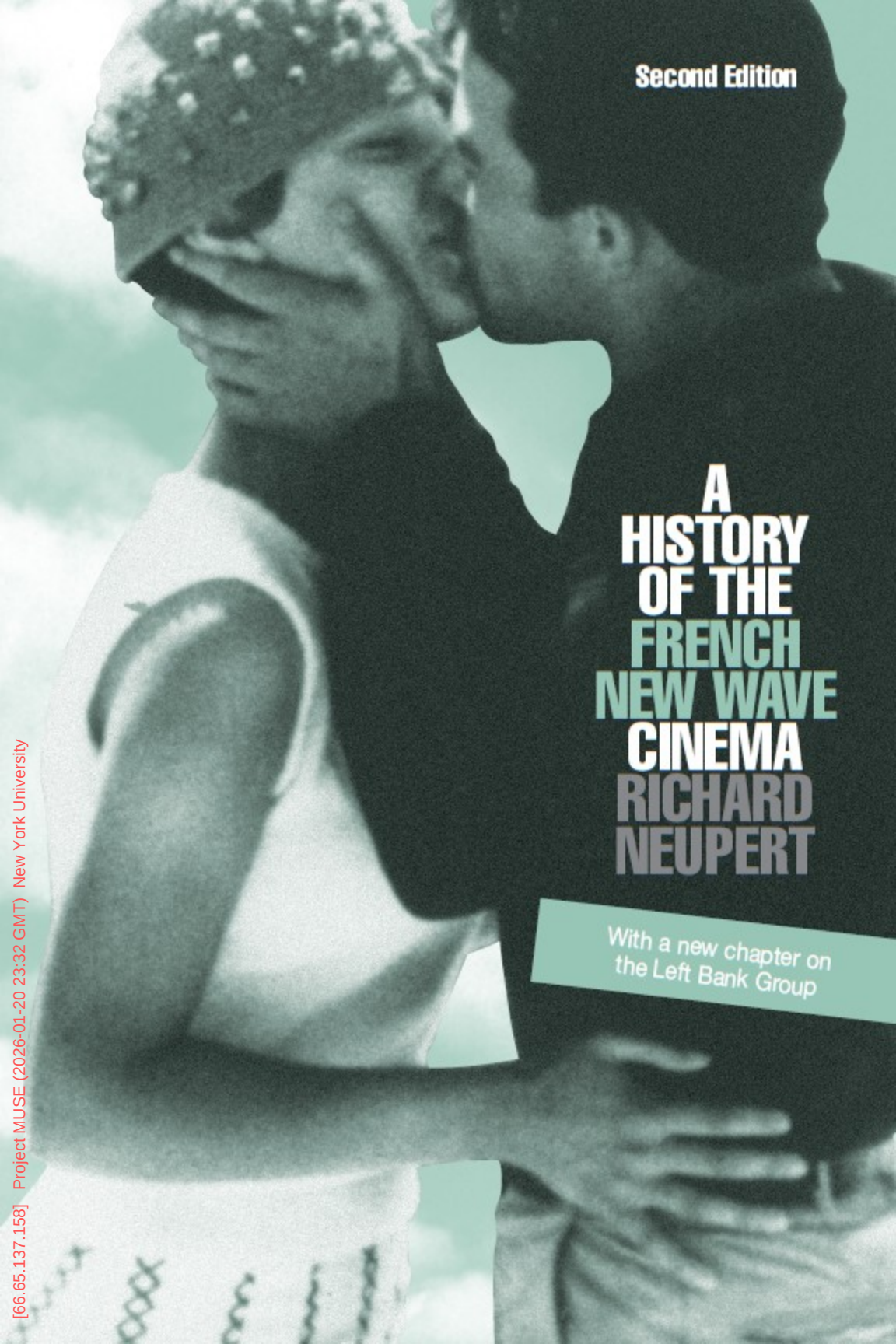




Second Edition

**A
HISTORY
OF THE
FRENCH
NEW WAVE
CINEMA
RICHARD
NEUPERT**

With a new chapter on
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6

Jean-Luc Godard: Le Petit Soldat

Criticism has taught us to love both Rouch and Eisenstein and that we must not neglect one sort of cinema in the name of some other mode. A young writer today is aware of Molière and Shakespeare. Well, we are the first directors to be aware of D. W. Griffith. Even Marcel Carné, Louis Delluc, and René Clair had no real critical or historical background.

—JEAN-LUC GODARD, “Entretien avec Jean-Luc Godard”

GODARD, LIKE Truffaut, was a confident, often brash critic. Even before he began shooting his first feature, he proudly and loudly proclaimed himself a member of the *jeune cinéma*, taking part in the famous discussion in May 1959 at the La Napoule colloquium outside Cannes, as one of the “seventeen young directors” of the New Wave who discussed the future of French cinema. Yet, while he has earned an incredible amount of attention from film critics, historians, and theorists, Godard never received the sort of adoration lavished on Truffaut. In person, Godard could be combative and obscure. As demonstrated in the opening epigraph, in which he claims the New Wave was the first cluster of directors to be aware of film history, Godard readily made ridiculous claims, often making it sound as if they were the only directors ever to have seen many movies or cared about film history. Unlike the romantic Truffaut, jokingly endearing Chabrol, or evasive Rohmer, Godard made sure that he was always a force to be reckoned with and even feared. Moreover, while Truffaut intertwined cinema history with his own personal history, Godard saw film history as a series of modes of discourse rather than merely *mise-en-scène* options. He concentrated on the relationship between various filmmakers, industrial systems, and ideological functions of the cinema, seeing every shot as more than a potential homage to a favorite director: each cinematic device was a signifier with multiple cultural effects. The cinema was more than a personal means of expression; it was the principal means of culture formation.

Godard also differed from Truffaut in his personal background. Born in Paris in 1930, Godard was raised mostly in Nyons, Switzerland, in great luxury. Godard's father, Paul-Jean, was a distinguished doctor, licensed to practice in France, England, and Switzerland. His mother, Odile Monod, was the daughter of the founder of the Banque de Paris et des Pays-Bas. Her family owned a vast estate just across Lake Geneva on the French side, where Jean-Luc spent many summers. Thus, while young Truffaut was denied a happy, stable family setting and often found himself scrounging for refuge, Godard had a lavish childhood, shuffling between Nyons, Paris, and Lake Geneva. In 1940, with the Nazi victories, the Godards retreated to Switzerland, secured Swiss citizenship for Jean-Luc, and enrolled him in school, though he returned to Paris to study immediately after its liberation in 1945. By the late 1940s, he began regularly attending the Cinémathèque, where he met Rivette, Rohmer, Chabrol, Resnais, Truffaut, and Bazin, though he also pursued a degree in ethnology from the Sorbonne. Like Truffaut, Godard credited Henri Langlois and the daily screenings at the Cinémathèque with providing him an education in film history. He also attended the booming *ciné-clubs*, and by March of 1951, was writing review articles, first for Rohmer's *Gazette du cinéma* and then for *Cahiers du cinéma*, typically under the pseudonym Hans Lucas. As Colin MacCabe writes, even from the beginning with his first long article in *Cahiers*, which confronted classical découpage and storytelling, "Godard was always trying to push a genre to the moment it would break down to reveal the operations of the cinema."¹

But while Truffaut and others had to grapple with the mandatory draft during the Indochina escalation in the 1950s, Godard, with his Swiss passport, could avoid service. During 1952 and 1953, he even followed his recently divorced father to Jamaica, before touring South America on his own, visiting distant relatives. Upon his return, Godard's life became more turbulent as he stole small amounts of money from family members, was cut off by his father, and reportedly jailed briefly in Switzerland and even sent to a clinic for psychological evaluation.² But in 1954, Godard's mother got him a job on the construction of a massive dam in Switzerland, and he used his earnings to make a documentary about it, the 35 mm short *Opération Béton* (*Operation Cement*), which the company purchased from him to use for publicity. Shot silent, with sound added in postproduction, it is a very conventional document that clearly demonstrates the stages of the massive construction project. This experience and his earnings motivated him to return to Paris and leap back into the cinema culture he had abandoned for

several years. There he wrote for *Cahiers* and *Arts* and even replaced Chabrol at his job in the publicity department at Twentieth-Century Fox. He also continued to shoot short films, including his first New Wave-era film, *Tous les garçons s'appellent Patrick* (*All the Boys Are Called Patrick*, 1957), shot in 35 mm, based on a script by Rohmer, featuring Jean-Claude Brialy and Nicole Berger, and produced by Pierre Braunberger.

Godard went on to shoot two more Paris shorts, *Une histoire d'eau* (*A Story of Water*, 1958), which is a strange muddle of a film, codirected with Truffaut, and then *Charlotte et son Jules* (*Charlotte and Her Jules*, 1959), both of which were produced by Braunberger and his Films de la Pléiade. He tried to interest producers in feature-length projects, but it was finally Chabrol's and Truffaut's initial successes that helped him convince Georges de Beauregard to produce Godard's first feature. Truffaut had once discussed an idea for a film about a young French man who steals a car and shoots a police officer on his way to Paris to see his American girlfriend, which was the basic idea for *Breathless*, so Godard asked if Truffaut could sketch out the story line to test on Beauregard. Based on Truffaut's name, the short script idea, plus the fact that Claude Chabrol had agreed to serve as "technical advisor," Beauregard agreed to take on the project. Truffaut sold Beauregard and Godard his scenario for only two thousand dollars and agreed to read the final script for them; the producer wrote back, "I know it's out of friendship for Jean-Luc, but believe me, a producer doesn't often have the opportunity to encounter such disinterestedness. Therefore, thank you."³ While Godard did make many additions and a few fundamental changes to Truffaut's scenario, such as adding its tragic ending, he nonetheless retained quite a few of the original details. The budget was roughly eighty-five thousand dollars, requiring Godard, like all his filmmaking friends, to cut corners whenever possible. According to Truffaut, Godard himself was so poor during the production, "he didn't have enough money in his pocket to buy a metro ticket, he was as destitute as the character he was filming."⁴ He continues, "The miracle of *Breathless* is that it was made at a time in the life of a man in which he normally would not make a film. One doesn't make a film when one is sad and destitute."⁵

Yet, Godard had been ready for years for his first chance at a feature film. He was very aware of the production strategies of his predecessors, and he had already been referring to himself as a member of the French *jeune cinema* even before he knew what his first feature would be. When André Malraux's office announced that France's submissions to the 1959 Cannes Festival would be the three first features by Marcel Camus, Alain

Resnais, and Truffaut, Godard wrote proudly in *Arts*, “Today it seems that we have won the battle. It will be our films that go to Cannes, proving that France has a pretty face, cinematically speaking. And next year the same thing will happen. Fifteen new, courageous, sincere, lucid, beautiful films will again take the road over, blocking out conventional productions.”⁶ He was correct, of course, and *Breathless*, which won the Prix Jean Vigo in 1960, was most prominent among those courageous next films. Thus, when he got his chance, he had a long list of feisty claims to live up to.

For his actors, Godard began with Jean-Paul Belmondo in the lead role. Godard had praised Belmondo in a review of *Les tricheurs* (Carné, 1958), and the two had become friends, with Belmondo acting in his short *Charlotte et son Jules*. For the leading woman, Patricia, Godard persuaded Beauregard to hire Jean Seberg, whose salary was the highest part of the budget. She had starred in Otto Preminger’s *Saint Joan* (1957) and the Françoise Sagan tale *Bonjour tristesse* (1958). Godard considered the role of Patricia to be a continuation of her character in *Bonjour tristesse*, and with her presence he could make reference to one of his favorite American directors while creating a connection to the popularity of “New Wave generation” writer Sagan. Most importantly though, he used her to forge a hybrid acting style that seems to owe as much to film history as to the casual, contemporary spontaneity of the New Wave proper.

Since most of *Breathless* was shot silent, its technical team was reduced to a bare bones crew, with cinematographer Raoul Coutard proving to be the only other individual allowed much creative input, especially before composer-sound director Jacques Maumont and Truffaut’s editor, Cécile Decugis, joined Godard in postproduction. Coutard, who had previously shot only three quick films with Pierre Schoendoeffler, forged his quick, quirky signature style while improvising with Godard, who was not always clear or certain just what he wanted. “From day to day, as the details of his screenplay became more precise, he explained his conception: no [tripod] for the camera, no light if possible, traveling without rails . . . little by little we discovered a need to escape from convention and even run counter to the rules of ‘cinematographic grammar.’ The shooting plan was devised as we went along, as was the dialogue.”⁷ Thus, from the beginning, the mode of production for *Breathless* was more unconventional and “personal” even than most of its contemporaries, as the shooting method and scripting and improvisation affected every aspect of the mise-en-scène as well as the dialogue. Moreover, Godard and Coutard settled on a fast Ilford film stock that was not available commercially for motion-picture cameras, so they pur-

chased spools of the still-camera film and spliced it together into adequate rolls for their 35mm Cameflex. They decided also that Coutard should use the camera hand-held, perched on his shoulder, while seated in wheelchairs and even a mail pushcart or in the backseat of a car, rather than placing it on conventional camera mounts. The goal was to capture a rough documentary quality, following the characters as if Coutard were a reporter out to get a story. Godard's procedure with the actors was very similar; he often showed up in the morning with sketchy notes for the actors, who were expected to improvise as the camera shot them from various angles, experimenting in order better to capture their loose performances. Seberg and Belmondo, however, became quite discouraged during production, feeling as if Godard had no idea what he was doing and that he had come to despise them. According to Godard, "Belmondo never invented his own dialogue. It was written. But the actors didn't learn it: the film was shot silent and I cued the lines."⁸ The result would prove stunningly "unprofessional" to some critics but historically monumental to others.

Breathless, whose opening titles simply announce the name, *A bout de souffle* and the dedication to Monogram Pictures, tells the tale of Michel Poiccard (Belmondo), who steals an American military officer's car in Marseilles, with the help of a young woman he then abandons, and heads to Paris. His goals are clear, as bits of dialogue, spoken to himself as he drives, reveal: he needs to get some money owed him, pick up Patricia, and head for Italy with the cash. But along the way, he is chased by two motorcycle cops for a traffic violation; in a disorienting scene, Michel uses a pistol he found in the car to kill one of the officers. Michel flees to Paris, where he visits and robs one old girlfriend (played by Truffaut's mistress, Liliane David), before locating the American college student, Patricia, who had spent part of a vacation recently with Michel before returning to Paris to register at the Sorbonne and sell *Herald Tribunes*. Over the course of several days, Michel alternates between pursuing his two goals: seducing the reluctant Patricia to come with him and locating the money through his friends Tolmatchoff and Berruti. But Patricia struggles to remain independent and pursue her interest in writing; she even spends the night with her editor in order to get an interview with a famous novelist, played by Jean-Pierre Melville, but she also discovers she is pregnant, probably with Michel's child. In the meantime, the police detectives connect Michel with the crime and begin to track him via Patricia, warning her that they can take away her visa and work permit if she does not cooperate. But she and Michel evade the police, even ducking into movie theaters to lose the agent tailing them.



Figure 6.1. Michel and Patricia chat in her apartment (*Breathless*)



Figure 6.2. Inspector Vital warns Patricia (*Breathless*)

On the last day, as Berruti is on his way with an escape car and the cash, Patricia goes out for a newspaper and suddenly calls the police to tell them where Michel is hiding. She quickly warns Michel to leave, arguing that this was her test: if she could turn him in, then she must not be in love with him. But Michel, contrary to everything he has done and said up to this point, decides not to drive off to Italy and that he will stay and go to prison. He runs outside to warn Berruti that the cops are coming. Berruti tosses him a pistol from his glove compartment as the police arrive; the police shoot Michel on the street as Berruti drives off alone. Patricia runs to Michel in time to hear his dying words, "C'est vraiment dégueulasse." ["That's really disgusting."] She looks confusedly as the police alter his final words: "Il a dit, 'vous êtes vraiment dégueulasse.'" ["He said, 'You really are a bitch.'"] She turns toward the camera in a shot strangely reminiscent of Antoine Doinel's freeze frame. Patricia seems not to understand what has happened. The original script by Truffaut provides the same basic outline for the action but concludes differently, with Michel, spurned by Patricia, driving off to Italy: "Out of the car he hurls insults at Patricia. The last shot shows Patricia watching Lucien [changed to Michel by Godard] leave and not understanding him because her French is still not very good."⁹ Thus Godard's ending preserves aspects of Truffaut's conclusion while going further with Michel dead on the street and the malicious police victorious; Godard even wanted to include dialogue from Inspector Vital telling his men to shoot Michel in the spine, but Truffaut vetoed that cruel touch.

As James Monaco points out, *Breathless* was hailed as a landmark film right from the start, and even though a summary of its story line sounds rather generic, or at least a bit like a tale by Melville, its overall style and attitude made it amazing: "*Les 400 coups* was fresh and new but it was also perceived to exist essentially within certain broad traditions. *Breathless*, on the other hand, was clearly revolutionary."¹⁰ The overall story structure is chronological, yet has large scene-to-scene gaps that, mirrored by the discontinuous jump cuts, leave out some information. For instance, after Michel shoots the police officer and runs across a field, the audience next sees him in Paris riding in a car. No attempt is made to explain how much time has passed, whether he hitchhiked the whole way, or whether the police have even discovered the crime yet. Similarly, when Michel enters a café, checks for money, orders breakfast, and runs out to buy a paper, the viewer never knows whether he returns for the food. Moreover, the spectator is left pondering whether this scene is in anyway significant to the story.

Thus, while Truffaut sets complete scenes end to end, more in the fashion of a neorealist film, Godard presents incomplete shards of action and often reduces the most significant narrative events, such as Michel shooting the officer or Inspector Vital shooting Michel, to brief and confusing scenes, while lavishing longer shots and more screen time on other events, such as watching Patricia brush her hair or seeing Michel walk around in a travel agent office, that do not significantly advance the action.

Godard's story construction remains more fragmented than that of many of his contemporaries, with time and space simultaneously concrete and subjective. The central characters come to the audience in bits and pieces as well. The audience slowly learns more about Michel's past and Patricia's concerns, but there is never a scene like Truffaut's flashback in *Shoot the Piano Player* that explains character motivations and clarifies the attraction of the lovely young woman for the "wrong" man. It is unclear why Patricia even bothers with Michel, and she becomes a satirical representative of the American college woman abroad, who is excited by the exotic and dangerous French male but in the end pulls back to a safe distance. Nonetheless, Patricia remains a complicated art-film character full of contradictions: She loves art and literature, but spends time with an uneducated thug; she wants to remain independent of men but seems happy to depend upon and please men (her boss, Michel, the police) and her family to get by. She tells Michel she is pregnant, curious to see his reaction, but she never uses the pregnancy, or his reaction, as a motive for any of her subsequent actions. But the strangest twist is that she finally tells Michel that she loves him only late in the movie when she is driving in the stolen Cadillac and learns from the newspaper that he is a cop killer and married to boot. Nonetheless, she will spend the night with him only to squeal to the police the next day to chase him out of her life. And it is never clarified why Michel, who has had no qualms about exploiting other women, is suddenly ready to give up money and a sure escape to Italy for a chance to stay and talk more with Patricia, who just betrayed him. The characters remain fascinatingly complex and incomplete.

Breathless, like Truffaut's films, includes many intertextual references to other movies and also to painting, music, and literature. Here, too, Godard's storytelling is a bit more extreme. The differences between Patricia and Michel are partly defined by their taste in art: he likes Bogart and only one Mozart violin concerto; she likes Brahms, Renoir paintings, and William Faulkner novels. At one point she even hangs up a poster of a Renoir painting and asks Michel what he thinks. He rubs her bottom and

replies, "Not bad." They rarely speak about the same things with the same meanings. This scene anticipates the scene with the musical parody in *Pierrot le fou* (1965), in which the Belmondo character sings about the Anna Karina character's "thigh line" while she tries to sing about chance and eternal love. Among the scenes that best reveal that these two young people literally live in different worlds is the one in which Patricia asks if Michel knows Faulkner and he assumes she means some guy she has slept with. Many of the movie references are already inscribed in Truffaut's script, including Michel's pause before a picture of Bogart outside a theater showing *The Harder They Fall* (Robson, 1956) and the fact that Michel and Patricia hide out in a movie theater that is showing an American Western. So, while references to other arts help delineate character differences, the many movie references establish a generic milieu for Michel and Patricia's saga and place the final death scene, in which Michel is gunned down in the street, in relation to those other texts: his death is a duel gone wrong—it is broad daylight, but Michel refuses to shoot and is shot in the back—as if film noir rules perverted a classic shoot-out. Yet it all seems to have been predetermined when Michel passed a movie poster proclaiming, "Live dangerously to the very end!" As David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson point out, "Michel's behavior is presented as driven by the very movies *Breathless* imitates," right down to rubbing his thumb across his face à la Bogart.¹¹ The Paris of *Breathless* is thus a modern patchwork and an allegorical setting that looks nothing like the city of *The Cousins* or *The 400 Blows*. But as in those films, Paris is continually signifying; New Wave mise-en-scène is ever conscious of the locations selected and the ongoing fictionalization of the real worlds explored.

Beyond mode of production and story, *Breathless* is most famous for its narrative style. While the jump cut is the most obvious device that rendered Godard's first feature new and strange, a host of other strategies function alongside that one editing tactic. *Breathless* opens with twelve shots of Michel stealing an American officer's car with the help of an anonymous young woman. This sequence immediately establishes a number of patterns for the film's overall style: the hand-held camera makes the medium close-ups vibrate, the eyelines do not match, continuity editing is rejected in favor of discontinuity, and the soundtrack is emphasized as an artificial construction, with the boat and fog horns coming and going, even though the sounds and dialogue are exclusively diegetic. The opening shot shows Michel behind a girlie magazine, *Paris Flirt*, but his very first words

are ambiguous in both source and meaning: “Après tout, je suis con. S’il faut, il faut!” [“All in all, I’m a dumb bastard. All in all, if you’ve got to, you’ve got to.”] Not only is the audience unsure what has to be done, but since his face is obscured by the paper, the close-miked words could be those of Michel or of a voice-over, and just who is being addressed or why is left unclear. *Breathless* begins as if in midscene, and later, at the film’s end, Michel’s final words will be just as enigmatic: “C’est vraiment dégueulasse.” [“That’s really disgusting.”] The beginning and end remain vague: What, precisely, is he talking about? Does he intend for anyone but himself to hear it? Camera and sound selection, especially in the opening scene, obscure the character, disrupting any clear exposition, and this recurs at the end, undercutting clear resolution. Style disrupts rather than clarifies Godard’s story.

The dynarrative function of Godard’s style brings the viewer back to the jump cut as one key device since it is emblematic of the film’s overall radical nature. For instance, when a jump cut occurs, even on a simple event like Michel’s perceptual point of view of the road as he drives north to Paris, the soundtrack remains constant, while time is missing in the image. The resulting contradiction between Michel singing Patricia’s name continuously, while the images show time is cut out of the visuals, creates an impossible situation: either there is a gap of distance on the road or there is not; time cannot flow smoothly in the sound space while it is fragmented in the visual space. As David Bordwell points out, the jump cut was born with the in-camera tricks of Georges Méliès, exploited by a number of internationally famous directors in the 1920s, and then returned with New Wave directors such as Malle and Truffaut, but especially Godard, who helps make the jump cut a recognized stylistic option, albeit a disruptive one.¹² Interestingly, Godard would never again use this technique as consistently as in his first feature, yet he is often identified with the jump cut nonetheless. Like his entire arsenal of narrative tactics, however, the jump cut is highly significant since it calls attention to the constructed reality of the filmic text, to the spectator’s on-going labor of generating a fictional world out of often contradictory stylistic cues, and to Godard’s own expressive, auteur presence.

The use of temporal and spatial ellipses, which characterizes the overall visual style in *Breathless*, recurs in multiple ways beyond the repeated jump cuts. Discontinuity editing tactics abound throughout, though some continuity conventions do recur, such as occasional “correct” eyeline matches, matches on action, and analytical editing with consistent screen

direction. But the instances of discontinuity, combined with some very long takes, distinguish *Breathless*, as the narrator disrupts or undercuts both mundane and highly significant story events, in contrast to Truffaut's *Shoot the Piano Player*, which reserves discontinuity for the most significant moments in Charlie's chronicle. The editing rhythm is unusual in *Breathless*, even though the thirteen-second ASL sounds fairly conventional. One rich example of Godard's dynarrative style can be seen in the scene when Michel has to steal a car as Patricia waits at a café for her ride to interview the writer Parvesco (played by Jean-Pierre Melville). In this ninety-seven-second montage, alternating between the impatient Patricia (who even looks at her wrist as if checking a watch she does not have) and Michel trying car doors, there are seventeen shots, most of which systematically violate basic continuity rules. Michel begins to run left in one shot and the next shot shows him moving right, but more interestingly, actions are begun with no consequences. In one shot Michel is leaning into a silver sports car when a man arrives in the background and strikes an indignant pose, but there is never any shot to show whether the man confronts Michel. Instead the next shot shows Michel passing a man getting out of the Thunderbird convertible Michel will eventually steal. But here, too, the dynarration denies more information than it delivers: Michel, in several shots, checks out the car and quickly runs to follow the athletic, T-shirted man into his building and up in the elevator. The elevator shot is a thirty-two-second long medium close-up of both men as they move in and out of darkness, rising to the fifth floor where Michel announces he was mistaken about his floor and pushes the down button. The next shot shows him running out of the building; five shots later he picks up Patricia in the Thunderbird.

The representative significance of this sequence is that it displays an array of story fragments, none of which are finally completed, and several possible outcomes can be assumed, though none is definite. For instance, perhaps Michel had a brief confrontation with the first sports-car owner and, having learned his lesson about the risks of stealing a car in broad daylight, decides that next time he will make sure the owner is at a safe distance indoors before hot-wiring the car. Hence, he follows the Thunderbird's owner all the way to his door before risking a theft. But since the viewer never sees just how Michel starts the Thunderbird, one could also hypothesize that Godard is showing the audience a slick pickpocket job, where Michel, passing in and out of the light, steals the man's keys while they share the cramped elevator. If so, then the sequence could be a tribute



Figure 6.3. Michel is seen snooping around a car (*Breathless*)

to Bresson, who regularly denies the audience the very shot it needs to see to understand the event fully. The fact that the seemingly uneventful elevator ride is the longest continuous shot in this scene motivates the audience to ask, “Why is he showing us all this when he cut out the confrontation with the first car owner?” There is, of course, no answer; the entire sequence calls attention once more, like most every scene in the movie, to the personal style of a filmmaker unwilling to follow conventions and unwilling to allow the audience to create passively the world of his characters. Similarly, Godard never clarifies whether the impatient Patricia looking at her watchless wrist is meant to serve as a joke on the subjectivity of time in this world, or whether the audience is to surmise that she just realized that her watch is missing, and perhaps Michel, who has robbed most everyone he has met in the movie, may have pinched it, just as he is pinching another car while she waits.

Thus, this typical scene contains many strategies that reappear in scene after scene, as the visual style complicates rather than clarifies cause-effect events or the worlds of the characters. Dysnarration is a strategy that does more than employ discontinuous devices; it emphasizes the arbitrariness of story construction, creates permanent complexity and ambiguity, and calls the viewer’s attention abruptly to the labor of sig-

nification. The overall stylistic arsenal in *Breathless* does all of this with a fresh flourish.¹³ Nearly every scene, such as the conversation between Patricia and her editor, the detective's shadowing of Patricia, and the final circular explanation by Patricia to Michel of her reasons for turning him in to the police, is constructed from an intriguing menu of disruptive images and sounds. Most telling of the dynarrative qualities of *Breathless* is the shooting of the police officer and finally Michel's death; in both scenes it is impossible to reconstruct the actions into a logical space and time. For the death scene, Berruti's car travels to the right in one shot, left in the next, yet there is classical match on action as Michel begins to explain to Berruti why he will stay behind, though the next two-shot again breaks screen direction. Once Michel is shot, Patricia, running to him as he lies in the street, is obviously holding up drivers who just want to get through the street, and no police or police car are visible. Yet the detectives seem somehow to get to Michel, who has now rolled over on his back, before she can. The soundtrack is also a jumble, with the music coming and going, crescendoing and dropping out altogether, and occasional diegetic sounds such as audible running footsteps but no traffic noises.

Much has been made about the use of unflattering lighting, harsh images, wildly mobile camera work, and other significant aspects of *Breathless*, but one of the most radical strategies was its reconceptualization of the soundtrack. Michel Marie claims the dialogue alone "constitutes the most revolutionary use of language since the coming of sound. . . . Poiccard was the first film character to violate the refined sound conventions of 1959 French cinema by using popular slang and the most trivial spoken French," producing a totally new linguistic texture.¹⁴ Marie's hypothesis is that Godard's interest in Jean Rouch's groundbreaking ethnographic filmmaking, and especially *Moi, un noir* (1958), helped him rethink sound-to-image relations here. *Breathless* stood as a complex text, exploiting and expanding many cinematic devices simultaneously. Godard's combination of a hand-held camera, Michel's dialogue with asides, quotations, onomatopoeic outbursts, and vulgar whisperings, plus a nondiegetic music track that can boom parodically and then disappear, and discontinuity between time and space on the visual versus audio tracks owed something to nearly every form of world cinema. But *Breathless* also provided a unique New Wave experiment, against which all others would quickly be judged. Godard, who liked to quip afterward that he made the movie as if cinematic conventions had not yet been invented, nonetheless also liked to acknowledge that the *Cahiers* directors were the

only ones truly aware of film history; thus, in typical Godardian fashion, he offered bold contradictions in his interviewed statements just as he did in his narratives. *Breathless* at once broke new ground while it acknowledged its debt to film history, and Michel and Patricia became the ultimate New Wave couple, at once exemplary icons and unique works in progress.

By contrast, Godard's second film, *Le petit soldat* (*The Little Soldier*, 1961), became more a *cause célèbre* than an important or canonical New Wave film, because it was banned outright for several years. This movie, funded again by Georges de Beauregard, with Raoul Coutard as cinematographer, was shot on the fly, with Godard often failing to have any dialogue or action sketched out until each morning before shooting, though the actors did have to rehearse most scenes repeatedly. Rather than filming in two weeks, as hoped, it took most of April and May 1960, just as *Breathless* was opening to rave reviews in its first run. For the leads he cast newcomer Michel Subor along with Danish Anna Karina, who had just appeared in Michel Deville's *Ce soir ou jamais* (*Tonight, or Never*, 1960). While *Le petit soldat* would prove neither a financial nor a critical success, it did firmly establish Godard as a more combative and esoteric filmmaker and set up a crew, including editor Agnès Guillemot, that would go on to help him establish many production practices and aesthetic traits that continue into his subsequent works.

The story of *Le Petit soldat* is at once simple and confusing. It is told in flashback by its protagonist. Bruno Forestier (Subor), a photojournalist and member of a pro-French, antiterrorist commando group is ordered to kill a man named Palivoda, who is opposed to France's Algerian War. Strangely, Bruno is a French Army deserter living in Geneva who pretends to have no political ideals. Bruno's colleagues Jacques and Paul in the Organization of the Secret Army (OAS) suspect he may be a double agent, so they want him to prove himself by killing the pacifist Palivoda, who encourages desertion and supports the Algerian Front de Libération Nationale (FLN). Bruno, who would rather discuss Paul Klee's paintings than kill people, meets and quickly falls in love with Veronica Dreyer (Karina), who turns out to be slightly involved as well with the outlawed FLN. Bruno fails initially to kill Palivoda and is captured by FLN members, who torture him in their hotel room until he leaps through a window and escapes to Veronica's apartment. In long monologues Bruno tries to explain the difficulty of living with no ideals; he even reverses Patricia's thought from *Breathless*, pondering whether he is happy because he is free or free because he is happy. Hoping to please the OAS and in turn get visas to es-



Figure 6.4. Ad for *Le petit soldat*

cape with Veronica to Brazil, Bruno calls Jacques to say he will kill Pavlodá, but while he pursues and finally shoots his target, Jacques and Bruno decide to kidnap, torture, and murder Veronica. As Jacques puts it, “A woman on her own is either a whore or an informant.” The film ends with Bruno in voice-over explaining that he has to learn not to be bitter; luckily he is still relatively young and has time.

Since the French government banned any mention of the Manifesto of 121, it should have been no surprise to Godard and Beauregard that *Le petit soldat* would face harsh treatment, though during postproduction Godard, in an interview with *L'Express*, showed no such concern: “Will my film be censored? I doubt it. It’s an adventure film. I could just as well have invented a story based on the theft of Sophia Loren’s jewels. But why not choose something current?”¹⁵ But this movie proved a bit too current: it not only demonstrated a French government–supported underground group assassinating political enemies in a neutral country; it also showed in detail how the FLN and the OAS French commandos practiced torture and espionage. French Minister of Information Louis Terrenoire banned *Le petit soldat* outright, proclaiming, “At a time when every young Frenchman is being called upon to serve and fight in Algeria, it seems quite impossible to allow this oppositional conduct to be exposed, presented, and finally justified. The fact that [Bruno Forestier] is paradoxically engaged in a

counterterrorist action does not change the fundamental problem.”¹⁶ That the censors found the film “paradoxical” is not surprising. Even as Godard tried to justify the convoluted politics in his film, many of the motifs from later in his career, such as posing problems without solutions and offering bits and pieces of truth rather than concrete analysis, are already hinted at:

Politics are talked about in *Le Petit soldat*, but it has no political bias. My way of engaging myself was to say: the nouvelle vague is accused of showing nothing but people in bed; my characters will be active in politics and have no time for bed. . . . So I showed a man who poses himself a lot of problems. He can't resolve them, but to pose them, even confusedly, is already an attempt at a solution. . . . Since it is a film about confusion I had to show it. It appears throughout, and it is experienced by the hero, who discovers that both the OAS and FLN quote Lenin. . . . The events are confused because that's how it is. My characters don't like it either.¹⁷

Seen in light of *Breathless*, *Le petit soldat* looks like an amateurish, undisciplined, chaotic, and even ugly film. But many of the most frustrating aspects of this second feature will reverberate throughout Godard's career, most immediately in *Les carabiniers*. The story, while playing with parodic moments from film noir, political thrillers, and even Jean Rouch ethnography, presents a jumble of ideological issues that have to be considered in relation to personal politics. Just as hitchhikers in *Weekend* will be asked whether they would prefer to have sex with Lyndon Johnson or Mao Tse-tung, characters here have to decide whether they have ideals and whether they should violate those ideals for love, friendship, or even blackmail. As Bruno proclaims, “Even soldiers cannot be forced to kill,” but by the end of the film he proves his own statement wrong. Godard also sprinkles more references to the arts throughout the text, with Bruno trying to decide whether Veronica, named after director Dreyer, has eyes that are closer to Velázquez or Renoir gray, and the pair debate what time of day is best for listening to Mozart versus Haydn. Bruno even quotes Rousseau's *Confessions* “because he is passing near the Iles Rousseau in Geneva.”¹⁸ When Bruno plans to leave alone, he echoes Johnny Guitar, asking Veronica to lie to him about whether she will miss him. The rabid transtextuality, discussed by David Bordwell in relation to Godard's work as a whole, is everywhere here; further, high art, love, and torture are all intertwined in an unpleasant mixture that forces the audience, in this overtly Brechtian text, to judge every aspect of daily routine and cultural representation for potential significance. Thus, while the story concerns generic bits and

pieces tied to current events, the overall themes have more to do with abstract Godardian concerns than with whether France should be fighting to retain its colony, Algeria. It is also significant to note that Godard never did sign the manifesto urging soldiers to desert and thus perhaps really did have no political bias at this point; he may even have been critiquing himself as a “man with no ideals.”

Thus, on thematic levels, *Le petit soldat* returns to and expands upon some auteurist aspects already seen in *Breathless*: The male character is wandering and indecisive, one member of the romantic couple will die at the end, there are long, seemingly spontaneous and unnecessary conversations (with Bruno proclaiming at one point, “We never know what is important”), and American cars and pistols are featured prominently. Godard even shows up in a scene to stand self-consciously next to Bruno, as if he were again an informant, as in *Breathless*. But this loose story construction, told in flashback from an uncertain time and place, raises new narrative style issues that build upon the experimentation begun in *Breathless*. For instance, the soundtrack here is less playful and more seriously experimental. Bruno’s voice-over often overlaps with spoken diegetic dialogue, but it can also intervene, further blurring the lines between subjective and objective depth. He begins the film by announcing that for him the time of action has passed and the time for reflection has arrived but also that three days earlier several battling nations engaged in mortal combat in neutral Switzerland. *Le petit soldat* seems then to be a reconstruction of events that occurred within the past week; yet whether his words are always coming from outside or from within the diegetic space and time is often confusing, a confusion reinforced by the postsynchronized dialogue.

Bruno’s voice intervenes in the action in bizarre ways. At one point while Bruno is photographing Veronica and, with his camera held high, covering his mouth, he mentions that Russians are always studying; she asks, “What?” The second time he repeats his statement, his voice has a slightly different quality, suggesting that perhaps the first line was mental subjective but Veronica somehow sensed it, and the second time it is spoken dialogue. (Of course, the disparity could also result from a poor dubbing job in the postproduction recording session.) Next, Bruno says, “I find it funny you want to be an actress,” while Veronica, seated, reaches for her cigarettes. And he adds in voice-over, “She lit a cigarette and asked why.” The only diegetic sound is her striking of the match, as she then tosses the match aside and asks “Why?” to which he responds that he finds actors stupid because they do whatever they are told. This experimentation with

the narrative functions of dialogue undercuts any sense of an absolute fictional time and space and reminds the spectator that, as in *Double Indemnity*–like films noir, everything the viewer sees and hears comes from Bruno’s mind and memory, so on one level every word is “his” and there is little difference between story and narration. But *Le petit soldat* also lacks the visual or narrative charm of the conversations between Michel and Patricia. If Michel complained about an actor or artist, the audience, nonetheless, was intrigued by his opinions, in part because he had a sense of humor. But when Bruno complains about actors and Veronica responds by showing him a photo of Paul Klee’s painting *An Actor*, it seems artificial and cold rather than narratively significant. The drab style and experimentation here do not lend qualities to the characters since the characters seem more like the actors Bruno is condemning: they have no freedom and simply stand there doing what they are told, whereas in *Breathless* there was an open spontaneity, as if the filmmakers were trying to follow their characters. Here the actors simply follow direction in a cynical and lifeless, overly rehearsed performance.

Visually, *Le petit soldat* is a dreary experience, far from the lively and fragmented world of *Breathless*. The time and space Bruno inhabits reinforce his comment that for men, death is more important than life, and Godard’s mise-en-scène repeats over and over that this is a world of death, loss, and confusion. Characters move in and out of shadow, and despite the thematic content of torture and murder, everything is shot as if it were a mundane observation of events, producing a Geneva composed of dull, flat narrative spaces in contrast to the Paris of *Breathless*. Godard even employs conventional continuity eyeline matching often, as in the scene when Bruno, set up by his fellow commandos and in trouble with the police, exchanges looks with them to nod that, yes, if they get him out of this scrape, he will kill for them. The ASL is twelve seconds, and there are only a few jump cuts in this film, as Godard selects whip pans instead as a constant punctuation device. Sometimes the camera swings to one side of the street to reveal one character and then swings back to the other side to catch another action. At other times the camera work is used to blur events or simply as a transition; for example, when Bruno arrives at Veronica’s apartment, there is a whip tilt up her building and a cut to him inside chatting with her. But unlike the jump cut, these whip pans and tilts merely provide a striking device to suggest a rapid narrative perspective, while the action itself rarely feels vibrant, as the characters plod heavily, as if already doomed, through the streets and hallways of *Le petit soldat*.

Because of the exhibition and export ban, *Le petit soldat* provided no potential for income. Nonetheless, Godard, who to a certain extent still owed Georges Beauregard a movie, began his third feature in fourteen months, getting Beauregard and his new coproducer at Rome-Paris Films, Carlo Ponti, to fund a wide-screen, color musical comedy, *Une femme est une femme* (*A Woman Is a Woman*, 1961), starring Godard's new wife, Anna Karina. *Le petit soldat* would not be released in France until 1963 and then only after a few additional cuts for the censors, such as Veronica being tortured by the French OAS; it did not play internationally in markets such as the United States until 1965. That Beauregard took another risk on Godard proves his dedication to the young director who had earned him a great deal with *Breathless*, but it also reveals just how bold and unconventional a producer Beauregard was, traits that allowed him to become one of the major New Wave producers. Godard's third feature was based on a script he had already written and even published in part in *Cahiers du cinéma* in 1959, based on an idea from actress Geneviève Cluny.¹⁹ In a slightly different form, the same story had just been filmed by Philippe de Broca as *Les jeux de l'amour* (*Games of Love*, 1960), starring Cluny.

Godard began shooting *A Woman Is a Woman* in November 1960, with a five-week production schedule; its commercial premiere was in September 1961, six months after Jacques Demy's *Lola*, which shared some similar dialogue and story events and was also shot by Raoul Coutard. This was Godard's first film to be shot partly in a studio, though he did have ceilings built on many sets to make sure the lighting set-ups did not mimic conventional high-angle studio light grids. He also insisted on direct sound recording for the first time, a documentary/newsreel tactic that seems to contradict the control of moving into a studio. For a few scenes, Godard used his own apartment on rue du Faubourg Saint-Denis, and some scenes were filmed on the street or in real shops and cafés. Since Godard had already published the original scenario, he not only possessed a basic script to show Beauregard and Ponti, but he had, as with Truffaut's outline for *Breathless*, more of a structure than with *Le petit soldat*. Nonetheless, he continued writing dialogue and action up to the last moment, claiming often to have finished the day's script while the principal actors, Karina, Jean-Claude Brialy, and Jean-Paul Belmondo, were in make-up.

This would be the second Godard feature seen by the public, and, as James Monaco points out, it, like Truffaut's *Shoot the Piano Player*, would also be a surprising and disappointing second film for many critics,

especially since *A Woman Is a Woman* reworked the musical even more radically than *Shoot the Piano Player* did film noir, and neither film resembled Truffaut's or Godard's first, more popular, features.²⁰ Despite color, wide-screen, the success of *Breathless*, added marketing from Rome-Paris Films, and a first prize at Berlin's film festival, *A Woman Is a Woman*, sold only sixty-five thousand tickets in Paris, which was a little worse than *Shoot the Piano Player*. Today, however, *A Woman Is a Woman* can be seen to exhibit many of the personal story and style traits audiences have come to expect of Godard, though by the 1970s he himself would dismiss it as a bourgeois experiment.

After a brilliant title sequence of one-second-long blue, white, and red flashing words and names, such as "Once Upon a Time," "Beauregard," "Eastmancolor," "Comedy," and "Lubitsch," but also "Musical" followed with composer "Legrand," and "Theatrical" followed by the name of art director "Evein," there are three rapid shots of Karina, Brial, and Belmondo along with their superimposed names. This opening, accompanied as it is with crew sounds and the discordant sounds of tuning instruments and Karina's voice yelling, "Lights, camera, action," playfully begins the film with a series of discursive reminders of the artifice and process of film-making. Such overt references to personnel and context will become the norm for the rest of Godard's career. *A Woman Is a Woman* tells the tale of Angela (Karina), a stripper at the crummy Zodiac club, who suddenly decides that she wants to become pregnant. Although she has a device to calculate "scientifically" the precise moment for successful impregnation, and it has indicated that December 10, 1961, is the day, her live-in boyfriend, Emile Récamier (Brial), thinks this is not the time to start a family. He wants to wait until they are married in the near future, but she insists she wants to make a baby within twenty-four hours. Emile has a bike race on Sunday and uses that as an excuse: he wants to rest, so refuses to have sex with her. He is baffled as to why she wants a child now, and her only explanation is "because," though she then presents a circular argument that since she thought Emile loved her she wanted a child, but since he does not want a child, he must not love her. This explanation resembles Patricia's explanation for why she turned Michel in to the police in *Breathless*: it was to test her love.

Disappointed, Angela promises to ask the first man she sees to impregnate her, at which point the police arrive at the door, looking for an escaped suspect. She chickens out. But Emile calls out the window for their friend Alfred Lubitsch (Belmondo), who is also in love with her, to come

up to the apartment. While the couple waits for Alfred to climb the stairs, they sit in silence, and superimposed titles announce that it is precisely *because* they love each other that things will go badly for Angela and Emile. Alfred, who is in a hurry because he wants to get home to see *Breathless* on television, is bemused when Emile tells him Angela wants a baby; Alfred even asks whether this is a comedy or a tragedy. Alfred and Angela flirt and joke in the bathroom for a few moments under red-and-blue flashing lights, but finally the men decide to go out for a drink together. As Angela announces to the audience, it is now the end of the third act, so, in the tradition of great tragedies the heroine must hesitate as her fate hangs in the balance.

In bed that night, Emile and Angela argue in silence by showing each other titles from books that replace their dialogue, and the next day she makes a date with Alfred. But progression toward some resolution is delayed with chance meetings and anecdotal events. In a café Alfred sees Jeanne Moreau and asks her how things worked out with Jules and Jim, but she simply replies, “Moderato!” (she had just completed filming Peter Brooks’s *Moderato Cantabile* along with Belmondo).

Before Angela meets Alfred, she runs into her friend Suzanne (Marie Dubois), who mimes out the title for *Shoot the Piano Player*, and Angela tells her how much she liked the movie and especially Charles Aznavour. When Angela and Alfred meet for a drink, Alfred tells her the story of a woman who has two lovers and sends them each a letter; she thinks she put



Figure 6.5. Alfred caught between Emile and Angela (*A Woman Is a Woman*)



Figure 6.6. Jeanne Moreau in a café (*A Woman Is a Woman*)

the letters in the wrong envelopes and apologizes to each man. However, she had *not* mixed up the letters, but her explanation cost her both men. This, of course, will be the story Godard films for his episode of *Paris vu par* (1964). As Alfred and Angela try to decide what to do, he shows Angela a photo of Emile with another woman; in pain, she asks to hear a sad Aznavour song on the jukebox.

Meanwhile, Emile searches for Angela, but finally goes with a prostitute, which undercuts his entire defense to Angela that he cannot make love for fear of weakening his performance in the bike race the next day. At the same time, Angela and Alfred make love at his apartment. Back at home, Angela and Emile decide the only way to remedy the unfortunate situation is for them to have sex together right away so that if she does become pregnant there is a chance Emile will be the father. Finally, Emile tells her she is *infame*, or shameful, but she plays on the word's pronunciation and says “Non, je suis *une* femme” [“No, I am a woman”]. The tale ends with a wink to the camera from Angela and a musical crescendo, then the sound of studio lights being turned off: click.

The story construction for this light-hearted parody of a sex comedy is just as loose as it is linear. It opens with a classical Hollywood-like motivation: Angela wants to become pregnant and has roughly twenty-four hours in which to accomplish her goal. Her desire is, in fact, met doubly, as she ends up in bed with both Alfred and Emile. Many scenes are devoted to helping and/or hindering Angela in her pursuit: Emile tries to

understand her concern but then makes fun of her, Alfred shows up but then goes out for drinks with Emile and two other women, Angela reads baby books and speaks with her women colleagues at the Zodiac about pregnancy, and so on. But like *Breathless*, this film also has many seemingly inconsequential scenes and conversations: Alfred encounters a hotel landlord who proves he skipped out without paying; Angela has a long chat with Emile about what he wants for dinner despite the fact that she's already overcooked a beef roast; Emile searches for Angela to win her away from Alfred but then goes with the prostitute; and the women at the Zodiac repeat lines of dialogue from *Lola* in which they discuss who will go off on a striptease tour to southern France. But none of this affects Angela, so the scenes are merely important for providing background information, standing in as pleasant individual mininarratives or as intertextual connections with Demy's movie. Godard provides a loose, artificial story that appears both as a reference to Doris Day–Rock Hudson color romantic comedies and as a good-natured comment on love, sex, and contemporary New Wave youth. It also continues the New Wave plot device, already worked out in *Le beau Serge*, *The Cousins*, and *Jules and Jim*, of peering into contemporary morality by placing one woman in relationships with two males. In the end, however, the tone of *A Woman Is a Woman* is comically contradictory; as Brialy explains, “[Godard] made us play false situations in a realistic way, and realistic situations in a false way. The phonier it was, the more it had to seem natural.”²¹

But Godard's style here is certainly what makes *A Woman Is a Woman* such an unusual film, or as *Cahiers* wrote, “Cinema in its pure state. It's both spectacle and the charm of spectacle. It's Lumière in 1961.”²² It is indeed a stunning exercise in mise-en-scène, sound-to-image relations, and narration. The characters talk to the camera, superimposed titles provide narrative commentary to the audience, there are mismatches and tiny jump cuts alternating with perfectly classical eyeline matches, the music drops out just when Angela sings or speeds up like a calliope out of control in other scenes, characters repeat lines, and the camera occasionally pans away from the characters to cross the room, pause, and pan back, elegantly ignoring the characters for a moment of nothingness while they decide what to do or say next. The intertextual references, including Godard's suggestion that *A Woman Is a Woman* is an updating of Ernst Lubitsch's *Design for Living* (1933) crossed with Jean Rouch, all make this another fascinating variation on Godard's narrative experimentation and motifs. At one point Angela even tells Alfred what she really wants is to be

in a musical comedy with Cyd Charisse and Gene Kelly, choreographed by Bob Fosse. But its most striking innovation is its use of color; it not only prefigures Godard's own life-long fascination with how to use color anew, but it also points the way for other 1960s art films to update their arsenal of cinematic tricks with the bold semiotics of color.

Godard and Color

Today one associates the low-budgets and often grainy black-and-white images of movies such as *Breathless* and *Le petit soldat*, as well as *Shoot the Piano Player* and *The Cousins*, with the essence of art film production in the late 1950s and early 1960s. But not all of these young directors, including Godard, shot in black-and-white simply out of aesthetic choice. The *Cahiers du cinéma* directors in particular display a long fascination with color aesthetics, as they did with wide-screen framing. Color in particular could provide the New Wave a more contemporary “look” and a chance to rethink color codes, paralleling their ongoing challenges to editing and sound conventions. But color doubled the cost of production, and its slow speed limited the sorts of locations they could use. Thus, when Godard did manage to shoot in color with *A Woman Is a Woman*, he immediately engaged its radical narrative potential, exploiting color systematically to fit his own personal aesthetics, which had been a long time in critical preparation.

For New Wave directors, color posed unique challenges. On the one hand, black-and-white allowed them to shoot on location with low budgets. On the other hand, the New Wave obviously identified with the vibrant postwar youth culture. Their stories reveled in the novelty of American cars, whiskey, and jazz, but also glossy magazines, neon lights, and billboards. As Alain Bergala observes, “Strangely, the most contemporary, youthful films, the ones reflecting major changes in French society and cinema, were still using the oldest technology—black-and-white film—precisely at the moment when color film was on the rise in France.”²³ In 1959 only 15 French films were in color, while by 1961 there were 54 (of 105). But for the most part, the New Wave had to abandon color to their enemy—the big-budget “cinema of quality.”

For New Wave directors trying to shoot quickly and cheaply, color offered a host of practical problems. Most importantly, color 35 mm raw stock, laboratory fees, and release prints were much more expensive. A few people followed Jean Rouch's example and tried shooting color in

16 mm, which was roughly one-fourth the cost of 35 mm color. But even that option was expensive: in 1960, 16 mm Kodachrome had an ASA of only 16 (versus 50 for 35 mm Eastmancolor or 250 for black-and-white XX) and thus required extensive lighting set-ups for interiors. Such a slow speed also inhibited spontaneous shooting on location. But 16 mm also provided another economic hardship: the CNC did not recognize 16 mm as a professional standard and thus could not give Film Aid to 16 mm features, even if they were going to be blown up to 35 mm for exhibition (a format required in all Art et essai theaters).

For aesthetic reasons, too, a few New Wave directors did not see color as fitting their needs or desires. François Truffaut was one of the more outspoken advocates of black-and-white during the 1950s: "The proliferation of color has pushed backwards the average quality of images, making our perception of films simpler and less spellbinding."²⁴ Truffaut represents the sort of critic for whom black-and-white possesses a distinct nostalgic value but also a richness of visual parameters that help define the essential artistry of the cinematic image. Noël Benoit explains, "In Truffaut's eyes color is hideous because it contents itself with recording reality without transforming it . . . [and] it also destroys fiction by carrying the image ineluctably toward documentary."²⁵ Truffaut did make effective use of black-and-white in scenes such as the opening of *The 400 Blows* with the spilled black ink on the white paper or the scene in *Shoot the Piano Player* in which Fido drops the "milk bomb" onto the windshield of the would-be kidnappers. In contrast to Truffaut, however, the bulk of young French filmmakers of this era were, indeed, fascinated with color as one more creative parameter for film language. Jacques Rivette wrote in 1954 that color was even more important to film history than the advent of sound: "It is no longer from the shadow of things that the filmmaker will draw substance, but from the most alive and striking forms. . . . For us the history of Technicolor is synonymous with films of Jean Renoir, Alfred Hitchcock, and Howard Hawks."²⁶ Similarly, Eric Rohmer, who would not shoot a color short until 1964 or a feature until 1966, wrote as early as 1949 that color has great potential but only a handful of filmmakers use it productively. In subsequent articles, he divided color films into those that exploit it as an ornament versus those concerned with its power as an emotional motif. For him, the best color is seen in Hitchcock's use of the green dress for Miss Lonelyheart in *Rear Window* (1954). He wrote, "Do not use color like a painter, use it in a more cinematic way."²⁷

Godard later echoed this sentiment when he wrote that filmmakers

should not search the Louvre for lessons on how to use color. Instead, he looked both to film history and contemporary pop culture, including comic books and op art, when he finally got to add color to his palette. But many historians trying to explain how color burst upon the scene in 1960s art films still fail to acknowledge fully the amazing contributions by Godard and his colleagues. Alain Bergala, for instance, locates the pivotal moment in the art cinema's transition to color as the 1964 *Cahiers* interview of Antonioni by Godard. In that interview, Antonioni agrees with Rohmer's claim that color can help reveal the beauty in things such as factories and even barren landscapes, and Antonioni and Godard both refer to the bright metal and plastic objects that have begun to dominate modern landscapes. For Bergala, once Antonioni and others like him decided color film can best represent their world, modern European cinema was changed forever. Yet, by this 1964 interview concerning *Red Desert*, Godard, Malle, Chabrol, and Demy have already shot in color. It is, indeed, the French New Wave directors that establish new color norms in the cinema precisely by combining their interest in certain theorists and directors with their desire to further their own personal experimentation. Most likely, Antonioni rethought how to use color, thanks to them. The New Wave directors first carried color beyond the Technicolor stylists Vincente Minnelli, Douglas Sirk, and Alfred Hitchcock by combining it with more formal manipulation right out of Eisenstein's theories and their own practical criticism.

Of the *Cahiers* filmmakers, Godard is certainly the most important in his novel use of color for its thematic as well as formal qualities. *A Woman Is a Woman*, even more than Chabrol's *A double tour* (1959) or Malle's *Zazie dans le métro* (1960), forcefully established the narrative power of color for the New Wave. Godard offered *A Woman Is a Woman* as a tribute to his new "toy," color, but also in homage to the sort of films Hollywood would never make again, especially the 1950s musical. But he also exploited color as one more strategy that could parallel his interest in other devices such as the iris and direct sound, all of which were present in *Singin' in the Rain* (Kelly, Donan, 1952). Thus, *A Woman Is a Woman* is central to understanding how New Wave color films borrowed some of Hollywood's most daring color strategies but carried them further according to intricate and personal color systems.

Godard had already praised color in his critical articles, including his 1958 review of *Pajama Game*: "Robert Fosse has managed to coax a maximum of bright and graceful effects from the austere Warnercolor, juggling red lipstick, blue jeans, green grass, yellow flags, and white skirts, to com-

pose a wild and ravishing kaleidoscope.”²⁸ For Godard the objects filmed are inseparable from their color (it might seem redundant to say red lipstick or green grass, but for Godard their color comes first). Moreover, Godard, like Truffaut, regularly praises a certain sort of American cinema but always a cinema that he admits can never be made again, such as *Singin’ in the Rain* (which was “number five” on Godard’s Best Hollywood Movies list). But Godard develops a more modernist response to the challenge of color and bases it in part on his experimentation with representational challenges that also face modern painters. Jacques Aumont argues that *A Woman Is a Woman* announces Godard’s early fascination with op art, collage, and cubism’s potential to confuse and fragment space. “Godard’s references to artists, especially Picasso and Klee, connect his own work to their lively experimentation; but rather than identifying with artists, Godard identifies with their pictorial problems.”²⁹ Noel Benoit writes, “Godard never lost sight of the weight, power, and potential of color and especially the possibility that color could be used to disguise reality . . . and undo whatever it was coloring.”³⁰ Godard grapples with color within the context of past film practice, the history of modern art, and theories of representation from Eisenstein to Brecht.

Godard’s color scheme in *A Woman Is a Woman* establishes many of the traits that his later films will continue to develop: First, he uses uniform interior lighting levels to create homogeneous and pure colors. By contrast, Technicolor’s Natalie Kalmus, who is responsible for the Technicolor style that dominated Hollywood of the 1930s into the 1950s, had argued against maintaining equal light levels in interiors since “unimportant” bright objects such as a painting in the background would compete for attention with the actors. Second, Godard plants his camera directly in front of highly saturated primary colors, producing a very flat, pop art space, resembling modern paintings or collages that destroy depth cues. Third, Godard’s color echoes Eisenstein’s call for color selection that is textually determined for a limited color palette specific to the world of each film. Godard does not rely on traditional cultural connotations or even thematic development so much as recurring formal patterns. In *A Woman Is a Woman* all three of these strategies are already at work, and his standard color range is established with the recurring blue, white, and red that he will use throughout his career.

A Woman Is a Woman’s intertextual references to Hollywood color are also quite striking. First, there are dialogue references to *Singin’ in the Rain* and Bob Fosse; second, are the exaggerated formal color patterns that

recall the most transgressive moments in 1950s American cinema. For instance, movies such as *Johnny Guitar*, *Singin' in the Rain*, Sirk's *All That Heaven Allows* (1955), and Tashlin's *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter* (1957) were already breaking away from the functional pastel harmonies of Natalie Kalmus and the Technicolor style. When *Rock Hunter* (Tony Randall) tries to confront his test of success by keeping his pipe lit, Tashlin flashes red-and-blue lights on his face, much like Godard's lights on Angela when she sings her "I'm so beautiful" song or when she and Alfred joke in the bathroom. Where Godard exceeds the artificial 1950s models is in narrowing the range of options on his palette, rejecting wholeheartedly the use of color as "natural" or simply thematic in any single scene. Color for him is rediscovered and purified partly by discarding any appeal to realism or reducing color to thematic function.

Godard's color reveals just how deep his debt to Sergei Eisenstein runs. Eisenstein preferred that color create new emotional significance without relying on previous cultural symbols, which, of course, is the exact opposite of Natalie Kalmus's color theories. In David Bordwell's summary of Eisenstein's color theories, one can see how closely they anticipate Godard's cinema: "There is no universal psychological correspondence between a specific color and a certain feeling. . . . Color is, like graphic contour, detachable from specific objects. Pure color can suggest concepts. . . . The filmmaker can start by exposing the film's palette, associating certain colors with particular narrative elements, and then building each episode around a dominant color or color combination. . . . It [thereby] maximizes the interaction of color motifs within the film's polyphony . . . and reinforces the inner unity of picture and sound."³¹ Now the changing reds and blues on Angela's face during her striptease not only parallel her red and blue stockings, or recall *Rock Hunter*'s frightened face, but they also pastiche Vladimir's horror in *Ivan the Terrible, Part II* (Eisenstein, 1946). And unlike Tashlin's musical comedy, the color palette in *A Woman Is a Woman* continues to be narrowly defined and controlled, creating a very limited, textually specific menu that is all Godard's. Even for Godard's short, "Montparnasse et Levallois," in *Paris vu par*, the red and blue recur, helping distinguish these characters from the drab grays of their traditional Parisian setting, but the colors never seem thematically significant. Initially, the woman seems tied to red, as she always wears a red sweater, and the first man wears a blue jacket. But Roger, the second man, wears blue *and* red, is working on the pope's red car, and has a shop full of red automobile posters. Red is not thematically limited to the

woman in the space of this short film, and thus the color leans more toward formal patterns (character number one wears red, number two wears blue, number three wears red and blue, and so on) than characterization.

Godard's Paris, like that of Louis Malle's *Zazie dans le metro*, is full of modern color accents among the drab city colors. The world is changing, and the color announces those changes in the modern urban terrain, where red fire trucks, blue billboards, and intense neon lights lash the wild world of commercialism and pop art onto gray Paris. Jacques Aumont labels Godard "the next-to-last painter of the cinema," claiming Godard's investigation of pictorial problems and his defamiliarization of color composition make him the ultimate film theorist.³² Thus, when Angela, wearing her red sweater, walks into her white kitchen, surrounded by blue pots and pans, while Emile, in his dark blue blazer, stands in the white living room next to white and red flowers and a red lamp shade, the viewer is witnessing a bold modern portraiture that owes as much to advertising posters and Mondrian's formal patterns as to Eisenstein and Tashlin's color compositions. Right from the beginning this novelty is announced: the opening blue, white, and red titles proclaim that *A Woman Is a Woman* won a special jury prize at the Berlin Film Festival "for originality, youthfulness, audacity, impertinence in shaking off the norms of the classical film comedy." Color is part of the medium communicating to the audience, yet it can never be reduced to simple monological connotations—this movie does not reward a facile attempt to read the triple color motif as representing France or the United States—any more than the colors in a Paul Klee can be narrativized. Color, for Godard, had become a central, formal parameter, like editing, music, and camerawork. But he would have to follow this expensive failure with two more black-and-white features, *Vivre sa vie* (*My Life to Live*, 1962) and *Bande à part* (*Band of Outsiders*, 1963), before returning to color experimentation with *Le mépris* (*Contempt*, 1963).

Dysnarration and Godard

By the time of *Vivre sa vie*, Godard's distinct narrative strategies for investigating the cinema's modes of storytelling were fully in place. While he varied the specific tactics of experimentation in each text, he nonetheless had staked out a set terrain, exploring sounds and images in fairly consistent ways. *Vivre sa vie* proves exemplary in that it shows him pushing even further the limits of what is, or is not, appropriate in a feature film's content and style. As V. F. Perkins observes, "As a filmmaker, Godard remains

a critic speculating on the nature of film and the possibilities of direction. One of his concerns, here as elsewhere, is to test the relative strengths of language and the movie image as media for various forms of communication.”³³ Hence, by the early 1960s, Godard’s career was veering off a bit from simply telling new stories in casual new ways. His niche was rapidly becoming what at the time was labeled an “anti-cinema” that paralleled more extreme work in the New Novel as well as trends in the academic fields of philosophy, semiotics, and art theory. He may have learned to love the cinema from watching Renoir, Hawks, and Hitchcock, but his own films began to owe as much or more to theories of capitalism’s inherent alienation effects or Bertolt Brecht’s applicability for forging a nonbourgeois film style. Every mode of film practice and critical perspective could now pop into his films, lending them a forbidding quality that would eventually force friends like Truffaut to complain that Godard no longer made movies that people like Truffaut, who had never attended college, could understand. The irony was that much of Godard’s antibourgeois cinema was incredibly elitist, requiring more than just an apprenticeship at the Cinémathèque.

Vivre sa vie would again be shot in an unorthodox manner, with Godard making many decisions during the production stage while working from a brief scenario and increasingly chaotic notes to himself as well as a source book on prostitution by sociologist Marcel Sacotte. The shooting schedule was only four weeks, but the second week saw almost no shooting. Godard had promised with each new project to begin working differently, relying more on an established script, but by *Vivre sa vie* he seems to have accepted that production to him was a personal process involving last minute decisions or long pauses so he could further reflect on just what he wanted next: “The big difficulty is that I need people who can be at my disposal the whole time. . . . The terrible thing is that in the cinema it is so difficult to do what a painter does quite naturally: he stops, steps back, gets discouraged, starts again.”³⁴ *Vivre sa vie* is composed of twelve scenes, each capped off with its own introductory title, such as “The Record Shop,” “Two Thousand Francs,” “Nana Lives Her Life.” Each scene is set in linear order, though there are sizeable temporal gaps between some of them. The film was shot mostly in sequence, and according to Godard, there was little postproduction editing: “What the crew saw at the rushes is more or less what the public sees. . . . The film is a series of blocks. You just take them and set them side by side. . . . I obtained a theatrical realism.”³⁵ The result is a stunning film, again shot by Raoul Coutard, whose static shots,

filmed with the bulky, studio Mitchell camera, lent a very polished and stable look to what was in fact a very improvisational project. Moreover, its ASL was a leisurely twenty-two seconds, as opposed to the ten-second ASL for the wide-screen *A Woman Is a Woman*.

Vivre sa vie opens with white titles on a black background announcing its Special Jury Prize at the Venice Film Festival; the second title provides the visa number and copyright date, adding “conceived, written, shot, edited, in brief: directed by J.-L. Godard.” Next the white title and cast are superimposed over a dark profile, the silhouette of Nana (Anna Karina). In the first scene, or tableau, Nana, an aspiring actress, chats with her ex-husband Paul (critic André S. Labarthe) in a scene that hides their faces, shooting each separately from behind, occasionally with their faces visible in the café mirror. They have a son, raised by Paul now, and she works at a record store. In scene two, made up mostly of a three-minute-and-fifteen-second shot sequence, Nana is bored at work, and she tries to borrow two thousand francs from her female coworkers, in an episode that recalls the demoralized shop women in Chabrol’s *Les bonnes femmes*. In the third scene it becomes clear why Nana needs money: her landlady will not let her back into her apartment until she pays the overdue rent. Chased away from her apartment, she meets Paul to see photos of her son, then goes to Dreyer’s *Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928); Godard includes an entire scene from that film, in silence, intercut with Nana’s teary face. After the movie, she brushes off one man and meets another who wants to take nude photos of her for a potential film acting job, and as Patricia did with her editor in *Breathless*, she spends the night with him to further her possible career.

By the fourth scene, “Police, Nana Is Questioned,” Nana in silhouette admits that she tried to steal one thousand francs that a woman had dropped; since she had failed, she argues, she should not be arrested. Scene five depicts Nana having decided to prostitute herself and shows her servicing her first client. In tableau six, she encounters a prostitute friend, Yvette (Guylaine Schlumberger), who explains that her husband had left her with several children, so she slipped into prostitution. Nana claims that everyone is responsible for his or her own actions. Yvette then introduces her to Raoul (Sady Rebbot), her pimp, but machine-gun shots and a huge police raid send her running away. Scene number seven reveals Nana writing a letter to a madam in another town, asking if she can work in her brothel. Raoul finds her, however, and she asks him whether he finds her “special” (she had complained to Paul in the first scene that she left him because he never saw her that way). With scene eight, Nana learns the

“business” of prostitution from Raoul. On the soundtrack, she asks questions concerning rates, numbers of clients, and rules, and he answers matter of factly; the image offers a montage of Nana at work, especially entering hotel rooms and exchanging money.

Scene nine does not, at first sight, seem to advance the plot: Raoul meets with his friend Luigi, so the bored Nana, waiting for him to finish, dances to the jukebox and flirts with another young man (Peter Kassowitz). During tableau ten, Nana secures a client and then procures a second woman for him as well. In scene eleven, Nana strikes up a conversation with Sorbonne professor (Brice Parrain) in a café near Châtelet (where Nana claims once to have acted on stage). The professor tells her the story of a Dumas character who killed himself accidentally the first time he bothered to think deeply. The pair discuss the value of words and thought, with references to Hegel and the centrality of contradiction in one’s life. This scene, like Patricia’s interview of Melville in *Breathless*, relates tangentially to issues in both the story and the film’s style, but the interview also has a more polemical motivation. Filmologist Gabriel Marcel had once written that placing a Sorbonne professor in a film to discuss Kant and philosophy would be “a ridiculous abuse of film, from an aesthetic viewpoint.” As V. F. Perkins points out, much of the force and value of *Vivre sa vie* resides in Godard’s direct attack on such preconceived notions of any fixed “nature of the cinema.”³⁶

The final scene, number twelve, finds Nana with the young man from scene nine; he reads Poe’s tale of the oval portrait for her (although the voice is actually Godard’s). Parts of their conversation are delivered only in subtitles, including the final line stating that she will move in with this man and tell Raoul she is finished with prostitution. But the next shot shows Raoul pushing Nana out of her old apartment and into his car with three other men. Raoul is angry with Nana for refusing to take certain clients, so he intends to sell her to these other pimps. He drives them past a long line of people waiting to see *Jules and Jim* as well as a sign for “Enfer et ses fils” (Hell and sons). When he stops to transfer her to the men’s car, the men argue over money. In a tragic-comic exchange, one man clicks his gun, then tells his partner, “You shoot, I forgot to load.” One of the men shoots Nana, then Raoul does too. Raoul drives off, pursued by the other men, leaving Nana lying crumpled on the street in a shot that recalls Lena’s death in *Shoot the Piano Player*: an innocent woman is killed, and the incompetent gangsters take off on a chase that the audience never sees to its end.



Figure 6.7. Nana in a café (*My Life to Live*)



Figure 6.8. The philosophy professor (*My Life to Live*)



Figure 6.9. Nana is killed (*My Life to Live*)

The story construction in *Vivre sa vie* is fascinating in its mix of linearity and ellipses. While the twelve tableaux are summarized in their chapter headings and placed in sequence to produce the “theatrical realism” Godard mentions, they nonetheless leave huge gaps between one another. The viewer never learns, for instance, how much time has passed between Nana’s first customer and her meeting with Yvette, who already seems like a long-time acquaintance. Moreover, the audience is given no cue that the young man playing billiards and watching Nana dance around him in scene ten has become her lover and, by scene twelve, her willing protector. Rather than using intertitles to clarify the missing story action, such as “Over the next two months, Nana secretly met with this young man and fell in love,” the film leaps from Nana in the café with the professor to her presence in an apartment with the young man. Storytelling here offers concrete sections of time and space within chapters but communicates little about what is not shown in the scenes. Arguing, as many critics have, that *Vivre sa vie* is an essay about or a study of Nana, prostitution, or even contemporary French culture is unconvincing since the narrative provides so little background or context for the characters or their actions. What minimal information the audience does receive—Nana had a family, Yvette too has children, the young man likes Poe—is undercut by large gaps of space, time, and causality. The result is an aggressively open-story film

that is simultaneously a brave and distancing formal experiment, though some critics, such as Wheeler Winston Dixon, insist the narration is “brutally realistic,” lending the portrayal of Nana, “considerable depth and humanity.”³⁷ But for most viewers, it offers a shallow though fascinating presentation of bits of a tiny piece of Nana’s life; neorealism it is not.

Visually, *Vivre sa vie* avoids jump cuts, replacing them with fades as the most obvious and privileged form of punctuation. Each fade further emphasizes the narrator’s denial of information, with the blackness on the screen representing physically the ellipses. In addition to the many experiments with direct sound and the resulting range of image-to-sound relations (diegetic sounds crossing to become nondiegetic, subtitles replacing dialogue, Godard reading from the offscreen space, characters offering lecturelike tracts, and so on), *Vivre sa vie* was striking for its formal strategy of varying the means of staging conversations. Perkins and Bordwell have both outlined how Godard organized the framing of each scene around variations on “how one *might* shoot a conversation.”³⁸ As Bordwell points out, the opening title sequence and first scene shoot Nana from 45-degree angles, beginning with a left profile and ending by filming her from the rear, which “announces this ‘theme’ of varying camera/figure orientations.”³⁹ The rest of the scenes explore other options, including laterally tracking, arcing, and panning shots; 180-degree line variations, and even the shot/reverse shot sequence of Dreyer’s film intercut with Nana’s point/glance. For Godard, “one should feel that the characters here are constantly avoiding the camera.”⁴⁰ Thus, like his previous films, *Vivre sa vie* continues to provide a vibrant example of a text that is as much about variations on cinematic storytelling alternatives as it is about young characters wrestling with romantic and career options in their lives. It quickly became a canonical 1960s art film, celebrated by a wide range of critics and historians in a way that neither *Le petit soldat* nor *A Woman Is a Woman* would be. It also bolstered Godard’s reputation as a highly significant cinematic renegade and genius; in *A Woman Is a Woman*, Brial’s Emile declares that he does not know whether the movie he inhabits is a comedy or a tragedy, but regardless it is a “masterpiece.” But many reviewers were now eager to declare *Vivre sa vie* Godard’s masterpiece, his best work to date, prompting some to call him the French Ingmar Bergman.

Godard’s next project, *Les carabiniers* (*The Soldiers*, 1963), was less fortunate, critically and at the box office. The story outline was based on a play by Benjamin Joppolo but then revised by Roberto Rossellini and Jean Gruault, who provided a typed script for Godard, who revised it further,

cutting parts he liked out of the original and taping them into a notebook alongside his own handwritten additions. The short scenario was summarized in four acts (Nature, War, Paradise, The World) and is reprinted in *Avant-Scène Cinéma* (August–September 1976), along with a description of the final film. In his famous *Cahiers du cinéma* interview, taped before filming began in 1963, Godard claimed that the scenario was so good that he would simply film it with few complications or decisions; it would be like making an old Rossellini movie.⁴¹ The initial written script, however, was rejected by the CNC's censorship board.

Once again, Godard worked with the producers Beauregard and Ponti and with the usual crew of Coutard, Guillemot, and camera operator Claude Beausoleil, among others. While Godard hoped to film in color, his budget was too low, so he switched to shooting in Kodak XX, printing it onto high-contrast stock for a stark, grainy look; sometimes he even had the footage duplicated several times to make it look, at least in his eyes, like the orthochromatic stock used by Charlie Chaplin. Jean Douchet celebrates the result: "He worked with [high-contrast stock] as a form of Art Brut, the way Dubuffet treated paint and canvas. He extracted from it a chalk-colored world of immense sorrow."⁴² He also included newsreel footage, following Truffaut's model in *Jules and Jim*, though here the images are not so aesthetically moving: they are ugly, sometimes even banal, images of warfare.

The story for *Les carabiniers*, even more than that of *Le petit soldat*, belongs to political theater and allegory. A cluster of comical and unpleasant peasants, living in a shack in a field, are visited by two carabinieri, who, by command of the king, order the two men, Ulysses (Marino Mase) and his younger brother, Michelangelo (Albert Juross), to join the army. The soldiers also threaten Ulysses's wife, Cleopatra (Catherine Ribeiro), and apparent daughter Venus (Geneviève Galéa). But soon everyone is excited by the promise of travel and riches as the soldiers explain they can take anything from the enemy: their land, their sheep, their palaces, their cities, their cinemas, their cigar factories, their Maserati automobiles. Michelangelo is suspicious and asks whether he could smash an old man's eyeglasses, leave restaurants without paying, massacre innocent women and children, and steal designer slacks. Finally convinced that all is permitted, the men sign their contracts, and the women urge them to go to war; Cleopatra wants a washing machine, while Venus asks Michelangelo to bring her back a bikini.

The war, introduced with stock newsreel footage of cannons firing and

tanks in battle, is punctuated with title cards handwritten by Godard, such as “We saw infantrymen and generals die without a whimper, their stomachs ripped open, uniforms soaked in blood, and eyes gouged out,” “A nice summer nonetheless.” The progression of the war is shown in bits and pieces and intertitles; Cleopatra and Venus receive postcards recounting the soldiers’ adventures, and the audience sees Ulysses and Michelangelo accost civilians, execute hostages, and eventually take over apartment buildings and kill the concierges. Godard makes comical use of the Kuleshov effect and his own creative geography, alternating shots of the men looking with cuts to the Sphinx or the Statue of Liberty. Michelangelo also interrupts a movie he sees in a theater, supposedly in Mexico, by trying to peek into the offscreen space and join a naked woman taking a bath in the projected film. Later, after being injured and denied a Maserati, the men turn up at home, where Cleopatra must kick out her new lover as Ulysses arrives. The men claim to have the riches of the world in their suitcase, but it is only postcards and photographs of all the objects and places they now claim to own, such as monuments, animals, automobiles, Tiffany’s, and the planets. More soldiers show up, however, to announce that no one can claim any riches unless the king wins the war. Soon afterward, loudspeakers announce the war is over, but the king’s faction has lost. Chaos reigns as the resistance and the soldiers try to kill each other off in the streets and Venus and Cleopatra are attacked and have their hair cut by the victorious enemy. Finally, a soldier explains to Ulysses and Michelangelo that the defeated king has agreed to execute all war criminals; he ushers the men into a building, then machine-guns them down before driving off alone in a jeep. The final handwritten card informs the audience that these brothers, sleeping now through eternity, thought their dreams were really paradise.

Les carabiniers was immediately attacked by a wide range of critics who found it bizarre, a dull mess, distasteful, and/or pretentious. According to Douchet, during the film’s first run, a Champs Élysées theater simply closed its doors one night since there was no audience. *Les carabiniers* was nearly as big a financial failure as the banned *Le petit soldat*. Only twenty-eight hundred tickets were sold, or roughly 1 percent of the Paris attendance for *Breathless*! Some critics found the opening dedication to Jean Vigo pompous and insulting, while others tried to find parallels between the casual vitality of Vigo and the challenging political theater offered here by Godard. A number of reviewers cited one or two comical or even invigorating scenes, but Jacques Siclier’s review of *Les carabiniers* was fairly

typical: Siclier wrote that while some scenes were truly admirable, they simply did not add up to “a film.”⁴³

By this point in Godard's career, all his motion pictures were radical experiments, but they were uneven since he was testing various cinematic options in story and style with each new project. Nonetheless, similar motifs can be discerned from film to film, and, contrary to the argument of historians such as Wheeler Winston Dixon, there is no implicit pattern in Godard's alternating commercial and noncommercial projects.⁴⁴ Rather, Godard's dynarrative strategies, which reveal the arbitrariness of narrative forms and concentrate the audience's attention on the practice of signification, have led him to create texts that try to incorporate Bertolt Brecht, Roland Barthes, and Marxism into a single text without necessarily attempting a culminating synthesis. Characters have long been open, dialogical constructs for Godard, but by *Les carabiniers*, Venus, Michelangelo and the others, including the murdered concierges, are mere representations on an equal footing with other elements of the mise-en-scène, such as the postcards, intertitles, documentary footage, and underwear ads. Godard's cinema is already struggling on the “two fronts” of signifier/signified, offering up collages of images and sounds and variations on cinematic figures and exploiting simultaneously codified tactics from documentary and the most abstract fiction. It therefore comes as no surprise that someone actively investigating and attacking the norms of storytelling should elicit such strongly divided reactions from his contemporary reviewers. *Les carabiniers* is not an essay on war (it has no argument), nor a tract on exploitation of the working class, nor a study of consumerism; it is a cluster of experiments barely held together by a linear, fablelike tale of some weakly defined characters going off to a ridiculous semblance of war and then dying. As David Bordwell writes, “Those who dislike Godard's films may well find the works' resistance to large-scale coherence intolerably frustrating; those who admire the films have probably learned to savor a movie as a string of vivid, somewhat isolated effects.”⁴⁵ *Les carabiniers* was the least popular of Godard's New Wave-era films, but it was hardly atypical in terms of its general narrative strategies.

Godard finished shooting *Les carabiniers* in January 1963; by April he was fast at work, shooting *Le mépris* (*Contempt*) in Italy, one month before the former film premiered in France. Thus, by this early point in his career, he was already filming his sixth feature in three and a half years; plus he had shot three shorts: “Sloth,” for *The Seven Capital Sins* (1961); “The New World,” for *RoGoPaG* (1962); “Le grand escroc” (“The Big Swindle”), for

The World's Biggest Swindles (shot in January 1963 in Marrakech as soon as *Les carabiniers* was complete). In December 1963, as *Contempt* was premiering, he filmed his episode of *Paris vu par*. He had thus managed, despite the financial failures of every feature since *Breathless*, to shoot constantly; only Chabrol had made more movies by then, but Chabrol was rapidly losing the financial clout to continue. Godard began *Bande à part* in February 1964, followed closely by *A Married Woman* in June 1964 and then *Alphaville* in January 1965. If he had a master plan or production pattern, it was to be at work shooting his *next* film as his *previous* film was appearing in its first run. Each of these subsequent films continues Godard's experimentation; while they belong to the New Wave, their director was no longer "new," and they began to have less and less in common with the work of his contemporaries from *Cahiers*. Thus, they were increasingly seen as "Godard" films rather than as "New Wave" films, and for the purposes of this study at least, analysis of his first four features proves his centrality to the history and narrative tactics of the French New Wave, tactics that will continue to be explored in his subsequent films.

As a director, Godard managed always to be in pre- and postproduction almost simultaneously, a pattern that was helped along by his unconventional and spontaneous shooting strategies as well as by the continued support of his producers. Unlike Malle, Chabrol, or Truffaut, during these early days, Godard never produced his own movies.

By 1964, Truffaut and Godard began to move in very separate directions in every aspect of their lives. Truffaut, who was also considered a "man of cinema" like Godard, obsessed for all things cinematic, readily blurring the lines between the personal and professional worlds, but by the mid-1960s, he was working at a more leisurely pace, premiering a new film every other year, which ensured a high level of technical polish, narrative purpose, and consistent, auteurist results. These two friends, who had argued side by side for a new auteurist cinema in France, had each won his own battles in his own way by that time. Both directors had become spokesmen for the *jeune cinéma* and the New Wave in particular. But most important, each had offered a unified body of work that pointed out the options open to 1960s world cinema.

Of all the new directors, Truffaut and Godard represented the extremes of the New Wave to contemporary critics. While Chabrol initially helped define the New Wave and motivate its sensational reception, and Rohmer and Rivette would be recognized later as highly significant, Truffaut and Godard were the core of the *Cahiers* directors at this point, and despite

their incredible differences, they were proof of the New Wave's vitality and versatility, but most of all its victory over the so-called tradition of quality. They had indeed altered the image of French cinema, its directors, and its stars, changed its direction, and expanded the arsenal of contemporary film style at a time when the popular press was constantly asking whether the New Wave had perhaps just been a temporary phenomenon, a media creation, or a great joke. Amazingly, Truffaut and Godard kept proving over and over that they were here to stay, and they also kept helping their friends continue to move into production; at the same time, they provided a model for directors in other nations, motivating them to rethink cinematic stories, styles, and modes of production. Both Godard and Truffaut have received some of the most thorough critical and historical attention of any filmmakers in history. Thus, it seems fitting to close this chapter with two celebratory quotations:

The secret of great storytellers is perhaps to be able to unite in their work ingenuity and generosity. Truffaut understood this secret. He put it to practice in each of his films.⁴⁶

If God (or Henri Langlois) could edit Lumière and Méliès together, mightn't he get something like Godard?⁴⁷