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Made in U.S.A. (Jean-Luc Godard, 1966).





13

The French New Wave, or *Nouvelle Vague*, and Its Native Context

The Occupation and Postwar Cinema

During the German Occupation of France, from 1940 to 1944—when Feyder, Renoir, Duvivier, and Clair were all in exile—a new generation of French directors emerged, most of whom had worked as scriptwriters or assistants under the leading figures of poetic realism in the 1930s.

Claude Autant-Lara (1901–2000), who had worked as a designer for Marcel L'Herbier and as an assistant to Clair, directed a number of sophisticated period films during the Occupation, but his critical reputation rests most firmly on a series of stylish literary adaptations written by Jean Aurenche (1904–1992) and Pierre Bost (1901–1975) that he made in the postwar era—especially *Le diable au corps* (*The Devil in the Flesh*, 1947) and *L'auberge rouge* (*The Red Inn*, 1951). Writing as a team, Aurenche and Bost became specialists in tightly scripted films; they also worked closely with the director René Clément (1913–1996), whose first film had been a neorealist account of the activities of the French Resistance, *La bataille du rail* (*The Battle of the Rails*, 1946).



Clément also co-directed *La belle et la bête* (*Beauty and the Beast*, 1946) with playwright Jean Cocteau and made the suspenseful anti-Nazi thriller *Les maudits* (*The Damned*, 1947). Yet his two greatest films of the postwar era, both written by Aurenche and Bost, were the poetic antiwar drama *Jeux interdits* (*Forbidden Games*, 1952) and a strikingly evocative adaptation of Zola's *L'assommoir*, titled *Gervaise* (1956). These films won multiple international awards, as did Clément's comic masterpiece *Monsieur Ripois* (*The Knave of Hearts*), shot in England in 1954. Afterward, Clément turned to big-budget international co-productions, most of them distinctly mediocre.

Jean Grémillon (1902–1959), who had made important films in the silent era, produced his greatest work during the Occupation—*Lumière d'été* (1943), a Renoiresque portrait of the decadent French ruling classes, written by Jacques Prévert; and *Le ciel est à vous* (English title: *The Woman Who Dared*, 1944), a beautiful film about a provincial woman who breaks the world record for long-distance flying with the help of her husband and the people of her town. After the war, Grémillon turned to the documentary but continued to exercise great influence on French cinema as president of the Cinémathèque Française.

Jean Cocteau (1889–1963), who had confined himself to writing scripts during the Occupation, returned to filmmaking in the postwar years. Perhaps more than any other figure, he incarnated the literary tendency of French cinema during this period. In 1946, he wrote and co-directed (with Clément) an enchantingly beautiful version of the Flemish fairy tale *La belle et la bête* (*Beauty and the Beast*) in a visual style based on the paintings of Vermeer; it stands today as perhaps the greatest example of the cinema of the fantastic in the history of film. With *Orphée* (1950), a modern version of the Orpheus legend, Cocteau returned to the surreal, psychomythic regions of *Le sang d'un poète* (*Blood of a Poet*, 1930) to create his most brilliant film. He adapted his play *Les enfants terribles* (*The Terrible Children*, directed by Jean-Pierre Melville) for the screen in 1950 and gave the cinema his final artistic statement in *Le testament d'Orphée* (*The Testament of Orpheus*, 1959), a surrealist fable that is replete with personal symbols and that attempts to suggest the relationships among poetry, myth, death, and the unconscious.

(left) Jean Marais and Josette Day in *La belle et la bête* (*Beauty and the Beast*; Jean Cocteau, 1946).

Jacques Becker (1906–1960) is another figure who emerged during the Occupation and came to prominence in the postwar years. As assistant to Renoir from 1931 to 1939, Becker tended to direct films that cut across the traditional class barriers of French society. Yet Becker's masterpiece is unquestionably *Casque d'or* (*Golden Helmet/Golden Marie*, 1952), a visually sumptuous tale of doomed love set in turn-of-the-century Paris and written by Becker himself. Cast in the form of a period gangster film and based on historical fact, *Casque d'or* is a work of great formal beauty whose visual texture evokes the films of Feuillade and engravings from La Belle Époque. *Touchez pas au grisbi* (English title: *Honor among Thieves*, 1954), adapted from an Albert Simonin novel, is a sophisticated tale of rivalry between contemporary Montmartre gangs; it started the vogue for gangster films and thrillers that typified French cinema in the late 1950s, for instance, Jules Dassin's *Rififi* (1955). After making three commissioned films of uneven quality, Becker directed, shortly before his death in 1960, his final masterpiece, *Le trou* (*The Hole/The Night Watch*, 1960)—a restrained exploration of loyalty, freedom, and human dignity, set entirely in a prison cell where five men plot an ill-fated escape.

Another important director whose career began during the Occupation was Henri-Georges Clouzot (1907–1977), a former scriptwriter for E. A. Dupont and Anatole Litvak at UFA. Clouzot's first feature was unremarkable, but his second, *Le corbeau* (*The Raven*, 1943), established him as the chief progenitor of French film noir. This darkly pessimistic tale of a town destroyed by poison-pen letters is a masterpiece of psychological suspense, but because it was produced by the Nazi-owned Continental Corporation and seemed to be anti-French (although it was actually simply misanthropic), both Clouzot and his co-scenarist, Louis Chavance (1907–1979), were accused of collaboration and briefly suspended from the French film industry after the Liberation. In fact, Clouzot was apolitical, but his films typically dealt with the brutal, the sordid, and the neurotic, and his entire career was marked by an aura of scandal.

With *Le salaire de la peur* (*The Wages of Fear*, 1953), he created a masterpiece of unrelenting alienation in a film about a group of down-and-out expatriates trapped in a miserable South American town who are driven by despair and greed to undertake the suicidal mission of hauling a truckload of nitroglycerine through a dense jungle for an American oil company. Always a meticulous and professional craftsman in the French studio tradition, Clouzot became increasingly erratic as the 1950s progressed. The film that confirmed his



1



2

[1] Simone Signoret in *Casque d'or* (*Golden Helmet/Golden Marie*; Jacques Becker, 1952). [2] Charles Vanel and Yves Montand in *Le salaire de la peur* (*The Wages of Fear*; Henri-George Clouzot, 1953).

international reputation, *Les diaboliques* (*Diabolique*, 1955), is a brilliantly manipulative exercise in horrific suspense involving a complicated murder plot in a boarding school. Like Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, it was adapted from a novel by Pierre Boileau and Thomas Narcejac.

Robert Bresson and Jacques Tati

Except for film noir, the prevailing mode of postwar French cinema was literary adaptation, which caused French films to become increasingly verbal and theatrical. It was against this tendency—identified as “the tradition of quality” (“*la tradition de la qualité*”) by François Truffaut and the other critics writing in *Cahiers du cinéma*—that the New Wave reacted in the late 1950s and the 1960s. In fact, the war had not produced a break with cinematic traditions in France, as it had in Italy and other European nations, except for the innovative work of Robert Bresson and Jacques Tati.

Robert Bresson (1907–1999), a former scriptwriter, was the more important of the two. His two Occupation films—*Les anges du péché* (*The Angels of Sin*, 1943), written with the playwright Jean Giraudoux, and *Les dames du bois de Boulogne* (*The Ladies of the Bois de Boulogne*, 1945), freely adapted by Bresson and Jean Cocteau from a story by the eighteenth-century writer Denis Diderot—established Bresson as a serious and disciplined artist within the “scenarist,” or literary, tradition of French cinema. Yet in *Le journal d'un curé de campagne* (*Diary of a Country Priest*, 1951), Bresson displayed a highly personalized style whose psychological realism is predicated on an absolute austerity of acting, dialogue, and mise-en-scène.

All of Bresson's later films display this austerity and precision of style, which has led some critics to call him a classicist, although he preferred to be thought of as a realist practicing close to the borderline of abstraction. His masterpiece, *Un condamné à mort s'est échappé* (*A Man Escaped*, 1956), concerns the arrest, escape, and recapture of a young Resistance fighter during the Occupation, and it takes place almost entirely in the condemned man's cell. Most of Bresson's subsequent films—for example, *Pickpocket* (1959), *Le procès de Jeanne d'Arc* (*The Trial of Joan of Arc*, 1961), *Au hasard Balthazar* (1966), and *Mouchette* (1967)—were derived from literary sources and dealt with humanist themes.

Jacques Tati (b. Jacques Tatischeff, 1908–1982), a former music-hall entertainer and pantomimist, became one of international cinema's great comic talents in the postwar era, rivaling such masters of the silent film as Max Linder, Charlie Chaplin, and

Buster Keaton. In his first feature, *Jour de fête* (*Big Day/The Village Fair*, 1949), which took him several years to complete, Tati plays a French postman who is persuaded by a documentary into employing sophisticated American postal-service technology in his small village, with disastrous results. As in all of Tati's films, the humor, which is largely visual, is achieved through scrupulous planning and brilliant mime. In *Les vacances de M. Hulot* (*Mr. Hulot's Holiday*, 1953), Tati created a new comic character, Mr. Hulot, a vague, wacky, middle-class Frenchman who goes to spend his holiday at a seaside resort in Brittany. Hulot's misadventures there are represented to us as a series of meticulously worked-out sight gags, in which things simply “happen” to the character with no particular logic or cause.

With *Mon oncle* (*My Uncle*, 1958), his first film in color, Tati turned to the more serious vein of satire. Here, Hulot's traditional and somewhat archaic lifestyle in an old quarter of Paris is contrasted with the antiseptic and mechanistic environment of his brother-in-law, Arpel, who lives in an ultramodern house in the city's new suburban wasteland and works as an executive in a plastics factory. The humanistic impact of the satire is not unlike that of René Clair's *À nous la liberté* (1931) or Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936), although its appeal is totally unsentimental.

Tati's next film, *Playtime* (1967), took him three years to complete and was shot in color and 70mm Panavision with five-track stereophonic sound. Using



Alain Bécourt and Jacques Tati in *Mon oncle* (*My Uncle*; Jacques Tati, 1958).



(left) Claude Laydu and Nicole Ladmiral in *Le journal d'un curé de campagne* (*Diary of a Country Priest*; Robert Bresson, 1951).

the full resources of the widescreen format to create spectator involvement, Tati offers in *Playtime* a series of quietly humorous vignettes about a group of American tourists who come to see the “real” Paris and end up experiencing a space-age city of steel, glass, chrome, and plastic. Widely regarded today as a modernist masterpiece, it is a film not of belly laughs, but of sustained, intelligent humor, and it clearly represents Tati’s finest achievement. Yet *Playtime* was a multimillion-dollar commercial failure, and because he had financed it himself, the director was nearly bankrupted by it. To recoup his losses, Tati made *Traffic* (*Traffic*, 1971), a minor Hulot film that comments on the auto mania of modern industrial society. A painstaking craftsman who planned every detail of his films far in advance of production, Tati made only five features in his entire career. Nevertheless, he was a master cinematic humorist, whose concept of comedy was almost purely visual, and he deserves to be ranked with the greatest of the silent comedians for the breadth of his humanity and the restrained brilliance of his comic achievement.

Max Ophüls

Another major figure working in French cinema in the 1950s, and one who had a profound influence on the New Wave generation that succeeded him, was Max Ophüls (b. Max Oppenheimer, 1902–1957). Ophüls was a German Jew who had directed films for UFA between 1930 and Hitler’s rise to power in 1933. For the next seven years, he made films in Italy, the Netherlands, and France, where he ultimately became a citizen in 1938. Ophüls was forced to flee to Hollywood when France fell to the Nazis in 1940, and after four years of anonymity, he was finally able to make a series of stylish melodramas for Paramount: *The Exile* (1947), *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948), *Caught* (1949), and *The Reckless Moment* (1949), which are among his very best films. Returning to France in 1949, Ophüls entered the period of his greatest creativity, making four elegant, masterful films in succession between 1950 and 1955—*La ronde*, *Le plaisir*, *Madame de . . .*, and *Lola Montès*. Ophüls had always worked within the studio system, so the subject matter of his films, often light and operettalike, was never as important to him as visual style. And it is for their dazzling

mise-en-scène that Ophüls’s last four films, all photographed by the great French cameraman Christian Matras (1903–1977), are most remarkable.

La ronde (1950) is an adaptation of an Arthur Schnitzler play set in turn-of-the-century Vienna. Its ten separate episodes posit that love is a perpetual roundabout, in which one partner is regularly exchanged for another until the pattern comes full circle, like the movements of a waltz, only to begin again. This unbroken circle of affairs is presided over by a master of ceremonies who manipulates and comments on the behavior of the characters, becoming a surrogate for Ophüls himself. *Le plaisir* (English title: *House of Pleasure*, 1952) is derived from three Maupassant stories, linked by a narrator; they illustrate the theme that pleasure may be easy to come by, but happiness is not. Like all of Ophüls’s work, the film is marked by meticulous attention to period detail and by an incessantly moving camera. In one famous sequence, the camera circles the exterior of a brothel time and time again, never entering the set but peering voyeuristically through windows at significant dramatic actions taking place within.

In *Madame de . . .* (English title: *The Earrings of Madame de . . .*, 1953), also set at the turn of the century, Ophüls constructs yet another circular narrative that rotates around a central axis of vanity, frivolity, and lust. Here, the passage of a pair of earrings from a husband to his wife to the husband’s mistress to the wife’s lover and finally back to the husband again constitutes a single perfect revolution in the roundabout of infidelity. The characters are ultimately shallow because everything in *Madame de . . .* is subordinate to its aesthetic design. As if to mirror the movement of the waltzes on the sound track, the camera whirls and pirouettes continuously to follow the film’s principals through its glittering period decor, suggesting that life is itself a kind of waltz in which all of us are caught up while the music plays.

Lola Montès (1955) is generally considered to be Ophüls’s masterpiece, the consummation of his life’s work. Conceived by its producers as a big-budget superspectacle in Eastmancolor and CinemaScope with an international cast of stars, it was based on the scandalous life of a mediocre nineteenth-century dancer who became the mistress of the composer Franz Liszt and, during the revolutions of 1848, of Ludwig I, deposed king of Bavaria. She finally ended as a circus performer, selling kisses to earn her keep. Ophüls cared nothing for the subject, remarking of Lola herself, “Her role is roughly the same as that of our pair of earrings in *Madame de . . .*” That is, he merely used her





Martine Carol (center) in *Lola Montès* (Max Ophüls, 1955).

story to create a dazzling exercise in visual style. This was one of the most intricate, opulent, and elaborate films to appear on the French screen since Abel Gance's *Napoléon* (1927).

Ironically, Ophüls was initially opposed to the use of CinemaScope, but his sense of visual patterning was such that he turned *Lola Montès* into a stunning exhibition of composition for the widescreen frame. He frequently broke the horizontal space of the screen with vertical dominants and framed shots through arches, columns, and drapery. He learned to compose close-ups by balancing both sides of the frame, and at other times—as during the circus scenes—he would fill the entire CinemaScope frame with significant dramatic action. The film begins and ends within the circus tent, where the ringmaster introduces Lola's act by recalling the circumstances of her past life, which is then represented on the screen in a series of a chronological flashbacks. Ophüls uses color nonnaturalistically throughout the film, especially in these flashback sequences, where each is tinted according to its prevailing emotional tone. Finally, the camera seems never to stop its circular tracking around some invisible axis, in or out of the tent, making the circularity of things seen on the screen a metaphor for life itself. As critic Andrew Sarris has remarked, "With Ophüls it is movement itself that is emphasized rather than its terminal points of rest."

The key to Ophüls's style is his mastery of the long take and, especially, of the continuously moving

camera. Ophüls was also a genius at composition within the frame, and the influence on him of both German Expressionism and French pictorial impressionism was profound. In his passion for decor and his obsession with the sensuous surfaces of reality, Ophüls most closely resembles Josef von Sternberg. In his cynicism and worldly wit, he is close to Ernst Lubitsch. That his films are devoid of content—a charge frequently leveled against both von Sternberg and Lubitsch—is quite true, if we mean by the term *verbal* or *conceptual* substance. Yet as the New Wave generation was to argue and to demonstrate time and again, the substance of cinema is *audiovisual*, not verbal, and it exists on a level of discourse—similar to that of the circular tracking shots in *Lola Montès*—where perception and conceptualization become one.

Influence of the Fifties Documentary Movement and Independent Production

By 1955, French commercial cinema was approaching stagnation because many filmmakers who had emerged during the Occupation were firmly ensconced within the studio system or working on big-budget spectacles and international co-productions. The cinematic individualism of Bresson and Tati, and also of Cocteau, offered the succeeding generation of French directors examples of how film could be used as a medium of personal expression, and Ophüls had forecast the possibility of a purely audiovisual language for the screen. Yet the most important stylistic influences on this next

(left) Simone Simon in *Le plaisir* (English title: *House of Pleasure*; Max Ophüls, 1952).

generation of filmmakers came from the French documentary movement of the 1950s, which was their training ground, and from the films of independent directors working outside the studio system of production.

The documentary movement can be said to have begun in 1946 with Georges Rouquier's *Farrebique*, a lyrical feature-length documentary about peasant life on a farm spanning the four seasons. Jean Grémillon and Roger Leenhardt both made countless short documentaries during the 1950s on art and on the lives of great men. Yet the master of French documentary cinema during this period was Georges Franju (1912–1987), a totally original filmmaker who was deeply influenced by German Expressionism and has often been called a surrealist.

Franju had been working in cinema since 1937, when he made a 16mm amateur film with Henri Langlois. However, his first major film was *Le sang des bêtes* (*The Blood of the Beasts*, 1949), a brutally graphic documentary short about the daily activity of a slaughterhouse in a quiet Parisian suburb, whose butchery was made deliberately resonant of the horrors of the Nazi death camps. In *Hôtel des invalides*, possibly his finest film,

Franju turned an ostensibly objective account of the French War Museum into a devastating antiwar statement by exposing the human suffering that underlies the myths of heroism and glory enshrined by that institution. In 1958, Franju directed his first feature, *La tête contre les murs* (English title: *The Keepers*), a half-documentary, half-surrealistic account of a sane man who is committed to a French lunatic asylum; the film is often cited as a forerunner of the New Wave. Similarly influential is *Les yeux sans visage* (*Eyes without a Face*, 1959; released in the United States cut and dubbed as *The Horror Chamber of Dr. Faustus*), about a mad doctor who kidnaps young girls in a futile effort to graft their faces onto his daughter's disfigured one; it is regarded today as a landmark in modern horror.

Alain Resnais (b. 1922), whose first feature, *Hiroshima, mon amour* (1959), became the clarion call of the New Wave, was another important figure in the French documentary movement. He made documentary shorts for the first eleven years of his career, beginning with a series of films about art—*Van Gogh* (1948), *Gauguin* (1950), *Guernica* (1950)—and progressing to *Nuit et brouillard* (*Night and Fog*, 1955), a profoundly





Jean-Louis Trintignant and Brigitte Bardot in *Et Dieu créa la femme* (*And God Created Woman*; Roger Vadim, 1956).

disturbing meditation on the horrors of the Nazi death camps and on the way time and memory affect our perception of them, written by Jean Cayrol with an original score by Hanns Eisler.

Toute la mémoire du monde (*The Memory of the World*, 1956), a study of the books “imprisoned” in the French National Library, has a similar temporal theme, as do most of Resnais’s features. Other figures associated with the documentary short were Chris Marker, who would later organize the radical cooperative La Société pour le Lancement des Oeuvres Nouvelles (SLON) for the production of *Loin du Vietnam* (*Far from Vietnam*, 1967), and the ethnographic filmmaker Jean Rouch, who invented the term *cinéma vérité* by translating Dziga Vertov’s *kino-pravda* into French for his *Chronique d’un été* (*Chronicle of a Summer*, 1961; co-produced with Edgar Morin).

The example of independent production outside of the traditional studio system was another important influence on the emergent New Wave generation. Jean-Pierre Melville (b. Jean-Pierre Grumbach, 1917–1973) was a vastly significant figure in this regard. A lover of cinema from an early age, Melville founded his own production company in 1945. His first feature, *Le silence de la mer* (*The Silence of the Sea*, 1947), earned him the admiration of Cocteau, who commissioned him to direct *Les enfants terribles* in 1949. The commercial success of *Quand tu liras cette lettre* (*When You Read This Letter*, 1953) allowed Melville to purchase

his own studio and move into totally independent production. The result was the much-admired gangster film *Bob le flambeur* (1955), a highly personalized work whose production methods—location shooting, small crew, use of unknown actors (all borrowed, of course, from neorealism)—became the model for New Wave filmmakers. Melville’s work itself became increasingly commercial after he directed *Léon Morin, prêtre* (*Léon Morin, Priest*, 1961), a star vehicle for Jean-Paul Belmondo, but his fascination with the iconography of the American gangster film and the underworld of urban crime caused him to produce a trilogy of popular gangster films in the 1960s that are among the most admired in the genre—*Le doulos* (*The Finger Man*, 1962), *Le deuxième souffle* (*Second Breath*, 1966), and *Le samouraï* (*The Samurai*, 1967).

Another independent production that foretold the New Wave—and that some critics have called its first manifestation—is Agnès Varda’s *La Pointe-Courte* (1955). This film, about the dissolution and reconstruction of a marriage, is set against the backdrop of a small fishing village and was produced by a collective of crew and actors. It was edited by Alain Resnais and is considered to be a direct antecedent of his own *Hiroshima, mon amour* (1959). The drama of the husband and the wife is highly stylized and “literary,” but the day-to-day life of the village is presented in semi-documentary form.

It was the early films of Roger Vadim (1928–2000), however, that contributed most to the economic development of the New Wave. The spectacular commercial success of his independently produced first feature, *Et Dieu créa la femme* (*And God Created Woman*, 1956),

(left) Shoes of the deported, gassed, and incinerated in *Nuit et brouillard* (*Night and Fog*; Alain Resnais, 1955).

demonstrated to the stagnant French film industry that young directors and new themes could attract large audiences. A visually sumptuous production in widescreen and color, *Et Dieu créa la femme* was a sensitive examination of the vagaries of amoral youth set against the luxurious background of St. Tropez. It starred Vadim's wife, Brigitte Bardot, and featured a number of explicit love scenes, which made it an international hit. In subsequent films, such as *Les liaisons dangereuses* (*Dangerous Liaisons*, 1959), Vadim's commercialism and exploitativeness increased, but he remained an impeccable craftsman and an elegant stylist of the widescreen color film. Moreover, it was Vadim, more than any other single figure in French cinema, who opened the doors of the industry to his generation of filmmakers and provided the economic justification for the New Wave.

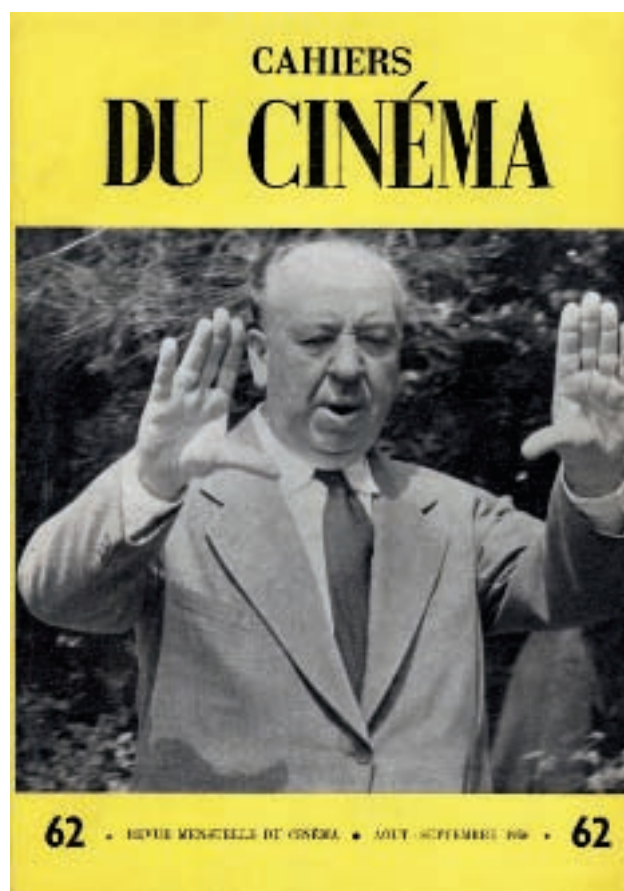
Theory: Astruc, Bazin, Auteurism, and *Cahiers du cinéma*

The theoretical justification for the New Wave cinema came from another source: the film critic Alexandre Astruc (b. 1923), who published a highly influential article in *L'écran française* in March 1948 on the concept of the *caméra-stylo*, which would permit the cinema “to become a means of expression as supple and subtle as that of written language” and would therefore accord filmmakers the status of authors, or *auteurs*. Astruc's notion was to break away from the tyranny of narrative in order to evolve a new form of audiovisual language. He wrote, “The fundamental problem of the cinema is how to express thought. The creation of this language has preoccupied all the theoreticians and writers in the history of cinema, from Eisenstein down to the scriptwriters and adaptors of the sound cinema.”

Like Bazin, Astruc questioned the values of classical montage and was an apostle of the long take, as exemplified in the work of Murnau. Astruc was succeeded as a theorist by the vastly influential journal *Cahiers du cinéma* (literally, “cinema notebooks”), founded in 1951 by André Bazin (1918–1958) and Jacques Doniol-Valcroze (1920–1989), which gathered about it a group of young critics—François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Claude Chabrol, Jacques Rivette, and Eric Rohmer—who were to become the leading directors of the **New Wave**. These young men were *cinéphiles*, or “film lovers.” They had grown up in the postwar years

watching great American films of the past and present decades (many available for the first time only when the German Occupation ended), as well as classical French films at the amazing **Cinémathèque Française** in Paris, the magnificent film archive and public theater founded in 1936 by Georges Franju and Henri Langlois to promote cinema study and cinema culture in France and throughout the world. During the Occupation, Langlois kept the enterprise in operation secretly at great personal risk, and afterward, through André Malraux, minister of culture, he obtained a large government subsidy for it.

Today, the Cinémathèque is the largest public film archive in the world, housing more than 50,000 films, three theaters, and a museum in the Palais de Chaillot devoted entirely to film history. It was Langlois who preserved the works of Griffith, Keaton, Gance, Vigo, and Renoir for the postwar generation of *cinéphiles*, and introduced them to the then unrecognized genius of directors such as Ingmar Bergman and the great Japanese masters Akira Kurosawa and Yasujiro Ozu. Under Langlois's tutelage, these young men came to



Alfred Hitchcock on the August–September 1956 cover of *Cahiers du cinéma*.

love film and desperately wanted to become filmmakers themselves, but found French commercial cinema inaccessible to them because of the powerful influence exerted by the trade unions. Because they knew more about film than any other generation in history, based on the experience of actual viewing, they became critics and theorists instead.

The *Cahiers* critics had two basic principles. The first, deriving from Bazin, was a rejection of montage aesthetics in favor of *mise-en-scène*, the long take, and composition in depth. *Mise-en-scène*, the “placing-in-the-scene,” is probably best defined as the creation of mood and ambience, though it more literally means structuring the film through camera placement and movement, blocking the action, directing the actors, and so on—in other words, everything that takes place on the set prior to the editing process. Integral to the concept of *mise-en-scène* is the notion that film should be not merely an intellectual or rational experience, but an emotional and psychological one as well.

The second tenet of the *Cahiers* critics, derived from Astruc, was the idea of personal authorship that François Truffaut expressed in a 1954 essay titled “Une certaine tendance du cinéma français” (“A Certain Tendency in French Cinema”) as *la politique des auteurs*. This “policy of authors,” christened “the auteur theory” by the American critic Andrew Sarris, states that film should ideally be a medium of personal artistic expression and that the best films are therefore those that most clearly bear their maker’s “signature”—the stamp of his or her individual personality, controlling obsessions, and cardinal themes. The implicit assumption was that with each successive film, an auteur grows increasingly proficient and mature in vision, an assumption that is not always borne out by fact.

Truffaut’s essay, which appeared in *Cahiers du cinéma* (no. 31) for January 1954, began by attacking the postwar “tradition of quality”—that is, the commercial scenarist tradition of Aurenche and Bost, Spaak, and directors such as Clair, Clément, Clouzot, Autant-Lara, Cayatte, and Yves Allégret, with its heavy emphasis on plot and dialogue. The key figure in this literary/theatrical cinema was the scriptwriter, the director being merely “the gentleman who added the pictures.” To these *littérateurs* and their *cinéma de papa*, Truffaut counterposed *un cinéma d’auteurs*, in the work of such French writer-directors as Gance, Vigo, Renoir, Cocteau, Becker, Bresson, and Ophüls, and of numerous American directors—both major and minor—who had somehow managed to make personal statements, despite the restrictions imposed on them by the studio system. Some of the American

choices, such as Welles, Hitchcock, Hawks, Lang, Ford, Nicholas Ray, and Anthony Mann—all masters of *mise-en-scène*—made perfect sense. Others, such as Jerry Lewis, Otto Preminger, and Roger Corman, were based less on the quality of their films than on evidence of their personal directorial control. And the unquestioning allegiance that the *Cahiers* group gave to the figures in its pantheon made many skeptics wonder whether one form of ironclad dogmatism had not simply been exchanged for another.

Yet for all of its deficiencies (and a proneness to fanaticism and cultism seems to be a major one), the auteur theory does offer a valuable schematic model for interpreting the filmmaking process and goes some way toward solving a very basic methodological problem of film criticism: that is, to whom or what does one attribute cinematic creation? Furthermore, the *Cahiers* critics were able to partly vindicate the auteur theory by becoming filmmakers themselves and practicing it.

The New Wave’s challenge to the “tradition of quality” was economic, as well as aesthetic. Under the system that prevailed from 1953 to 1959, government aid was awarded to productions by the Centre National de la Cinématographie (CNC, founded in 1946) on the basis of reputation, so potential directors needed an established record of success, and very few new people could hope to enter the industry. In 1959, however, the laws relating to aid for film productions were changed to allow first films to be funded by the state on the basis of a submitted script alone, enabling hundreds of new filmmakers to become their own producers and creating the economic context for the New Wave. Moreover, the international commercial success of films such as *Les quatre cents coups*, which was produced for \$75,000 and brought in \$500,000 for its American distribution rights alone, dramatically increased the number of private producers willing to finance new work. Thus, for a while at least, until the failures mounted, Truffaut’s concept of *un cinéma d’auteurs* was realized in France by placing the control of the conception of a film in the same hands that controlled the actual production.

The New Wave (*Nouvelle Vague*): First Films

The first films of this “new wave” of French directors were independently produced dramatic shorts, many of them shot in 16mm and subsequently blown up for 35mm exhibition. Yet the first feature-length

success of the New Wave is generally acknowledged to have been Claude Chabrol's first film, *Le beau serge* (*The Handsome Serge/Bitter Reunion*, 1958), although Varda's *La Pointe-Courte* preceded it by three years. While still a *Cahiers* critic, Chabrol (1930–2010) shot *Le beau serge*, about the rehabilitation of a village drunkard, on location with funds provided by a small inheritance. The success of *Le beau serge* enabled Chabrol to follow it with *Les cousins* (*The Cousins*, 1959), an ironic study of sexual intrigue and murder set against the backdrop of Parisian student life.

The year 1959 was the annus mirabilis for the New Wave, because three of the main figures of the movement released their first features. François Truffaut's *Les quatre cents coups* (*The 400 Blows*), made for \$75,000 with a loan from his father-in-law when the director was twenty-seven years old, is a lyrical but wholly unsentimental account of an adolescent delinquent, shot on location in Paris. Dedicated to the memory of André Bazin (who died on the second day of shooting) and photographed in Dyaliscope (a French version of CinemaScope) by the talented New Wave cinematographer Henri Decaë (1915–1987), the film is

consciously evocative of Vigo's *Zéro de conduite* (1933). It won the prize for Best Direction at Cannes in the year of its release, as well as the New York Film Critics Circle Award for Best Foreign Film in 1959. It was also the first film in Truffaut's Antoine Doinel series, a kind of continuing cinematic autobiography starring Jean-Pierre L  aud (b. 1944), an actor who physically resembled Truffaut.

More remarkable in structure and theme was Alain Resnais's first feature, *Hiroshima, mon amour* (1959), which, like *Nuit et brouillard*, examines the relationship between time and memory in the context of a terrible atrocity. With a brilliant script by the novelist Marguerite Duras (who was to become an important director herself in the 1970s) and cinematography by Sacha Vierny (1919–2001), the film concerns a love affair between a French actress working in Hiroshima and a Japanese architect, in the course of which both recall their memories of the past war in Asia and Europe. Resnais maintains the counterpoint between present and past by continuously shifting narrative modes from objective to subjective and, in several extraordinary sequences, by combining dramatic footage of the





Emmanuelle Riva and Eiji Okada in *Hiroshima, mon amour* (Alain Resnais, 1959).

couple making love with documentary footage of the aftermath of the Hiroshima blast. *Hiroshima, mon amour*, like *Les quatre cents coups*, was a great commercial success and conferred further prestige on the New Wave by winning the New York Film Critics Circle Award for Best Foreign Film in 1960.

The third important New Wave film of 1959, Jean-Luc Godard's *À bout de souffle* (*Breathless*), was in many ways the most characteristic and influential film of the movement. *Breathless*, which was written by Godard after a story by Truffaut and shot by cinematographer Raoul Coutard (b. 1924) in four weeks for less than \$90,000, is dedicated to Monogram Pictures, one of the larger American B-film studios of the 1930s and the 1940s, which were famous for their ability to turn out tightly paced films on short shooting schedules and poverty-line budgets. This was precisely the ideal of the New Wave (or, at least, of its dominant *Cahiers* branch), but instead of making cheap films in order to make a quick profit, the New Wave directors

made cheap films in order to be able to make films at all, because their productions were necessarily independent of the industry. (Happily, many of the first New Wave films, including *Breathless*, made a great deal of money, which temporarily ensured the future of the movement.)

Modeled on the American gangster film in a simultaneous spirit of parody and homage, *Breathless* is about an amoral young thug on the run who is finally betrayed to the police by his American girlfriend (deliberate shades of *Pépé le moko* [1937] and *Quai des brumes* [1938]), and it contains virtually every major technical characteristic of the New Wave film. These include the use of shaky, **handheld** 35mm camera shots; location shooting; natural lighting; improvised plot and dialogue; and **direct sound** recording on location with portable tape machines that were electronically synchronized with the camera.

Yet the most important technical characteristic of the New Wave film was its jagged, elliptical style of editing, which employed a high percentage of jump cuts within and mismatches between scenes in order to destroy the spatial and temporal continuity of the viewing experience. As *Breathless* begins, for example,

(left) Jean-Pierre Léaud in *Les quatre cents coups* (*The 400 Blows*; François Truffaut, 1959).



Jean-Paul Belmondo and Jean Seberg in *À bout de souffle* (*Breathless*; Jean-Luc Godard, 1959).

we witness the following sequence of events: Michel, the young hood, steals a car in Paris with the help of his French mistress and speeds out into the countryside alone; at high speed, he passes several other vehicles on his side of the road; he briefly contemplates picking up two female hitchhikers; and, to occupy the time, he talks to himself and to the audience about a variety of subjects. Next, he passes a large truck at a road construction site and suddenly finds himself pursued by two motorcycle cops; he pulls off the road into a small wooded area and pretends to be having car trouble. One cop passes him by, the second spots him and pulls into the wood. At this point, Michel reaches into the car, grabs a revolver, and guns down the cop. He then flees across an open field and hitchhikes back to Paris. In a conventional commercial film of the day—French, American, British, or Italian—this sequence would have been rendered in many separate shots fully depicting each of the actions. In *Breathless*, the whole sequence is conveyed in only several brief shots: alternating close-ups of Michel and his mistress on a Paris street; a quick take of the car theft at eye level; medium-close shots, taken from the passenger's seat, of Michel driving the car; medium-long shots, which pass away rapidly through the windshield, of the road and later the hitchhikers; a shot of the motorcycle cops appearing in the rearview mirror, followed by one of Michel pulling off the road and opening the hood of his car as the cop discovers him; an extreme close-up of the revolver, followed by a medium-long shot of the murder; a long shot of Michel running across a

field; and a medium shot of him arriving in Paris as a passenger in the backseat of an unidentified car. Later in the film, Godard begins many scenes with a huge disorienting close-up and only later cuts, or pulls his camera back, to reveal the context of the action—which completely reversed conventional practice of the day.

Most radical of all, however, was Godard's use of the jump cut, in which a section of a single continuous shot is eliminated and then what remains is spliced together, creating a completely nonnaturalistic ellipsis in the action and calling attention to the director's power to manipulate all aspects of his medium. This radical elimination of transitional scenes (of what Hollywood calls **establishing shots**—medium or long shots of exteriors that indicate changes in dramatic space), and even of continuity *within* the shot itself, was thought extremely confusing when Godard and his peers first practiced it on a large scale. Yet it is no more than a logical extension of the discoveries of Méliès, Porter, and Griffith, that cinematic narrative is by its nature *discontinuous* or, as Eisenstein discovered, that spatial and temporal continuity in the cinema resides not on the screen but in the viewer's mind as it makes the connections that the images on the screen, by their arrangement, suggest.

The New Wave: Origins of Style

These conventions, like all film conventions, sprang from two sources—theoretical conviction and material circumstances (not necessarily in that order). The material circumstances were these: the young directors of the New Wave were the first *film*-educated generation of filmmakers in history. They approached the cinema from the experience of having viewed almost the whole of its history at Langlois's Cinémathèque Française and from having written about it theoretically and critically in *Cahiers du cinéma* for nearly a decade. When they finally came to practice cinema, they knew more about the medium as an art form and less about the practical aspects of production than anyone who had ever made films before them. Consequently, they made many mistakes that their low budgets and tight shooting schedules would not permit them to correct. Like the Soviet filmmakers during the film-stock shortage that followed the 1917 Revolution, the New Wave directors could not afford to retake shots, so they relied on elliptical editing to conceal technical

defects on the screen. Jump cuts, for example, were a means not only of creating perceptual dislocation in the audience, but also of restoring botched scenes by excising some actor's or cameraman's blunder from the middle of a take.

Yet there were sound theoretical reasons for the stylistic conventions of the New Wave, as well as budgetary ones. If location shooting with handheld cameras was inexpensive, it was also totally at odds with the fluid, studio-bound cinematography of the contemporary commercial film. If jagged editing and jump-cutting were useful in concealing defective footage, they also eliminated the smooth transitions that permit an audience to forget that it is watching a film—that is, a consciously crafted product of human imagination, rather than some “found” reality.

The psychological effect of these conventions—and they must be considered calculated effects by the directors, as well as functions of economic necessity—is to establish aesthetic distance between the audience

and the film. New Wave films constantly remind us that we are watching a film, and *not* the reality that a film inevitably resembles, by calling attention to their “filmicness”—that is, to their artificially created nature. The abrupt and, above all, obvious manipulation of our perception in these films, through the use of the jump cut, handheld cameras, and so forth, jolts us out of our conventional involvement with the narrative and our traditional identification with the characters, who are often less recognizable as characters than as actors playing characters. This is because New Wave cinema is, in a sense, self-reflexive cinema, or *metacinema*—film about the process and nature of film itself.

According to the New Wave *cinéastes* (loosely, “film artists”), the conventional cinema had too faithfully and for too long reproduced our normal way of seeing things through its studiously unobtrusive techniques. The invisible editing and imperturbably smooth camera styles of commercial cinema of the 1930s, the 1940s, the 1950s, and much of the 1960s were designed



Metacinema: François Truffaut and crew shooting *L'amour à vingt ans* (1962) on location.



Jean-Luc Godard (1965).

to draw the spectator's attention away from the fact that he or she was watching a consciously crafted artifact. Yet the disruptive editing and camera styles of the New Wave say to us constantly, "Look, there's a film being made right before your eyes," that whenever we watch a film, the process immediately beyond the borders of the frame is being controlled by a handful of artists.

The theoretical position of the New Wave filmmakers is therefore that film must constantly call attention to the process of its own making and to the medium's own unique language—thus, the unparalleled cinematic *éclat*, or explosiveness, of the New Wave, its emphasis on "magical" cinematic tricks such as the jump cut; the iris-in and iris-out, decelerated and accelerated motion; and optically violent camera movement—all devices of which film and no other medium is capable. In this sense, the New Wave represents a return to Méliès and his conspicuously cinematic brand of conjuring. On one hand, it envisions film as a special kind of magic that requires of its viewers a uniquely cinematic

way of seeing to comprehend. On the other hand, the New Wave reaches back equally to Lumière, because its most characteristic techniques are essentially documentary in practice. In fact, *cinéma vérité*, the chief documentary mode of the 1960s and the 1970s, constitutes an application of New Wave shooting and recording practices to real events, rather than staged ones.

Furthermore, Jean-Luc Godard, the most innovative and radical director to emerge from the New Wave, has virtually rejected narrative cinema in favor of cinematic "essays" on ideology and social praxis. New Wave cinema is aware of this paradox, because it is aware of its history and conscious of the mediating position it holds between the narrative and documentary traditions of Western film. The allusions to, and "quotations" from, films of the past (sometimes called *hommages*), with which New Wave films are replete, are no mere mannerisms, but rather testaments to the critical-historical cinematic consciousness out of which the movement grew.

Major New Wave Figures

The critical and commercial success of the New Wave in 1959 was so great that between 1960 and 1962, more than one hundred new French directors were able to find funding for their first features—an extraordinary thing in an industry formerly so conservative. In some cases, the director of a commercial hit, such as Godard or Truffaut, would produce for a less fortunate friend. In many others, a French commercial studio would produce the movie, hoping to come up with a smash hit such as *Breathless* on a B-film budget. In fact, the climate of creative and commercial enthusiasm during these two years was such that virtually anyone with the will to do so could obtain financial backing to make a low-budget film, although many who turned to directing lacked either the talent or the discipline to bring their projects to a successful conclusion.

The commercial failures of the less talented began en masse in 1962, and by 1964, the studios had been so badly disappointed by well-intentioned amateurs that production money for first features was more difficult to raise than it had been in the 1950s. By this time, the New Wave as a collective phenomenon was over, and the French film industry had resumed

(right) Henri Serre, Oskar Werner, and Jeanne Moreau in *Jules et Jim* (François Truffaut, 1962).

its conventionally rigid contours. Yet French cinema continued to be dominated creatively by the handful of young *cinéastes* who had initiated the movement and who emerged from it as distinctly major figures—François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Alain Resnais, Claude Chabrol—and by a small group of sophisticated but less spectacular talents, such as Louis Malle, Eric Rohmer, Jacques Demy, Jacques Rivette, and Agnès Varda.

François Truffaut

François Truffaut (1932–1984), the most commercially successful of the post-New Wave group, was able to maintain his independence by forming his own production company, Les Films du Carrosse (1957), named in *hommage* to Renoir's *Le carrosse d'or* (1952). His main cinematic influences were the American B-film, film noir, and the work of Alfred Hitchcock and Jean Renoir. He followed *Les quatre cents coups* (1959) with what he called “a respectful tribute to the Hollywood B-film,” *Tirez sur le pianiste*

(*Shoot the Piano Player*, 1960), based on an American gangster thriller (*Down There*) by the novelist David Goodis. Criticized on its release for its radical shifts in mood from comedy to melodrama to tragedy and for the manipulateness of its disjointed narrative style, *Shoot the Piano Player* was nevertheless Truffaut's *Breathless*—a quintessentially New Wave film replete with bizarre visual puns, allusions to other films, a mixture or “explosion” of genres, and all of the self-reflexive anti-conventions of the movement. Like *Les quatre cents coups*, it was stunningly photographed by the innovative New Wave cinematographer Raoul Coutard in Dyaliscope.

Truffaut's third feature, *Jules et Jim* (1962), stands as a tribute to the influence of Renoir and the French lyrical tradition. As in Renoir's work, the basic themes of *Jules et Jim* are friendship and the impossibility of achieving true freedom in love (or, as Truffaut himself put it, “monogamy is impossible, but anything else is worse”). While it appropriately avoids the self-conscious pyrotechnics of *Shoot the Piano Player*, *Jules et Jim* is gorgeously composed and photographed in Franscope,



yet another version of CinemaScope, by Raoul Coutard and sustains its emotional lyricism through the unconventional use of telephoto zooms, slow motion, freeze frames, anamorphic distortion (of World War I combat footage), and even a helicopter shot.

After directing *Antoine et Colette*, also shot by Coutard in Franscope, for the anthology film *L'amour à vingt ans* (*Love at Twenty*, 1962), Truffaut produced in collaboration with this inventive cinematographer a restrained and sympathetic study of middle-aged adultery, *La peau douce* (*The Soft Skin*, 1964), which was marred by an overly melodramatic ending. His erratic adaptation of Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1966), Truffaut's first film in color and English, is generally regarded as a failure because it played down traditional science-fiction themes. Yet its portrait of a near-future society of emotionless, hedonistic people mindlessly tripped out on big-screen color television seems more than prophetic today, and Nicolas Roeg's cinematography is first-rate.

In 1967, Truffaut published a book-length interview with Alfred Hitchcock in which he demonstrated his reverence for the American director by comparing him not only to Griffith, Hawks, and Ford, but to Kafka, Dostoevsky, and Poe. Appropriately enough, Truffaut's next two features were conceived as direct tributes to the Hitchcock thriller. *La mariée était en noir* (*The Bride Wore Black*, 1967), photographed by Coutard, is a suspenseful tale of vengeance in which a woman (Jeanne Moreau) relentlessly tracks down and kills the five men responsible for the accidental shooting of her husband on their wedding day. Adapted from a novel by William Irish—the author of the novel on which the film *Rear Window* (Hitchcock, 1954) is based—and with a musical score by a frequent Hitchcock collaborator, Bernard Herrmann, Truffaut's film contains a dense pattern of allusions to specific Hitchcock films, uses Hitchcockian plot construction, and is intensely manipulative of audience expectations to generate suspense. *La sirène du Mississippi* (*Mississippi Mermaid*, 1969), also adapted from a William Irish novel and shot in Dyaliscope by Denys Clerval, is dedicated to Jean Renoir and contains many allusions to his films (especially in its “open” ending, which is a visual *hommage* to the conclusion of *La grande illusion*, 1937). In terms of style and construction, however, this minor thriller about the degradation of an honest man by a femme fatale is pure Hitchcock.

Between *La mariée était en noir* and *La sirène du Mississippi*, Truffaut made his second Antoine Doinel feature, *Baisers volés* (*Stolen Kisses*, 1968), handsomely

photographed by Clerval, a tender and affectionate portrait of Antoine's coming to adult consciousness through a series of affairs and, finally, his engagement to Christine (Claude Jade). *Domicile conjugal* (*Bed & Board*, 1970), the third feature in the Doinel series, examines the first few years of Antoine and Christine's marriage, its deterioration under the pressure of an affair, and its ultimate, uneasy reconstitution. The film is light and humorous, and its comedy is quite successful, but like *Jules et Jim*, it also raises some serious questions about the institution of marriage and its alternatives. Truffaut concluded the Doinel series, begun with *Les quatre cents coups* twenty years earlier, with *L'amour en fuite* (*Love on the Run*, 1979), which opens with Antoine's uncontested divorce from Christine and proceeds through his chance encounters with figures from his past.

L'enfant sauvage (*The Wild Child*, 1969), based on the true account of a “wolf-boy” captured in the forests of central France in 1806, was shot in quasi-documentary style by the award-winning cinematographer Néstor Almendros. *The Wild Child* allowed Truffaut to explore more intensively the themes of confinement versus freedom, and social conditioning versus nature, that he had first broached in *Les quatre cents coups*. *Les deux anglaises et le continent* (*Two English Girls*, 1971), adapted like *Jules et Jim* from a novel by Henri-Pierre Roché and set at the turn of the century, inevitably evokes comparison with the earlier film, of which it contains many deliberate echoes. The story of a young Frenchman's love for two English sisters, it was Truffaut's most visually sensuous work to date. Its sumptuous re-creation of la belle époque is conveyed in shots composed after impressionist paintings of the period, and its use of color was the most subtle Truffaut had achieved so far.

Yet *La nuit américaine* (*Day for Night*, 1973) provided the ultimate in self-reflexive cinema: a film starring Jean-Pierre Léaud (the Truffaut figure in the Antoine Doinel series) and directed by Truffaut, about the making of a film, starring Léaud and directed by Truffaut. **Day for night** (or *la nuit américaine*) is the technical term for shooting night scenes in daylight through a filter; by choosing it as his title, Truffaut intended to evoke the entire arsenal of cinematic tricks of which it is merely typical. Dedicated to Dorothy and Lillian Gish, the great Griffith actresses, the entire film is predicated on cinematic illusion, and in this respect, it recalls Fellini's *8½* (1963) and Bergman's *Persona* (1966). It is difficult from the outset to tell whether a scene is occurring in the film or in the film *within* the film, because the cast and crew live so closely together



Isabelle Adjani in *L'histoire d'Adèle H.* (*The Story of Adèle H.*; François Truffaut, 1975).

that there is little distinction between their work and their personal lives. *Day for Night* was in many ways a consummation for Truffaut. It combined the stylistic influence of American realism with that of French lyricism and drew together his dual thematic obsessions with autobiography and psychology in a hymn of praise to the cinema—an art form to which he was passionately devoted for his entire life. It answered the question posed by its own director-character—“Are films more important than life?”—with an emphatic “Yes!”

Truffaut’s next project was *L’histoire d’Adèle H.* (*The Story of Adèle H.*, 1975). Based on the diary of Victor Hugo’s youngest daughter, this subtle and powerful film demonstrates a total mastery of the new cinematic language that he helped create and triumphantly confirms his status as one of the most important film artists of our time. His films of the late 1970s include the comedies *L’argent de poche* (*Small Change*, 1976) and *L’homme qui aimait les femmes* (*The Man Who Loved Women*, 1977); *La chambre verte* (*The*

Green Room, 1978), based on several short stories by Henry James; and *Le dernier métro* (*The Last Metro*, 1980), a fascinating account of life in a small Paris theater under the Nazi Occupation—inspired by the autobiography of the stage and film actor Jean Marais (1913–1998)—which became his biggest box-office success.

In 1979, Truffaut was honored with an extraordinary twenty-year retrospective by the American Film Institute and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; but many critics feared he was becoming the kind of mainstream establishment director he had begun his career by attacking. His last two films, however, marked a modest return to the familiar terrain of obsessive romance with *La femme d’à côté* (*The Woman Next Door*, 1981), and the Hitchcockian comic thriller with *Vivement dimanche!* (*Finally Sunday!*, 1983; American release title: *Confidentially Yours*). On October 21, 1984, François Truffaut died of a brain tumor; he was fifty-two years old.

Jean-Luc Godard

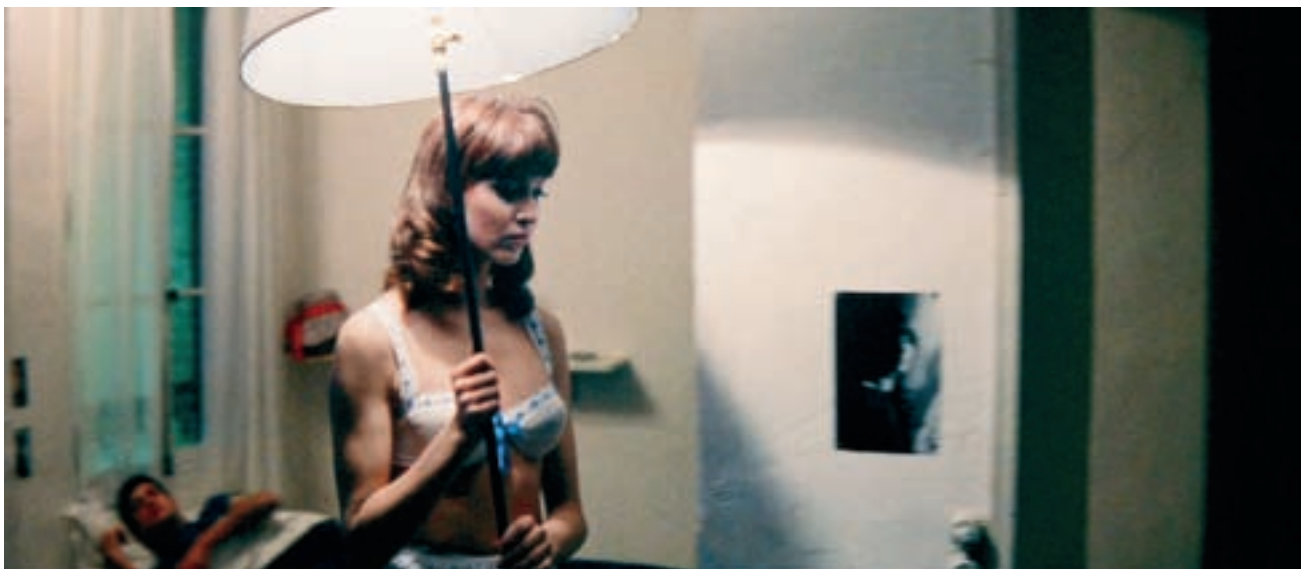
Jean-Luc Godard (b. 1930) is the most prolific and stylistically radical of all the directors who came to prominence during the New Wave. He has made more than forty feature films since *Breathless* (1960), working closely with Raoul Coutard as his director of photography on most of them, and he is among the most influential figures in world cinema today. Unlike Truffaut, Godard is a militantly intellectual and ideologically committed filmmaker whose films almost always involve some form of *autocritique* or interrogation of cinema itself. In a certain sense, they collectively constitute a *theory* of cinema because, better than any of his peers, Godard understood the essential impulse of the New Wave. “The whole New Wave,” he wrote in *Cahiers*, “can be defined, in part, by its new relationship to fiction and reality.” Godard’s films have consistently tested this relationship by rejecting narrative in favor of praxis, the working out of social or political theory within the cinematic process.

Since the early 1960s, his films have become increasingly dialectical and rhetorical in structure, and Godard himself calls them “critical essays.” Most of these “essays” are personal to the point of being idiosyncratic, and Godard has maintained his independence by producing them quickly and cheaply. His films are therefore not as carefully crafted as those of Truffaut and his other peers, and they frequently appear to be less finished films than unvarnished journals about the making of a film, full of technical

blunders and undigested facts. And, unlike his peers, Godard is still in the business of breaking every known cinematic convention—even the more recent conventions established by the New Wave itself—in a ceaseless attempt to expand the medium’s form and pursue its potential for artistic, intellectual, and political self-expression.

Several of Godard’s early films were characteristic New Wave tributes to American cinema. *À bout de souffle* (*Breathless*, 1960) was modeled on the B-film gangster thriller, and *Une femme est une femme* (*A Woman Is a Woman*, 1961), described by Godard as “a neorealist musical—that is, a contradiction in terms”—was a studio-produced tribute to the American musical comedy, made in Franscope and color. *Le petit soldat* (*The Little Soldier*, 1960), made between these two films, was banned by the French government for three years because it commented on the Algerian War. *Vivre sa vie* (*My Life to Live*, 1962), a study of a woman who chooses to be a prostitute, is constructed in the form of a twelve-part sociological tract on the problem of prostitution, complete with statistics and pseudo-clinical jargon.

With *Les carabiniers* (*The Soldiers/The Riflemen*, 1963), an adaptation of Beniamino Joppolo’s play *I carabinieri*, co-written by Roberto Rossellini, Godard created the first of his “critical essays,” for, as one critic has said, *Les carabiniers* is less a war movie than “a series of propositions about war.” *Le mépris* (*Contempt*, 1963), based on Alberto Moravia’s novel *A Ghost at Noon*, was Godard’s sixth feature. It was an international



Anna Karina in *Une femme est une femme* (*A Woman Is a Woman*; Jean-Luc Godard, 1961).

co-production starring Jack Palance and Brigitte Bardot, shot in widescreen and color, and like Truffaut's *Day for Night*, it concerns the making of a movie. This film within the film is a version of Homer's *Odyssey* being shot in Rome by Fritz Lang, who plays himself. *Bande à part* (*Band of Outsiders*, 1964) is based on an American pulp thriller and constitutes Godard's first return to the gangster genre since *Breathless*. It deals with a burglary attempt by three Parisian students—two men and a woman—that ends in tragic farce when one of the would-be criminals is killed. In *Une femme mariée* (*A Married Woman*, 1964), ironically subtitled "Fragments of a Film Shot in 1964," Godard mixed a wide range of narrative and documentary styles to create a sociological study of woman's role in modern culture.

In *Alphaville* (1965) Godard used the form of the science-fiction thriller to create a parable about the alienating effects of technology. He makes brilliant use of contemporary Paris to evoke the future, which serves to remind us that the world of *Alphaville* is already upon us. In *Pierrot le fou* (*Crazy Pete*, 1965), Godard returned to the disjointed and self-reflexive narrative style of *Les carabiniers* and to the generic model of the gangster film: a man (Jean-Paul Belmondo) and a woman (Anna Karina) run away from a Parisian gang to live an idyllic, desert-islandlike existence in the south of France until a series of betrayals causes their horribly violent, if apparently accidental, deaths. Scriptless and virtually plotless, the film comes close to realizing the Godardian ideal of "a film where there has been no writing, no editing, and no sound mixing."

Masculin/féminin (1966) marks a definitive turning away from narrative. Like *Vivre sa vie* and *Une femme mariée*, it is a film of sociological inquiry hung upon a slender plot, but here the plot is almost irrelevant to the inquiry. The film is concerned with illustrating fifteen distinct problems of the younger generation, the "children of Marx and Coca-Cola," members of which are interviewed and interview one another in *cinéma vérité* fashion. Godard shows that their idealism is belied by the world of cynical sex and violence that surrounds them. Since *Masculin/féminin*, Godard's films have become increasingly ideological and, in some cases, structurally random. As he wrote in 1966, "Cinema is capitalism in its purest form. . . . There is only one solution, and that is to turn one's back on the American cinema." The ironic result of this logic was *Made in U.S.A.* (1966).

Though it is loosely based on a detective thriller, *Made in U.S.A.* has no narrative thread at all and is a film intent on destroying virtually every illusion

of which cinema—especially, traditional American cinema—is capable. Ostensibly a remake of Hawks's *The Big Sleep* (1946), the film is so self-reflexive as to have no content: characters speak to the audience, explaining their behavior and commenting on the triviality of the plot, and the dialogue is nonsensical and sometimes deliberately rendered inaudible on the sound track. The film's meaning lies at its periphery, in its comment on political violence, the viciousness and stupidity of the Right, the sentimentality and fecklessness of the Left.

Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle (*Two or Three Things I Know about Her*, 1966) is a collage of images and interviews centering around a Parisian housewife who has turned to casual prostitution in order to keep herself in middle-class luxury. The film is a radical indictment of capitalist technocracy in the West, which, Godard holds, makes prostitutes of us all through its system of economic constraints.

Yet Godard's most savage attack on the values of Western capitalist society is *Weekend* (1967), a film that begins as a recognizable, if violent, narrative and ends as an apocalyptic vision of the collapse of civilization in the West. A young bourgeois couple sets out to visit the woman's mother in Normandy to borrow some money from her, but becomes trapped in a monumental weekend traffic jam, which Godard renders in a single slow lateral tracking shot lasting a full four minutes on the screen. Gradually, we pass from a real landscape into a symbolic one, in which the highway is littered with burning automobiles and the bloodied, mutilated bodies of crash victims. From this point on, the film is dominated by images of mindless slaughter and mayhem from which the thin veneer of civilization has been stripped away.

After *Weekend* and the political turmoil of May 1968, Godard attempted to abandon narrative altogether, considering it a bourgeois form. All of Godard's films between 1968 and 1973 were produced by the Dziga Vertov Group (actually an uneasy creative partnership between Godard and the ideologist Jean-Pierre Gorin), and Godard came to make increasing use of the arsenal of agitational techniques employed by the Soviet revolutionary cinema of 1924–1928. *Un film comme les autres* (*A Film Like Any Other*, 1968), for example, is a 16mm record of an elementary political discussion that takes place among several people lying in tall grass, none of whom is clearly distinguishable. Godard makes a point of its randomness by suggesting that a coin be tossed to determine which one of its several reels is screened first.

One Plus One (1968; also known as *Sympathy for the Devil*) is a film of seemingly unrelated fragments: a





Mireille Darc and Jean Yanne in *Weekend* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1967).

Bolivian revolutionary hiding out in a London men's room, the Rolling Stones rehearsing the song "Sympathy for the Devil," black-power militants plotting revolution in a junkyard, a television interview with a lobotomized fairy godmother called Eve Democracy, a man reading *Mein Kampf* in a Soho porn shop, and so on.

At one point in *One Plus One*, a character remarks, "There is only one way to be an intellectual revolutionary, and that is to give up being an intellectual." Some critics believe that Godard followed the logic of this statement to the point of nihilism. All of his films for the now defunct Dziga Vertov Group show Godard concerned with the nature and function of ideology, regardless of its medium. Although his later work demonstrates a renewed interest in narrative, it has been suggested that Godard's cinematic "essays" are not films in the conventional sense at all, but a form of narrative embattled with discourse. Nevertheless, Godard's impact on contemporary cinema generally,

as distinct from his importance to the French New Wave, has been immense. His most discernible influence in the 1970s and the 1980s was on the materialist cinema of Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet, the omnibus films of Hans-Jürgen Syberberg, and the award-winning minimalist work of Belgian filmmaker Chantal Akerman (b. 1950). Yet Godard made a whole generation question the accepted conventions of filmmaking, remaining all the while a solitary and independent figure.

After ending his association with Gorin in 1973, Godard experimented with a combination of film and videotape that permitted him to superimpose two or more images on the screen simultaneously in works such as *Numéro deux* (*Number Two*, 1975), *Six fois deux/Sur et sous la communication* (1976), and *Comment ça va?* (*How Goes It?*, 1978). In 1980, Godard produced his first theatrical feature in nearly eight years, and he has continued to make features since, renewing his extraordinary collaboration with Raoul Coutard. In 1987, Godard—who once said that "one could make a good film in twenty seconds"—directed jeans commercials for designers Marithé and François Girbaud (M.F.G.),

(left) Jean-Paul Belmondo and Anna Karina in *Pierrot le fou* (*Crazy Pete*; Jean-Luc Godard, 1965).

confirming for himself, no doubt, his 1967 declaration that “cinema is capitalism in its purest form.” Moving beyond semantics, there is finally Godard’s *Adieu au langage* (*Goodbye to Language*, 2014), a bold experiment in 3-D techniques shot by Fabrice Aragno over a four-year period in and around the director’s home on Lake Geneva in Switzerland.

Alain Resnais

Alain Resnais (1922–2014) is identified with the New Wave because his first major successes, *Hiroshima, mon amour* (1959) and *L’année dernière à Marienbad* (*Last Year at Marienbad*, 1961), both appeared during its height. Yet Resnais was a generation older than the *Cahiers* group, and he began his film career not as a critic but as an editor and a director of short films in the scenarist tradition. Unlike several of his New Wave counterparts, he preferred to work from an original

script, usually one written especially for the screen by a major novelist. He also worked slowly and planned his films meticulously in advance of production, in close collaboration with his writers and technicians, believing that film is basically a collective art. Yet Resnais was an avant-garde intellectual who had been strongly influenced by the philosophy of Henri Bergson. And because his main theme was the effect of time on human memory and the relationship between memory and politics, he communicated by exploding the conventional boundaries of narrative form. His fascination with time and memory led Resnais to create remarkable structures for his films, in which past, present, and future are perceived on the same spatial and temporal plane, and in which objectivity and subjectivity are never clearly distinguishable.

In *L’année dernière à Marienbad* (1961), written by French experimental novelist Alain Robbe-Grillet, a man, X, meets a woman, A, at a Baroque chateau that seems to be a resort for the very rich and that may or



may not be Marienbad (a spa in Czechoslovakia). He claims to have met her, or a woman like her, with a man, M, who was perhaps her husband, “last year at Marienbad.” She denies this, and their debate, which is a debate about the nature of reality itself, recurs endlessly through the film, as labyrinthine images of past, present, and future, framed in Dyaliscope by cinematographer Sacha Vierny, seem to merge in the same visual continuum of highly stylized tracking shots (a Resnais trademark) and frozen geometric compositions. As Resnais remarked, *Marienbad* represents “an attempt, still crude and primitive, to approach the complexity of thought and its mechanisms.” The film won the prestigious Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival in 1961 and is one of the few authentically modernist works in cinema.

Muriel, ou le temps d'un retour (English title: *Muriel*, 1963) was written by Jean Cayrol, author of the commentary for *Nuit et brouillard* (1955). *Muriel* is a brilliant political film and, although government censors did not recognize it at the time, perhaps the most damning of all films about the Algerian situation as it affected France. Yet in its remarkably complex montage of nearly a thousand shots, Sacha Vierny's luminous color cinematography, the innovative sound recording of Antoine Bonfanti, and a score featuring the music of avant-garde composer Hans Werner Henze, *Muriel* approaches the cinema of pure association and is clearly Resnais's greatest work.

With *La guerre est finie* (*The War Is Over*, 1966), written by the Spanish novelist Jorge Semprún, Resnais entered the arena of political commitment. More conventional in narrative structure, *La guerre est finie* concerns three days in the life of a middle-aged revolutionary named Diego (Yves Montand), who, some thirty years after the Spanish Civil War, still works for the overthrow of the Franco regime. During the 1960s, Resnais's films, like Godard's, became increasingly unfashionable and unconventional, as he pursued the logic of his own artistic development at the cost of financial gain. If Godard's films became critical essays on ideological praxis, Resnais's had always been philosophical investigations into the workings of the human mind, and this meant the loss of popular audiences after his initial success with *Hiroshima, mon amour*. As a result, Resnais was unable to direct for five years after 1968 for lack of financial backing.

(left) Delphine Seyrig and Giorgio Albertazzi in *L'année dernière à Marienbad* (Alain Resnais, 1961).

In 1975, however, his *Stavisky* was released to both critical acclaim and commercial success. Written by Jorge Semprún and starring Jean-Paul Belmondo in the paradoxical title role, *Stavisky* is a political period film about a colossal financial scandal that toppled the French government in 1934. With a melodic score by Stephen Sondheim, it was shot by Sacha Vierny to evoke the two-color Technicolor process of the early 1930s, and it became Resnais's most popular film to date.

Frequently accused of coldness and abstractionism, Resnais was a serious, committed filmmaker whose technical mastery of his medium enabled him to create a handful of films of great visual beauty and intellectual depth that rank among the masterworks of French cinema. When asked, in a recent interview, about the filmmakers who had most influenced him, Resnais mentioned Griffith, Pudovkin, and Eisenstein. He also spoke of the Czech-born British director Karel Reisz (see Chapter 14) as his “real teacher,” through Reisz's book *The Technique of Film Editing*. In other words, Resnais clearly saw his work as growing out of the tradition of classical montage. And in his fascination with the manipulation of the space-time continuum, Resnais serves to remind us that montage aesthetics are still alive and well in a film culture that looks to mise-en-scène as a kind of cinematic god.

Claude Chabrol

Claude Chabrol (1930–2010), who had been forced to make a series of commercial thrillers after the financial failure of *Les bonnes femmes* in 1960, returned to the top of his form with *Les biches* (*The Does*, 1968), a subtle, visually exquisite study of lesbian sexual obsession and domination, set in St. Tropez in the winter. *Les biches* marked the beginning of his long collaboration with the cinematographer Jean Rabier (b. 1927), formerly the camera operator for Henri Decaë, who had shot Chabrol's earliest films. Like Resnais, Chabrol believed that filmmaking is a collective enterprise, and after *Les biches*, he had a team of collaborators who worked with him on every film. These included, in addition to Rabier, his co-scenarist, Paul Gégauff; his art director, Guy Littaye; his editor, Jacques Gaillard; and his leading actress (and wife), Stéphanie Audran.

Chabrol achieved absolute mastery of his medium with *La femme infidèle* (*The Unfaithful Wife*, 1968)—an investigation into the violent consequences of adultery in a typical French bourgeois family—which owes much technically to Hitchcock. Like Truffaut, Chabrol



(left) Stéphane Audran and Jacqueline Sassard in *Les biches* (*The Does*; Claude Chabrol, 1968).

(with Eric Rohmer) wrote a book on Hitchcock; in fact, Chabrol was stylistically influenced by the American director more than any other figure of the New Wave generation. One critic sees the whole body of Chabrol's work as an extended *hommage* to Hitchcock. Yet, although Chabrol frequently employed Hitchcockian structures and metaphors, such as the simultaneous tracking out and zooming in that occurs near the end of *Vertigo* (1958) and in the final shot of *La femme infidèle*, he had a theme that was very much his own—the impact of a crime of passion on a small but intimate network of human relationships, such as those that exist within a middle-class family, a love triangle, or even a small community. Chabrol dissected the psychological complexities of these relationships with clinical precision, yet in his mature films, this ironic detachment from his material never seems indifferent or cold, and at its best, can evoke feelings of compassion devoid of sentimentality. Perhaps it is Fritz Lang and his deterministically plotted cinema of destiny—*M* (1931), *Fury* (1936), *The Big Heat* (1953)—rather than Hitchcock, whom Chabrol most resembles in this respect.

Que la bête meure (*Killer/The Beast Must Die*, 1969) is an ironic revenge tragedy about a man who relentlessly tracks down the driver of an automobile that has killed his young son in a hit-and-run accident and comes to love the murderer's son in the process. Chabrol continued to probe the violence and bestiality that lie just beneath the surface of everyday life in *Le boucher* (*The Butcher*, 1970), which one Parisian critic hailed as the best French film since the Liberation and which is clearly among the best two or three works to emerge from the immediate post-New Wave period. Told with a remarkable economy and purity of cinematic style, *Le boucher* is essentially a love story set in a small French village in which one of the lovers is a sexual psychopath given to murdering young women and mutilating their corpses. This “butcher,” however, is made the most sympathetic character in the entire film, and the compassionate psychological study of his relationship with a young schoolteacher, who loves him even as she becomes increasingly convinced of his guilt, represents a high point in contemporary French cinema.

After *Le boucher*, Chabrol directed approximately one film a year until his death in 2010. Like Truffaut, Godard, and Resnais, Chabrol is a major figure in contemporary French cinema, although his films of the 1980s were uneven.



Jean Yanne and Stéphane Audran in *Le boucher* (*The Butcher*; Claude Chabrol, 1970).

Louis Malle

Louis Malle (1932–1995), a former assistant to Bresson and the celebrated underwater filmmaker Jacques-Yves Cousteau (with whom he co-directed *Le monde du silence* [*The Silent World*, 1956]), began his career as a director, two years before the debuts of Godard and Truffaut, with the taut suspense thriller *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud* (*Frantic/Elevator to the Gallows*, 1957) and earned an international reputation the following year with *Les amants* (*The Lovers*, 1958). This lyrical film about a brief love affair between a bored socialite and a young student for whom she leaves her husband was beautifully photographed by Henri Decaë and produced with Malle's own funds.

Zazie dans le métro (1960) was an anarchic adaptation of Raymond Queneau's novel about a foul-mouthed



Jeanne Moreau in *Les amants* (*The Lovers*; Louis Malle, 1958).



Benoît Ferreux and Lea Massari in *Le souffle au coeur* (*Murmur of the Heart*; Louis Malle, 1971).

ten-year-old girl who comes to visit her uncle in Paris and wreaks havoc everywhere she goes. The film is a technically exciting attempt to find visual equivalents for Queneau's neo-Joycean puns through the use of trick shots, superimposition, variable camera speeds, jump cuts, and multiple allusions to other books and films (especially Resnais's *Hiroshima, mon amour*; Fellini's *La dolce vita*; and Malle's own *Les amants*). Malle continued his experiments in narrative form in *Vie privée* (*Private Life*, 1961), a film about a young provincial girl's rise to stardom, based loosely on the experience of its own star, Brigitte Bardot.

Yet *Le feu follet* (*The Fire Within/Will o' the Wisp*, 1963), adapted by the director from a novel by Drieu La Rochelle, with a piano score by Erik Satie, is regarded as Malle's masterpiece of the 1960s. It depicts the last forty-eight hours in the life of an alcoholic playboy, who is relentlessly driven to suicide by his disgust at the world around him. Many critics feel that the film's mood of psychological intensity and Malle's sureness of touch in sustaining it bring *Le feu follet* close to the best work of Bresson. After contributing to the 1967 collective film *Loin du Vietnam*, Malle journeyed to the East to film the feature-length *Calcutta* (1969), part of

his brilliant six-hour documentary essay *Phantom India* (1969), for French television. This film, which has also been shown theatrically, offers a marvelously complex vision of the paradoxical subcontinent that has always so fascinated and puzzled the West.

In 1971, Malle produced a masterpiece equal to *Le feu follet* in the remarkable *Le souffle au coeur* (*Murmur of the Heart*), a delicate and irresistibly funny tale of casual incest among the bourgeoisie of Dijon in 1954—the time of the fall of Dien Bien Phu, Vietnam. Scripted by Malle and sumptuously photographed by Decaë, this film offers an amiable, intelligent, and perversely humorous portrait of middle-class French family life in the postwar era, as well as a sensitive study of the sexual and social agonies of adolescence. Malle's next film, *Lacombe, Lucien* (1974), received international acclaim for its subtle portrayal of a seventeen-year-old peasant boy who joins the French Gestapo during the Occupation for no particular reason.

In 1978, Malle directed *Pretty Baby* in the United States. Shot entirely on location in New Orleans by Sven Nykvist, this controversial film deals with a love affair between an eccentric photographer and a child prostitute in a turn-of-the-century Storyville brothel.

Malle's subsequent American films include the brilliant tour-de-force conversation piece *My Dinner with Andre* (1981); *Damage* (1992), an adaptation by David Hare from Josephine Hart's novel about a ruinous erotic obsession set in the context of British politics; and *Vanya on 42nd Street* (1994), about New York theater director—and the subject of *My Dinner with Andre*—Andre Gregory's experimental production of Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* in the then derelict New Amsterdam Theater. Malle died of cancer in November 1995.

Unquestionably an important filmmaker, Malle was frequently accused of dilettantism because of his wide range of subjects and styles. Pauline Kael has pointed out that had he chosen a single theme and stuck with it—as Chabrol did—Malle would have been acclaimed as a major figure long ago. Yet Malle's intellectual restlessness and his remarkable ability to present material from simultaneously opposing points of view have led some critics to dismiss him as an elegant stylist with little substance at the core. The best of his films offer ample proof that only the first part of this proposition is true.

Eric Rohmer and Jacques Rivette

The former *Cahiers* critic Eric Rohmer (b. Jean-Marie Maurice Schérer, 1920–2010) began to blossom as a director in the late 1960s. His first feature, *Le signe du lion* (*The Sign of Leo*, 1959), received virtually no notice in the year of its release, but between 1962 and 1963, Rohmer made the first two of his six “Moral Tales,” or “*Contes moraux*,” whose basic theme is the antagonism that exists between personal identity and sexual temptation, or between the spiritual and passionate sides of human nature. *La boulangère de Monceau* (*The Baker of Monceau*, 1962) and *La carrière de Suzanne* (*Suzanne's Vocation*, 1963) were both shorts shot in 16mm and produced by Barbet Schroeder, who also produced the entire series. *La collectionneuse* (*The Collector*, 1967), *Ma nuit chez Maud* (*My Night at Maud's*, 1969), *Le genou de Claire* (*Claire's Knee*, 1970), and *L'amour, l'après-midi* (English title: *Chloe in the Afternoon*, 1972) are the 35mm features that complete the *Contes moraux*, providing four more variations on Rohmer's single theme and inaugurating his long-term collaboration with the cinematographer Nestor Almendros. Abstract, intellectual, supremely ironic, these inquiries into the nature of human passion are constructed with all the precision of Cartesian logic, and they have been hailed internationally as components of a philosophical masterpiece.

Subsequently, Rohmer made a beautiful, ambiguous version of Heinrich von Kleist's *Die Marquise von O.* (*The Marquise of O.*, 1975), which continues his metaphysical probing of human sexuality in the story of a young noblewoman who awakes one day to find herself inexplicably pregnant. Perhaps because of his late start, Rohmer was one of the few original New Wave figures to consistently produce major work. During the 1980s, he contributed yet another extraordinary contemporary cycle titled “Comedies and Proverbs,” achieving a formal beauty and classical precision unequaled even in his previous work. Several of these were shot in 16mm and blown up for 35mm theatrical exhibition, as in the earliest days of the New Wave. Rohmer's cycle of four seasonal films dealing with the power of myth—*Conte de printemps* (1990), *Conte d'hiver* (1992), *Conte d'été* (1996), and *Conte d'automne* (1998)—was followed by *L'anglaise et le duc* (English title: *The Lady and the Duke*, 2001), based on the memoirs of a Scottish gentlewoman stranded in Paris during the Great Terror of 1792, whose precincts are simulated digitally from contemporary-looking paintings and panoramas.

Jacques Rivette (b. 1928), another *Cahiers* critic and former assistant to both Renoir and Becker, also directed a handful of important films in the 1960s that show a marked predilection for literature and the theater. *Paris nous appartient* (*Paris Belongs to Us*, 1960) concerns the members of a Parisian acting troupe who are rehearsing a version of Shakespeare's *Pericles*. Rivette shot *Paris nous appartient* on a day-to-day basis between 1957 and 1959, with money for film stock borrowed from Truffaut and a camera borrowed from Chabrol. (Appropriately, the “film” that the Doinel family goes to see at the Gaumont-Palace in *Les quatre cents coups* is *Paris nous appartient*, although it was in fact still in the process of production.) None of the cast or crew was paid until after the film's release, at which time the *Cahiers* group issued a joint statement concerning its crucial importance to *la politique des auteurs*. Rivette's film, they wrote, was “primarily the fruit of an astonishing persistence over several years to bring to the screen a personal vision of the world as rich and diverse *as if expressed by any other means*” (italics added).

Rivette's second feature, *La religieuse* (*The Nun*, 1965), was based on Denis Diderot's eighteenth-century novel about a woman driven to prostitution and suicide through the hypocrisy of religious orders. This bleak film acquired something of a sensational reputation due to its suppression in France, but its sober camera style and rather conventional narrative



Anna Karina in *La religieuse* (*The Nun*; Jacques Rivette, 1965).

structure lend it a seriousness that no amount of scandal can belie. Rivette's third film is his greatest to date, and it, too, reveals his literary tastes. *L'amour fou* (*Crazy Love*, 1968) is a four-hour study of the slow disintegration of a marriage, set against the filming of a television production of Racine's tragedy *Andromaque*, which provides Rivette with a laboratory in which to explore questions about the nature of film and stage illusion.

During the 1970s, Rivette made six features but only two of them, *Céline et Julie vont en bateau* (*Celine and Julie Go Boating*, 1974) and *Duelle* (1976), were distributed outside of France. In the 1980s and the 1990s, Rivette continued to elaborate the mysteries of identity in such vaguely surrealistic films as *Le pont du nord* (*North Bridge*, 1981), *Hurlevent* (*Wuthering Heights*, 1985), and *La belle noiseuse* (*The Beautiful Troublemaker*, 1991), a four-hour adaptation from Balzac that became a box-office hit in France. Owing to his obscurity and artistic integrity, Rivette had little

commercial success before his work took a more popular turn in the mid-1990s, and he continued to actively direct features until 2009.

Agnès Varda, Jacques Demy, and Others

Agnès Varda (b. 1928), whose *La Pointe-Courte* (1955) had been something of a New Wave landmark, continued to write and direct fine films in the 1960s. Her second feature, *Cléo de cinq à sept* (*Cléo from 5 to 7*, 1962), photographed by Jean Rabier, depicts exactly ninety minutes (the running time of the film) in the life of a young pop singer who is waiting for a lab report that will tell her whether she has cancer. *Le bonheur* (*Happiness*, 1965) is a strangely detached film about a happily married family man whose affair with another woman causes his wife to commit suicide and who proceeds to lead a happy existence with his

mistress after his wife's death. The film is highly decorative but ambiguous in terms of psychological and moral considerations. In *Les créatures* (*The Animals*, 1966), Varda examined the relationship between fantasy and reality in the mind of a writer who talks to animals and cannot distinguish real people from the characters in his novels. Varda also contributed to the collective *Loin du Vietnam* (1967), and in 1969, she came to America to make the improvisational feature *Lions Love*.

During the 1970s, Varda directed the semi-documentary *Daguerréotypes* (1976; French release, 1979), a feature-length study of the rue Daguerre in Paris, where she had lived for many years, and *L'une chante, l'autre pas* (*One Sings, the Other Doesn't*, 1977), a fifteen-year chronicle of two women friends pursuing totally different lifestyles. With *Vagabond* (1985), Varda produced a Bressonian film about an aimlessly drifting teenage girl and the people she meets before her wretched death from exposure. In the early 1990s, Varda collaborated with her dying husband, the

director Jacques Demy, to produce a filmic autobiography/biography of his youth. The resulting *Jacquot de Nantes* (1991) covers Demy's life through 1949, at which point his lifelong infatuation with cinema began to fulfill itself as a career. After another documentary about her late husband (*L'univers de Jacques Demy* [1995]), Varda made the self-reflexive documentary feature *Les glaneurs et les glaneuses* (*The Gleaners and I*, 2000), which examines the social, cultural, and political implications of scavenging, even as it contemplates her own mortality.

Demy himself (1931–1990) became a specialist during the 1960s in colorful, bittersweet melodramas reminiscent of poetic realism and the work of Max Ophüls. His *Lola* (1961), which is dedicated to Ophüls and owes much to the fluid camera work of Raoul Coutard, is a gay, lighthearted film about love, set in Nantes and similar in style to *La ronde*. It has been called “a musical without songs or dances,” and it earned Demy an international reputation. *Les parapluies de Cherbourg* (*The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*, 1964) is



Claire Drouot and Jean-Claude Drouot in *Le bonheur* (*Happiness*; Agnès Varda, 1965).

an actual musical about a romance between a shop girl and a service-station attendant, in which the dialogue is sung, as in an opera; it is also notable for the vivid decor of designer Bernard Evein (1929–2006) and the riotous color cinematography of Jean Rabier. *Les demoiselles de Rochefort* (*The Young Girls of Rochefort*, 1966) is a lively *hommage* to the Hollywood musical, directed in collaboration with Gene Kelly. After the American-made *Model Shop* (1968), in 1982, Demy returned successfully to his all-singing formula with *Une chambre en ville* (*A Room in Town*), his first French-language film in more than eight years.

After the Wave

Other noteworthy French filmmakers since the New Wave who have distinct ties with it are Philippe de Broca (1933–2004), a former assistant to Chabrol and Truffaut, who has become a skilled director of sophisticated comedy and satire. During the 1990s, de Broca did most of his work for French television. Also, Pierre Étaix (b. 1928), a former circus clown and gag writer for Jacques Tati, directed a number of excellent comic films in the tradition of Max Linder and Buster Keaton; Étaix starred in all of his own films but stopped directing features in 1971. The former actor Jean-Pierre Mocky (b. 1929) became a fine and prolific director of iconoclastic comedy, and his later films are notable for their edgy black humor. Alain Robbe-Grillet (1922–2008), the leading practitioner of the French *nouveau roman* and the scriptwriter for Resnais's *L'année dernière à Marienbad*, turned to directing in the 1960s and the 1970s with *L'homme qui ment* (*He Who Lies*, 1968), followed by *Le jeu avec le feu* (*Playing with Fire*, 1975) and *La belle captive* (*The Beautiful Prisoner*, 1983). His last film was *Un bruit qui rend fou* (English title: *The Blue Villa*, 1995), set in a brothel on an isolated Greek island. His films are all narratives about the mental process of constructing narratives, and he makes no distinction between them and his novels, calling both *ciné romans* (film novels).

In 1973, Jean Eustache (1938–1981) contributed perhaps the last authentically New Wave film in *La maman et la putain* (*The Mother and the Whore*). This provocative two-hundred-and-twenty-minute assault on the intellect and the senses focuses on the disillusionment of the generation that produced the political upheaval of May 1968, and it won the Special Jury Prize at

Cannes in the year of its release. Alain Jessua (b. 1932) produced several important films during the 1960s, including the remarkable *La vie à l'envers* (*Life Upside Down*, 1964), a subjective portrait of the inception of madness, and *Jeu de massacre* (*The Killing Game*, 1967), in which the protagonist becomes so obsessed with the heroes of his favorite comic strip that he can no longer distinguish fantasy from reality.

Later, Jessua directed *Traitement de choc* (*Shock Treatment*, 1974), a horror film by genre but thematically a parable of capitalist exploitation of the underdeveloped nations (Portuguese workers are murdered so that their blood may be given to a rich Frenchman undergoing an exotic medical treatment). The single New Wave feature by Jacques Rozier (b. 1926), *Adieu Philippine* (1962), has acquired the reputation of a minor masterpiece, although it is really something less than that—an engagingly improvised narrative about a Parisian youth in the 1960s, filmed in *cinéma vérité* fashion, which contains a hilarious parody of French television.

The Greek-born director Constantine Costa-Gavras (b. 1933), formerly associated with conventional thrillers, developed into a masterful director of political films in the 1970s with *Z* (1969) and *L'aveu* (*The Confession*, 1970), both shot by Raoul Coutard; *État de siège* (*State of Siege*, 1973), *Section spéciale* (*Special Section*, 1975), *Clair de femme* (*Womanlight*, 1979), all starring Yves Montand; and, for the American producers Edward and Mildred Lewis, *Missing* (1982), a Universal release.

The work of the French director Claude Lelouch (b. 1937) is more controversial than that of the filmmakers discussed previously because of its blatant appeal to a mass audience. Lelouch uses all the modern narrative techniques of his New Wave counterparts, and he is an auteur in the most comprehensive sense of the term in that he produces, directs, writes, photographs, and edits all of his own films, such as *Un homme et une femme* (*A Man and a Woman*, 1966) and *Vivre pour vivre* (*Live for Life*, 1967). While these films are visually engaging, though, they lack emotional depth and have the quality of extended television commercials. Yet in 1995, Lelouch produced a remarkable variation on Victor Hugo's *Les misérables* (1995), which uses the novel as a gloss on an act of heroism and resistance by a Jean Valjean–like character during the Nazi Occupation.

(right) Romy Schneider and Michel Piccoli in *César et Rosalie* (*Cesar and Rosalie*; Claude Sautet, 1972).