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Between Mainstream and Avant-Garde Filmmaking: The French New Wave and the Illusion of Realism

MA THESIS / DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

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Souhlasím se zapůjčením magisterské práce ke studijním účelům.

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Introduction

There is a lack of agreement when it comes to delineating and defining the categories of experimental and/or avant-garde film, and the discussion is made no less problematic by the borderline case of the many New Waves of the second half of the 20th century, especially the French New Wave, the school which was at the *forefront* of this trend. In his *Avant-Garde Film* (2003), Michael O'Pray acknowledges that "[t]he inclusion of a chapter on the New Wave in a book dedicated to avant-garde film may raise eyebrows in some quarters."[1] The number of *quarters* in existence shows that "the theories when applied to art are nothing more than models" created a posteriori with the intention to schematize phenomena which are, most of the time, unconcerned with fitting in those models.[2] O'Pray concludes that "all of these nomenclatures – avant-garde, underground, experimental, modernist, independent – share some sense of outsideness, of marginality, of independence."[3] But what he really means by avant-garde, as his study shows, is *untraditional*, *innovative* and *against mainstream filmmaking* at the historical moment of appearance. This is made obvious precisely by his inclusion of the New Wave in the study – a film which wins its director the Best Director award at Cannes can hardly be considered *marginal* any longer.

As theoretical models are bound to exclude a specimen or other, the most usable definition is likely the one which is straightforward but which does not generalize too much. What O'Pray implicitly does is ignore the need to differentiate between, for example, early films of François Truffaut and those of Jonas Mekas. There is an obvious tension and dissimilarity between these two kinds of films and disregarding them ultimately means

[1] Michael O'Pray, *Avant-Garde Film: Forms, Themes and Passions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 69.

[2] O'Pray, *Avant-Garde Film*, Preface, no page number.

[3] O'Pray, *Avant-Garde Film*, 7.

defining the avant-garde with the smallest common denominator – against mainstream cinema. In 1975, Peter Wollen channeled some latent presuppositions towards a differentiation between what he calls the *two* avant-gardes. The first is related to formal experimentation which strives to attain what is "specifically cinematic" while retaining a close relationship with painting and post-painting, and is exemplified by The Filmmakers' Cooperative.[4] Implicit is the influence of Clement Greenberg's understanding of modernism as a "self-critical tendency" of each art to "determine, through the operations peculiar to itself, the effects peculiar and exclusive to itself."[5] The other avant-garde is exemplified by Godard's post-1968 films and is connected to the revolutionary, critical tendencies of that period. It has its origins in the films and theory of Sergey Eisenstein and other Soviet filmmakers, and, rather than the Greenbergian influence of painting, of importance here is the Brechtian influence of theater. Wollen notes that the simple distinction according to which the first avant-garde is formally purist, while the other is prevalently political, does not truly stand, but this is nevertheless the most practical and fruitful way of distinguishing between the two categories.

The French New Wave's avant-garde status is obviously disputable from the point of view of the avant-garde interested in the specifically cinematic, the one which seeks "the soul of cinema in the nature of the cinematic process, the cone of light or the grain of silver."[6] But where does this school of filmmaking stand with respect to the political avant-garde? Clearly, Wollen insists on Godard's post-68 films in order to exclude Godard's earlier films. Wollen's point brings to the fore another problematic issue – was the French New Wave really a *school* whose avant-garde qualities are equally present (or not present) in all the films? Categorizing

[4] Peter Wollen, *Readings and Writings: Semiotic Counter-Strategies* (London: Verso, 1982), 93-97.

[5] Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," in *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. F. Frascina and C. Harrison (New York and Toronto: Westview Press, 1987), 5-9.

[6] Wollen, *Readings and Writings*, 97.

a number of films as a school is, in many cases, yet another theoretical model. The film historian Michel Marie argues that, "contrary to the discourse by some of its own participants, the [French] New Wave is one of the most definite and most coherent schools in film history."[7] And yet, Marie uncritically includes the films of the Left Bank Group in his analysis, although most authors recognize that there is, again, a tension between the two sets of directors, and that ignoring it is not theoretically fruitful. Generally speaking, the Left Bank – Alain Resnais, Agnès Varda, Chris Marker, Marguerite Duras – was more *political*: if the thematic sources of the New Wave were "autobiographic and neo-romantic," the Left Bank was interested in "the repercussions of the cataclysm of war, the threat of the atomic bomb and the absurdity of the world."[8] Marie's decision is that much more problematic because, as Ian Aitken points out, the Left Bank has more similarities with later Godard than with the New Wave.[9] The New Way per se includes the films made by Claude Chabrol, François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Eric Rohmer, Jacques Rivette, and a few minor directors, "from 1958 through 1964" when most of these men diverged from their original cinematic style.[10] It is this latter group of directors, that is, the French New Way proper, that will interest me with respect to their avant-garde qualities – the dissimilarity between films like Truffaut's *400 Blows* (*Les quatres cents coups*, 1959) and, for example, Resnais's *Last Year in Marienbad* (*L'Année dernière à Marienbad*, 1961) is such that it would necessarily broaden the analysis

[7] Michel Marie, *The French New Wave: An Artistic School*, trans. Richard Neupert (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 29.

[8] Claire Clouzot, *Le cinéma français depuis la nouvelle vague* (Paris: Fernand Nathan/Alliance Française, 1972), 56. All translations from this book are mine.

[9] "Like [the later] Godard, the *rive gauche* were influenced by a post-structuralist opposition to cinematic illusionism. Film-makers such as Resnais and Marker were also familiar with, and influenced by, both Soviet montage theory and Brechtian aesthetics, whilst Resnais, Varda and Duras used their films to comment directly on political issues." Ian Aitken, *European Film Theory and Cinema: A Critical Introduction* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001), 136.

[10] Richard Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave Cinema* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), xviii.

greatly; while the relationship of the Left Bank with the avant-garde is certainly interesting, it is also one of the particularities which ultimately demarcates the difference between the two groups.

Although Wollen insists on Godard's post-1968 films, already the French New Wave, Godard included, flaunted a "spirit of rebellion against authority and convention."[11] While François Truffaut did receive the Best Director award at Cannes in 1959, during the 1950s, the awards were regularly given to mainstream French films that have come to be known as the Tradition of Quality. Originally, the French New Wave films were made with little or no institutional support, by first-time directors who did not know how to operate cameras, outdoors and with improvised equipment, and with the director's friends as actors.[12] "For the traditional avant-garde," O'Pray says, "the New Wave made too many concessions to mainstream cinema."[13] And yet, he concludes, while remaining "committed to a broader audience," the French New Wave still *was* "a form of experimental art cinema."[14] What are the qualities which allow O'Pray to talk about the French New Wave as experimental/avant-garde, and what the *concessions* which make this decision problematic?

What is of interest here is neither the decision of one particular critic, nor even the understanding of the concept of the avant-garde, whose status itself is today problematic.[15] But the French New Wave does present us with another stumbling stone when it comes to defining the avant-garde/experimental film, or, simply, the film which challenges the mainstream – sometimes what is at the forefront of cinematic history becomes obsolete and commodified for the generation that comes after. The French New Wave developed in the atmosphere of a burgeoning realist film theory of André Bazin, the theory which is still the

[11] Aitken, *European Film Theory and Cinema*, 134.

[12] Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave Cinema*, Introduction.

[13] O'Pray, *Avant-Garde Film*, 69.

[14] O'Pray, *Avant-Garde Film*, 70.

[15] Cf. Jacques Rancière's critique.

main point of reference when it comes to the issue of realism in cinema. Bazin was the most important educational figure for the young directors, and his presence in their lives went beyond the projection room. They synthesized his teachings about what would become their two most important predecessors, Orson Welles and Italian Neorealism, creating the kind of filmmaking which would influence national cinemas around the world. Then, the French New Wave was left behind and became the target, together with its father, of ideological criticism which developed somewhat before and in the wake of the protests of 1968. Again, France was at the center of a worldwide ideological consciousness-raising, and the theory its critics produced marked "[t]he birth of film studies in the university,"[16] much of it continuing to have "unabated" influence even today.[17] Moreover, one of the most influential directors of the post-New Wave period had also been one of the most important directors of the New Wave. Because of these particular circumstances, what is at stake is the exploration of the specificity of the French New Wave as a school which attained and lost its avant-garde status for, as I will argue, one and the same reason. What allowed the French New Wave to make a break with the classical filmmaking of its time – that is, what puts it in the category of avant-garde filmmaking – was, paradoxically, or at least ironically, also what ultimately denies it a firm place in that same category: its concern for realism and realistic representation, an issue which is, moreover, at the center of inquiries into the nature of film.

[16] Richard Rushton, *The Politics of Hollywood Cinema: Popular Film and Contemporary Political Theory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 33.

[17] Richard Rushton, *The Reality of Film Theories of Filmic Reality* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2011), 21.

1. The French New Wave and What Came Before It

In his manifesto of 1954, with the intention to criticize contemporary French cinema, François Truffaut outlined its recent history: with the talkies, French cinema became a "frank plagiarism" of American cinema; poetic realism produced a few masterpieces; after the war, under "internal pressure," poetic realism was substituted by "psychological realism."[18] Truffaut ascribes the disputable 'psychological realism' to what he considers the shameful practice of literary adaptations. In truth, it was Hollywood and its norms that pushed *le cinéma de papa* ("daddy's cinema"), as the young generation called the Tradition of Quality, into its shape. The basis was already there – "[m]ost of the stylistic trends of the Occupation […] carried over with little change to the postwar Tradition of Quality."[19] But a contextual fact cemented the direction of French cinema. With the end of the war, Hollywood films began to "inundate" the French market.[20] Because of pressures from the United States, the law for the protection of the local film industry passed by the French government was "farcically weak," leaving the industry to fight for itself.[21] The emulation of the films so coveted by the public after years of deprivation seemed like the logical move. From a future perspective, however, it would look like an error of judgment.

[18] François Truffaut, "A Certain Tendency in French Cinema," in *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Scott MacKenzie (Berkley: University of California Press, 2014), 134.

[19] Alan Williams, *Republic of Images: A History of French Filmmaking* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 265.

[20] Williams, *Republic of Images*, 277.

[21] Williams, *Republic of Images,* 277-8.

1.1. Daddy's Cinema and the Father(s) of the French New Wave

The 'quality' in the post-war school's name (based on the phrase "bonuses for quality" used by the National Center for Cinematography which subsidized the films) meant, "first of all, that the films could not be inferior to the best American products, either technically […] or materially."[22] But what exactly were these 'American products' that the Tradition of Quality was trying to emulate? As David Bordwell says in the study on classical Hollywood cinema he co-wrote with Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, "[w]e all have a notion of the typical Hollywood film," and this notion "carries a set of expectations […] about cinematic form and style."[23] Hollywood cinema, which relies on "decorum, proportion, formal harmony, respect for tradition, mimesis, self-effacing craftsmanship, and cool control of the perceiver's response," has the role of "the world's mainstream film style."[24] It is in this sense that early French sound cinema was, according to Truffaut, a 'plagiarism' of American cinema, and it is these characteristics that the Tradition of Quality wanted to adapt and repackage for the French audience. "They call themselves *industries*," say Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer deprecatingly about film and radio in their 1944 *Dialectic of Enlightenment*; the public is "catered for" by them.[25] In the case of the Tradition of Quality, the *industrial* intention was indeed quite openly the original driving force. The word 'tradition,' used to refer to a newly-conceived phenomenon, was supposed to imply old-fashioned, national(istic) values that were needed to differentiate the Tradition of Quality from the Hollywood cinema

[22] Williams, *Republic of Images*, 278.

[23] David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2005), 2.

[24] Bordwell, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 2.

[25] Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* trans. John Cumming (London and New York: Verso, 2016), chap. "The Culture Industry," Kindle. Emphasis original.

whose tools it was using. An exaggerated "Frenchness" was achieved by adapting literary works by authors who belonged to the national pantheon and were able to infuse the films with the "national Spirit."[26] The films, directed by Claude Autant-Lara, René Clément, Christian-Jacques, the somewhat isolated Henri-Georges Clouzot, and others, were mostly written by Jean Aurenche and Pierre Bost, and could be counted upon to flaunt "smoothness of editing, glitchless camera movement […] expensive costumes and sets, appealing stars."[27] But the ethic, aesthetic and narrative rigidity and obsolescence of these films intended for the mass market were at odds with the post-war period of financial and moral relaxation which increasingly characterized French society. The Tradition of Quality's classic Hollywood-style 'psychological realism' was proving more and more *unrealistic* from the point of view of the new generation.

In his 1961 study, published when the French New Wave was at its peak, Jacques Siclier notes that, in the public consciousness of the time, the New Wave meant a non-conformist universe filled with non-conformist characters rather than a particular cinematographic style.[28] Be that as it may, the change in content actually went hand in hand with the change in style – as the New Wave's original ideologue said, quoting Jean-Paul Sartre, "every technique refers to a metaphysics."[29] André Bazin was the "*auteur*, in the deepest sense, of the *nouvelle vague.*"[30] His role in the creation of the new film school was crucial in more than one way. As one of the organizers of the ciné-club Object 49 and the journal *Cahiers du cinéma*, he helped create "the nearly fanatical *cinéphilia* that came to

[26] Williams, *Republic of Images*, 278.

[27] Williams, *Republic of Images*, 278.

[28] Jacques Siclier, *Nouvelle Vague*? (Paris: Les éditions du cerf, 1961), 57. All translations from this book are mine.

[29] André Bazin, "Comment peut-on être Hitchcocko-Hawksien?" *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 44 (February 1955): 18. All translations from this article are mine.

[30] T. Jefferson Kline, "The French New Wave," in *European Cinema*, ed. Elizabeth Ezra (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 167.

characterize 1950s Paris," which produced, and was then fuelled by, the New Wave critic-directors.[31] He was a father figure to François Truffaut, whom he introduced to the world of film, but also sheltered in his home in times of family, financial and legal crises, to the point that Truffaut pronounced Bazin and his wife his "true parents."[32] Bazin's teachings at the ciné-club made possible the criticism of the men whose radicalism went far beyond his own temperance; he would call them "Young Turks" while defending their admiration for Hitchcock and Hawkes, an admiration he did not share.[33] Finally, it is Bazin's writings that provide the theoretical basis for the understanding of the shift from the Tradition of Quality to what could be called the *Bazinian realism* of the New Wave. "The institution's discourse should not set our agenda for analysis," says Bordwell, explaining that Hollywood's "assumptions" about itself do not "exhaustively account for its practice."[34] The same can be said of the French New Wave, for whose analysis Bazin's theory is likely more fruitful than the heated polemics and hyperbolized opinions of the critic-directors themselves.

"Through the contents of the image and the resources of montage," writes Bazin, "the cinema has at its disposal a whole arsenal of means whereby to impose its interpretation of an event on the spectator."[35] If the possibilities of the image (that is, what is added to reality in the form of set-up, make up and lighting) were used and abused by German expressionism, montage was carried to its extreme in the Soviet cinema.[36] With the beginnings of the sound film, "originating largely in the United States, a common form of cinematic language" was developed, based on the already tested cinematic devices of the silent era.[37] This cinematic

[31] Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave*, 26.

[32] Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave*, 163.

[33] Bazin, "Comment peut-on être Hitchcocko-Hawksien?" 18.

[34] Bordwell, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 3.

[35] André Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol. I*, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2005), 26.

[36] Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol. I*, 26.

[37] Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol. I*, 28.

language was 'analytic,' 'dramatic,' or simply 'classical' editing, as Bazin variously calls it, known generally as *continuity editing*: "[c]lassical editing, deriving from Griffith, separate[s] reality into successive shots which [are] just a series of either logical or subjective points of view of an event."[38] But cutting reality up in a manner which imposes a certain physical and interpretative perspective on the spectator goes against the essence of film's ontology, according to Bazin. The purpose of cinema – what led visionaries to imagine it long before it became technologically possible – is the attainment of an "integral realism, [the] recreation of the world in its own image."[39]

Bazin accords a privileged place in the history of film to Orson Welles. The Hollywood film "purports to be 'realistic' in both an Aristotelian sense (truth to the probable) and a naturalistic one (truth to historical fact)."[40] Bazin's cinematic "conquest of realism" refers neither to "the realism of subject matter" nor to the "realism of expression," but to the "realism of space."[41] Welles "restored to cinematographic illusion a fundamental quality of reality – its continuity," by putting to significant use the depth of field and the long take.[42] Another privileged place in the history of film belongs to Italian Neorealism: "As in the films of Welles and in spite of conflicts of style, neorealism tends to give back to the cinema a sense of the ambiguity of reality."[43] Here, this is mostly related to anchoring the film in the reality of everyday life: "[t]he action could not unfold in just any social context, historically neutral, partly abstract like the setting of a tragedy, as so frequently happens to varying degrees with the American, French, or English cinema."[44] While Welles developed formal

[38] André Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol. II*, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2005), 28.

[39] Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol. I*, 21.

[40] Bordwell, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 2.

[41] Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol. I*, 112.

[42] Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol. II*, 28.

[43] Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol. I*, 37.

[44] Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol. II*, 20.

possibilities for representing reality, Italian Neorealist directors did away with the "papier-mâché forests" of the past and left the studio to film outdoors, on location, with post-synchronized sound and with an abundance of unprofessional actors who accorded the films an increased level of authenticity.[45] The French New Wave would take the best of both worlds, learning from Welles's formal achievements while holding Neorealism's production values, to create films characterized by the *ambiguity of reality* which Bazin praised.

For Bazin, the image should be evaluated "not according to what it adds to reality, but what it reveals of it," and classical editing inherited the silent era's predilection for the symbolic, "the creation of a sense or meaning not objectively contained in the images themselves but derived exclusively from their juxtaposition."[46] In 1948, two years before Bazin, Alexandre Astruc had referred to these "heavy associations of images that were the delight of silent cinema" in his important text titled "The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Caméra Stylo":

> [I]n order to suggest the passing of time, there is no need to show falling leaves and then apple trees in blossom; and in order to suggest that a hero wants to make love there are surely other ways of going about it than showing a saucepan of milk boiling over on the stove.[47]

Astruc opposes these "symbolic associations" to the "caméra-stylo" of the future – "the cinema is quite simply becoming a means of expression" where the director, the *auteur*, now *writes* like a novelist, discarding the scriptwriter to produce him/herself the totality of the

[45] Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol. II*, 19.

[46] Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol. I*, 25-28.

[47] Alexandre Astruc, "The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: *La Camera-Stylo*," in *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Scott MacKenzie (Berkley: University of California Press, 2014), 605.

work of art.[48] The issue of scriptwriters and book adaptations would become the central point of Truffaut's attack on the Tradition of Quality. Without mentioning names, Astruc called the results of Aurenche and Bost's scriptwriting "idiotic transformations."[49] Six years later, in "A Certain Tendency in French Cinema", Truffaut dealt with them openly. In concordance with the director and the producer, these scriptwriters were choosing narratives that had the potential to become commonplace stories with a dose of ostensible subversion – those of forbidden love, for example – and which served to make the audience emotional, giving it "its habitual dose of smut, non-conformity and facile audacity."[50] As Adorno and Horkheimer say, talking about the film industry in general, "[n]o medieval builder can have scrutinized the subjects for church windows and sculptures more suspiciously than the studio hierarchy scrutinizes a work by Balzac or Hugo before approving it."[51] After the scriptwriters simplified and 'corrected' a national literary classic, old or modern, in order to make it more approachable, more mediocre and appealing to the general public, the result was a film "unfaithful to the spirit" of the original work.[52]

Truffaut's article is written with an auteurist tendency: as Astruc had suggested, against the functioning of the studio system, the director should be the creative force behind the filmmaking process and have his/her say in all its aspects. The article, considered today the manifesto of the *Cahiers* auteur theory, appeared in the midst of a critical re-evaluation of contemporary Hollywood cinema. In 1953, Jacques Rivette had written on "The Genius of Howard Hawks". In the article, Rivette understands Hawks's generic versatility as symptomatic of what he sees as a meaningful cohesion of comic and tragic – comedy gives "Hawks's tragedy its effectiveness," and a whole worldview of an auteur-director stems from

[48] Astruc, "The Birth of a New Avant-Garde," 604-5.

[49] Astruc, "The Birth of a New Avant-Garde," 606.

[50] Truffaut, "A Certain Tendency," 139.

[51] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, chap. "The Culture Industry," Kindle.

[52] Truffaut, "A Certain Tendency," 137.

this.[53] Rivette finds in Hawks "a classical conception of man;" regarding *Monkey Business*, he reads "[t]he monkeys, the Indians, the goldfish" as "no more than the guise warn by Hawks's obsession with primitivism."[54] Throughout, Hawks is referred to as a genius director with an irrepressible individual agency; Rivette intentionally downplays the role of the Hollywood production system in shaping Hawks's work. As Neupert points out, the future directors' "gift of auteur status to Hitchcock or Hawks as equivalents of Renoir and Bresson amounted to incendiary criticism during this era."[55] In an ironic twist of fate, the *Cahiers*' praise of American auteur-directors served to deprecate the Tradition of Quality, whose aspiration to emulate Hollywood proved to be arrested in the past. But the ideological dimension, such that was necessarily deleted from the discussion by the introduction of the concept of auteur, was not completely lost on the young critics and future directors – Truffaut mentions that one of the problems with the Tradition of Quality was also that it was a contentious "anti-bourgeois cinema made *by* the bourgeois *for* the bourgeois."[56] However, if these concerns existed, they were latent or obscured in the race to create a new, truly realistic, youthful cinema.

1.2. The Technique and the Metaphysics

One such 'anti-bourgeois' film based on the script by Aurenche and Bost, an adaptation of the novel by Raymond Radiguet, is Claude Autant-Lara's *Devil in the Flesh* (*Le diable au corps*, 1947). What annoyed the up-and-coming generation of directors was that the films of the Tradition of Quality really received the official recognition they aimed for – they

[53] Jacques Rivette, "The Genius of Howard Hawks," trans. R. Campbell and M. Pister, in *Cahiers du cinéma. The 1950s. Neorealism, Hollywood, New Wave,* ed. Jim Hillier, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 126.

[54] Rivette, "The Genius of Howard Hawks," 127.

[55] Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave*, 30.

[56] Truffaut, "A Certain Tendency," 143. Emphasis modified.

"regularly carr[ied] off medals, golden lions and *grands prix*,"[57] and *Devil in the Flesh* was no exception, it won the Grand Prix at the Brussels International Film Festival and the Best Actor award for its lead Gérard Philipe at the Cannes Film Festival. In other words, although they were industrial, mainstream productions, they were treated like innovative festival competitors and winner. In a single sentence, Truffaut paraphrases *Devil in the Flesh* thus: "They make the gestures of love and have no right to."[58] And this is indeed the gist of it – the film is set in France during World War I, but the setting is 'partly abstract,' in Bazin's terms, a logistic prop in the story of forbidden love between François, a high-school student, and a somewhat older Marthe, engaged to be married to a soldier who is fighting on the front. Autant-Lara relies on continuity editing whose most "characteristic procedure" is the shot/reverse-shot, used in "a dialogue scene, [when] the camera follow[s] the order of the text, alternating the character shown with each speech."[59] According to Kristin Thompson, the shot/reverse-shot is "one of the most prevalent figures in the classical Hollywood cinema spatial system."[60] Autant-Lara consistently employs it, especially to represent fateful conversations between the film's protagonists. For example, after François returns from a summer spent in a resort, where he'd gone to forget Marthe, he encounters her in front of his school. He declares to a friend that his feelings for Marthe are "ancient history," only to run after her as soon as the friend is out of sight.[61] The conversation in front of Marthe's apartment house, rendered as a shot/reverse-shot scene, leads into François's request that Marthe show him her apartment, on which occasion their affair truly begins.

[57] Truffaut, "A Certain Tendency," 134.

[58] Truffaut, "A Certain Tendency," 139.

[59] Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol. I*, 33.

[60] Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 303.

[61] *Le diable au corps*, dir. Claude-Autant Lara, writ. Pierre Bost, prod. Paul Graetz, Transcontinental Films, 1947, 44min, 07sec – 44min, 27sec. All future references will be included in parentheses in the text.

Writing about Welles's contribution to the history of film, Bazin gives the example of the now famous kitchen scene from *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942). It is a long take of an apparently innocent conversation between George Minafer and his aunt Fanny which ends with Fanny's emotional outburst. "Treated in the classic manner," Bazin writes, "this scene would have been cut into a number of separate shots, in order to enable us to distinguish clearly between the real and the apparent action. The few words that reveal Fanny's feelings would have been underlined by a close-up."[62] While the *Devil in the Flesh* sequence doesn't end with an outburst, it does have two layers of action, one 'apparent' and one 'real,' and, exactly according to Bazin's analysis, Autant-Lara makes sure to differentiate them visually. The central moment of the sequence is the revelation, to François and the spectator alike, that Marthe intends to hide the fact that she had in truth come to their last meeting on the dock, when François watched her wait for him from afar. It is worth digressing to note that this equally fateful scene (Marthe got married because François hadn't showed up) had ended with a 'symbolic association': when François leaves, the camera cranes down towards Marthe who approaches the water, then tilts further down to the water where Marthe's reflection is now visible; rain begins to fall on Marthe's reflection then, symbolizing her tears and implying her emotional state – a state already quite obvious (39min 20sec-39min 48sec). In the later sequence in front of the house, François and Marthe are shown in a medium two-shot. François mentions, schemingly, that she must be annoyed with him because he did not show up for the meeting, and the moment Marthe hears this, Autant-Lara cuts to a close-up of her face. According to Thompson, it was only after 1914 that the shot/reverse-shot technique started to be used for persons who were close to each other – "a two-shot could have easily been used in these cases, but the director cut in […] to catch reactions during

[62] André Bazin, *Orson Welles: A Critical Introduction* (Los Angeles: Acrobat Books, 1992), chap. "The Great Diptych: Geology and Relief," Kindle.

conversations."[63] And indeed, together with François, we watch Marthe dissimulate her feelings and the truth, and a reverse shot reveals François's own reaction to her dissimulation. The shot/reverse-shot alteration continues while the pair ensures one another that everything is fine since neither of them showed up for the meeting. François then asks Marthe, in keeping with his impetuous, child-like persona, if she is happy, and Autant-Lara again cuts to Marthe, who gives another dishonest answer, the camera lingering on her unnerved face as François repeats, equally dishonestly, "good, good, good" (44min 52sec-45min 30sec).

Autant-Lara's focusing on certain reactions in certain moments helps the spectator orientate him/herself in the scene. Put differently, it serves to *tell* the spectator where to look and what is really happening under the pretense action. The spectator is supposed to "follow [the director's] guide;" his/her attention "follow[s] along smoothly with that of the director who will choose what he should see."[64] The two-shot at the beginning of the apartment house sequence shows Marthe's face in anticipation of the close-up. The audience, identified with François because of their shared knowledge of facts, needs to focus only on Marthe's reaction, and a two-shot would tempt it to look at the speaker and thus overlook it. The reverse shot of François upon hearing Marthe lying, on the other hand, serves to confirm, beyond any doubt, that Marthe *is* in fact lying – it is not even left to the spectator to rely on his/her knowledge of the facts of the film, François's somewhat exaggerated reaction is there to make this clear. François's face at this moment also expresses his disappointment at Marthe's intention to dissimulate, which serves characterization by playing into the lover's interpersonal dynamic. In any case, if, in *The Magnificent Ambersons*, it was from the spectator's "attention and his will that the meaning of the image in part derive[d]," while

[63] Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 304.

[64] Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol. I*, 36.

watching the exchange of François and Marthe in Autant-Lara's *Devil in the Flesh*, the spectator is not "called upon to exercise [even] a minimum of personal choice."[65]

That change in technique, as Bazin implied, goes hand in hand with change in content, is well exemplified by Claude Chabrol's *The Cousins* (*Les cousins*, 1959), a film which preceded the first features of more famous New Wave directors. It has as its topic the clash between the old value system and the new, with each represented by one of the eponymous cousins, Charles and Paul. In a way, the whole plot is anticipated in the film's second minute, when the taxi driver, upon hearing the address given to him by Charles, the cousin who had just arrived by train from the provinces, instructively mentions the abbreviated, jargon form of the street's name.[66] Indeed, Charles is not prepared for the Parisian way of life, while his cousin Paul seems to be at its center. The antagonism between Charles and Paul will be reflected in Chabrol's playful, contrasting, ironic usage of the Tradition of Quality's stylistic devices, and in his relation to their ideology.

An early sequence in the underground student club where Paul brings Charles to meet his friends accords numerous opportunities for gauging the novelty of Chabrol's style. At one point, Charles is talking to two women who are standing by the wall. When one of them comments that Paul is "busy," Chabrol cuts to a shot of Paul surrounded by three people whom he'd met moments before. But Paul is in the upper left corner of the screen, and the waitress, who is listening in on his seductive, theatrical speech, is positioned to the right. The camera pans in her direction while she removes some glasses from the bar, then tracks backwards – suddenly Charles appears in close-up, but the camera moves further backwards and the shot now includes the women he'd been talking to. The camera still tracking

[65] Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol. I*, 36.

[66] *Les cousins*, dir. Claude Chabrol, writ. Claude Chabrol, prod. Claude Chabrol, Ajym-Films, 1959, 1min, 10sec. All future references will be included in parentheses in the text.

backwards, Charles moves in its direction until he is in the other room of the club. The shot sequence ends when the center of attention is no longer Paul, whom, as the sequence implies, everybody's been looking at, but the card game (18min 30sec-19min 13sec). The impression this sequence creates is that of a relay race: the baton of action is handed seamlessly over from one character/group to the next. In every crowd scene of the film – and there are many – the main characteristic of the camera is this same smoothness while it discreetly follows the two cousins shifting among various groups of people, making and breaking connections, as if the camera were a partygoer itself. This technique is reminiscent of the one used by Welles in the ball sequence in *The Magnificent Ambersons*, a sequence Bazin describes as "several centers of interest […] perpetually crossing the screen, compelling us to leap from one to the next, regretfully abandoning each preceding one."[67] In *Ambersons*, the sequence introduces the characters (to each other and to the spectator) and the plot, putting them all together for the first time, revealing character traits and anticipating future events, which will revolve around the rashness of the young George Minafer and his jealousy towards Eugene Morgan, his mother's true love. Chabrol's early club sequence has a similarly introductory role in *The Cousins*, bringing all the characters together for the first time and introducing important issues of the film, such as Charles's mounting annoyance with his narcissistic cousin.

According to Richard Neupert, Chabrol's film actually "updates [Jean] Renoir's highly metaphoric spatial configurations, exploring Paul's apartment and student club in particular via a very mobile camera that yields deep space and planes of action."[68] Together with Robert Bresson, Jean Cocteau, Abel Gance, and a few others, Renoir was a French director considered an auteur by the young critics.[69] Renoir's 1939 *Rules of the Game* (*La regle du jeu*) dynamically portray a wild party whose several actions and groups of guests

[67] Bazin, *Orson Welles*, chap. "The Great Diptych: Geology and Relief," Kindle.

[68] Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave*, 147.

[69] Truffaut, "A Certain Tendency," 142.

intersect to create the film's main plot. Indeed, Bazin himself notes that the construction of Welles's *Ambersons* sequence is "very close" to that of Renoir's, filmed only a few years earlier.[70] However, the sole existence of Renoir's deep space mise-en-scène would not allow for the future developments of French cinema. As Bordwell puts it, "the 'deep focus' of Lumière is not that of Renoir, and that of Renoir is not that of Welles."[71] Renoir's films "often produce depth by composing significant action on two planes or by using doors and windows to frame distant action; yet usually only one of these planes will be in sharp focus."[72] All three directors rely on the mobility of the camera and the so-called 'blocking' to achieve dynamicity, but, in Welles and Chabrol, the deep-space mise-en-scène relies also on the usage of deep-focus photography. Both Bordwell and Bazin point out that Welles did not discover this technical possibility, but, before him, "shooting in depth went generally unnoticed because the devices fitted comfortably into roles allotted by the classical style."[73] More importantly, Welles's innovation, achieved technically by his *Citizen Kane* cinematographer Greg Toland, was led by a concern for realism. Welles demanded "[r]ealism of space, because the eye sees in depth […]; [r]ealism of time, because cuts call the audience's attention […]; realism in the name of continuity and concealed artifice."[74] James Naremore points out that Welles, Toland and Bazin are all wrong to compare the deep-focus shot with the human eye's natural vision. In truth, natural vision is exactly the opposite of depth photography, we are unable to keep both the extreme foreground and the extreme background in focus at the same time.[75] More metaphorically speaking, the argument of, for example, Gilles Deleuze is on the

[70] Bazin, *Orson Welles*, chap. "The Great Diptych: Geology and Relief," Kindle.

[71] Bordwell, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema,* 581.

[72] Bordwell *The Classical Hollywood Cinema,* 581.

[73] Bordwell, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema,* 585.

[74] Bordwell, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema,* 588.

[75] James Naremore, "The Magician: Orson Welles and Film Style," in *The Wiley-Blackwell History of American Film*, ed. C. Lucia, R. Grundmann, and A. Simon (Oxford and Maiden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 7.

contrary that the cinema is not only "the perfected apparatus of the oldest illusion, but […] the organ for perfecting the new reality."[76] Richard Rushton understands this to mean that "the cinematic perception and quotidian perception function in precisely the same way, only cinematic perception achieves more effectively that to which ordinary perception aspires."[77] In the final instance, however, these views only play into Bazin's argument. What Bazin really means by *realism* is the *illusion* that the recorded images were not mediated by a human agent. Bazin is aware that this is, indeed, an illusion: "[d]ramatic effects for which we had formerly relied on montage [are now] *created* out of movements of the actors;" now there are in fact "more means of manipulating reality and of modifying it *from within*."[78] Rather than to 'imitate human vision,' the goal is therefore to *give back to the cinema a sense of the ambiguity of reality* – by engaging the spectator as s/he is engaged in real life. As Naremore himself says, not even while watching a deep-focus scene do we see everything at once, but are instead "required to make certain choices, scanning the various objects in the picture selectively."[79] The point is not to show everything at once – the point is to let the spectator explore the visible and to judge. That what is at stake here is in fact a certain paternalism towards the spectator which conventional filmmaking strives to preserve is demonstrated also by Welles's and Toland's early critics, who claimed that "exaggerated depth of field sacrificed selectivity, *the ability to control audience attention*."[80] For Welles, Bazin, and Chabrol, true realism, and, by extension, true art, means manipulating reality *from within* so that it still appears unmanipulated, natural, real.

What is important is that Chabrol's formal decisions are based in the ideology of the film and crucially determined by his opposition to the Tradition of Quality and its worldview.

[76] In Rushton, *The Reality of Film Theories*, 142.

[77] Rushton, *The Reality of Film Theories*, 142.

[78] Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol. I*, 33-40. Emphasis added.

[79] Naremore, "The Magician," 7.

[80] Bordwell, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 589. Emphasis added.

The ideology, in the broadest sense of the word, of the Tradition of Quality was arrested in a kind of romantic past where "true love" fights against the world but ultimately loses. The shift which occurred around the time the French New Wave appeared is exemplified well in the scene of Paul's playful seduction of the girl he'd just met, again in the early student club sequence. When the card game Charles had been watching ends, Paul approaches, the girl and her male companion following him. The two points of action merge when Paul, hearing the comments from the table, exclaims: "*I* am the king!" In this moment, the reactions of a total of *six* people are represented in the same shot, each of them slightly different, ranging from indifference bordering on irritation in the case of one of the players, to adoring interest in the case of the girl. Needless to say, the spectator is on his/her own to grasp all of these expressions at one and the same time, but this is in fact impossible: as Naramore says, the spectator cannot keep everything in focus at once. The scene is therefore truly *realistic* when it comes to the spectator's relation to it, only some reactions are grasped and others are necessarily overlooked. The reactions serve to characterize Paul and his status in society, but are also important with respect to Charles – at this early point in the film, his reaction is still sympathetic, perhaps a little embarrassed, which is important to note for the understanding of the gradual change in their relationship. The shot continues with Paul's hand around the girl's shoulder and his revelation to the group that the girl intends to leave the club in order to attend a university class – a *blasphemy* of its kind in this world, and one which anticipates Charles's failure to pass the exam and the tragic events that will follow. Soon, we see Paul with the girl in a "romantic" shot, Paul asking her "have you forgotten that you love me." Only this is not a two shot, but a three shot: behind Paul's back, the girl's male friend is standing and watching – not jealously, as we might expect, but with a good-hearted interest in Paul's seductive ways (19min 26sec-19min 58sec).

The *romantic exchange* between a *couple in love* has obviously undergone significant changes form the times of *Devil in the Flesh*. As one of the important New Wave topics, Claire Clouzot singles out the "re-evaluation of love and the couple."[81] This had arguably begun with Roger Vadim's 1956 *And God Created Woman* (*Et dieu créa la femme*), a film starring Brigitte Bardot and the New Wave's immediate predecessor. Vadim was "inspired by both the polish of classical Hollywood spectacle and a highly stylized but authentic use of locations."[82] Bardot's embodiment of female eroticism and unrestrained sexuality, fancy St. Tropez locations, and a story which brought "new perspectives on morality" all fit with what *L'Express* had labeled *nouvelle vague*.[83] *And God Created Woman* today looks like a Hollywood movie because of an eroticized star of the Marilyn Monroe type and the richness of setting and color. The New Wave films would be made mostly in black-and-white and with significantly less resources; despite the occasional inclusion of such stars as Jean Moreau and even Bardot herself, the true female protagonist of the New Wave is more like the thin, pixy-haired Jean Seberg of Godard's *Breathless* (*À bout de souffle*, 1960). Clouzot mentions *The Cousins* as a film which portrays love in the form of a "discovery" of the body of the man/woman, as opposed to disguising sexuality as "love at first sight."[84] Indeed, precisely such 'disguise' accounts for some tenuousness in the portrayal of François and Marthe's relationship, whose development is unnaturally hastened. When François tells Marthe that he will never forgive her fiancé for "having [her] before [him]" (56min 52sec), this seems inappropriate for the stadium of their relationship, that is, considering how long they have known each other. Details of this kind can arguably be explained by reference to François's childish character, but his words in this scene seem rather as the point of eruption of the

[81] Clouzot, *Le cinéma français*, 33.

[82] Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave*, 83.

[83] Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave*, 85.

[84] Clouzot, *Le cinéma français*, 33.

sexual tension otherwise repressed to fit into the story of impossible love. If Chabrol's three-shot romantic exchange is an ironization of the conventions of *le cinéma de papa* and a signal that the times have changed, Paul's inquiry to Charles upon his arrival to Paris about whether he is happy ironizes François's question to Marthe of the same import in the apartment building scene. In *Devil in the Flesh*, the question bears on circumstances of a fateful kind and renders the scene pathetic; in *The Cousins*, Paul's masquerade is the result of his own intention, a function of his ironically pompous (though also egotistic), theatrical self-styling – that Paul's question is supposed to *refer* to something is signaled by his use of the third person (in addressing Charles directly, he asks: "Is he happy?") (5min 20sec). The same could be said of Paul's question to the girl he'd just met about whether she'd forgotten that she loves him. Of course, reference to film history (and the current cinema) is one of the important traits of the French New Wave. As Richard Neupert says, Chabrol's style "is not only self-conscious but springs from past film traditions as he mixes genres, authorial and intertextual reference," which is "certainly one central aesthetic trait for defining a New Wave film."[85]

A few minutes before the end of Autant-Lara's *Devil in the Flesh*, after childbirth, Marthe grabs her husband's hand and pronounces the name of her lover. The camera then pans around the bed, behind Marthe, eventually showing her hand dropping from her husband's, then it pans to the left for a shot of the hearth – the flame dies out slowly, marking symbolically the end of Marthe's life and her *flame* for François. The final shot of Chabrol's *The Cousins* is a 'symbolic association', despised by Astruc, Bazin and Truffaut, of the same import: the needle on Paul's gramophone lifts, and the record comes to an end. This shot, although apparently utterly symbolic, isn't completely gratuitous, as it marks the end of the loose, partying life Paul has been living, for either external or internal reasons – he might go

[85] Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave*, 160.

to prison, or maybe Charles's accidental, and yet foreseeable/anticipated death by Paul's own careless hand, will force him to change his way of life. However, Autant-Lara's shot of Marthe's death is not exactly gratuitous either – it references and contrasts an earlier sequence, that of the beginning of François's and Marthe's affair. Then, the camera had also panned around the bed during the couple's first caresses, arriving at the other end to reveal two hands grasping each other, feverishly struggling to turn off the lamp, then panning further to the left and tracking forward to show the hearth and the flame increasingly getting stronger (55min 11sec-55min 44sec). Although the metaphor of the fire burning stronger or dying out is none the more innovative for it, the obviously intentional parallelism of the two scenes "acquits" Autant-Lara of some of the Young Turk's charges. In fact, André Bazin felt obliged to defend this particular film from them, and the way he goes about it is significant because it touches upon the question of literary adaptations – and, on the background of Bazin's temperance, reveals the provocative hyperbolizing which often characterized the views of the young critic-directors. As Bazin puts it: "There is nothing to prevent us from dreaming of a *Diable au corps* directed by Jean Vigo but let us congratulate ourselves that at least we have an adaptation by Claude Autant-Lara."[86] In other words, "[c]ertainly it would be better if all directors were men of genius; presumably then there would be no problem of adaptation."[87] In a reconciliatory manner, Bazin even goes so far as to turn the Young Turks' argument over – yes, adaptation means looking for cinematic "equivalents" to scenes rendered textually in the literary work, but it is *owing to*, and not *despite of* them, that the films "turned out so well."[88] According to Truffaut, however, there are no "unfilmable scenes" in a literary work, the filmic equivalent is often simply "a decoy," in the case of *Devil in the Flesh*, "a decoy for the

[86] Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol. I*, 67.

[87] Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol. I*, 67.

[88] Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol. I*, 141.

anti-militarist elements added to the work."[89] What truly seems to be the problem therefore, violent attacks on respected elder directors aside, is essentially not against Bazin, but rather that which is implicit in his call for more realism: the intention to paternalize the spectator by telling him/her where to look and what to think.

What is important, however, is that Chabrol's use of the 'symbolic association' is *ironic*, while Autant-Lara's certainly is not; this is an ideological difference which shows that the French New Wave style is more mature and in accordance with the changing times then the Tradition of Quality's. Chabrol's usage of the 'symbolic association' for the film's ending is another self-conscious, intertextual reference to the history of cinema. It is, indeed, hard to imagine Paul changing, or even honestly grieving for his cousin, in a world freshly devoid of moral obligations and considerations. *The record* is *over* only for Charles, the innocent provincial youth. The dynamic between the two cousins functions as a kind of metaphor, allegory even, for the relationship between the films of the Young Turks and those of papa's generation. In comparison to Chabrol's film, *Devil in the Flesh*, despite its strong emotions, or rather because of them, seems naïve, both artistically and ideologically, a thing of the past, and the "cynicism" of Autant-Lara's youth, mentioned in a title card at the opening of the film, seems like unselfconscious self-styling revelatory of a deeper naïveté – their 'cynicism' cannot be compared to that of Chabrol's characters. The New Wave personalities no longer believe in love or family, as is programmatically explained in a disturbing apartment sequence with Paul, Clovis and Florence, when Paul and Clovis try to persuade Florence to forget about Charles as she would only get stuck in a marriage which she cannot truly want (starting at 58min 20sec). Those who still do, namely, Charles, are not exactly represented as deserving respect, but as laughable, and perhaps even conceited – they, too, in their own way. This same description – apparently romantic, but actually conceited – actually fits Autant-Lara's

[89] Truffaut, "A Certain Tendency," 136-8.

François as well. And when Charles tells Florence that he loves her, not at all in the manner of Paul but believing this to be true, she replies: "You love me? It's quite sudden." (42min 53sec–43min). These words are a kind of 'irruption of the real' into the rehearsed structures of lovemaking, speaking, and being, that is, into the worldview favored and promoted by the Tradition of Quality. By introducing a *realist* perspective, literally and cinematically, via Florence's words and the totality of his film, Chabrol speaks for the whole new generation.

2. The Wave's Tour de Force and Its Avant-Garde: Realism and Beyond

In the last chapter, we've seen how one of the first French New Wave films, Claude Chabrol's *The Cousins*, differed from the typical film of the Tradition of Quality, represented by Claude Autant-Lara's *Devil in the Flesh*. If the Tradition of Quality insisted on the continuity editing of classical Hollywood cinema, the New Wave started taking note of the innovations introduced, for the sake of realism, by an auteur such as Orson Welles, and brought into theoretical relief by André Bazin. Instead of the Tradition of Quality's reality cut up according to the intended interpretation of the film, which revealed a paternalizing attitude towards the spectator, the New Wave invited the spectator to be the judge of what is in front of him/her. The sense of the *ambiguity of reality* was thus restored to the cinema, a sense which made what was shown on the screen seem more like real life, despite the fact that it was, admittedly, manipulated. Moreover, the formal shift went hand in hand with the shift in ideology – the world was no longer black-and-white, a place of strict morality which true love could not successfully go against, but a world freshly devoid of traditional social constraints, where the young no longer cared for the values of their parents.

Further innovations were in store, however. Chabrol's ironizing use of historical devices is teasing, but *The Cousins* is, narratively, a relatively straightforward and traditional

film. Despite the film's intertextuality and formal and thematic freshness, the story is almost instructive in its delineation of two contrasting worldviews represented by the two cousins. We may need to watch the film twice to notice Charles's disappointment when Paul yet again frustrates his attempt at bonding with others (in a three-shot the morning after the party, at 50min42sec), given that Charles is at the margins of the shot and Paul at its center, but signals of this kind build towards an ending which relies on the cause-effect progression of the plot – the increasing tension between the two cousins and Charles's growing frustration with Paul's need to be the center of attention lead to the tragic (no matter how ironized) ending. In fact, it may be argued that there are a few too many signals of this kind. In his usage of deep focus and long takes, Chabrol relies on the spectator to understand the progression of the cousins' relationship, but the opportunities are abundant, and even if we miss one or two, the others will suffice. Unlike Autant-Lara's François, who likes to point out how his and Marthe's happiness is reliant on the war and will end with it, Chabrol's characters never interpret the film for its spectators in this blatant manner, but the film's point is nevertheless quite clear.

It is in this respect that somewhat later films represent a further step in the development of French filmmaking. This is again related to the pursuit of 'psychological realism', only this concept is now understood differently. In the case of the Tradition of Quality, a supposedly meticulous care for probability and consistency led to simplifications and trivializations which actually decreased the level of realism achieved – to a school whose target group was the audience of American films produced and imported to France by the dozens, 'probability' seemed to mean not what was probable in life, but what was probable to be shown in cinema. "This school which aspires to realism destroys it," Truffaut says, "so careful is the school to lock these beings in a closed world."[90] Bordwell mentions that classical Hollywood's "[s]creenplay manuals demand that a character's traits be clearly

[90] Truffaut, "A Certain Tendency," 141.

identified and consistent with one another."[91] A good piece of advice, perhaps, *if all directors were (wo)men of genius*, to paraphrase Bazin. There is another set of personalities out there, those who do not fit in the clear-cut world of mainstream Hollywood. As Fereydoun Hoveyda says about the hero of *400 Blows*, in the French New Wave films, characters do not have clear-cut traits, but are, on the contrary, themselves marked by an "*ambiguity* that endows [them] with truth."[92]

In the post-New Wave world, this ambiguity is recognized as characterizing a whole set of films. In his 1979 text, David Bordwell groups, a posteriori, the French New Wave films together with other examples of what is called art cinema (Bergman, Fellini, Antonioni, etc.). However, in order to appreciate the French New Wave's importance, it is crucial to consider these films with respect to their immediate context, historical and geographical. After all, with their alternative production values and alternative stories and characters, they were at the origins of the art film as a genre; moreover, as Bordwell himself points out, it is André Bazin, the *auteur* of the French New Wave, who "may be considered the first major critic of the art cinema."[93] Still, Bordwell's description of the art films does account, in the broadest terms, for the narrative practices of the French New Wave. The smooth style and appearance of *400 Blows* is less daring than Chabrol's meticulously Wellesian *The Cousins* or the "tongue-in-cheek style" of Truffaut's own *Shoot the Piano Player* (*Tirez sur le pianist*, 1960),[94] but it is important precisely as an example of a now classic art film. Its novel stylistic flourishes are related to its narrative, which is motivated by "realism and authorial

[91] Bordwell, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 13.

[92] Fereydoun Hoveyda, "The First Person Plural," trans. Liz Heron, in *Cahiers du Cinéma – The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave*, ed. Jim Hillier (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 55. Emphasis added.

[93] David Bordwell, *Poetics of Cinema* (New York, London: Routledge, 2008), 154.

[94] Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave*, 192.

expressivity."[95] Realism here means psychological realism, and psychological realism means ambiguity and inconclusiveness of story and personality. 'Authorial expressivity' is related to the auteur theory which, according to Bordwell, implies that certain deviations from "the classical norm" can be understood also as "authorial commentary."[96] *400 Blows* is about Antoine Doinel as much as it is a perhaps autobiographic 'commentary' on (a child's) life in Paris in 1959. "The characters of the art cinema lack defined desires and goals," Bordwell writes, "[c]haracters may wander out and never reappear; events may lead to nothing."[97] As much as they have bearing on *400 Blows*, listed in this generalized manner, these characteristics *commodify* the film(s) a bit prematurely, and at times seem to be related more to the Left Bank films than the French New Wave proper. At the time Truffaut's film was released, this whole alternative approach to narrative was new – if Truffaut was not the first to end the film without resolution, the historical impact and recognizable quality of the famous freeze-frame of Antoine's face is certainly comparable to Welles's deep focus contract-signing scene at the beginning of *Citizen Kane*.

400 Blows ends abruptly when Antoine runs away from the correction facility where he was put by his mother, but this is not the end of the story – the freeze frame suggests that this was just one of Antoine's stops in his fight for independence and human connection in a worlds which bullies him unfairly, forcing him to become a bully in turn. As Hoveyda says, "Antoine is a victim who at the same time colludes in his oppression," and this is what makes the film so *realistic*.[98] Moreover, ending the film with a freeze frame precisely at the moment Antoine steps into the sea is not gratuitous in the least – he had said to his friend René that he

[95] Bordwell, *Poetics of Cinema*, 153.

[96] Bordwell, *Poetics of Cinema*, 156.

[97] Bordwell, *Poetics of Cinema*, 153.

[98] Hoveyda, "The First Person Plural," 55.

had never seen the sea,[99] and his mother had requested, in a moment of tenderness, that he be put, if possible, in a correction facility near the sea (1h 24min 35sec). The ending is therefore a small victory of Antoine's over the world which treats him harshly, a moment of enjoyment and freedom in the midst of objective threat. As Neupert points out, yet another sequence of the film is classic now – the sequence of Antoine being questioned by the psychologist, with the psychologist never shown to the spectator, "so radical for narrative filmmaking at the time, has since become commonplace on television news shows."[100] *400 Blows*, with its tender childhood story and its "mix of Bazinian long takes [and] Hitchcock-style manipulation," remains "one of the most written about motion pictures in history," and probably the most famous French New Wave film.[101] If it is hard today to perceive it as formally or otherwise challenging, it is precisely because its objective novelty, albeit moderate, has made it into a classic, exemplary art film. *Shoot the Piano Player*, a lesser known film and Truffaut's "most daring early movie" which was, despite its qualities, not well received,[102] is likely more obviously "avant-garde". Released only a year after *400 Blows*, this film is, according to Neupert, a "lively example of the New Wave spirit" because of its stylistic experimentation.[103] But in between Truffaut's two films, something important happened – Truffaut's experimentation was partly motivated by Godard's work on *Breathless*.[104]

Breathless is another often written about film, another French New Wave classic, and one of Bordwell's examples of art cinema. "The art cinema is classical in its reliance on

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[99] *Les quatre cents coups*, dir. François Truffaut, writ. François Truffaut and Marcel Moussy, prod. François Truffaut and Georges Charlot. Les Films du Carosse, 1959, 56min, 41sec. All future references will be included in parentheses in the text.

[100] Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave*, 188.

[101] Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave*, 177-188.

[102] Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave*, 189.

[103] Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave*, 194.

[104] Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave*, 194.

psychological causation,"[105] but this is a psychology based in a certain *ambiguity* of motives – changing your mind and not being able to account for it yourself is perfectly *realistic*, and this is what the New Wave counts on. The central *ambiguity* of *Breathless* is, according to Bordwell, that "the reasons for Patricia's betrayal of Michel remain unknown."[106] It is important to clarify that her reasons are not intentionally mystified by the director who *knows* them but intends to withhold the fact from the spectator. There are no *facts* here, only the emotional ebb and flow of a young American woman in Paris faced with the invitation to elope to Rome with a seductive but insistent criminal. At the same time, Patricia's betrayal of Michel is not as arbitrary as it may sound. It is open to *psychological* analysis based on what the film has shown, and such analysis may yield the result that it is precisely Patricia's inability, or unwillingness, to decide – to *fix* her desires, goals and her future – that prompts her to solve the problem by handing Michel to the police. She does not decide to go with him – she does not decide to leave him. Guided by the promptings of the police inspector who is closing in on her too, she simply removes Michel as a threat to her still undecided future, to the unfulfilled possibilities of life which are constantly postponed. After all, despite Michel's Bogart-like exploits and reckless living, because of his firm decision to pursue Patricia and move to Rome with her, it is Patricia, and not Michel, who functions as a kind of metaphor for the psychological ambiguity of the New Wave. The 'psychological causation' at work here is both ungraspable and utterly realistically persuasive. This is what completely removes *Breathless* from a Tradition of Quality film. In *Devil in the Flesh*, everything is graspable; Marthe falls for a poor boy, and the spectator inevitably roots for this impossible love against Marthe's strict mother and the soldier husband. Besides, what Adorno and Horkheimer say of the *industrial* film, that "[a]s soon as the film begins, it is quite clear how it will end,"[107] holds

[105] Bordwell, *Poetics of Cinema*, 153.

[106] Bordwell, *Poetics of Cinema*, 152.

[107] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, chap. "The Culture Industry," Kindle.

true even in this film which does not have a happy ending – Autant-Lara makes sure to signal, as I've already mentioned, that the couple's happiness is dependent on the war. Although this premise is romantic and perhaps daring, this is, as Truffaut says, 'facile audacity.' With Michel's famous last words – "It's really disgusting"[108] – and Patricia's inability, with her limited knowledge of French, to understand them, it is the ending of *Breathless* which is truly audacious.

When it came out, certain unsympathetic spectators and critics saw *Breathless* itself as *truly disgusting*. The film was pronounced "amateurish and ugly," or "unprofessional."[109] The list of Godard's striking formal devices is long and well-known: asynchronous sound; discontinuous editing and transitions; very long takes combined with rapid jump cuts; language filled with filthy contemporary jargon, etc.[110] Godard's untraditional filming methods and the improvisation he resorted to while preparing for filming are well-known too, as is his handling of the script provided by Truffaut, which Godard reworked in such a way as to make the film formally and narratively stunning, for example, by developing Truffaut's original ten lines into a more than 25-minute-long sequence in Patricia's room.[111] *Breathless* is therefore, when it comes to its low-cost production, on-the-go approach to filming, and Godard's auteurist handling of the script, a true French New Wave film. And when it comes to innovation, it is an avant-garde film, one which irreversibly changed the history of cinema. Even the sardonic Jacques Siclier wrote of *Breathless* that it was "the most new of all the 'new wave' films."[112] But the avant-gardness of this film is not "self-made" in a way which

[108] *À bout de soufflé*, dir. Jean-Luc Godard, writ. Jean-Luc Godard and François Truffaut, prod. Georges de Beauregard, Impéria Films, Société de Voucelle de Cinéma, 1960, 1h 25min 27sec. All future references will be included in parentheses in the text.

[109] Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave*, 102, 211.

[110] Based on Neupert, Marie and others; these are well-established.

[111] Marie, *The French New Wave: An Artistic School,* 160.

[112] Siclier, *Nouvelle Vague*? 71.

would render other New Wave directors conventional or unimportant. This issue is addressed by Michel Marie:

> But why all these technical innovations, why this intransigence towards the dominant practices of French cinema in 1959, to the point of using a type of film stock hitherto used only in photography and which had to be spliced end to end in rolls of 17.5 meters? It was because Godard, *filming after Chabrol, Truffaut and Resnais*, wanted to make *À bout de souffle* the standard-bearer of a new aesthetics, that of the French New Wave of 1959. His film was to explore a hitherto unknown continent in the aesthetics of cinema, smash the boundaries of the conventionally 'filmable' and start again from scratch[.][113]

Godard's most obvious and most radical stylistic innovation is the jump cut, used mostly in the car sequences to render the passing of time, but so that the spectator gets disoriented, shaken up from his/her comfortable voyeuristic position and reminded that what s/he is watching is artificially constructed. It is also what, more than anything, makes the film seem 'unprofessional'. Godard himself said that he "wanted to give the feeling that the techniques of filmmaking had just been discovered or experienced for the first time."[114] And this corresponds curiously with Theodor Adorno's vision of the kind of film which can truly oppose the industry: "works which have not completely mastered their technique, conveying as a result something consolingly uncontrolled and accidental, have a liberating quality."[115] The jump cut also provides the opportunity for the usage of asynchronous sound, as the diegetic soundtrack remains uninterrupted during the rapid cutting. For example, early in the film, during a car ride, Michel tries to persuade Patricia to allow him to stay with her later in

[113] Michel Marie, "Godard's *À bout de souffle*," in *French Films: Texts and Contexts*, ed. S. Hayward and G. Vincendeau (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 162. Emphasis added.

[114] In Marie, *The French New Wave: An Artistic School,* 162.

[115] Theodor Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J. M. Bernstein, trans. Wes Blomster et al. (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 179.

the day, and then to forbid her to see an American journalist. During the dialogue, we mostly see Patricia over her left shoulder, with no reverse shots of Michel. Several jump cuts are included, but with no diegetic sound. Soon, however, Michel starts recounting the attributes of a girl he loves, presumably Patricia. As he lists the body parts (a beautiful neck, beautiful breasts, etc.), Patricia is shown from the same angle, with a jump cut to accompany every body part – more precisely, to accompany the next item on Michel's list, as we see the same 'beautiful neck' the whole time (22min-22min 17sec). What actually allows the jump cut to be perceived as such, that is, as the contraction of time, is the too-rapid change of the scenery beyond the car – if the spectator focuses only on Patricia, the impression might be simply that of the image "lagging". Michel's voice, which we connected to his presence in the car, becomes a sudden voice-off which disturbs the reality-effect of the scene.

In this sense, Godard certainly moves forward from Bazinian realism at certain points – points striking, but ultimately not so frequent. The jump cut is "the most obvious device that rendered Godard's first feature new and strange," a device which he neither invented, nor would ever again use as consistently and saliently as in *Breathless*, according to Richard Neupert.[116] But Godard also integrated in his style Bazin's and other realists' lessons, taking over from his immediate predecessors and fellow director-critics and creating a kind of enriched synthesis. *Breathless* is built of long takes of Michel and Patricia walking side by side down the boulevard, of Chabrol-like dynamic positioning of (albeit a smaller number of) actors in closed spaces, of Truffaut-like bird-view shots of Patricia or Michel running across the street during their exploits around town, and views of Paris and its traffic. Finally, Godard integrates *Cahiers'* most audacious auteurist reevaluation of American cinema by making Michel a kind of self-styled Bogart, by inviting Jean Seberg, Otto Preminger's actress, to star in his film, by dedicating the film to Monogram Pictures and finally by ending it with a cop

[116] Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave*, 215-216.

shooting a criminal while the unfaithful woman watches. According to Michel Marie, the absence of the title sequence is an explicit reference to *Citizen Kane*.[117] And Chabrol's reference to the 'symbolic associations' of the Tradition of Quality here becomes a Wellesian reference to silent film, in Godard's usage of the iris-out at the moment Michel is indicated to the police by a passer-by (53min 37sec) – portrayed, in a Hitchcockian manner, by Godard himself. What Adorno says of the Young German Cinema holds true for the French New Wave films like *Breathless* or Truffaut's *Shoot the Piano Player*: "[i]n this comparatively awkward and unprofessional cinema […] is inscribed the hope that the so-called mass media might eventually become something qualitatively different."[118] As we've seen, not all of the French New Wave films look exactly like this – in fact, most of them do not – nor were they all independent or low-budget productions. But their original concern for realism – the realism of space and of psychological ambivalence, guided by the refusal of paternalism towards the spectator – brought cinematographic discoveries of American and Italian directors to France, creating an authentic stylistic synthesis which pushed French cinema forward from the ossified, *industrial* stylistics and ideas of the Tradition of Quality, ultimately yielding a youthful art cinema whose practices would become influential internationally.

3. The New Wave and the New Real

With Godard's *Breathless*, the French New Wave reached the peak of its innovativeness. Godard merged different influences to create a film whose realistic qualities now had to do not only with formal manipulations of the camera in the Wellesian style of Claude Chabrol, or the changed perspectives on love, but also with the characters who we cannot fully understand though we can feel their humanity and be attracted to them the more

[117] Marie, "Godard's *À bout de souffle*," 163.

[118] Adorno, *The Culture Industry*, 178-9.

for it. With the jump cut, used, moreover, to emphasize the male character's lewd comments, and the unromantic, from the point of view of earlier cinema, even bizarre ending, with *Breathless* the French New Wave did away with the style of the Tradition of Quality for good, leaving this school's methods in the past to which they belonged. But with the *papas* now dethroned and the "revolution" performed, the question which posed itself was, yet again, about the future – what comes after? As we will see, what came after was a period of politicized thinking and filmmaking which shed a different light on some particularities of the French New Wave, revealing a guidelessness and, perhaps, misguidedness behind the school's *spirit of rebellion*.

3.1. An Ideology Without Ideas

"I win or lose, but I fight alone," says Bruno, the protagonist of Godard's *The Little Soldier* (*Le petit soldat*).[119] The film was made immediately after *Breathless*, but was banned for several years due to its favorable portrayal of desertion.[120] Bruno is a 26-year-old French reporter in Geneva and a secret agent in the Algerian war for independence. In truth, he is a deserter whose extradition to France depends solely on his secret agent work, that is, his committing a political murder. But Bruno can't force himself to do it, although he makes clear, in voice-over, that he's done it before; he lacks ideals or conviction; from a contemporary perspective and at first glance, he might be described as *depressed*. The cinematography of *The Little Soldier* continues Godard's work on *Breathless*, but the results are quite dissimilar, despite the apparent similarity. First of all, the world of *The Little Soldier*

[119] *Le petit soldat*, dir. Jean-Luc Godard, writ. Jean-Luc Godard, prod. Georges de Beauregard. La Société nouvelle de cinématographie, 1963, 1h 20min 23sec. All future references will be included in parentheses in the text.

[120] Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave*, 221.

is deeply informed by film noir: the lighting is low, the soundtrack consists of ominous piano notes combined with silence or Bruno's voice-over, and the political intrigue includes a secretive femme fatale of Russian nationality. Additionally, Thomas Odde shows how Switzerland becomes the space of film noir with Godard's visual focus on filling stations and intricate highway networks.[121] Godard's use of sound, similar to that in *Breathless*, helps create the feeling of a world amiss. For example, during a car ride, when Bruno asks his superior why he was chosen for the murder and not another agent, his superior is shown with a cigarette in his mouth, having it lit by the driver, while we hear his voice, in what is really a voice-over, saying: "because you…" and drifting off without actually answering the question (20min 02sec). If Godard's playing with the soundtrack produced youthful dynamicity in *Breathless*, here it helps build an atmosphere of living without direction in a way which is quite different from Patricia's unwillingness to have her life sorted out.

As Odde notes, "[t]he film's political perspective proves as difficult to pin down as its spatial and textual meaning."[122] The film's significance is rather confounding and open to interpretation largely because of Bruno's *deserter* view not only on war, but on politics in general (a fact quickly grasped by the censors). For Jacques Siclier, Bruno is a continuation of Michel, and if Michel was an anti-hero in disguise, but an anti-hero nevertheless, Bruno "straightens things out."[123] As Siclier quite correctly notes, the actor Michel Subor, who portrays Bruno, unlike Jean-Paul Belmondo, has no charm as an actor at all.[124] Indeed, at first glance, Bruno seems like a *fake* Michel, while Veronica, the Russian femme fatale, is a *fake* Patricia, the film as a whole being a pale imitation of *Breathless*. First and foremost, neither Bruno nor Veronica conveys any attractiveness or mystery, although it does seem they're both

[121] Thomas Odde, "The Children of Marx and Esso: Oil Companies and Cinematic Writing in 1960s Godard," in *A Companion to Jean-Luc Godard*, ed. T. Conley and T. J. Kline (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 228-230.

[122] Odde, "The Children of Marx and Esso," 230.

[123] Siclier, *Nouvelle Vague*? 120.

[124] Siclier, *Nouvelle Vague*? 120.

supposed to. The two long sequences in indoor spaces (apartments), reminiscent of the famous one in *Breathless*, give the impression of being deeply artificial and staged. When Bruno tells Veronica that "photography is the truth and film the truth 24 times a second," he has the appearance of someone who has learned this by heart in order to be interesting (16min 02sec). He will say, in voice-over, that upon seeing Veronica's "anguished look," he had a brief impression that he was "photographing death" (28min 50sec) – a claim effectively random, not to mention that Veronica's look does not even appear anguished. During the same sequence, Veronica's own "playful" teasing of Bruno is equally arbitrary, for example, she refuses, for no good reason, to tell him which side in World War II was responsible for the killing of her parents; although this seems like she's withholding an important detail, the issue is never revisited, implicitly or explicitly. Later, when Bruno is arrested by the police while Veronica is pretending to sleep, upon his return, he tells her that he'd gone out to get cigarettes (42min 35sec), an obviously impossible explanation given with nothing comparable to the charm and persuasion of Michel saying to Patricia, for example, that the stolen car she'd seen previously was in the garage. Bruno even runs the streets like Michel, but Michel's picaresque haste is, in the case of Bruno, mostly uncalled for, despite the noir-like plot. Bruno and Veronica, but also the terrorists supporting Algerian independence, seem like they are going through the motions of real people, in the case of Bruno and Veronica – *cool* people, without truly seeming either *cool* or real.

The exceptions are the French anti-terrorist bosses, who seem to be portrayed by the only talented actors involved in the film. They are also what makes the argument that the unrealistic effect is intended problematic – why are they the only ones who differ? As an early critic who wrote without the hindsight of Godard's later career, Jacques Siclier still reads *The Little Soldier* as intentionally *unattractive*, but this leads him to a somewhat contradictory conclusion. According to Siclier, unlike in *Breathless*, in this film Godard does not "risk to

give birth to a myth."[125] Michel actually lets himself get caught by the police (he refuses to get in his friend's car or take his gun, saying that he's had enough), but his persona and his quirky last words flat out the pessimism implicit in such a choice, positing Michel, a figure which had been doomed from the beginning, as a par excellence identifiable figure for the modern French youth of the time. In *The Little Soldier*, on the contrary, the lack of ideals and direction in life as something *negative* rather than playful remains on the surface. For Siclier, Bruno is "Godard himself," a man with whom "anarchism is transformed into nihilism;" he praises as "least contestable" Godard's ability to provocatively show himself in this manner.[126] But Siclier's argument represses the question of *why* Godard chooses, if he indeed does choose, to avoid creating a myth once again, a myth of complete nihilism. It remains unclear just why he would, in representing himself, opt for an actor 'with no charm' and, as it seems at certain points, with no talent for acting. Besides, Siclier does not address the impression that the acting is not very realistic – nihilism could be interpreted simply as Bruno's narcissistic self-styling. After all, one moment, he is prostrate; the next, he is asking for passports to go to Brazil with Veronica, whom he barely knows.

Writing with the hindsight of Godard's later career, Richard Neupert sees *The Little Soldier* as an "overtly Brechtian text."[127] Neupert finds something Brechtian in Godard's playful soundtrack, which he describes as "more seriously experimental" than in the case of *Breathless*, while the film's cinematography in general forces the audience "to judge every aspect of daily routine and cultural representation for significance."[128] But while Godard's jump cut and sound experiments may strike the film historian as something innovative and radical, in reality, this is hardly a discouraging element for the spectator open to identification

[125] Siclier, *Nouvelle Vague*? 120.

[126] Siclier, *Nouvelle Vague*? 120-121.

[127] Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave*, 222.

[128] Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave*, 222-223.

with the protagonists – these devices may not fit well with the consumer of Hollywood run-of-the-mill productions, but that does not equal their being automatically radical in their effects. After all, the continuing popularity and appeal of *Breathless* testifies to this. In truth, what forces the spectator to search for the unspoken significance of what is shown in *The Little Soldier* is also the only thing that is – *if* it is – really Brechtian here, and that is the acting. It is questionable whether the acting in this film would pass a proper Brechtian "test", however, some of Bertolt Brecht's ideas may arguably account for it. Undeniably, the acting in *The Little Soldier* achieves a kind of *V-Effekt*, one which, even if it doesn't awaken the spectators to action, certainly confounds critics. In his notes on one of his plays, Brecht defends one of his actors and his own acting method by saying precisely that "it was *not lack of talent* that made the actor's performance disappointing for certain people."[129] In a text on Stanislawski, whose method is one of "compel[ling] the spectator's empathy systematically," he defines his own as "radically forego[ing] the production of empathy."[130] Indeed, Godard's actors seem to lack not only charm, but talent, and what they fail at is producing empathy in the spectators – they *look* like they are *acting*, rather unrealistic, in other words. Neupert himself notes this, describing interactions between Bruno and Veronica as "artificial and cold" and the actors as "simply stand[ing] there doing what they are told," but he never connects it to Brecht, seeing it rather as the film's imperfection.[131]

Ultimately, the question of whether *The Little Soldier* is Brechtian or simply not such a good film lies in the *significance* Neupert mentions. If the acting is indeed strange and not very persuasive, not *realistic*, what are its effects, what is achieved by making this choice? Godard leaves us guessing and reading into the film. Both Siclier and Neupert fall into

[129] Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. M. Silberman, S. Giles, and T. Kuhn, trans. Jack Davis et al. (London and New York: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015), 82. Emphasis added.

[130] Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 133.

[131] Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave*, 224.

contradiction or repress certain questions as the result of the expectation that the creator of *Breathless* (and, for Neupert, of many radical films) could not have lost control over his film. At the same time, this arguably Brechtian film was followed by not-so-Brechtian films, for example, *Band of Outsiders* (*Bande à part*, 1964), where Godard doesn't seem to have a problem with *creating myths*. In truth, seen independently of other Godard films and of anything one knows of Godard, *The Little Soldier* strikes one as a successful stylistic experimentation, but an ideological failure – if it can be both at the same time. It is an *apolitical* "political" film and, from the perspective of the political avant-garde, potentially even reactionary. Bruno works for the secret service, an "antiterrorist" organization financed by a man formerly connected to the collaborationist Vichy government. This is certainly Godard's intentional critique; however, the "terrorist" organization too is represented in negative terms, as foolishly indoctrinated. And Bruno, the protagonist, has the sole goal of opening an art gallery, away from politics, and then of going to Brazil with Veronica. For Philip Watts, the film, and especially the shots of Bruno's room decorated with photos of the Spanish Civil War, World War II, Soviets in Berlin and Budapest, and Brigitte Bardot and Jean Seberg, draws "explicit parallels between the French tortures in Algeria and the crimes of the Nazis."[132] If these parallels exist, they are the product of the mind of the critic/spectator who sees these images/events mentioned in the same context; to say that they are *explicit* is simply an exaggeration. In 1960, these photographs are there to fill, artificially, the film with political content. There is, moreover, no indication of a politically mature perspective on the "terrorists" as a people fighting for decolonization. Violence is certainly criticized, but that is hardly unconventional, and equating colonial and decolonizing violence is hardly progressive. Neupert terms Godard's position "unbiased" (unlike Truffaut, Godard never signed the

[132] Philip Watts, "Godard's Wars," in *A Companion to Jean-Luc Godard*, ed. T. Conley and T. J. Kline (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 199.

manifesto for the desertion of soldiers in Algiers),[133] but unbiased reads as *apolitical*, and, from a politicized perspective, apolitical reads as reactionary when the issue is that of a colonized people's fight for independence. Watts insists that "there is hardly a [Godard] film that doesn't include some reference to the armed conflicts of the twentieth century,"[134] but this is not really a value in itself. Truffaut and other *Cahiers* critics attacked Autant-Lara and other Tradition of Quality directors for creating *anti-bourgeois films for the bourgeois* filled with *facile audacity*. Autant-Lara represented, according to Alan Williams, a kind of old-fashioned "knee-jerk leftism prevalent in postwar French society" which preferred "topics of anti-clericalism, bourgeoisie-bashing, and the corruption brought by social and political power."[135] But the difference between Autant-Lara's François and Godard's Bruno is ultimately not that great. If World War I was just the background for a love story, the political issues of *The Little Soldier* are equally apolitical, perhaps even more problematically so. At the end of *The Little Soldier*, Bruno equates the Right and the Left, saying that, when the Right wins, it applies leftist policies, and vice versa. This is clearly supposed to be provocative, as Siclier notes. But Bruno also yearns for the Spanish Civil War as a lost ideal, saying that the young now don't even have a war of their own; he pronounces that "you can't be forced to love them all," meaning all people (1h 17min 31sec-1h 20min 32sec). Bruno is a "*totally disengaged* being" for whom "the political notions of the Right and the Left no longer make any sense."[136] Whether Godard, as the director of the film, is aware that the Algerian war for independence might well be perceived as more *theirs* than the Spanish Civil War, and that these pronouncements are full of contradiction rather than *ambiguity*, remains unclear in the film, and not in the positive sense of the tension created by the form of great works of art.

[133] Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave*, 223.

[134] Watts, "Godard's Wars," 199.

[135] Williams, *Republic of Images*, 290.

[136] Siclier, *Nouvelle Vague*? 120. Emphasis original.

Bruno does mention, referring to his first long conversation (i.e. monologue) with Veronica, that he was saying "whatever came into [his] head" (18min 04sec). And the film as a whole is, narratively, Bruno's reminiscence – he says at the beginning that, at that time, he was "young and foolish" (8min 29sec). But Bruno's narratorial voice, his "older self", is not represented as fundamentally changed or more mature politically; towards the end, he merely states that he "had no choice but to learn not to be bitter" (1h 28min). When everything is taken into consideration, the ideology of *The Little Soldier* is vague at best and most certainly such that it leaves critics gauging it on the basis of Godard's figure and his other work.

What is, according to Siclier, most contestable about 'the little soldier' is that he is "the superior avatar of the elite personality which races from one [French New Wave] film to the other."[137] Claire Clouzot points out as well that the matter the New Wave dealt with is, logically enough, restricted to what was familiar to the directors, but that this was a bourgeois milieu populated by intellectuals, artists and "parasites" (in the manner of Chabrol's Clovis) with women, sex and cinema as their central preoccupations.[138] And indeed, Bruno does not restrict himself to philosophizing about the value of political allegiances, but spends quite some time on commenting on the nature of woman. Clouzot says, contrary to Watts, that the Algerian war is never mentioned in a French New Wave film between the years 1958 and 1962 except in conversation, insisting that *The Little Soldier* is not a politically engaged film given that it negates the value of engagement and shows the supposed pointlessness of right- and left-wing ideas.[139] The New Wave as a whole disregards "the reality of the working class," it is, thematically speaking, an "elite cinema for and by an elite, politically and socially

[137] Siclier, *Nouvelle Vague*? 120.

[138] Clouzot, *Le cinéma français*, 28.

[139] Clouzot, *Le cinéma français*, 33.

disengaged."[140] For Siclier, *The Little Soldier* functions as "the ideological manifest" of the New Wave:

> [The French New Wave is] a cinema whose moral is only aesthetic, a cinema of contempt which takes no heed of man, a cinema atemporal and without deeper structures, a cinema which asserts [...] the primacy of force over intelligence but which is no less a cinema of intellectuals convinced of their superiority.[141]

What both Siclier and Clouzot imply is that the director's level of irony towards his protagonists – Chabrol's towards his complacent and pro-fascistic Paul, Godard's towards his disengaged and, again, complacent Bruno – is either not great enough, or questionable, in order for us to be able to understand the French New Wave as *critical*. One may wonder how a film such as *400 Blows* fits into the descriptions given by Siclier and Clouzot; indeed, it seems to be an exception to the rule with its focus on a child from a working class family. At the same time though, Antoine may easily be imagined as growing up into a typical New Wave character with preference for little work and many women, and a dreamy disposition which is not normally *allowed* to the working class. This story of boyhood posits the *world* as treating the young individual harshly, not *society*. This may seem like hairsplitting, but it is this subtle difference that makes Truffaut's film so universally understandable and, importantly, appealing. One can imagine the same story quite easily transposed to our own present time, and to many other contexts. Indeed, if it seems that this film is, à la Italian Neorealism, firmly anchored in the here and now of France in 1959, this is the result of the

[140] Clouzot, *Le cinéma français*, 33.

[141] Siclier, *Nouvelle Vague*? 121. It is perhaps important to note that this is not an evaluation of an a priori hostile critic, or a critic from the Tradition of Quality generation: Jacques Siclier was only three years older than Godard, he cooperated with *Cahiers du cinéma* for two years and even appeared, uncredited, in *Breathless*, according to his *Le Monde* obituary.

visual rather than the ideological. It suffices to compare it with *Bicycle Thieves* (*Ladri di biciclette*, Vittorio de Sica, 1948) and to note that what is oppressing Bruno Ricci, the son of the worker who had his bicycle stolen, is not an abstract world of adults but a very concrete poverty of post-war Italy. From their early attack on the Tradition of Quality's *industrial* production values, and their insistence on the individual agency and genius of the auteur, and to their narcissistic protagonists who like to pronounce "truths" about the nature of woman, "the New Wave illustrated the behavior of privileged beings in privileged situations and privileged places."[142] The privilege may not have always been economic, but it was regularly *intellectual*. This is likely the ultimate art house quality which immediately disqualifies the New Wave from ever being considered politically avant-garde, despite its innovativeness and its historical importance, which are hard to deny. The French New Wave directors made clear that, like Godard's Bruno, they *fight alone* and for themselves.

3.2. Two or Three Things France Has Learned About Ideology

Godard did not sign the petition for the desertion of soldiers in Algiers, but he soon became the most political French New Wave director – a *former* French New Wave director, that is.[143] What came after the Wave was a period of politicized filmmaking, brought about by an increased awareness of the social and cultural powers influencing society, reflected in post-structuralism which replaced the structuralism that operated on linguistic binary oppositions disconnected from the immediate social context. All tenets of the French New Wave were challenged. Instead of a genius auteur able to oversee and control every aspect of his/her work in which s/he invested his/her personality and worldview, the "death of the author" was

[142] Clouzot, *Le cinéma français*, 56.

[143] Godard's attitude to his New Wave period is well-known and is made clear in Colin MacCabe's *Godard: Images, Sounds, Politics* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1980).

announced, most famously by Roland Barthes in 1967, but the works of Jacques Derrida, who did away with the so-called 'transcendental signified' in the same year, were equally important. It implied that no text could be controlled by the intention of its 'creator' because of language's citationality with respect to already existent discourses. The enthusiasm for American cinema and culture subsided: "for Godard (as for so many French artists and intellectuals) the war in Viet Nam had shed new light on the United States' role in world politics and culture."[144] The old excitement around American mass products began to be understood as unnecessary consumerism. Finally, within cinema itself, these changes led to a reevaluation of the faith in and possibility of realism, and, within film theory, to a criticism of Bazin, led by the now politicized *Cahiers du cinéma*.

Consequently, the set of relevant figures from the history of film changed: the foundations of the new cinema were provided by "the combined influence of Russian formalism, Soviet montage, Brechtian aesthetics and French post-structuralism."[145] As for film theory, which lived through a kind of renaissance which determined today's film studies, it was based on the post-structuralist Marxism of Louis Althusser and the influences present in Althusser's thought.[146] *Cahiers du cinéma* itself made a 180-degree turn, becoming an important proponent of and vehicle for the new, politicized film theory. The now classic "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism" 1969 *Cahiers* editorial by Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni made clear just why realism and its immersing powers are problematic: "'[R]eality' is nothing but an expression of the prevailing ideology. […] What the camera in fact registers is the vague, unformulated, untheorized, unthought-out world of the dominant ideology."[147] Even when these critics don't mention André Bazin by name, he is implied in any discussion on

[144] Williams, *Republic of Images*, 385.

[145] Aitken, *European Film Theory and Cinema*, 132.

[146] Cf. Rushton, *The Politics of Hollywood Cinema*.

[147] Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni, "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism," trans. Susan Bennet, in *Cahiers du Cinéma Volume 3: 1969-1972 The Politics of Representation*, ed. Nick Browne (London: Routledge, 1996), 60.

realism. Realism is now written by these critics between inverted commas to signal that the word actually denotes its opposite – an ideological construction. And the adjective realistic without inverted commas means something else too. As Brecht had said in 1938, "[*r*]*ealistic* means: revealing the causal complex of society/unmasking the ruling viewpoints as the viewpoints of the rulers/writing from the standpoint of the [biggest class, the working] class."[148]

If Godard was arguably proto-Brechtian in *The Little Soldier*, he was most certainly Brechtian in *Two or Three Things I Know About Her* (*Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle*, 1966), "the first of [Godard's] works to seek coherence and meaning in *its own* political positions."[149] While this is a pre-1968 film, its already felt difference from Godard's and other New Wave films clarifies the changes in film style and culture which rendered the New Wave obsolete and effectively annulled its avant-garde status. Brecht is mentioned, in a programmatic manner, already in the third minute of the film. The narrator, whose whispering voice we recognize as belonging to the director, introduces us to Marina Vlady, an actress of Russian origin, and when she changes her position on the background of enormous apartment buildings in the distance, the same woman becomes Juliette Janson, the tentative protagonist. Marina Vlady says: "Yes, to speak as though quoting the truth. Old man Brecht said it, that actors should quote."[150] We understand that she is replying to a question of the narrator that we did not hear. This procedure will be employed throughout the film and will function as the main vehicle for the attainment of the *V-Effekt*. Brecht really does include "quotation" in his "Short Description of a New Technique of Acting That Produces a *Verfremdung* Effect". The actor "does not have to make us forget that the text is not spontaneous, but has been

[148] Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 203.

[149] Williams, *Republic of Images*, 385.

[150] *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle*, dir. Jean-Luc Godard, writ. Jean-Luc Godard and Catherine Vimenet, prod. Anatole Dauman and Raoul Lévy, Argos Films, Les Films du Carrosse, 1966, 2min 01sec – 2min 14sec. All future references will be included in parentheses in the text.

memorized" – s/he "*quotes* a character."[151] And: "Let's assume the character says something it believes to be true. The actor is able to express, must be able to express that it is untrue."[152] The latter especially seems to be describing also the acting in *The Little Soldier*, but even if that were the case, the effects of such a device in that film are, as we've seen, questionable. *Two or Three Things* will show what learning from a thinker on ideology like Brecht really means.

In accordance with Marina Vlady's early proclamation, Juliette Janson will sound as if she were quoting throughout the film. This is made especially salient because her profound ruminations, prompted by the questions of the narrator (continually unheard by the spectator), will clash with her everyday activities at the hairdresser's, while shopping or doing the dishes, etc. The interspersing of trivial dialogue with musings on life culminates, almost humorously, in the sequence at the hairdresser's, when Juliette is alternately replying to the questions of the narrator and engaging in small-talk with the manicurist (37min–38min 19sec). One is tempted to see in this a kind of ironic homage to the Bazinian 'real and apparent' action of *The Magnificent Ambersons*, because the concept of action, as well as that of the protagonist, remains but a metaphor in this film. Indeed, the duplicity of the "action" is ironic not only because there is no action or true protagonists, but, even more importantly, because there is no connection between the two "actions". The connection is only tentative. When Juliette pronounces: "What I say with words is never what I'm really saying" (38min 01sec), we may interpret this, for example, as an implication that her trivial conversation with the manicurist is obscuring a deeper need to scream against the futility of living. This may seem so especially with hindsight, since she will ask her husband towards the end of the film what they will do *after* – after sleeping, after waking up – and he will reply that they will do it all over again until they die (1h 20min 25sec-1h 21min). However, this connection is the result of

[151] Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 191. Emphasis added.

[152] Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 191.

a somewhat forced interpretation of the spectator used to classical filmmaking. Many other 'double actions' deny all connection of the thought to the trivial activity being performed, and the meaning lies precisely in its *lack*, that is, in the disconnectedness of the outward and the inner life. The film's meaning is social and ideological, and it is to be found in the totality of the film and its distancing devices rather than in the particularities of "action".

The film consists of Juliette's day, a day which has no plot and is no different than any other day. Godard makes sure that this is understood by meticulously avoiding any kind of plot-like progressive action. Not even the sexual encounter with the ironized American war correspondent who came to Paris to relax pushes the plot forward. Moreover, the 'she' of the title, as the opening title cards clarifies, is Paris in the process of construction and development. The scenes of Juliette's day are juxtaposed with scenes of different construction sites or common spaces, like the gas station. Godard relies on the montage of different spaces to achieve meaning, though not really in the radical manner of Eisenstein's experiments. "Naturally," says the narrator, "such development of Paris allows the government to pursue its politics of class discrimination and allows large monopolies to organize and direct the economy, regardless of the needs and the aspirations of its 8 million inhabitants" (9min 07sec-9min 23sec). This is the kind of reality Godard is interested in now. And he shatters almost completely, already in this film, the classical psychologically realistic dialogue. Early on, Juliette talks to her schoolboy son, and this scene between a mother and her child has all the visual markings of realism – it is based on the shot/reverse-shot technique – but is nevertheless completely unrealistic and very far removed from the 'psychological realism' as understood by either the Tradition of Quality or the New Wave. Juliette gives a poetic description of her experience of dreaming in general ("it's like being scattered in a thousand pieces"), while the son relates an obviously allegoric dream, at whose end he "realized that these two persons were North and South Vietnam reuniting." Then he asks: "Mommy, what's

language?" and she says that it is "the house man lives in" (10min-11min 30sec). This dialogue clearly doesn't aim at realistically presenting a morning conversation between a mother and her son; neither the dialogue nor character psychology is too realistic. The kind of questions we ask of Bruno, such as whether he is a narcissist or someone pretending to be a narcissist, are irrelevant here, and neither acting nor the film as a whole leave any doubt about it. The concept of character motivation and its quality of being or not being realistic does not help in interpreting *Two or Three Things I Know About Her.* The question to be asked is: what is Godard telling us about the world and about film with the specific ways in which he breaks with the illusion of reality?

Juliette is shaped into an exemplary Parisian working-class woman by the addition of a number of other women, sporadically "interviewed" by the narrator. We meet one of them at the other end of one of Godard's fluid pans, reminiscent of Chabrol's student club sequence camera movements in *The Cousins*. Godard's scene also takes place in a café. Juliette gets up from the table to fetch cigarettes; as she turns to the left, behind the panel separating the seating space from the counter, Godard pans right and, as Juliette exits the shot, a woman at the bar suddenly becomes its center. We learn, from the few replies she gives to the narrator, that she comes to Paris twice per month from its southern suburbs where she lives in an apartment complex. The focus is then again on Juliette (24min 23sec-25min 03sec). What was, in Chabrol, a realistic device for subtly representing and anticipating the tense relationships between characters, becomes here a device for making a political statement. These women share an experience which is not unique or individual, but crucially determined by the social circumstances of the working-class life in 1960s Paris. The Italian Neorealist legacy of anchoring the film in real-life context and circumstances is emphasized by Godard's innovative and striking use of color: in the dialogue scene with Juliette and her son, Juliette's blue sweater, white sheet and red blanket make the colors of the French flag. These colors are

employed meticulously throughout the film, allowing for the visual to stand for the intellectual in the spectator's memory long after the film ends.

At other times, Godard represents dialogue by not showing the interlocutor (for example, in the café scene with Juliette's husband and another woman, starting at 58min 29sec), in a manner already practiced by himself and Truffaut. The important figure of the narrator is itself an extension of this technique, as his questions to the women are never heard by the spectator. The film also includes a two-minute-long Wellesian long take, in a kind of cheap hotel, i. e. apartment, where prostitutes bring their clients and mothers leave their children while they run errands (13min 02sec-15min 20sec). The camera smoothly and uninterruptedly follows the movements of various characters around the room. Juliette comes to leave her daughter; the *concierge* tends the children and warns a couple inside a room that they have 7, then 2 minutes left; another couple enters and heads to the other room, the man paying with cat food which the concierge leaves on a table full of equally random objects that we understand are accepted as payment. Again, rather than intricate psychological relationships, we see the intricate interconnectedness of key areas of human life, juxtaposed in a single take. Eating and procreating are the basis of existence, and working provides for them. These three are normally carefully separated in bourgeois existence, but, due to poor living and financial circumstances, the working class has to forego the bourgeois sense of propriety – the separation is a repression of *all too human* facts about human life which the working class cannot afford; the concierge is also the babysitter. The sequence, just as the rest of the film, contains pervasive, distracting sounds which the characters who occupy the space of the film disregard. Here it is the sound of Juliette's daughter crying. Juliette takes no heed of her as she leaves, and the concierge really turns to the girl only at the end of the take. Everything, including the sexual *transactions* behind the closed doors, happens with the sound of a child crying as the soundtrack, emphasizing yet again that, in the working class

world where time for pleasure is short, it is not possible to be fussy or too sensitive. Similarly, while Juliette's husband is talking to the woman in the café, it seems that only the spectator notices the insistent sounds of the ball coming from the table football behind them. Everybody is minding their own business in a world whose implicit dictum is that everybody deserves the most happiness, or, rather, the most enjoyment and entertainment they can get in the time they have available. At the same time, everybody is inconveniencing everybody else because cheap places are cramped – the apartment building complex is huge, but the apartments in it are tiny. The most prevalent sound in the film's soundtrack is, logically, that of construction works, which marks the everyday life in these complexes. These sounds are indeed very realistic, and yet, there is rarely, if ever, a place for them in mainstream filmmaking.

Godard is direct when it comes to the film's aim, an aim "political as it is poetic" – the attainment of "a new world where men and things can live in harmony" (46min 59sec-47min 08sec). *Two Or Three Things* came out a few months before Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, and Godard anticipates Debord in his interest for the object and the visual. At the moment structuralism was about to give way to post-structuralism, Godard notes that language, images and objects all seem to fill the void left by the disappearance of the subject. The film contains many gnomic pronouncements about the "increasing interaction between images and language" (42min 24sec). For Debord, the spectacle is "the omnipresent affirmation of the choices that have *already been made* in the sphere of production and in the consumption implied by that production."[153] "News, propaganda, advertising, entertainment" takes over reality and leaves nothing but the spectacle, which in turn leaves humans without agency, "in a state of unconsciousness."[154] "The reigning economic system is a *vicious circle*

[153] Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2014), 3. Emphasis original.

[154] Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 3-9.

of isolation," while "commodification is not only visible, we no longer see anything else."[155] Compared to Debord's, Godard's critique of the new consumer society is relatively mellow, but *Two or Three Things* nevertheless anticipates Debord's points. Throughout the film, Juliette is in a kind of dreamlike state, noticeable despite the Brechtian acting, as if "unconscious" of what is happening around her. She mindlessly browses through the clothes in the department store; the clothes of other women resemble her own. Godard criticizes "this object, which, in journalistic parlance, is called a [fashion] magazine;" Juliette looks through it, and then "another young woman, her fellow creature, her sister, sees the same object" (26min 30sec-26min 43sec). Magazine pages are blown up to the size of the screen, as are, on occasion, different advertisements. As for commodification, it is criticized at the same time attention is drawn to the poor economic situation of the majority of Parisians – one needs to choose either a TV or a car, either a washing machine or a vacation (12min 54sec-12min 56sec).

Debord paternalizes the population of the society of the spectacle quite literally – he says that "real adults – who are masters of their own lives – are in fact nowhere to be found."[156] Godard too would soon, a bit too early perhaps, move on to a critique of the commodification of revolutionary and ideological fervor. In 1967, he criticized the childishly violent French Maoists in *La Chinoise*, and in 1968, in his "documentary" about the Rolling Stones, *One Plus One*/*Sympathy for the Devil*, he de-naturalized the self-styled identities of rock stars and protesters for peace, revealing the commodification underneath the apparent subversion. Political doubts of this kind are essentially similar to his coolly defeatist *The Little Soldier*, and are perhaps susceptible to the critique Jacques Rancière performed, in *The Emancipated Spectator* (2008), on the example of Josephine Mekseper's photograph of a trashcan filled with supposedly consumerist refuse, with people marching against war beside

[155] Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 10-16.

[156] Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 25.

it.[157] But that would all get left behind after 1968, when Godard removed to the seclusion of alternative production and exhibition circuits, practically renouncing his earlier films. In *Two or Three Things I Know About Her*, his openly Brechtian film, Godard was "avant-garde" in the most positive way possible – de-naturalizing our consumerist tendencies, he understood them as caused by the society which posits products as a comfort and a reason for enduring reified labor, while drawing attention to the role of the ruling class who has a financial interest in keeping the status quo.

When it comes to the proverbial "watchability" of an avant-garde film, Godard's *Two or Three Things I Know About Her* strikes a balance between the total immersion in a New Wave film and the arguable lack of appeal of a later film such as *La Chinoise*. This is what makes it more approachable than the films of the "official" political avant-garde (understood according to Wollen) while still keeping the spectator alert to the ideological causes and consequences of the reality shown. This is also why this film is somewhat more resistant than Godard's later films to (Rancière's and others') critique that the political avant-garde is too separated from the "masses" it wishes to liberate from false consciousness. Nevertheless, if one spontaneously identified with Patricia and Michel and thus effectively ignored the *realities* obscured by their privileged exploits (even the fact that Michel is a criminal is romanticized, his status is never connected to social issues), in *Two or Three Things* identification is, according to Brecht's ideas, rather intellectual than spontaneous – a married woman forced into prostitution may well understand Juliette, but a different spectator might not empathize as *naturally* as s/he does in the case of *Breathless*. And this is, of course, intentional. By the time Godard made *Two or Three Things I Know About Her*, the world was no longer meant to appear *natural*, but, on the contrary, *constructed*, *manipulated* – not by an

[157] In opposition to the United States' announcement of the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London and New York: Verso, 2011), 26-28.

individual agent, but by those in power with a stake in preserving existent social relations and the (lack of) balance between the rich and the poor.

3.3. Realism and Ideology

As we've seen, the New Wave's ideological *auteur*, André Bazin, was himself clear about the fact that the reality represented on screen is always necessarily manipulated, constructed. The key difference between him and the later *Cahiers* critics – and the key difference between the French New Wave and the political avant-garde of the late 1960s and early 1970s – is related to the understanding of whether this constructedness of reality should be *obscured* or *revealed*. But this entails a deeper change in political consciousness. For Bazin, construction and reality meant what they mean in the common understanding of the words, construction was related to the recreation of reality with cinematographic means. Bazin's preference was for manipulations of actors and staging rather than for camera manipulations in the classical style of continuity editing, which was, according to him, the main way of Hollywood prior to Orson Welles. Manipulations of actors rather than of shots left reality integral, as if unmediated, although this, perhaps paradoxically, implied in fact a thorough manipulation of supposedly objective reality, that which is in front of the camera. When it comes to the French New Wave's relationship with Bazin's teachings, Claude Chabrol's *The Cousins* scene at the card table in the student club, when the spectator needs to grasp six different reactions (apparently spontaneous, but undoubtedly meticulously pre-planned and rehearsed) at one and the same time, is indeed exemplary. The later films of Godard and Truffaut mitigated this somewhat literal understanding of spectatorial agency and focused instead on psychological ambiguity, which allowed for stylistic flourishes of a less strictly realist kind, like the jump cut or the exclusion of the interlocutor from a dialogue

scene (as opposed to Chabrol's inclusion of all speakers in the same shot, itself in opposition to the style of a Tradition of Quality director like Claude-Autant Lara). The understanding of *the world itself*, that is, of the relations which determine it, as "constructed", would come after Bazin's time and after the time of the New Wave's fight with the ossified artificiality of the Tradition of Quality's cinematography and its obsolete worldview.

In the second half of the 1960s, the ideological ramifications of Bazinian realism became apparent. The *ontology* of film itself was problematic – if humans sought an apparatus which would be able to render the world 'in its own image', as Bazin claimed, the apparatus which they came up with was, as Jean-Louis Baudry explained in 1970, itself ideological in its capability and tendency to show what is constructed as natural. What Adorno and Horkheimer say about the film industry and the most run-of-the mill film ironically bears on the New Wave too:

> Real life is becoming indistinguishable from the movies, [which leave] no room for imagination or reflection on the part of the audience. […] They are so designed that […] sustained thought is out of the question if the spectator is not to miss the relentless rush of facts.[158]

The somewhat paternalizing harshness of this ideological critique makes the connection less obvious, but the immersive powers of realism, combined, importantly, with the New Wave's thematic preoccupations, really do not leave much room for *sustained reflection* of a more *social* kind. Bazin's understanding of cinema and the school which stemmed from it, no matter its inner stylistic evolution, addressed the spectator who is sensitive to subtleties of human interactions and able to grasp the manifestations of individual psychology. Political modernism, in the times of the shift towards a post-structuralist, more complex understanding of language and the world, now addressed the spectator interested in and sensitive to the ways

[158] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, chap. "The Culture Industry," Kindle.

the *social* overdetermines the individual. Truffaut's *400 Blows* is exemplary when it comes to the New Wave's individualistic orientation, especially in comparison with *Bicycle Thieves*, because it reveals just how a film which addresses social issues nevertheless remains uninterested in them. *Bicycle Thieves*, a film of the school of Italian Neorealism which Bazin saw, with Welles, as fundamental for the development of cinema history towards realism, does not really leave room for sustained reflection either. But its topic is *social* through and through, its characters types rather than individuals, and so its "message" is social, too. *400 Blows*, on the other hand, represents a story which is social through and through *as* psychological and individual. The film doesn't invite reflection on, for example, the issue of conservative understandings surrounding abortion, an issue which is implicit and perhaps even crucially important, given the centrality of the "unloved child" theme. The fact that Antoine's grandmother prevented her own daughter from having an abortion is, in this film, not related to important social questions, but, in the auteurist spirit of the times, to the director's biography. The whole issue ultimately appears ideologically rather dubious, with the implication that a genius wouldn't have been born if his mother had done what she had wanted to do for the sake of her own happiness. No matter Truffaut's stance on abortion, what *is* important is that his film ultimately obscures the social which determines individual destinies – Antoine ends up in a correction facility because he is an unloved and unwanted child who was born against his mother's wishes – and, a fortiori, posits these circumstances as something taken for granted, unchangeable, when they are in fact man-made, romanticizing them rather than exploring them for what they really are.

Colin MacCabe expresses the gist of the relationship between Bazinian and Hollywood realism:

> By the criteria of [Bazin], for a film to be realistic, it must locate its characters and action in a determinate social and historical setting. Most Hollywood films, it could be argued, fail to do this

> and are, therefore, unrealistic. But Bazin's characterization of realism is much more centrally concerned with a transparency of form which is reduplicated within Hollywood film practice.[159]

While Bazin may have praised Italian Neorealism for anchoring films in a specific historical context, his theory shows that what really interested him was the achievement of a persuasive illusion of reality in the manner of Welles, but in the manner not wholly incongruent with classical Hollywood. The result is an illusion, a better one and, from the point of view of political modernism, ideologically perhaps more dangerous than Hollywood. What is implicit in Bazin's understanding of realism is not only his contempt for paternalism towards the spectator, but also his uncritical stance towards what would become the ideology implicit in realism. If this is the case, this was not Bazin's intention; he praised Italian Neorealism, a school dedicated to representing suffering and poverty, as "at least prerevolutionary;"[160] he asks, "[d]oes one not, when coming out of an Italian film, feel better, an urge to change the order of things?"[161] He even says that he is "prepared to see the fundamental humanism of the current Italian films *as their chief merit.*"[162] Nevertheless, in a more politicized time, this proved to be beside the point, and what didn't help was that none of the New Wave films were like *Bicycle Thieves* in their impact on the spectator. Even at its "most realistic" – be it most formally (à la Welles) or thematically (à la Italian Neorealism) – Bazinian realism does not allow for sustained thought in the sense of the meta-reflection of what is being shown on the screen, preferred by the ideological critics of the Frankfurt school, by Brecht, by post-New Wave Godard, or the post-68 *Cahiers* critics.

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[159] Colin MacCabe, "Theory and Film: Principles of Realism and Pleasure," in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 180.

[160] Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol. II*, 21.

[161] Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol. II*, 21.

[162] Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol. II*, 21. Emphasis added.

Meta-reflection is the step Jean-Luc Godard made as a bridge from his New Wave phase to his politically modernist phase. If *The Little Soldier* was an apolitical film with a political topic, *Two or Three Things I Know About Her* is a political film despite its more or less mundane topic. As Alan Williams points out, although *Two or Three Things* contains allusions to the war in Vietnam, it actually "focuses primarily on the Americanization of French economic and cultural life," that is, on consumerism. [163] But, unlike in the case of two realist films like *Bicycle Thieves* and *400 Blows*, the topic need not be about the political issue of the day for the film to be political if *the form of the film* is political – the "questioning of the cinema itself is a necessary prerequisite to its use for political purposes."[164] At the beginning of *Two or Three Things*, the actress Marina Vlady transforms herself, with minimal effort, into the protagonist Juliette Janson, and this is an immediate distancing and anti-realist gesture. Combined with Vlady's Brechtian acting and the lack of a plot, the effect is that of "break[ing] with the classical forms of identification, where the audience hangs on the destiny of the 'hero' and all its energy is concentrated on theatrical catharsis."[165] Anti-realism is itself achieved by manipulation, only now the manipulation needs to be felt, not obscured, in order to reveal that reality – filmic reality, and the false consciousness we perceive as reality – is itself discursively manipulated. The film's form reflects its content, and the content becomes inseparable from the form in a proper post-structuralist manner. What Louis Althusser says of Brecht describes the post-New Wave attitude: ideology can be effectively criticized only if "the ideology's aesthetic" is abandoned.[166] The ideology's aesthetic is realism, problematic, in the final instance, most of all because of its understanding of filmed reality as something given, objective. As Colin MacCabe says, contrary to the ideologists of realism, it is "[t]he

[163] Williams, *Republic of Images*, 385.

[164] Williams, *Republic of Images*, 385.

[165] Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London and New York: Verso, 2005), 146.

[166] Althusser, *For Marx*, 144.

audience and their representations [that] are the terms of the 'realism' of any film or work of art – not some preexistent reality which it merely conveys."[167] Manipulating cinematography so that reality shown appears unmediated means "remov[ing] the spectator from the realm of contradiction"[168] and creating a filmic surface which smooths out and contains ideological tensions present in reality, such as the working class's existential position; the dehumanizing consumerism's role in sanitizing discontent and its positioning as the worthy reason behind commodified work; the financial gains of the ruling class as opposed to the "democratization of the unenlightened" as the true cause of violent imperialism, and the justified struggle of colonized peoples.

While there is no doubt that the post-New Wave understanding of film yielded more politically conscious works, there is no reason to subscribe uncritically to the view that Hollywood/Bazinian realism is a priori incapable of going against ideology. It is one thing to say that the urge to change society one gets after watching *Bicycle Thieves* does not include an awareness of the *causes* behind this society as it is, which is perhaps necessary for true change, and quite another to say that only a Brechtian film can truly create this awareness. After all, Godard *appropriated* realist means of cinematographic expression to create an anti-realist, anti-ideological film. As Ian Aitken notes:

> Although the emphasis on *auteurism* within both *Cahiers* and the *politique des auteurs* was antithetical to the post-structuralist orientation of later cinematic political modernism, the films of the *nouvelle vague* themselves contained a number of stylistic characteristics which a more politicized cinema would later draw upon.[169]

[167] MacCabe, "Theory and Film: Principles of Realism and Pleasure," 191.

[168] MacCabe, "Theory and Film: Principles of Realism and Pleasure," 191.

[169] Aitken, *European Film Theory and Cinema*, 133.

If, in the politicized period which followed, the French New Wave started to be perceived as a smug and hopelessly realist school of filmmaking, the truth was that the period of political modernism couldn't have happened – at least not the way it happened – without the stylistic advancements of the New Wave. While Godard's intentions in *Two or Three Things* were now ideological, he could, proverbially, not break the rules of realism without first mastering them. In fact, the realism achieved during the New Wave as the result of Bazin's teachings and the wish to improve on the Tradition of Quality's dubious 'psychological realism' could and would be utilized for different, ideological purposes. This is most clearly shown in *Two or Three Things* when Juliette leaves the shot to provide space for the woman from the suburbs, a characteristic Chabrolian shot thus becoming, so to say, *ideologized.* The French New Wave "provided a foundation for the later cinema of political modernism."[170] And, after all, consciousness develops in stages, and even though the New Wave's rebelliousness "did not stem from any wider sense of political affiliation or commitment,"[171] without their opposition to the *papas* and their old-fashioned worldview, there would perhaps be no opposition to the ruling class and its ideology. While its formal and psychological realism bar it from ever becoming accepted as the avant-garde by (any of) the avant-garde(s), as Alexandre Astruc says, "[t]here is always an *avant-garde* when something new takes place…"[172] The *Cahiers* critic-directors, with their brazen and irreverent attack on the ways of the old generation, put themselves on the line and opened up the space for the critical and the progressive. They introduced new modes of production and created a surge of fist-time directors who wanted to contribute to the growing film culture even though they lacked experience, money, or both. Around "120 first-time French directors were able to shoot

[170] Aitken, *European Film Theory and Cinema*, 134.

[171] Aitken, *European Film Theory and Cinema*, 134.

[172] Astruc, "The Birth of a New Avant-Garde," 604.

feature length motion pictures between 1958 and 1964."[173] This number later dropped significantly, and the French New Wave's art cinema qualities seemed a thing of the ideologically naïve past, but its formal and narrative innovativeness had, by that time, already "dramatically changed filmmaking inside and outside France."[174] With them, "[a] whole new array of options for film aesthetics was born."[175] And if the realism they used to counter the paternalism of mainstream cinema was later pronounced a mere illusion, without them, this critique wouldn't have become possible.

[173] Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave*, xv.

[174] Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave*, xv.

[175] Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave*, xv-xi.

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Films

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Les quatre cents coups. Directed by François Truffaut. Written by François Truffaut and Marcel Moussy. Produced by François Truffaut and Georges Charlot. Les Films du Carosse, 1959.

Abstract

The thesis explores the French New Wave as a film school which made a break with classical filmmaking and became influential worldwide, but was then discarded as ideologically naïve in the politicized atmosphere before and after the year 1968. It aims to demonstrate that what allowed the New Wave to make groundbreaking changes in filmmaking, that is, what makes it avant-garde, is also what ultimately denies it this attribute: its concern for realism, an issue at the center of inquiries into the nature of film. The first chapter analyses the Wave's stylistic and ideological opposition to the Tradition of Quality in relation to the theory of André Bazin, the Wave's ideologue. The example of Chabrol's *The Cousins* shows the influence of Orson Welles's long takes and deep focuses which urge the spectator to judge him/herself, as in real life, the relations among characters, as opposed to the paternalizing editing devices of classical Hollywood and the Tradition of Quality. The second chapter analyses the Wave's most famous films, Truffaut's *400 Blows* and Godard's *Breathless*, with the emphasis on the shift from Chabrol's formal realism to a psychological realism based in *ambiguity*, Bazin's key term. *Breathless* is understood as the Wave's avant-garde and a realist film which goes beyond realism. The third chapter analyses the "apolitical politics" of the Wave on the example of Godard's *The Little Soldier*, demonstrating why the aimless, individualistic rebellion of the New Wave could not be accepted as progressive by the next generation. The Wave is put in contrast with Godard's own later film, the Brechtian *Two or Three Things I Know About Her*, which introduces meta-reflection on the ideological nature of realism in cinema, the key element of political filmmaking. Finally, Bazin's understanding of realistic representation is revealed as uncritical from the perspective of political modernism, but the New Wave he influenced, with its innovative formal concern for realism and its opposition to the ways of the older generation, is ultimately understood as a necessary step in the development towards the ideological critique of the political avant-garde.

Abstrakt

Tato práce přezkoumává Francouzskou novou vlnu jakožto filmový směr, který se odpoutal od klasické filmové tvorby a měl celosvětový vliv, ale který byl později ve zpolitizované atmosféře před a po roce 1968 zavržen jak ideologicky naivní. Za cíl si klade ukázat, jak tytéž prvky, jejichž prostřednictvím Nová vlna vnesla do filmové tvorby přelomové změny, tedy ty, jež ji činí avantgardní, jsou též tím, co jí tento atribut odepírá: její zaměření na realismus, tématika ve středu průzkumů podstaty filmu. První kapitola analyzuje stylistickou a ideologickou opozici Nové vlny vůči Francouzské kvalitě ve spojitosti s teorií Andrého Bazina, ideologa Nové vlny. Na příkladu Chabrolových *Bratranců* je v ní ukázán vliv dlouhých záběrů a hloubky zaostření Orsona Wellese, které nutí diváka, aby sám posoudil, tak jako ve skutečném životě, vztahy mezi postavami, čímž odporují diktujícím prostředkům editace používaným klasickým Hollywoodem a Francouzkou kvalitou. Druhá kapitola analyzuje nejslavnější filmy Nové vlny, Truffautův *Nikdo mne nemá rád* a Godardův *U konce s dechem*, s důrazem na posun od Chabrolova formálního realismu k psychologickému realismu založeném na *nejasnosti*, Bazinově klíčovém pojmu. *U konce s dechem* je chápán jako avantgarda Nové vlny a jako realistický film, jenž přesahuje realismus. Třetí kapitola analyzuje „apolitickou politiku“ Nové vlny na příkladu Godardova *Vojáčka*, čímž ukazuje, proč bezcílná a individualistická vzpoura Nové vlny nemohla být přijata jako progresivní následující generací. Nová vlna je kontrastována Godardovým pozdějším filmem, Brechtovským *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle*, jenž obsahuje metareflexe o ideologické podstatě realismu v kinematografii, což je klíčový element politické filmové tvorby. Závěrem je Bazinovo chápání realistické reprezentace odhaleno jako nekritické z perspektivy politického modernismu, ale Nová vlna, na kterou měl vliv, je se svým inovativním formálním zájem o realismus a se svou opozicí vůči praktikám předchozí

generace nakonec chápána jako nutný krok ve vývoji směrem k ideologické kritice politické avantgardy.