opt for another mode of action, one that draws him into the orbit of the dock workers' well-armed and cagey adversaries. Eager to discredit Jean Fournier, an effective and widely respected leader from a family line of dock worker advocates, port officials strive to undercut the authority and prestige he enjoys with the rank and file by enticing his brother into becoming a "yellow" strike breaker.²¹ The agent of this stratagem is a company lackey named Jo Brunelle,²² who feigns to befriend Robert and promises to use his personal connections with municipal authorities to see that he and Marcelle move to the top of a long waiting list for one of the few public housing units the government has at its disposal. Robert's eagerness to ingratiate himself to an apparently well connected co-worker whom he naively takes to be his benefactor leaves him vulnerable to the latter's political persuasion and manipulation. If Robert remains oblivious to these machinations, the audience is not, privy as it is to a discussion between Brunelle and a port official in which the undercover informant proposes to work on Robert Fournier in order to turn him against his brother's cause: "He [Robert] has one invaluable quality," Brunelle snidely reports. "Do you know Jean Fournier, the head of the union at the port? Well, he's his brother. And this one [Jean Fournier] is a rock. Martin tried [to get to him], so did Jourdan. He's incorruptible. So, do you get my drift?" The response of his interlocutor is positively gleeful: "A Fournier in our camp! Talk about a coup!"

The steps that lead Robert down the slippery slope of collaboration will place him at ever greater odds with his brother, his union, and even his fiancé Marcelle, all of whom are unwavering in their loyalty to the beleaguered but proud community they are steadfastly committed to serving. In sharp contrast to Robert's self-seeking individualism, they stand ready to assume whatever risks and to make whatever personal sacrifices are necessary in order to advance their cause. Especially remarkable in this regard is the lead role Carpita has women characters take in solidifying the social bonds that will help shield dockers and their families against adversity, in articulating collective grievances, and even in devising tactics in the combat that is about to be waged against the powers that rule their lives. The result is a film that offers a dramatically different cultural conception of urban blue-collar existence and that also directly challenges the subordination of women by re-imagining their place in society in ways that are diametrically opposed to the era's prevailing gender codes.

In attempting to convince Robert that his interests will be better served by not

participating in the strike and by crossing picket lines to return to work, Jo calls for an "every man for himself" (*chacun pour soi*) stance, an idea to which the younger Fournier becomes more receptive as the prospects of finding an apartment become rosier. Once the strike is declared and news of a government troop deployment spreads, Jo is confident that he and port officials are about to score the public relations coup they have plotted by drawing the younger Fournier across the picket line. As tensions mount and Robert's moment of decision approaches, Jo happens upon Marcelle, who is combing the pier in search of her betrothed so she can share her joy at having been named by her fellow workers to lead the committee they have formed in support of the striking dockers. Marcelle is stunned to learn from Jo that she will not find Robert on the picket lines because: "He prefers to remain alone, he is like us . . . hesitating. With all of these events, what do you expect . . . it will be a pleasure to go back to work." Brunelle goes on to proclaim: "After all, one has to think of one's family." It is clear from the incredulous, and then disgusted look with which Marcelle greets the news of her fiancé's impending betrayal that her family values are of an entirely different order than those to which Brunelle is opportunistically appealing. What we see in Marcelle's reaction is a clash between the conventional patriarchal idea of family Jo is holding out as a model and her own growing sense of the need to belong to social entities beyond the insular couple Robert is longing to form. The former is predicated on what the French call a "*repli sur soi*," a turning in on the self that fosters few if any attachments beyond those that are bound by the limits of a hierarchically ordered domestic sphere. It is this model of family life that Robert appears to be embracing in his single-minded quest for married housing, a search through which he is striving, or so his behavior repeatedly suggests, to separate from the Fournier clan and its closely knit social milieu, saying, in essence, that "he prefers to remain alone." It is not surprising that Marcelle would balk at this narrowly conceived notion of family, recognizing that to become party to such an arrangement would prohibit her possibilities for self actualization in her work and community life that she has just begun to explore. As Robert pulls away from his peers, Marcelle moves in the opposite direction, having learned first hand how empowering and uplifting collective action can be for those assigned to her humble station in life. It is a lesson she learns when the women in her workplace rally to her defense after she is summarily dismissed from her assembly line job, vigorously contesting management's arbitrary decision to deprive the young woman of her livelihood. Not only will Marcelle retain her employment, but she quickly earns the respect of her co-workers who, soon after, offer her a leadership role in her own labor organization, a form of recognition that buoys her sense of self and strengthens her resolve to participate in building alliances of the sort that shielded her from misfortune.

An alternative to the insular model of family life that Robert appears to be offering Marcelle can be found in the elder Fournier brother's home. Unlike Robert and Marcelle, Jean shares his political and social vision with an equally engaged spouse who moves freely in the social world they inhabit. Although he works tirelessly for his union's cause, Jean also finds the time to be involved in rearing their young daughter, Danielle. In marked contrast to his brother, who

seems never to lift a finger to help his mother, Jean happily takes on household chores such as preparing family meals and supervising his daughter's homework, a strikingly domestic and nurturing posture for the burly longshoreman he is. It sends a powerful message that housework and childcare are not solely women's work. Jean's participation in maintaining the family's home life allows his wife Simone to also invest her energies and assert herself in the public sphere where she acts as a community organizer and strives to raise the political consciousness of women in her milieu by disseminating a publication called "Femme Française" (French Women). She, too, has earned the respect and admiration of other women in her community, who gladly lend a helping hand with childcare when her activism calls her away. Simone leads by example, offering her community a model of womanhood that is a direct challenge to a patriarchal status quo that would relegate her to the domestic sphere and subordinate her wishes and desires to those of her husband.

Simone is not the only woman in the Fournier family to question the order of things. The Fournier's widowed mother, while she engages in a good deal of maternal hand-wringing over her younger son's predicament and does more than her share of catering to his needs, also has strong opinions about the state of affairs in her family and community and is always prepared to speak up when things seem to be going awry. She readily enlists her elder son's aid when she recognizes Robert's troubles may be threatening his psychological well being ("He's running all over the place looking for an apartment, he can't afford the charges, you know his work is not going well and this morning when he came home I thought he was going to cry . . . he's running around like a madman, and I am beside myself"). Yet, however concerned she is about Robert's state of mind, she does not shrink from letting him know that she expects him to help out around the house. After one particularly burdensome trip to the public water fountain, she finds her son in front of their dwelling tinkering with his bicycle and calls: "Oh, so you're here! There is quite a crowd at the fountain. If I had known [you were home], I would have sent you to get the water. It killed me [to carry it back]." She then takes the opportunity to express her own sentiments about the increasing difficulties of everyday life. Bent over an old washboard scrubbing clothes, she laments: "Every thing is going wrong, huh, as if we didn't have enough troubles as it is. It's a scandal that a city like Marseille doesn't have running water. And prices are skyrocketing. The thousand franc bill [we had] is gone and I bought practically nothing." The exasperated look on Robert's face conveys to the audience that he can't be bothered with such mundane concerns, further reinforcing the sense that he is selfishly retreating from the family entity that nonetheless continues to meet his material needs.

One other example of Carpita's reconfiguration of the conservative gender codes that prevailed in France of the 1950s also merits discussion. It involves a comical scene that tweaks the phallocratic notion of male firstness and projects an image of working-class women as intelligent and enterprising beings who are every bit as adventuresome as the men in their lives. The setting for this scene is a Sunday outing in which the Fourniers join their friends Jeanne and 'Toine for a leisurely day at the beach. Jean Fournier and another friend quietly approach

'Toine to request the use of his boat for a midnight trip to the Marseille port where they plan to launch their protest against what newspapers have announced will be the "hundreds of coffins" arriving in port on *Le Pasteur*. The boat they ask to borrow will allow Jean and his fellow traveler to approach the pier and to paint the slogan "Peace in Vietnam" in bold enough strokes that all the world can see there is stiff opposition mounting to what Jean disdainfully calls "that dirty war." A self-employed tour guide who relishes showcasing Marseille's beautiful waterfront, 'Toine is dead set against lending his support to this clandestine undertaking, fearing not only the wrath of the law, but also that of his wife Jeanne, who, he is utterly certain, will not approve of his participation in defacing public property. After finally agreeing to lend Jean and his cohort Fred the boat, he warns them: "Don't talk about this, it will lead to a divorce."

As the friends later gather around the table to share their Sunday meal, talk obliquely turns to the night boat ride Jean Fournier and his friend Alfred are plotting. The women are cajoled into thinking that the plan simply involves a late night fishing excursion. Later in the afternoon 'Toine's wife Jeanne asks Simone Fournier if she would like to return the next week for another enjoyable outing. Simone reminds her friend that the following Sunday is July 14 and that there are festivities planned, including a demonstration in which community youth plan to unfurl large banners that read "Peace in Vietnam." Hearing this news, Jeanne turns to the male cohort and quips: "And since we're talking about slogans, I have an idea. Hey, you sweet fishermen, instead of going out acting like fools with your fishing lamp, you'd be better off taking a can of paint and going out to write (anti-war) slogans along the pier." The next scene shows Simone Fournier gathering paint cans in preparation for the night ride to the pier. Rather than being left in the dark about her husband's clandestine protest, she actively encourages it and even lends a helping hand. The reversal that takes place in this situation works effectively to undermine the prevalent notion that women are inclined to align themselves with the Law rather than run the risks involved in questioning the legitimacy of its exercise. It also calls into question the conventional cultural wisdom that women are to be shielded from the rough and tumble of the public and especially the political sphere. In this context, Jeanne outpaces her husband in acquiring an awareness of the issues being debated and the policies being contested within her community. She is also quick to propose a course of action from which 'Toine initially recoiled for fear of running into trouble with the authorities. Jeanne is not nearly so reticent. The matter-of-fact manner in which she encourages the expression of dissent calls attention to the ways in which she and a number of other female characters in *Le Rendez-vous des quais* step out of the feminine position of passive, inessential secondariness to make their presence felt and their desires known to the world. I would not go so far as to claim that Carpita's representation of gender is entirely revolutionary, for in a number of respects women characters remain bound by the gender codes of the time. However, we are in Carpita's cultural imaginary a long way from the "femme au foyer" ideology promulgated by Vichy conservatives during the war and even more at odds with what Burch and Sellier describe as postwar France's cinematic campaign "to reaffirm the supremacy of male values that had recently taken such a

beating.”²³

In the final portions of *Le Rendez-vous des quais*, the two Fournier brothers nearly come to blows when Jean learns that Robert is giving serious thought to abandoning the strike and returning to work. He implores his brother not to crawl into his shell (performing, thus, another “repli sur soi”) during this “great movement” (grande action) and to work with the collective to help them achieve their ends. Robert angrily counters his brother by pointing out that “it is easy for [him]” to preach solidarity when he had no difficulty marrying the woman he loved, snidely adding: “I don’t owe you a thing.” Infuriated, Jean Fournier counters: “Yes you do have to be accountable, to us, to Marcelle and to the memory of papa, which you are disgracing.” This heated exchange between Robert and Jean is more than just a family dispute. It is a contest of wills between two members of the same family, one of whom believes he is accountable to no one, and the other who adamantly holds that individual sacrifices must be made to protect the dignity and promote the well being of all members of the community to which one belongs. I would propose that the divergent paths Jean and Robert take in the course of the crisis situation the dockers strike creates symbolically mirrors the fundamental ideological schism between Left and Right that, Henry Rousso shows, has rent French national political life at regular intervals since the Revolution of 1789. Viewed from this vantage point, the most striking aspect of the interfamilial struggle waged in *Le Rendez-vous des quais* is not so much which of the two parties can, in the end, claim victory, but that such a contest is ever staged in the cultural and political symbolics of mid-1950s France. To see images of Frenchmen pummeling other Frenchmen in one of the country’s busiest ports could not have been comforting to the conflict stiflers who were working so diligently in this period to craft an image of France’s restored national unity and glory. Even Carpita himself could not bring himself three years after the fact to recognize within the text of his film that the longshoremen strike of 1949–50 had been roundly defeated and that it had left the community physically and morally battered. He opts instead to close his film with a scene in which a repentant Robert, who quite by chance discovers that he has been the pawn of the contemptible Jo Brunelle, returns to the family fold vowing to win back all that “I have lost, my friends, my mother, Marcelle.” Through this relatively happy ending, Carpita sutures the narrative in a way that would have given the audience that was never allowed to see the film a sense that the struggles of the past had not been entirely in vain and in which hope could still be found in the ideal of collective solidarity that the film celebrates. But, I propose, what makes *Le Rendez-vous des quais* such a valuable historical document is the forthrightness with which it reminds the French nation that its tradition of contestation was alive and well and that new arenas of struggle were emerging on the class, gender, and colonial fronts of the country’s postwar political landscape.

In their discussion of the motivations the French government might have had for placing such an uncommonly restrictive ban on *Le Rendez-vous des quais*, Jean-Pierre Rioux and Marc Vernet speculate that the 1955 seizure of Carpita’s film had probably less to do with France’s campaign in Indochine, which Pierre Mendès-France had ended in 1954, than with the independence movement the Algerian F.

L.N.²⁴ had launched in November 1954, just six months after the French military conceded defeat in Vietnam in the wake of Dien Bien Phu.²⁵ Recalling this context, it is not difficult to imagine how a Parisian Film Oversight Commission might see fit to curtail the domestic and even foreign circulation of Carpita's film, which showed galvanizing images of insurgent workers at home supporting the cause of anti-colonial rebels abroad. What may have been less obviously, but nonetheless more deeply unsettling to censors were the links *Le Rendez-vous des quais* established between class and gender oppression and that it did so at a time when the idea of women organizing on the workplace and fighting the C.R.S. on barricades could not have been more at odds with the images of passive, objectified, and increasingly sexualized femininity that were becoming a staple of France's cinematic and visual culture. Perhaps *Le Rendez-vous des quais* most important and lasting contribution will one day be found not in the history of its censorship, but in the rich oppositional politics it sought to project on the silver screen during one of modern Republican France's most repressive hours.

NOTES

1. La Commission de contrôle des films cinématographiques (the Film Oversight Commission) recommended the film's censure on 9 August 1955. Three days later, the Minister of Information, functioning under the aegis of the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, imposed a total ban on the film.

2. For a fascinating, first-hand account of these circumstances, see the 6 February 1991 edition of the France 3 television program *La Marche du siècle* in which Carpita, his close collaborators, and a panel of specialists discuss the history of the production, censorship, and recovery of *Le Rendez-vous des quais*. The subtitle given to this edition of *La Marche du siècle* was "La Censure" (Censorship), which had a special resonance in February 1991 when information regarding the Gulf War was being closely guarded by U.S. and other military forces involved in its prosecution.

3. The Film Oversight Commission required that films made in France receive a pre-production authorization from the board, which Carpita never sought. Given the film's subject matter—a fiercely opposed strike by longshoremen that, among other objectives, aimed to obstruct French colonial policy—it is unlikely that Carpita would have been allowed to proceed with making his film. Had Carpita sought the required authorization to make *Le Rendez-vous des quais* in 1953 when he began working on the film, it is difficult to imagine that, with the war in Indochina still raging, port authorities would have allowed him and his crew to move about the port areas as freely as they apparently did. In his 1991 *La Marche du siècle* appearance, Carpita explained that although access to the docks had been strictly curtailed following the 1950 strike, he received permission to film on the docks after presenting himself to port authorities as a local school teacher making an educational film for his students.

4. Film scholar Marc Vernet emphasizes that the ban placed on *Le Rendez-vous des quais* was exceptionally severe. The measure ruled the entire film unacceptable and barred both its domestic and foreign distribution. In his informative and historically astute analysis of the film, Vernet points out that such restrictions were extremely rare in this period. See Vernet's "Si Orphée se retourne, Madame Dupont lui sourira: A propos du *Rendez-vous des quais* de Paul Carpita" *Cinémaèque* (May 1992): 100.

5. See Vernet for a detailed account of the chronology of events and circumstances that led from the film's censorship and seizure in 1955 to its commercial release in February 1990 (*Ibid.*, 100–105).

6. For a discussion of *Le Rendez-vous des quais*'s neo-realist qualities and those of several other French films of the period, see Tanguy Perron's "De quelques hommes qui marchent dans la ville" in *Le Néo-Réalisme Italien, CinémaAction* 70 (1994): 190–97. Perron offers a concise analysis of the postwar circumstances that limited neo-realist influences in France, pointing out that "in the cluster of films that moved in the direction of a French neo-realism, two groups can be distinguished . . . : 'a

socialist neo-realism' on the one hand, and on the other 'a bleak realism,' that hesitated between the heritage of poetic realism and its adaptation to contemporary society and the influences of Italian Neo-Realism" (191). Marc Vernet also notes that two articles published by Albert Cervoni in 1955 found parallels between *Le Rendez-vous des quais* and Vittorio de Sica's *The Bicycle Thief* (1950). These articles appeared in *La Marseillaise* on 27 March and 3 April 1955. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

7. See Jean-Louis Comolli's discussion of *Le Rendez-vous des quais* in *Libération*, 21 July 1989. He writes: "The freedom of tone, of play and of writing incessantly flows upstream to Jean Renoir and forward to the future New Wave." In an interview with Fabienne Hacault published in February 1990, Carpita himself evokes the innovation of the New Wave, asking: "Why did it [*Le Rendez-vous des quais*] remain smothered for thirty-three years. Because it wasn't true cinema. We were shaking everything up, ten years before the New Wave. This wasn't yet accepted in Paris. No one budged over there." ("Pourquoi [ce film] est-il resté trent-trois ans étouffé? Parce que ce n'était pas du vrai cinéma. Nous bousculions tout, dix ans avant La Nouvelle Vague. A Paris, on n'admettait pas encore ça. Personne n'a bougé là-bas.") See F. Hacault, "*Le Rendez-vous des quais*," *Cinéma* (February 1990): 28.

8. Local political conflicts and inter-union rivalry conspired with the circumstances that triggered the 1949 dockers strike to make Marseilles an especially hot zone of ideological struggle in immediate postwar France. In the *La Marche du siècle* broadcast, historian Jean-Pierre Rioux explains that the 1949–50 Marseille strike became politically enmeshed during this period with struggles between Socialists and Communists, who were vying for control of city government and authority over the port. In addition, Rioux notes, while it ostensibly targeted France's colonial policy, the strike, which was led by the C.G.T. (The Confédération Générale du Travail), one of France's most powerful trade unions, also aimed to block the expansion of "Force Ouvrière" ("Workers Force"), a rival union that worked diligently in this period to undercut the C.G. T. and its leftist influence among French longshoremen. One particularly unsavory character in Carpita's film, who manipulates co-workers and surreptitiously serves the interests of management, appears to embody Force Ouvrière's corporatist ideology. In one portion of the film, this character, named Jo Brunelle, chides fellow workers for participating in work stoppages "at the drop of a hat" (pour un oui ou pour un non). One dock worker in the group counters his admonitions, declaring: "What are you talking about there . . . you're talking like the worst bosses. If we hadn't struggled at every turn, now we'd be treated worse than galley slaves." After listening further to Jo's arguments, he concludes: "You see, Jo, I don't know where you fish for these arguments, they're very dangerous, you're playing management's game."

9. Vernet recalls that in November 1950, dock workers in Bordeaux refused to unload American military cargo (Ibid., 96). In June 1955, longshoremen struck in both Nantes and Saint-Nazaire, developments that threatened to paralyze France's shipping industry. Both Jean-Pierre Rioux (in the television broadcast cited above) and Marc Vernet surmise that these important labor clashes influenced the decision to ban the film, which featured actual footage of the Marseille port at a standstill and of dockworkers battling the C.R.S. (the Compagnie Républicaine de Sécurité), France's national riot police. Vernet recalls that the C.R.S. was formed by Socialist Minister Jules Moch "to counter the political strikes of 1947–1950 (99).

10. See both Vernet, and the *La Marche en siècle* telecast in which Marseille film buff Jean-Pierre Daniel, who urged Jack Lang to help locate *Le Rendez-vous des quais*, explains the steps that led to the recovery of Carpita's film, which, unbeknownst to the director, had been tucked away in the Centre National du Cinéma's film archives at Bois D'Arcy.

11. A tape recording of this 13 February 1991 France 3 telecast is held in the archives of the Institut National Audiovisuel in Paris.

12. The memory of the 1936 sit-down strikes is evoked in a key segment of the film where Jean Fournier joins his brother and other workers on the dock for lunch. In the discussion of the strike's merits, Jean acknowledges that the it will create difficulties for all ("Of course it will be hard, and it will become even harder"), which prompts other workers in the group to point to the events of May-June 1936, recalling: "Yes, we all participated, and things changed . . . yes, back in '36. . . ." As the conversation trails off, the memory of the hard-won reforms that resulted from the mass strikes fifteen years earlier seems to buttress support for the strike action for Jean Fournier is advocating.

13. Carpita, P. (Director). *Le Rendez-vous des quais*. Marseille: Groupe de réalisations cinématographiques de Marseilles, 1990.

14. See note # 9.

15. See Burch and Sellier's *La Drôle de guerre des sexes dans le cinéma français, 1930–1956*, (Paris: Nathan, 1996), 237–238. The handful of films Tangui Perron analyzes would also stand as exceptions to this general rule. See note #6.

16. For a listing of these prewar films, several of which were banned by the Third Republic beginning in July 1939 and many more by Vichy in July 1940, see Jean-Luc Douin's *Dictionnaire de la censure au cinéma*, (Paris, Presses Universitaires de France: 1998), 190–94.

17. *La Marche du siècle*, *Ibid.*

18. Burch and Sellier, *Ibid.*, 245–77.

19. *Ibid.*, 50.

20. See Henry Roussio, *Le Syndrome de Vichy de 1944 à nos jours* (Paris: Seuil, 1987), 42–55.

21. “Jaune” (yellow) is the French slang equivalent of “scab.”

22. For a further discussion of the political significance of this character, see note #8.

23. Burch and Sellier, *Ibid.*, 250.

24. “F.L.N.” signified Le Front National de la Libération (The National Liberation Front).

25. See Vernet, *Ibid.*, 102, and Jean-Pierre Rioux's commentary on the *La Marche du siècle* telecast.