

The French New Wave

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INTRODUCTION

The 'New Wave' (*la nouvelle vague*) refers to a group of filmmakers who, between the end of the 1950s and early to mid-1960s in France, momentarily transformed French cinema and had a great impact on filmmakers throughout the world. Those directors who came to prominence through the New Wave and who have remained major names in the pantheon of European 'auteur' directors include Jean-Luc Godard, François Truffaut, Eric Rohmer, Jacques Rivette, Claude Chabrol, Alain Resnais, Chris Marker and Agnès Varda.

French critic Michel Marie lists a series of key factors that dictated the aesthetics of New Wave films.

Découpage

A term that means the 'shot breakdown' of a scene.

- 1 the auteur-director also writes the screenplay;
- 2 a strictly broken-down **découpage** is not used and a significant place is left to improvisation in the conception of the sequences, the dialogue and the performances;
- 3 natural decor and locations are privileged over studio sets;
- 4 a minimal crew of a few people is used;
- 5 'direct sound' recorded at the moment of shooting is preferred to postsynchronisation;
- 6 traditional lighting set-ups, deemed to be cumbersome, are dispensed with so the director of photography tends to work with fast, ultra-sensitive film;
- 7 non-professional actors are used to interpret the characters;
- 8 if professional actors are chosen, they tend to be 'new faces' who are directed in a loose and free fashion.

(Marie 1998: 63)

While it has become identified in film history with the early work of the directors named above, the term 'New Wave' was not invented by them. It was coined by a journalist named Françoise Giroud who, in late 1957, wrote a series of articles on French youth for the weekly news magazine *L'Express*. Cinema, in the shape of this new generation of filmmakers, thus became associated with a 'youth' phenomenon. The association of 'youth' with New Wave cinema was sealed by the triumph at the 1958 Cannes Film Festival of *Les Quatre cents coups* (*The 400 Blows*), the debut feature film by the 27-year-old former film critic François Truffaut. A number of successful films by other directors followed, all of which enhanced the identity of New Wave cinema as 'youthful' and 'modern'; these included *A bout de souffle* (*Breathless*, Jean-Luc Godard, 1960), *Hiroshima, mon amour* (Alain Resnais, 1959) and *Les Cousins* (Claude Chabrol, 1959).

However, these new filmmakers had not emerged from out of the blue. They had all been involved in filmmaking for the best part of the 1950s, writing film criticism, making short films and documentaries. In fact, one of the most marked characteristics of the New Wave is its association with film criticism. Many of its main directors had a long relationship with the important monthly film magazine *Les Cahiers du cinéma et de la télévision* (literally meaning 'Cinema and television notebooks' and referred to as *Cahiers* hereafter) which had been founded by André Bazin and Jacques Doniol-Valcroze in 1951. Truffaut, Godard, Rivette, Chabrol and Rohmer had all written for the magazine throughout the 1950s. Thus the New Wave was in part characterised by the unusual phenomenon of film critics becoming successful filmmakers after having been influential and polemical writers. Before outlining some of the chief ideas that these filmmakers advanced in their work as critics, it is worthwhile describing the film culture that existed in France after the Second World War and on which the New Wave would have a profound impact.

POSTWAR FRENCH FILM CULTURE

Cinéphile

A term describing someone with a developed intellectual interest in cinema. Cinéphilia was part of the cultural climate in which the New Wave emerged.

While France was under Nazi occupation between 1940 and 1945, the importing of American films was banned by the collaborationist government of the Vichy regime. Shortly after the liberation of France in 1945 this backlog of American cinema started to hit the country's screens to the enthusiasm of French film-goers. This exposure to Hollywood films was a formative influence on the young critics who would become the directors of the New Wave in the late 1950s. For them, American cinema was more vital, more varied and considerably more exciting than the postwar productions of the French film industry which they derided as 'le cinéma de papa' ('Daddy's cinema'). Film culture in postwar France was bolstered by the growth in the number of magazines devoted to cinema (including *Positif*, the long-standing rival of *Cahiers*, founded in 1952) and the revitalisation of a network of 'ciné-clubs', where film screenings would be accompanied by public debates and lectures by critics. Between 1948 and 1949, an important ciné-club was established, 'Objectif 49', whose organisers included Jean Cocteau, Robert Bresson, Roger Leenhardt, René Clément, Alexandre Astruc, Pierre Kast and Raymond Queneau. As Doniol-Valcroze stressed, this ciné-club would 'constitute the first link in the chain which is resulting today in what has been called the nouvelle vague, the first jolt against a cinema which has become too traditional ... [and] ... brought together all those – critics, film-makers and future film-makers – who dreamed of a cinéma d'auteurs' (cited in Hillier 1985: 3). One of the founders of *Cahiers*, the highly influential film critic André Bazin, was instrumental in the 'ciné-club' movement and several future members of the New Wave were already writing film criticism for publications associated with 'ciné-clubs'. In addition, the work of the curator and film archivist Henri Langlois, along with his colleague Mary Meerson, was to be of great importance to a generation of film-goers who attended screenings at the Cinémathèque Française in Paris where they could see an eclectic range of films from around the world and from different periods of cinema history. All of these components of postwar French film culture contributed to a lively cinéphile community of viewers. The word 'cinéphile' does not translate easily into English. It does not exactly denote a 'film buff', a 'film fan' or a 'cinema enthusiast' but someone who is intimately involved in the cultural condition of 'cinéphilia', a uniquely French approach to cinema that has traditionally argued for it as 'the seventh art'. Before they became influential critics on *Cahiers* and were internationally recognised as film directors, the chief figures in the New Wave were enthusiastic cinéphiles.

An example of the intellectual interest that was developing as regards cinema came in an essay published in 1948 by the critic, novelist and film-maker Alexandre Astruc. The essay, entitled 'The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La caméra-stylo', argued that:

Cinema is quite simply becoming a means of expression, just as all the other arts have been before it, and in particular painting and the novel. After having been successively a fairground attraction, an amusement analogous to boulevard theatre, or a means of preserving the images of an era, it is gradually becoming a language. By a language, I mean a form in which and by which an artist can express his thoughts, however abstract they may be, or translate his obsessions exactly as he does in the contemporary essay or novel. That is why I would like to call this new age of cinema the age of '**caméra-stylo**' (camera-pen) ... (by this) I mean that the cinema will gradually break free from the tyranny of what is visual, from the image for its own sake, from the immediate and concrete demands of the narrative, to become a means of writing just as flexible and subtle as written language.

(cited in Graham 1968: 17–18)

Part of the legacy of the French New Wave lies in how it may be seen to have developed – both in terms of film criticism and filmmaking – some of Astruc's claims for what cinema could be.

caméra-stylo

A term coined by French writer Alexandre Astruc meaning 'camera-pen' and used to condense his argument for a 'personal' and self-expressive form of cinema.

FILM CRITICISM

***Cahiers du cinéma*, 'la politique des auteurs' and 'mise-en-scène'**

Throughout the 1950s, the critics on *Cahiers* argued and polemicised for cinema as an art form. That is to say, they approached cinema from the point of view of the filmmaker who, they argued, could be seen as the 'author' – the 'auteur' – of the work. This idea of 'authorship' was to prove highly influential in film criticism and has remained, though not without controversy, a key approach in the study of cinema. Initially, the major influence in this approach was the work of André Bazin. A humanist, left-leaning Catholic, Bazin had been deeply involved in film education and criticism following the end of the Second World War and had founded a magazine called *La Revue du cinéma* which, in 1951, was relaunched as *Les Cahiers du cinéma et de la Télévision*. It was on this magazine that the future directors of the New Wave cut their teeth as critics throughout the 1950s.

The critical agenda that was developed in the magazine throughout the 1950s claimed for certain directors the status of artist, an approach that was known as '**la politique des auteurs**' ('author politics' or 'the auteur policy'). What was unusual about such an approach was that it was developed around the work of filmmakers who were working in the highly standardised and controlled industrial environment of Hollywood cinema. Those directors chiefly favoured included, among others, Alfred Hitchcock, John Ford, Howard Hawks, Fritz Lang and Otto Preminger. Hitchcock was a major reference for many of the critics who would later become filmmakers. For example, François Truffaut went on to publish a famous series of interviews with Hitchcock while Claude Chabrol and Eric Rohmer co-wrote a study of his films (Chabrol and Rohmer 1979; Truffaut 1983).

politique des auteurs, la

Literally meaning ‘auteur policy’ or ‘auteur politics’ (although later translated by the American film critic Andrew Sarris as ‘auteur theory’). It describes the position of *Cahiers du cinéma* as one which argued for the work of favoured directors as that of film artists or ‘auteurs’.

The *Cahiers* critics went looking for ‘art’ in popular cinema. They did so because they were concentrating predominantly on the formal qualities of films to see how these might reveal a set of themes and preoccupations that could be associated with the name of the director, be it Hitchcock, Lang or Ford. The critical approach that the *Cahiers* writers used to analyse films has become known as **mise-en-scène** criticism. The term ‘mise-en-scène’ derives from the theatre, where it refers to the practice of stage direction in which things are ‘put into the scene’, or, arranged on the stage. One of the most straightforward and concise expressions of the importance of the idea of mise-en-scène to auteur criticism comes from one of the *Cahiers* critics Fereydoun Hoveyda, who wrote in 1960:

mise-en-scène

Literally meaning ‘putting in the scene’ and deriving from theatre. A film’s mise-en-scène is taken to describe all the elements visible in a shot – actors, objects, landscapes, and so on. In terms of classic auteur criticism, a director’s style may be identified only through the arrangement and orchestration of such elements, of the film’s mise-en-scène in other words.

The originality of the ‘auteur’ lies not in the subject matter he chooses but in the technique he employs, ie: the ‘mise en scène’, through which everything on the screen is expressed ... the thought of a cinéaste appears through his ‘mise en scène’.

(cited in Hillier 1985: 8–9)

Hoveyda goes on to explain:

What matters in a film is the desire for order, composition, harmony, the placing of actors and objects, the movements within the frame, the capturing of a movement or a look; in short, the intellectual operation which has put an initial emotion and a general idea to work. Mise-en-scène is nothing other than the technique invented by each director to express the idea and establish the specific quality of his work.

(ibid.)

It is useful to remember that the film criticism undertaken by writers on *Cahiers* throughout the 1950s was both highly influential and, at least initially, controversial. This controversy concerned the idea of ‘art’ being applied to the products of commercial American cinema. When systematically used to explore the *œuvre* (or ‘body of work’) of a director such as Alfred Hitchcock, John Ford or Fritz Lang, an ‘auteurist’ approach can discover the ways in which a director has consistently developed certain themes and how the style of that director has been developed and refined over time. However, the idea of the ‘auteur’ served another purpose apart from championing American cinema. It was part of a polemic against the state of French cinema which was actively developed in the pages of *Cahiers*. The most infamous expression of the journal’s attitude towards postwar French cinema came in François Truffaut’s article ‘Une certaine tendance du cinéma français’ (‘A certain tendency of the French cinema’) which was published in *Cahiers* No. 31 in January 1954. It was in this essay (which was largely devoted to examining the role of the scriptwriter in French cinema of the 1940s and 1950s) that Truffaut made a distinction between an auteur director and what he called a ‘metteur-en-scène’ (or, a director deemed to lack the ‘personal vision’ attributed to an auteur). For Truffaut, the metteur-en-scène was a filmmaker whose conception of cinema extends only as far as ‘illustrating’ a screenplay and being faithful to the written word: ‘when they [the screenwriters] hand in their scenario, the film is done: the metteur-en-scène, in their eyes, is

the gentleman who adds pictures to it' (cited in Nichols 1976: 233). It was the preponderance of films made either as literary adaptations or based on scripts by established screenwriters that Truffaut saw as evidence that French cinema was beholden primarily to literary criteria, rather than searching for specifically cinematic qualities. It is useful to remember here how critics such as Bazin and Astruc were arguing for a vision of cinema that did not wholly depend on validation by reference to the other established art forms. When Astruc wrote of the 'camerapen' ('la caméra-stylo') he was not thinking of the screenplay as a means of cinematic expression, but of filmmaking itself as a form of artistic creation that could be as fluent, expressive and rich as written language, rather than its merely being in the service of adapting classic literary works.

Tradition of Quality

A frequently derogatory term used by the critics on Cahiers du cinéma and referring to postwar, pre-New Wave French cinema characterised by its reliance on screenwriters and adaptations from literary classics.

Truffaut described the screenwriters and metteurs-en-scène as representing French cinema's '**Tradition of Quality**': 'they force, by their ambitiousness, the admiration of the foreign press, defend the French flag twice a year at Cannes and at Venice where, since 1946, they regularly carry off medals, golden lions and *grands prix*' (ibid.: 225). In other words, the Tradition of Quality represented the mainstream of French cinema of the day – internationally recognised, nationally dominant and, for Truffaut and many of his colleagues on *Cahiers*, the enemy. In the same article Truffaut set the names of metteurs-en-scènes associated with the Tradition of Quality – for example, Yves Allegret, Claude Autant-Lara and Jean Delannoy – against the names of other French directors such as Jean Renoir, Robert Bresson, Jacques Tati and Jean Cocteau, whom he held to be 'auteurs: who often write their dialogue and some of them themselves invent the stories they direct' (ibid.: 233). Truffaut argued for an idea of the auteur within the French context that is subtly different from the idea as it was applied to Hollywood cinema. It was taken for granted that in Hollywood the director worked within a large, powerful and regimented production system and collaborated with a host of other skilled people, from actors to camera operators, screenwriters to producers, and that the opportunity to exercise artistic control and to make creative decisions was concentrated in the act of directing. The mise-en-scène of the film was where the evidence of such decisions was seen to reside. However, in the French context, Truffaut uses the term 'auteur' for those directors whose control over their films extended to writing the dialogue and the stories, directors who were their own screenwriters; a degree of control that was impossible to conceive of in the classical Hollywood studio system. Thus Truffaut's polemic against the so-called Tradition of Quality was also a polemic against the mainstream establishment of the French film industry as well as being an assertion that it was possible to make films in another way, as is clear from his words: 'I do not believe in the peaceful coexistence of "The Tradition of Quality" and an "auteur's" cinema' (ibid.: 234). So, on the one hand, the development of auteur criticism with its emphasis on mise-en-scène (finding the 'personality' of the style, one might say) was a way of arguing for the artistic worth of popular cinema. On the other hand, it was also developed as a polemical assault on what was seen as the moribund state of French cinema.

Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, who co-founded *Cahiers* with André Bazin, believed that Truffaut's article was highly significant:

A leap had been made, a trial begun with which we were all in solidarity, something bound us together. From then on, it was known that we were *for* Renoir, Rossellini, Hitchcock, Cocteau, Bresson ... and against X, Y and Z. From then on there was a doctrine, the 'politique des auteurs', even if it lacked flexibility.

(cited in Hillier 1985: 4)

Doniol-Valcroze made this statement in 1959 and the ‘inflexibility’ he identified in the ‘politique des auteurs’ had been examined by Bazin himself in an article published in *Cahiers* in April 1957 entitled ‘On the politique des auteurs’. In this article Bazin examined the intellectual assumptions behind ‘auteur’ criticism and addressed its perceived ‘inflexibility’. He also placed the idea within the editorial culture of the magazine itself:

Our readers must have noticed that this critical standpoint – whether implicit or explicit – has not been adopted with equal enthusiasm by all the regular contributors to *Cahiers*, and that there might exist serious differences in our admiration, or rather in the degree of our admiration. And yet the truth is that the most enthusiastic among us nearly always win the day. Eric Rohmer put his finger on the reason in his reply to a reader in *Cahiers* no. 64: ‘When opinions differ on an important film, we generally prefer to let the person who likes it most write about it.’ It follows that the strictest adherents of the ‘politique des auteurs’ get the best of it in the end, for, rightly or wrongly, they always see in their favourite directors the manifestation of the same specific qualities. So it is that Hitchcock, Renoir, Rossellini, Lang, Hawks or Nicholas Ray, to judge from the pages of *Cahiers*, appear as almost infallible directors who could not make a bad film.

(cited in Graham 1968: 137–8)

CASE STUDY 1: A BOUT DE SOUFFLE (BREATHLESS, JEAN-LUC GODARD, 1960)

Jean-Luc Godard’s debut feature was one of the films that marked the advent of the French New Wave, both in France and abroad. Its story is that of a young criminal, Michel Poiccard (Jean-Paul Belmondo), who, having casually murdered a policeman, returns to Paris to collect money he is owed and to persuade his American girlfriend, Patricia Franchini (Jean Seberg), to leave the country with him. Patricia, who sells the *New York Herald Tribune* on the streets of Paris while attempting to establish herself as a journalist, betrays Michel to the police who shoot him dead when he tries to flee.

A bout de souffle is highly characteristic of the filmmaking style associated with the New Wave. The neo-documentary ‘look’ of the film was achieved partly through the use of a lightweight, handheld model of film camera called the Eclair which allowed for mobility and flexibility in shooting. In addition, the film marked the first of Godard’s collaboration with the cinematographer Raoul Coutard, which would continue for fifteen films between 1960 and 1968. Coutard had been a photojournalist and documentary cameraman, and was accustomed to a style of shooting that was far removed from the more conventional and poised style of studio-based shooting that characterised the so-called Tradition of Quality. *A bout de souffle* was shot on black and white film stock normally used for still photography to further enhance the ‘reportage’ look. This ‘realism’ was part of the film’s perceived modernity, in that it was filmed on the streets of contemporary Paris, a decision that was in part dictated by necessity – this was a low-budget film, after all, shot rapidly in only four weeks – but that emphasised the distance between the New Wave approach to filmmaking and that of the largely studio-bound Tradition of Quality.

A bout de souffle is heavily intertextual, a feature that was to remain a constant in Godard’s work. The film is scattered with allusions to painting, literature and, above all, cinema. From the opening dedication to the small American B-movie studio Monogram Pictures, through Michel’s adoration and imitation of Hollywood ‘tough guy’ Humphrey Bogart, Godard plays the cinéophile game of

homage and quotation that would be characteristic of his own films and of the New Wave generally. In addition, the casting of the young American actress Jean Seberg as Patricia may be read in a variety of referential ways – as an incarnation of ‘America’ and, more specifically, as a nod to the émigré European director Otto Preminger who, while working in Hollywood, cast Seberg in the title role of *Saint Joan* (1957). *A bout de souffle* was seen to be ‘revolutionary’ in the way that it directly challenged the accepted rules of cinematic language. For example, in the sequence near the opening of the film where Michel drives towards a police speed-trap, he addresses the camera – and hence, the audience – directly, breaking the ‘fourth wall’ that is seen to be necessary for the spectator’s identification with the film’s fictional world. Famously, the film’s use of jerky and discontinuous editing rhythms established the ‘jump cut’ as a (quickly clichéd) hallmark of New Wave style. But elements such as these should be set against the film’s frequent use of long-take, mobile camera shots and the lengthy mid-film sequence in which Michel and Patricia canoodle in a bedroom.

In many ways, the film may be seen as the first of Godard’s (increasingly ambiguous) love letters to Hollywood cinema. But it is a relationship marked by mutual incomprehension – as the love affair between Michel and Patricia becomes fraught with mistrust, linguistic misunderstanding and, ultimately, betrayal. Like many of the early New Wave shorts and debut features, *A bout de souffle* was the product of a collaboration between former *Cahiers* critics: the script was based on an idea by Truffaut, and Chabrol was the ‘technical adviser’ on the film. It was remade in America in 1983 by Jim McBride, starring Richard Gere and Valérie Kaprisky in the Belmondo and Seberg roles.

THE PRODUCTION CONTEXT OF THE NEW WAVE

One of the reasons for the worldwide influence of the French New Wave during the 1960s was its demonstration that it was possible to make exciting, dynamic and innovative films outside of an established production system. The situation that obtained within French cinema prior to the advent of the New Wave was one in which the industry was far from accessible to ambitious young filmmakers. The industry was largely studio-bound and heavily regimented. The way to become a director was to serve long years of apprenticeship as an assistant director before having the possibility oneself to direct. It was this institution of production that the New Wave was seen to have changed.

As films made within a certain production context, those of the New Wave can be examined from two complementary perspectives that are at the heart of any consideration of filmmaking: the production circumstances and the role of filmmaking technology.

cinema novo

Or, ‘New Cinema’. A movement of filmmakers that came to prominence in Brazil in the 1960s, the leading figure of which was Glauber Rocha. Influenced by the New Wave in France and the intellectual examples of Frantz Fanon and Che Guevara, ‘cinema novo’ called for filmmaking that emphasised ‘the aesthetics of hunger’ directed against a cinema of imperialism.

‘movie brat’ generation

A term that refers to the generation of American filmmakers who, following the decline of the Hollywood studio system in the 1950s, began to make films independently and were heavily influenced by the French New Wave and European ‘art cinema’ of the 1960s. Such directors include Martin Scorsese and Francis Ford Coppola.

Production circumstances

Two of the most common descriptions of New Wave films are that they were 'low-budget' productions that were made 'outside' the conventional system that obtained in France in the 1950s and 1960s. These features have held an abiding appeal for many filmmakers wishing to make films of an 'independent' and 'personal' nature. One can find echoes of the New Wave's example in the Brazilian '**cinema novo**' of the 1960s, in the '**movie brat**' generation of American independent cinema of the 1960s and 1970s, in the **New German Cinema** of the late 1960s and 1970s, as well as in the **Dogme 95** movement that emerged in Denmark in the mid- to late 1990s.

In a recent study of the New Wave, the French film historian Michel Marie examined what 'low budget' meant in terms of the production circumstances in French cinema between 1955 and 1959. Marie found that the average budget of a film in 1955 was 109 million old francs and in 1959, 149 million old francs (the conversion rate following the devaluation of the currency in 1960 saw 1 million francs being worth 10,000 francs). In 1959, of 133 films produced, 74 films cost more than 100 million old francs and 33 cost more than 200 million old francs. So, in 1959, there were 26 films made with a budget of less than 100 million old francs. But, as Marie stresses, the sole criterion of a 'low budget' did not qualify a film as being a New Wave production. Marie associates the relatively low budgets on which the New Wave films were made with a backlash among the *Cahiers* critics against films made on exceedingly high budgets, particularly *Notre Dame de Paris* (Jean Delannoy, 1956), a spectacular film made explicitly to compete with Hollywood films within the domestic market. Writing in *Cahiers* No. 71 (April 1957), Jacques Rivette claimed that what was missing in French cinema was 'the spirit of poverty ... French cinema only stands a chance now in as much as other directors will take the risk of making films for 20 or 30 million francs, or even less' (cited in Marie 1998: 51).

It was generally agreed that, while French cinema was in a state of good financial health in the mid- to late 1950s, it was deemed to be less healthy in creative terms. However, there were filmmakers who had already set an example of the kind of production that would become characteristic of the New Wave. One of these was Jean-Pierre Melville who, in an interview in 1960, delivered the most concise definition of the characteristic features of New Wave films as being '**an artisanal system of production**, shot on location, without stars, with a minimal crew and on ultra-fast stock, without necessarily having a distributor lined up, without authorisation or servitude of any kind' (ibid.: 45). Melville was the pseudonym of Jean-Pierre Grumbach, the director of such films as *Le Silence de la mer* (1947), *Bob le Flambeur* (1955) and *Le Samourai* (1967), whose influence as a predecessor of the New Wave was explicitly acknowledged by Jean-Luc Godard who cast him in a cameo role in his debut feature *A bout de souffle*.

New German Cinema

A movement in German cinema in the late 1960s and 1970s that called for a personal and auteur cinema in Germany to counteract the cultural imperialism of Hollywood. Notable directors who emerged included Wim Wenders, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Alexander Kluge and Margerethe von Trotta.

Dogme 95

The name given to a collective of Danish filmmakers united around the figures of directors Lars Von Trier, Thomas Winterberg and Kristian Levering. Dogme 95 was the name of a manifesto that committed filmmakers to observing a cinematic 'vow of chastity' involving an ultra-realist approach to filmmaking using only digital video cameras.

artisanal system of production

A way of making films outside of an established 'industrial' means of production which emphasises a more craft-like and personal process hence allowing greater control of the filmmaking process.

CNC

Centre Nationale de la Cinématographie, the chief body of the French state that oversees policy affecting filmmaking, including the subsidies accorded to cinema.

State subsidy

Marie attributes the relative 'health' of the French film industry to a number of factors. The cinema attendance figures between 1947 and 1957 averaged out at a robust yearly figure of 390 million; the domestic market was still largely dominated by French films (it would be in the 1960s that American films began to bite into their market share) and French films were proving highly exportable; in 1956 40 per cent of receipts were generated by sales of French films abroad. However, Marie identifies another crucial aspect of the production context in the 1950s: the role of state subsidy for filmmaking. Drawing on a revealing interview between Bazin, Doniol-Valcroze and the director of the **CNC** (Centre Nationale de la Cinématographie), written by Jacques Flaud and published in *Cahiers* No. 71 (1957) entitled 'The Situation of French Cinema', Marie examines the importance, as well as some of the ambiguous effects of such state aid to filmmakers. Marie cites a report by Flaud that questioned the consequences of state aid on the quality of French filmmaking: namely, that it tended to produce films 'treating relatively easy subjects, with international stars, taken from works by well-known writers, in other words, subjects that have already been tested in other art forms, thus creating films that are adaptations or remakes' (Marie 1998: 49). The paradox Marie identifies is that the CNC's criticisms are surprisingly close in their analysis, if not their tone, to the 'anti-Establishment' polemics of Truffaut and others on *Cahiers*:

This thesis was the institutional version of the more personal and polemical thesis put forward by François Truffaut. Jacques Flaud goes as far as to encourage producers to take risks, to try out new actors and to envisage artistic renewal. ... This official programme was announced at the beginning of 1957 and one understands why the CNC would go on to do everything to support the first productions by Chabrol and Truffaut in granting their production companies the necessary dispensations, to the anger of the cinema technicians unions.

(ibid.: 49)

What emerges from Marie's close attention both to the well-documented polemics originating in the pages of *Cahiers* as well as to the institutional discourses on the state of French cinema is an unexpected overlap between the two. According to Marie, the 1957 statement by the CNC may be seen to have played 'a decisive role in the emergence of the New Wave in the following year. This fact confirms that there was nothing "spontaneous" about the New Wave generation' (ibid.: 50).

The various types of state funding for filmmakers that became effective during the 1950s support Marie's assertion. Among these was the 'prime à la qualité' ('quality subsidy') which dated from 1953 and was intended to support films whose criteria was seen to be one of 'quality', films which would 'serve the cause of French cinema or ... open up new perspectives in the art of cinema' (ibid.: 48–9). Although it took until 1955 for certain films to benefit from this particular subsidy, the irony was that while the New Wave directors set themselves against what they saw as the Tradition of

Quality in French cinema, they themselves would be the beneficiaries of a state subsidy promoting an idea of 'quality' in French film production.

It should be remembered that the state support of French cinema was set against the wider backdrop of policies put in place to aid French reconstruction. Principally the Blum–Byrnes agreement, signed in 1946 and amended in 1948, that, among other trade agreements, fixed a minimum quota of French films to be shown on French screens against non-French (predominantly American) films. So, state subsidy for French filmmaking may be seen as having been a way of preserving and encouraging domestic production in the face of international competition. In 1953, financial assistance became available for the production of short films and was instrumental in helping directors such as Chris Marker, Alain Resnais and Agnès Varda to make their first shorts. In addition, in 1959 a system of 'avances sur recettes' ('advances against earnings') was introduced, enabling producers to part-finance feature films by borrowing from a 'fonds de soutien' ('support fund') against their eventual profits. Many of the funding elements of state support remain in place to this day, although now modified by the close co-production ties established between the French film and television industries, and they account in part for the vitality of film production in France relative to other European countries which have largely capitulated to American hegemony.

CASE STUDY 2: *LES QUATRE CENTS COUPS* (THE FOUR HUNDRED BLOWS, FRANÇOIS TRUFFAUT, 1959)

Having earned himself a reputation as an 'enfant terrible' with his polemical critical writing in *Cahiers*, and having been barred from the Cannes Film Festival of 1958, in the following year, François Truffaut won Best Director at the festival for his debut feature *Les Quatre cents coups*.

The film was the first to feature the character of Antoine Doinel, played by Jean-Pierre Léaud, to whom Truffaut would return in a further five films, always using the same actor. Léaud plays Doinel as Truffaut's alter ego and *Les Quatre cents coups* was more than a little autobiographically derived. The young Antoine's unhappy home life, his troubles at school and his subsequent incarceration at a correctional centre for delinquent minors were based on Truffaut's own errant youth which saw him locked up for deserting from the army. In fact, it was the intercession of the film critic André Bazin that saved Truffaut from further punishment.

Like Godard's debut *A bout de souffle*, *Les Quatre cents coups* (The 'four hundred blows' refers to the administering of corporal punishment) was set in the apartments and on the streets of contemporary Paris. The film's lyrical, long-take, mobile camera style owed much to the influence of the filmmakers Jean Renoir, Robert Rossellini and Jean Vigo. The Italian neo-realist director Rossellini was to be an important adviser and champion of many of the young New Wave directors. Truffaut's own cinéphilia is evident throughout the film, although one might argue that it is more fully integrated into the plot and action than in Godard's debut. Whether at the level of the influence of those older directors admired by Truffaut, or simply in the scene in which Antoine steals a still from a cinema of the sultry Harriet Andersson in Ingmar Bergman's *Summer with Monika* (1952) (Bergman was an important director for both Truffaut and Godard), the cinéphilic impulse to quote from and pay homage to other films informs *Les Quatre cents coups*. Although less formally audacious than Godard's debut, *Les Quatre cents coups* ends with an arresting freeze-frame image of Antoine on a beach and at the water's edge: the sense of narrative 'closure' is uncertain and suggests an ambiguous future for the young man. It is an image that implicitly contradicts the title caption that reads 'Fin' ('End') with its suggestion that Antoine's story is 'to be continued'. As indeed it was.

NEW DIRECTORS, NEW PRODUCERS

While certain young filmmakers such as Agnès Varda and Claude Chabrol established their own independent production companies to assist in the making of their first feature films (in Varda's case *La Pointe courte* [1954], in Chabrol's *Les Cousins* [1959]), there were other figures who were crucial to the production of films by New Wave directors, notably Pierre Braunberger, Anatole Dauman and Georges de Beauregard.

Pierre Braunberger began producing films in 1926 with works by Alberto Cavalcanti and Jean Renoir. The portfolio of his production company Les Films de la Pléiade was extensive, ranging from avant-garde films to commercial productions as well as works by precursors to the New Wave such as Jean-Pierre Melville (whom Braunberger supported in his adaptation of the novel *Le Silence de la mer* between 1947 and 1948) and the influential ethnographic documentarist Jean Rouch. Braunberger's involvement in producing documentaries and short fictions – both of which were genres of work important to the development of the New Wave – saw him working with figures who would become key directors in French cinema, including Alain Resnais whose films on artists, *Van Gogh*, *Guernica* and *Gauguin*, he produced between 1947 and 1948. Other directors' short films produced by Braunberger included *O Saisons, o châteaux* (Agnès Varda, 1957), *Le Coup du berger* (Jacques Rivette, 1956) and *Tous les garçons s'appellent Patrick, Une Histoire d'eau* and *Charlotte et son Jules* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1957, 1958 and 1959). He would continue to produce features by New Wave directors after their initial successes such as Truffaut's second film *Tirez sur le pianiste* (1960) and Godard's fourth film *Vivre sa vie* (1962).

Anatole Dauman founded Argos Films (with Phillippe Lifchitz) in 1951 as a company specialising in films about art and was responsible for producing important early works by two of the major 'Left Bank' New Wave filmmakers Alain Resnais and Chris Marker. Dauman produced Resnais' *Nuit et brouillard* (*Night and Fog*, 1955), a seminal documentary about the memory of the mass extermination of Jews, communists, gypsies and homosexuals in the Nazi 'death camps' of the Second World War. Dauman also produced the director's first ground-breaking feature film *Hiroshima, mon amour* (1959) and its follow-up *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* (1961). As regards Marker, Argos Films produced the director's early documentary-essay films *Dimanche à Pékin* (*Sunday in Peking*, 1956) and *Lettre de Sibérie* (*Letter from Siberia*, 1958). The relationship between Argos Films and Marker also includes the production of the filmmaker's singular black and white science fiction short *La Jeté* (1963). Other important and influential films produced by Argos included the ethnographic cinéma vérité exploration of Parisian life *Chronique d'un été* (1960) by Jean Rouch, as well as later works by Resnais (*Muriel, ou le temps d'un retour*, 1963), Godard (*Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle*, 1966, *Masculin Féminin*, 1966) and Robert Bresson (*Au Hasard, Balthazar*, 1966 and *Mouchette*, 1967).

The producer who was perhaps the principal supporter of New Wave filmmakers was Georges de Beauregard. Having produced Godard's highly successful debut *A bout de souffle*, Beauregard went on to produce six other films by the director: *Le Petit soldat* (1960), *Une Femme est une femme* (1961), *Les Carabiniers* (1963), *Le Mépris* (1963), *Made in USA* (1966) and then, years later, *Numéro Deux* (1975). Beauregard also produced films by other New Wave directors including Jacques Demy (*Lola*, 1960). Jacques Rozier (*Adieu Philippine*, 1962), Claude Chabrol (*L'Oeil du malin*, 1962), Agnès Varda (*Cléo de 5 à 7*, 1961), Jacques Rivette (*Suzanne Simonin, la religieuse de Diderot*, 1965) and Eric Rohmer (*La Collectionneuse*, 1966).

It is hard to conceive of New Wave cinema without the support of adventurous producers such as Dauman, Braunberger and de Beauregard who were able to support the ambitions of new

filmmakers on relatively low budgets, as well as to maintain the momentum of production after the first flush of New Wave successes had passed.

CASE STUDY 3: LA JETÉE (THE PIER, CHRIS MARKER, 1962)

La Jetée is a twenty-eight-minute, black-and-white film made entirely from a montage of still images (with the exception of a moment when the image moves in a conventionally 'cinematic' fashion). It tells the story of a soldier who, having survived the nuclear blast of 'the third world war', finds himself the subject of time-travel experiments in post-apocalypse Paris. It was the work of the filmmaker Chris Marker (real name: Christian-François Bouche-Villeneuve) who was associated with the 'Left Bank' grouping of the New Wave which was also seen to include Alain Resnais and Agnès Varda. Having been a writer and photographer, Marker collaborated with Resnais (he co-directed *Les Statues meurent aussi* (*Statues Also Die*, 1950) and wrote the narration for Resnais' 1957 short *Le Mystère de l'atelier quinze*) and distinguished himself with a series of highly individual documentary films including *Dimanche à Pékin* (1956) and *Lettre de Sibérie* (1958). Notable for the sophistication of their editing and their allusive, poetic commentaries, Marker's documentaries are often seen as defining a genre known as 'essay films'.

La Jetée is Marker's only foray into fiction and was the basis for Terry Gilliam's big-budget Hollywood 'remake' *Twelve Monkeys* (1995). But science fiction in *La Jetée* provides Marker with a narrative alibi – time-travel – by which to explore, with affecting poetry, the ideas of memory and history which are the key themes of all his work. Much has been written about this haunting film, acknowledged as one of the masterpieces of cinematic 'modernism'. Marker was a politically committed filmmaker, closely allied to the French left and active in the collective filmmaking groups that arose as a result of 'the events' of May 1968. Some of the themes that *La Jetée* touches on include the aftermath of war and atomic devastation; themes that Resnais also treated in *Nuit et brouillard* (1955) and *Hiroshima, mon amour* (1959). It has also been argued that, with its protracted scenes in which the 'time-traveller' is submitted to torture, *La Jetée* uses the science fiction narrative form as a way of commenting on the theme of political violence which was a major issue at the time. France was involved in a colonial war against Algeria, one of its former dependencies, and direct treatment of the subject could lead to censorship (as was the case with Godard's second film *Le Petit soldat* (1960, but banned until 1963)).

La Jetée alludes to a film that Marker has returned to several times in his career and which he sees as an exploration of the theme of 'impossible memory': Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958). When the time-traveller is sent back in time to pre-apocalypse Paris he meets a young woman and they walk together in the parks of Paris. Pausing at the stump of an ancient tree, he indicates on the rings of the tree where, in time, 'he comes from'. It is a moment that directly quotes a sequence in *Vertigo* where Madeleine (Kim Novak) shows Scottie (James Stewart) when she lived and when she died by pointing at the rings on a sequoia tree. Marker has referred to *La Jetée*, only half in jest, as a 'remake' of *Vertigo*. If there is a body of work that best exemplifies Alexandre Astruc's idea of the *caméra-stylo*, it is that of Chris Marker.

CASE STUDY 4: CLÉO DE 5 À 7 (CLÉO FROM 5 TO 7, AGNÈS VARDA, 1961)

Cléo de 5 à 7 was Agnès Varda's second feature film after her co-operatively produced and undistributed debut *La Pointe Courte* (1954) and, in characteristic New Wave style, the film is set

squarely in and around contemporary Paris. In ninety minutes of film, it recounts ninety minutes in the life of Cléo Victoire (Corinne Marchand), a successful pop singer who wanders through Paris, attends a rehearsal, and meets friends and new acquaintances while she awaits the results of a medical test for cancer. The 'realism' so often associated with the New Wave's approach to filmmaking is here taken to a particular extreme, extended beyond close attention to the street-level life of Paris to a 'real-time' approach to the film's duration and the action of the plot. The running time of the film corresponds, almost exactly, to the length and space of Cléo's journey round Paris between 17:00 and 18:30 on 21 June 1961 and uses the radio news for that day.

The film is divided into a prologue (the only sequence in colour) and thirteen sections, each with their exact time and the name of a character whose presence inflects the scene. In its attempt to develop and explore a cinematic language by which to convey a woman's subjective point of view, *Cléo de 5 à 7* relates to Varda's earlier short film *L'Opéra-Mouffe* (1958) which depicted a local Parisian neighbourhood through the mind of a pregnant woman (Varda herself) who is preoccupied by thoughts of the forthcoming birth. In its contrast between Cléo's outwardly glamorous appearance and her fear of death, *Cléo de 5 à 7* consistently probes the boundaries between the singer's appearance and her internal world which are explored through an attention to the world around her and the ways in which she sees and registers that world.

Cléo's progress through the film develops from an almost narcissistic preoccupation with her own image – the first part of the film is full of mirrors and reflections, the outside world being, for her, less of a direct experience than an 'image' – through a more direct encounter with that world and its inhabitants. In particular, there is Cléo's encounter with a gentle young man in a park who has been conscripted and is on the point of leaving to fight in Algeria. Across the film, Cléo changes from a creature whose sole function, as a beautiful woman, is to be 'looked at' to a woman who herself looks, sees and encounters the world and the people around her; a transformation from being an 'object' to a 'subject'.

CHARACTERISTICS OF NEW WAVE CINEMA

Technology and aesthetics

One of the most important aspects of the New Wave relates to the changes in filmmaking technology that occurred after the Second World War. These changes had an impact both on how films were made and how they looked. Particularly significant as regards the New Wave was the availability of relatively cheap and lightweight cameras (the Eclair, Arriflex and Cameflex being the dominant new models of lightweight cameras) and sound-recording equipment (the portable Nagra tape-recorder, for example). Not only did the advent of such technology allow filmmakers to shoot with smaller, less cumbersome crews, it also allowed the New Wave directors to work outside the established system of French filmmaking. This conventional style of filmmaking (the so-called Tradition of Quality) privileged a studio-based method of production in which directors and cinematographers worked alongside a team of other personnel such as set designers, lighting designers and art directors. Being opposed to many of the films produced by such a system, New Wave directors were able to convert their polemical antagonism to such filmmaking into practice. Influenced by the examples of **cinéma vérité** documentarists such as Jean Rouch and neo-realist filmmakers such as Roberto Rossellini, both of whom made films based on direct encounters with the world around them, the New Wave directors used the new cameras and sound equipment to extend this approach in the context of fiction filmmaking.

In his recent historical study of the New Wave, Jean Douchet (who had been a critic on *Cahiers* at the same time as Godard and Truffaut) states that '[the] hand-held camera became one of the

distinctive features of the New Wave'. It is important to remember two things here. First, that television was still in the process of establishing itself as the dominant entertainment medium in France in the 1960s, so the street-level, documentary look and feel of the New Wave films would have appeared very 'new' and 'modern' at the time, coming as something of a stylistic shock in comparison to the output of much of French cinema. Second, that the New Wave directors used this equipment in order to show the world of Parisian everyday life with greater 'authenticity' and 'directness' than had been hitherto possible in French cinema, but also to push at the limits of what was deemed 'acceptable' both in terms of cinematic conventions and subject matter. Douchet describes the significance of the new camera technology on the New Wave thus:

cinéma vérité

A term for one of the strands in the flourishing of new forms of documentary that took place in Europe and America from the 1950s onwards. Partly aided by lightweight camera and sound equipment, cinéma vérité saw the film-maker operating as a participant-observer relative to the reality being filmed. Another tendency in this new form of documentary was known as 'Direct Cinema'.

Carried around on the operator's shoulder, it (the lightweight camera) could closely follow the actor's every movement. A new intimacy developed between the camera and its subjects. The act of filming became a close physical encounter. ... In terms of craft, the camera enabled filmmakers to abandon the use of heavy equipment (and its operators) and provided rapidity of movement and execution (with less time required during filming). It gave them the ability to film from a variety of vehicles (the camera operator could work in anything from a car to a baby carriage) which allowed the use of camera movements that were not only unthinkable but impossible with dolly tracks. And it introduced the camera into actual spaces whose cramped quarters reinforced the impression of real life. Aesthetically, a new and unexpected style exploded across the screen and added a sense of buoyancy to otherwise serious issues.

(Douchet 1999: 204–5)

The freewheeling style of filmmaking that marked the New Wave cinema was highly influential around the world. Not only would many other directors be influenced by the 'look' of the New Wave films but documentary cinema found a new lease of life with the advent of cinéma vérité and 'Direct Cinema'. In addition, with the recent use of digital video cameras by independent filmmakers it is hardly surprising that references to the stylistic example of New Wave directors such as Godard and Varda should have become commonplace (see e.g. Kelly 2000).

There are, of course, exceptions to prove the very 'rules' that Michel Marie outlines at the beginning of this chapter. The soundtrack for *A bout de souffle*, for example, was entirely **post-synchronised** and neither of its lead performers, Jean-Paul Belmondo and Jean Seberg, were non-professionals. Belmondo was a relatively 'new face', however, and would soon become one of the leading actors associated with the New Wave generation.

post-synchronised

Referring to the process of adding and modifying some or all of a film's sound in a studio after the film has been shot and synchronising these sounds to the image track (also known as 'post-synching').

Influences and precursors

In the December 1962 issue of *Cahiers*, the magazine published a 'Dictionary of 162 New Filmmakers'. By this time, the New Wave was no longer deemed to be the 'phenomenon' it had been in 1958–1959 but the sheer number of directors who had made one or two films in the intervening years indicated that a veritable explosion of filmmaking had taken place in France which, in part, contributed to this idea of the 'phenomenon' of the New Wave. Most of these films and filmmakers are now forgotten, and the New Wave is reduced to a handful of illustrious names and admittedly important, ground-breaking works. It is worth pointing out, however, a few of the figures who influenced this phenomenon and who could be said to have been its precursors.

One can divide such figures into the following categories: 'elders', 'early contemporaries' and 'fellow travellers'. Of the elders, Jean-Pierre Melville has already been mentioned and his importance is undeniable, both in terms of the independence with which he produced his films but also in his abiding love of American cinema. Alexandre Astruc should also be mentioned as an example of a critic who also became a filmmaker prior to *Cahiers* writers making the same transition, although Michel Marie argues that Astruc's films *Les Mauvaises rencontres* (1955) and *Une Vie* (1958) cannot be considered as truly New Wave films because of their production circumstances and because the latter film featured the international star Maria Schell.

Two names are worth including in the 'early contemporaries' category: Louis Malle and Roger Vadim. Malle had been an assistant director on Robert Bresson's *Un Condamné à mort s'est échappé* (*A Man Escaped*, 1956), and his debut feature film *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud* (*Lift to the Scaffold*, 1957) had many elements that one might identify with the New Wave – a 'film noir' atmosphere and provenance (it was adapted from a thriller), a jazz score especially composed by the legendary musician Miles Davis, cinematography by Henri Decaë who would go on to shoot Truffaut's *Les quatre cents coups*, and a lead actress in the shape of Jeanne Moreau who was to become one of the key performers associated with the New Wave. Vadim's debut feature *Et Dieu créa la femme* (1956) was admired by Godard and Truffaut for its 'modernity' largely because Vadim brought to the screen a new image of youthful, devil-may-care femininity in the shape of Brigitte Bardot, who was to become the major sex symbol of French cinema and an important signifier of many of those qualities – 'youth', 'modernity' and 'subversive' sexual freedom – that would be associated with the New Wave as an image of modern, postwar France both at home and internationally.

As regards 'fellow travellers', this category is more fluid depending on whom one includes. For example, Roberto Rossellini may be seen as an illustrious 'elder' relative to the generation of the New Wave. The influence of his 'neo-realist' films on the critical ideas of André Bazin is well documented, but his significance extends beyond this. His 1953 film *Viaggio in Italia* (*Voyage to Italy*) was a commercial and critical failure, except with *Cahiers* critics such as Rivette, Rohmer and Godard, who regarded it as an extremely 'modern' work that 'opened a breach' in the history of cinema. It would be through this very breach that they would propel their first films and Rossellini was an adviser to the young directors, even co-writing the screenplay for Godard's *Les Carabiniers* (*The Riflemen*, 1963). Jean Rouch was a documentary filmmaker who came from a background in ethnology and anthropology, and his creative studies of life and rituals in 'primitive' societies as well as in European society – *Les Maîtres fous* (1955), *Moi, un noir* (1958), *La Pyramide humaine* (1959) and *Chronique d'un été* (1960) were particularly influential works – presented the New Wave filmmakers with an example of how documentary and fiction could intermingle and inform each other. The work of Agnès Varda and Alain Resnais, as part of the so-called 'Left Bank' group of filmmakers who were contemporaries of the *Cahiers* critics, also demonstrated a lively interest in documentary filmmaking that would lead to full-length fiction films.

Actors and stars

If one of the defining features of the New Wave was its wholesale rejection of the cinematic values of the Tradition of Quality, this is particularly marked as regards actors and actresses. The New Wave rejection of the French 'star system' may be ascribed to a number of factors: New Wave directors could not afford to employ 'stars', did not wish to be beholden to the power that a 'star' could exercise over creative decisions deemed to be in the hands of the auteur and, put plainly, 'stars' did not correspond with the New Wave 'project' which was in search of 'youthfulness', 'modernity' and 'spontaneity'. Instead, the New Wave cast relatively unknown performers, or outright newcomers, and, in so doing, discovered a new generation of actors and, in some cases, created bona fide stars.

One such star was Brigitte Bardot. While Bardot was by no means an archetypal New Wave actress like Anna Karina or Jeanne Moreau, she came to represent a new image of femininity that was to differentiate her and her contemporaries from the actresses who preceded them. The impact of her role in *Et Dieu créa la femme* (Vadim, 1956) was important for the New Wave for a variety of reasons. The film conformed to a certain number of the key characteristics of New Wave filmmaking. It was shot with a relatively small crew on location (in the then relatively 'unspoiled' fishing town of St Tropez in the South of France). While it featured a 'star' in the shape of Curt Jurgens, it was Bardot's youthful insolence and her unruffled sexual freedom that led François Truffaut to write: 'It is a film typical of our generation ... despite the vast audience that *Et Dieu créa la femme* will certainly find, only young spectators will be on Vadim's side, because he shares their vision' (cited in Vincendeau 2000: 85). Bardot's association with the New Wave was actually quite limited in terms of the films she made. With the exception of *Et Dieu créa la femme*, Bardot made only two other films with directors associated with the 'young generation' of filmmakers: *Vie privée* (A Very Private Affair, Louis Malle, 1961) and *Le Mépris* (Contempt, Godard, 1963). But there can be little doubt that her 'sex kitten' image and its connotations of a sophisticated yet earthy sexuality was important in opening up foreign markets for European art cinema abroad, particularly in the USA. As Vincendeau notes:

On the international film scene, the mid- to late 1950s saw both the break-up of the Hollywood studio system and concurrently, the rise of European art cinema: the films of Fellini, Antonioni, Resnais, Bergman, etc. As part of its drive to compete with Hollywood, European art cinema proposed a new kind of social and psychological realism which included a bid for explicit sexuality, made possible because of less stringent censorship codes. The different censorship laws and the more realistic genres of European films of the 1950s combined to produce a more 'natural' type of sexuality than Hollywood, best epitomized by Gina Lollobrigida, Sophia Loren and Silvana Mangano in Italian cinema. Women in peasant dresses, with bare feet paddling in rice fields, contrasted with the high glamour of Monroe and Lana Turner. Bardot was closer to the Italian model and *Et Dieu créa la femme* frequently features scenes of bathing, sea and beaches. European eroticism was bankable. Vadim said: 'Of course, some of [*Et Dieu créa la femme*'s] success came from its sexual frankness, and that's why so many of the first New Wave films, like Malle's *Les Amants* (1957) and Godard's *A bout de souffle* are equally casual about nudity. It's what distributors, especially American ones, were asking for.' (ibid.: 92–3)

For male and female performers alike, the New Wave filmmakers 'concentrated on behaviour, looks and gestures rather than psychology' (ibid.: 117). Vincendeau elaborates on these features of New Wave acting styles as follows:

Its authenticity was grounded in a discourse of anti-professionalism. It was important that actors and actresses were seen not to act, especially in contrast to the Tradition of Quality cinema, which foregrounded polished performances, careful lighting and framing,

experienced mastery of space, well-modulated delivery of dialogue. New Wave films foregrounded improvisation through filming on location, using available light and vernacular language. Performances matched this. Casual elocution and underplaying made performances appear 'modern' and blurred the distinction between fiction and document (reference to New Wave films as 'documentaries' on the actors are frequent). Lines are fluffed and movements are charmingly gauche. (ibid.)

What the New Wave auteurs required of their actors and actresses was 'male doubles or female muses' (ibid.: 115). In terms of the 'male doubles', it is particularly striking when one considers Truffaut's casting of Jean-Pierre Léaud as his alter ego Antoine Doinel in the suite of films beginning with *Les quatre cent coups*. Equally, Godard's 'discovery' of the relatively unknown Jean-Paul Belmondo (who was to become one of the most popular and enduring French male leading men for several decades) often saw him playing a surrogate for the director and his cinéphilic obsessions: consider Belmondo's 'caricature' of Bogart in *A bout de souffle*, for example. But whether the actresses were *gamine* types such as Anna Karina or Chantal Goya, or sophisticated and liberated 'modern' women such as Jeanne Moreau or Emmanuelle Béart, as Ginette Vincendeau stresses: 'The close relationship between actresses and filmmakers in the New Wave meant that while they played the traditional role of female object of desire, they, and not just the male alter-egos, also functioned as relayers of the film-maker's worldview' (ibid.: 116–17). Such 'close relationships' between directors and their leading actresses are often contextualised in cinéphilic terms with reference to other cinematic partnerships, such as those between Joseph von Sternberg and Marlene Dietrich or Ingmar Bergman and several of his actresses. Godard's relationship with Karina yielded seven films between 1961 and 1966, and Moreau was the partner of the directors of several of her major films in the 1960s, such as Truffaut and Malle. In fact, these 'cinéphile–svengali' partnerships may be said to be one of the characteristic features of European art cinema in the 1960s, from Federico Fellini's films with Giullietta Masina to Michelangelo Antonioni's films with Monica Vitti.

Society and politics

The social background against which the New Wave emerged was one of postwar reconstruction and modernisation which saw France enter an economic boom period known as the 'trente glorieuses', or the 'thirty glorious years' of prosperity and technological advances. Presiding over this period was the figure of Charles De Gaulle, the *résistant* war hero who, from the establishment of the Fifth Republic in 1958, was the President of France until 1969. However, during the same period, France was involved in bloody, drawn-out conflicts with countries struggling to free themselves from their former colonial masters. The involvement of the French armed forces in Indo-China saw them endure a humiliating defeat at Dien Bien Phu in May 1954, but the increasing involvement of American troops in the region set the scene for the war in Vietnam which would be one of the defining political events of the 1960s. While France negotiated the independence of two of its colonies, Morocco and Tunisia, the situation in France's oldest colony, Algeria, proved to be more intractable, and fatally damaged the last five administrations of the French presidential structure known as the Fourth Republic. The colonial war between Algeria and France would last for eight years and claim the lives of 18,000 French soldiers and 250,000 Muslims, while allowing De Gaulle to recast the presidential structure of power – the Fifth Republic – in order to resolve the crisis. Massacres and atrocities in Algeria were committed by both the Nationalist pro-independence movement, the FLN (Front de Libération Nationale), and the shadowy, colonialist 'secret army' of the French, OAS (Organisation de l'armée secrète), with the conflict spreading to the French mainland both in the shape of the attacks on civilians but also in mobilisation against the war by intellectuals, artists and those on the left-wing of the political spectrum. One such demonstration of opposition to the war in Algeria was the text supporting 'le droit à l'insoumission' (the right of soldiers to absent

themselves without leave rather than serve in the war) signed by 121 prominent French intellectuals and artists including, among others, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Alain Resnais, Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, Pierre Kast and François Truffaut. It was immediately banned from publication and became known as the 'Manifeste des 121' ('The Manifesto of the 121'). The Evian Agreements of March 1962 finally led to full Algerian independence, despite a last-ditch campaign of terror launched by the OAS.

The major political event of the 1960s in France occurred in May 1968 during which widespread demonstrations and strikes took place, disrupting public transport, closing banks, decimating industrial production and bringing the country to a virtual standstill. The two major forces of 'les événements de mai' ('the events of May') were students and workers whose discontent with the French economic and social system was palliated by government action. The threat of a full-scale insurrection was thus soon snuffed out. The country's filmmakers were heavily involved in the 'events' of May 1968 but the politicisation of the New Wave (often accused of having been apolitical, if not right-wing) began a little earlier. One of the main causes of such radicalisation was the perceived heavy-handedness of the state and its willingness to exercise censorship. This was an important issue during the 1960s, extending to all areas of media and culture and effecting coverage of the Algerian war just as it did the mainstream media coverage of the 'events of May'. The former writers of *Cahiers* who had avoided direct political engagement during the Algerian war came to political consciousness through a variety of confrontations with the French state in the mid- to late 1960s.

The censorship of filmmakers' work, often resulting in the forbidding of public projection, had already alerted directors to the heavy-handedness of the state when it came to matters military – for example, Godard's *Le Petit soldat*, shot in 1960 but banned until 1963 – or clerical – Rivette's adaptation of Denis Diderot's play *La Religieuse* was banned after protests by Catholic groups. But it was the decision of the Gaullist state in February 1968 to replace Henri Langlois as the head of the Cinémathèque Française that crystallised these misgivings and resulted in mobilisations and demonstrations that pre-dated the events of May by several months. The concerted campaigning efforts of many filmmakers protesting this decision was organised by *Cahiers* and resulted in Langlois' eventual reinstatement. Such activism generated a renewed confidence in the linking of culture and politics that would have profound repercussions throughout the milieu of filmmaking and criticism as well as further afield.

CASE STUDY 5: JEAN-LUC GODARD

Jean-Luc Godard has endowed cinema with a vast and inexhaustibly rich body of work. Since his debut in 1990 with *A bout de souffle*, Godard has made over forty feature films, numerous short films and many hours of video, not to mention his film criticism which, throughout the 1950s, preceded and overlapped with his career as a filmmaker.

In fact, Godard has frequently stated that he considers his filmmaking as much an exercise in criticism as his writing, an assertion that allows a way into his body of work. Godard's career is conventionally seen as divided into three phases. First, the New Wave period that begins with *A bout de souffle* and for which his writing on *Cahiers* and his short filmmaking throughout the 1950s may be seen as preparation. When the New Wave period is seen to end is a matter of historical debate. Some argue that the New Wave as a 'phenomenon' was over by 1962. Others argue that it can be extended up to the political events of May 1968. With Godard's increasing politicisation around that time, the 'second phase' of his work is seen to begin when the director jettisoned his auteur

celebrity status and became involved in collective, explicitly ideologically motivated filmmaking; this period continues until 1972. Godard's 'third phase' occurs in the early to mid-1970s when the director returned to relatively mainstream filmmaking with films such as *Tout va bien* (1972) and *Sauve qui peut* (la vie) (1979). One of the most important developments in this period, and which continues to the present day, has been Godard's long-standing use and exploration of video technology.

During the New Wave years (1958–62) and in the immediate post-New Wave period (1962–68) Godard sustained a steady output of work, sometimes shooting two films simultaneously. During this period he made seventeen features and eleven shorts (including those made prior to *A bout de souffle*) and the time was marked by two consistent collaborations (excluding that with the producer Georges de Beauregard); first, with the cinematographer Raoul Coutard on fifteen features and, second, with the actress Anna Karina who was married to Godard for a period in the 1960s and with whom he made seven films and co-founded a production company, Anoushka Films.

In the films that Godard made up to 1968 a keen awareness of the history of cinema co-exists alongside a critical analysis of cinematic language and the possibilities of extending cinematic forms. As early as *A bout de souffle*, it is evident that Godard is both glorying in the generic possibilities of the Hollywood B-movie but also taking advantage of their use within a specifically French context by employing them against the backdrop of everyday Parisian life. Here, genre meets documentary. This is a crucial aspect of Godard's filmmaking: the desire to explore the fictional aspect of a documentary context and vice versa. He was deeply influenced in this by the work of the ethnographical documentarist Jean Rouch (Godard had studied ethnography at the Sorbonne in Paris in the late 1940s). Equally important in this regard was the example of the great Italian director Roberto Rossellini, whose 'neo-realist' films such as *Rome, Open City* (1945), *Paisan* (1946) and *Germany, Year Zero* (1947), as well as later films made with his wife Ingrid Bergman such as *Voyage to Italy* (1953), were highly influential for many New Wave filmmakers in their extremely 'modern' use of documentary modes to treat fictional storylines.

Throughout the 1960s, Godard used generic forms to analyse French society, politics and consumerism. *Alphaville* (1965), for example, employs science fiction and the spy thriller forms in a generic hybrid, as well as quoting liberally from German Expressionist cinema (the sequence printed in negative is a direct quotation from *Nosferatu, Eine Symphonie des Grauens* (F.W. Murnau, 1922), and sets these to work to produce a dystopian vision of an inhuman, technocratic society using only the existing modernist architectural forms of Paris as it was in 1965. Across a number of his films made in this period, such as *Vivre sa vie* (*My Life to Live*, 1962), *Une Femme mariée* (*A Married Woman*, 1964) and *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle* (*Two or Three Things I Know about Her*, 1966), it became clear that Godard was as much a social critic with a camera as a film critic. This element of social criticism was to increase in significance in the late 1960s as Godard became more explicitly political in his analysis of consumer society (which he often likened to a form of 'prostitution' in advanced capitalist countries) and his increasing hostility towards American imperialism (this being the period of America's war in Vietnam) and what he saw as its propaganda vehicle, Hollywood cinema. By the time of *La Chinoise* (1967) and *Weekend* (1967), Godard had become fully radicalised by 'l'affaire Langlois' (see above). The political uprising of the 'events' of May 1968 – as a response to which Godard and others shut down the Cannes Film Festival in solidarity with workers' and students' protests – were to transform his career, as they would many others.

CASE STUDY 6: AGNÈS VARDA

Agnès Varda's debut feature film *La Pointe courte* (1954) was dubbed by the French film historian Georges Sadoul as 'the first film of the New Wave' and Varda has frequently been described as 'the grandmother' of the New Wave. A former art student and professional photographer, Varda made her first film with no previous experience of filmmaking. *La Pointe Courte* told the story of a relationship set against the location of a fishing village. It was co-operatively produced by a company which Varda established specifically in order to make the film. Ciné-Tamaris has remained Varda's production company ever since and through it she has made sixteen feature films, as well as many documentaries and shorts.

Varda is often bracketed as part of the so-called 'Left Bank' grouping of the New Wave. This term, coined by the American film critic and former director of the New York Film Festival Richard Roud, was intended to distinguish the work of Varda, Alain Resnais and Chris Marker from that of the filmmakers who emerged from *Cahiers*. The 'Left Bank' filmmakers were frequent collaborators with each other: Resnais was the editor of *La Pointe courte* and Varda accompanied Marker to China to assist on the production of his 1956 documentary essay-film *Dimanche à Peking* (*Sunday in Peking*). The 'Left Bank' filmmakers were distinguished by a number of characteristics: a practical relationship with documentary filmmaking, their literary affinities, close contact and interest in fine arts, and a more pronounced degree of left-leaning political commitment than the *Cahiers* directors.

That is not to say that these two groupings were mutually exclusive. *Cahiers* championed the work by the Left Bank group, and Godard, Doniol-Valcroze and Anna Karina appear in cameo roles in a short silent film inserted into Varda's second film *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1961).

For a more detailed discussion of Cléo de 5 à 7, see Case study 4.

As the only woman filmmaker associated with the New Wave, Varda's work is fascinating for a variety of reasons. From an early stage she practised what she called 'cinécriture' (a compound word made up of two French words, 'ciné' – cinema – and 'écriture' – writing; hence, 'cinematic writing'). One might say that all her films are examples of Alexandre Astruc's notion of 'le caméra-stylo' ('the camera-pen') in a woman's hands. Many of her films are explicitly about women's experiences and explore cinematic means of conveying female subjectivity. Varda was married for many years to another director who came to prominence during the New Wave period, Jacques Demy, who made a number of important and successful films including *Lola* (1960) and *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg* (*The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*, 1964), and who died in 1990.

The range of subjects covered by Varda's films include radical politics (*Black Panthers*, shot in the US in 1968) and the chronicle of the lives of two female friends coming to political consciousness through the 1960s and 1970s. *L'une chante l'autre pas* (*One Sings the Other Doesn't*, 1977). Many of her films are marked by her abiding interest in and love for the arts of painting, sculpture and photography. In 1985 Varda made a film about the short life and death of a young female drifter in the south of France, *Sans toit ni loi* (*Vagabond*), starring Sandrine Bonnaire, which was critically praised and reached international audiences.

More recently, Varda again claimed international attention and acclaim with her elegant and humane portrait of those living at the margins of French consumer society, *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* (*The Gleaners and I*, 2000), which won the European Film Academy Award for Best Documentary in 2000 as well as several prestigious American Film Critics awards. Shot on digital video, the film marked a kind of full-circle return to Varda's New Wave roots, the documentary-essay form updated with the new technology of digital video.

THE LEGACY OF THE NEW WAVE

In January 1999 *Cahiers* published a special supplement entitled 'The New Wave: A Legend in Question' which included seventeen articles reassessing the 'legend' of the French New Wave. The issue also featured a questionnaire in which a number of filmmakers from around the world were asked to respond to a series of questions, including: 'What did the phenomenon of the New Wave represent in your life?'; 'Was its influence positive or negative?'; 'Did the New Wave help you in making films?' The directors who responded included a combination of older and contemporary French filmmakers as well as illustrious international names such as Abbas Kiarostami and Martin Scorsese. It is instructive to listen to these two filmmakers, each from a very different culture and industry, the one Iranian, the other American, in what they had to say about the New Wave's impact. First, Scorsese:

Whether they're aware of it or not, all the filmmakers who have come since have been influenced by the New Wave ... the first films of Godard, Truffaut, Chabrol, Rivette, Rohmer and others gave you the feeling that you could make a film yourself, anyhow, with anyone, no matter what the story was and that you didn't need expensive materials, famous names or powerful lights. It was enough to go out into the streets and make a film and that it would work if you had the courage of your convictions.

(*Cahiers*, January 1999: 97)

And Kiarostami:

Perhaps you won't believe me if I tell you that the movement started in French cinema by the New Wave was followed day-by-day in Iran ... under the influence of New Wave filmmakers my way of imagining or envisaging cinema changed. Before, I believed that cinema belonged to superstars, to studios and spectacular sets. With the New Wave, I saw myself and my neighbours in films.

(*ibid.*: 96)

Before examining the considerable long-term influence of the New Wave, as attested to by Scorsese and Kiarostami, it is worthwhile considering the lifetime of the phenomenon in France. I have already explored some of the factors that encouraged the explosion of film production from 1958 onwards that became known as New Wave cinema, but it should be acknowledged how relatively short-lived this cinema was as a 'phenomenon'. That is not to say that the examples and possibilities for filmmakers represented by the New Wave expired along with its sure-fire commercial prospects, but to delineate a scale of time in which this 'phenomenon' may be seen to have existed. The standard film-historical time scale in which the New Wave is seen to have been born, flourished and expired was between 1958 and 1962, between the prize-winning success of Truffaut's *Les quatre cents coups* at Cannes in 1959 and the second films by Godard, Truffaut and Chabrol that were released between 1961 and 1962. With Godard's *Une femme est une femme* (1961), Truffaut's *Tirez sur le pianiste* (1960) and Chabrol's *Les Godelureaux* (1960) and *L'Oeil du malin* (1962), the novelty of the New Wave was seen to have worn off, with the public staying away and the critics unenthusiastic. This strict chronology serves to delimit the New Wave as a short-term, high-profile event in French cinema that quickly fell out of favour; a caricature of these films became current as being little more than a compendium of images of 'Saint Tropez, casual relationships, whisky and ennui' (de Baecque 1991: 138). In his recent study of the period, *A Portrait of Youth* (1998), the French cultural historian Antoine de Baecque points out also that there were larger transformations underway that should be considered when examining the immediate New Wave period. The backdrop to the New Wave was 'a long-term cultural evolution', one which saw the numbers of cinema spectators gradually decline throughout the 1950s and 1960s as television became the

dominant form of mass entertainment and communication. In these terms, the New Wave may be seen as the momentary phenomenon of a national cinema revitalising the domestic scene while also soliciting considerable international attention.

The New Wave certainly modified some of the conditions of film production in France, for example, the tendency to move away from studio-based production to an increased emphasis on location-based filming. It also had an effect on distribution, particularly in the importance accorded to the state-supported circuit of specialised *cinémas d'art et d'essai*, which might be seen as a precursor of the 'art cinemas' that became a feature of international film distribution from the 1960s onwards. It is in these terms that the New Wave may be seen to have had a profound and continuing influence on cinema, both in France and internationally. It may be argued that, since the New Wave period, the idea of 'auteur' cinema has become virtually institutionalised in France. During the Socialist presidency of François Mitterrand in the 1980s, the Minister of Culture Jack Lang instituted a series of policies that sought to defend French film production against American domination of the domestic film scene while paying particular attention to auteur production. Many of Lang's policies remain more or less in place to this day, and it has arguably been the French state's willingness to intervene, regulate and subsidise its national cinema that has contributed to its being the only European country with an active and vital national cinema.

The term 'national cinema' is increasingly questionable in a period of globalised capital and media, and it is useful to consider the extent to which the New Wave was an international phenomenon as much as it was national. Auteur filmmaking has been a significant part of the national industry since the 1960s and it is this form of filmmaking that tends to represent French cinema abroad, exporting more successfully than other, more populist, national genres such as comedies and thrillers. Thus it may be argued that the French films which successfully export abroad claim the mantle of 'art cinema' while losing some of their national specificity. Consider, for example, how the film *Amélie* (Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 2001), a huge popular success in France, was marketed as a reassuringly 'French art cinema' product in the UK.

As many critics have argued, one of the features of 'art cinema' is its simultaneously national and international character. During the 1960s, this sector of international cinema was the institutionalised space in which national cinemas competed for attention as the Hollywood studio system declined and American cinema turned to independent production. The international aspect of the New Wave legacy is complex and made up of many different strands. It should be remembered that the phenomenon of a 'new wave' of filmmaking was not restricted to France. In fact, 'la nouvelle vague' could be seen to have been one 'wave' (admittedly the first and perhaps most influential) following on from the international impact of Italian neo-realism, that would widen out as part of a tremendous renaissance in European national cinemas during the 1960s and 1970s and that would take in the strength of the Italian, Czech and German films of the period. The international appeal of European cinema throughout the 1960s depended on a combination of structural factors: a willingness to support domestic production, especially the work of new filmmakers, and a thriving international film culture able to circulate and promote such work. It might be said that one of the major legacies of the 'French New Wave' was that it was responsible for circulating not just films, but critical ideas as well. This was certainly the case with *Cahiers du cinéma*, which must rank as the most influential film magazine in the history of this field. As the directors of the New Wave became international celebrities, the ideas they had explored in their writing became international critical currency, particularly the notion of the auteur, which would become a cornerstone of early academic film studies. For a while in the 1960s, the magazine was published in English, a venture inaugurated by the American critic Andrew Sarris, who translated the term 'politique des auteurs' as 'auteur theory' and would go on to apply it to American filmmakers in

his book *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions 1929–1968* (1996). Thus a ‘politique’, as a politics and a policy, became, through mistranslation, a ‘theory’.

Both as a corpus of films and as a filmmaking example, the New Wave has continued to influence successive generations of French filmmakers. One way of considering how the memory and the myth of the New Wave still exerts a profound pull on auteur cinema – both in France and abroad – is by examining the persona of the actor Jean-Pierre Léaud. From his 1958 role as a child actor in *Les quatre cents coups* and through his numerous reprisals of the character Antoine Doinel, Léaud has become an iconic figure in French cinema. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s he worked with a number of major auteurs, including Godard, Pier Paolo Pasolini and Bernardo Bertolucci, who cast him as a thinly disguised New Wave cinéaste in *Last Tango in Paris* (1972). It is in Bertolucci’s film and in Jean Eustache’s *La Maman et la putain* (*The Mother and the Whore*, 1973) that one can detect the iconic associations of Léaud’s persona being modified and exploited by other directors who had been influenced by the New Wave but who were aware, sometimes uncomfortably, of coming after it. Eustache’s film, a harrowing anatomisation of the emotional fall-out of the post-1968 period, put Léaud’s persona as a petit-bourgeois Parisian solipsist to work in a particularly exacting fashion. Over the past decade or so, Léaud’s persona – one of madcap melancholy – has featured in a number of films as a way of looking back to the past of the New Wave and considering its legacy. Having been born into a cinema of film-fixated allusions, Léaud has literally ‘grown up’ on screen and now finds himself frequently cast as a kind of ‘quotation’ of himself, as an icon in inverted commas.

Recent films that have used Léaud in this self-reflexive manner include *I Hired a Contract Killer* (Aki Kaurismäki, 1990), *Le Pornographe* (*The Pornographer*, Bertrand Bonello, 2000) and *What Time Is It There?* (Tsai Ming-Liang, 2001). In France, Léaud has frequently taken roles in films by young French auteur directors who deliberately work with the self-referential register that his presence affords. Perhaps the most dizzyingly self-referential of such films is *Irma Vep* (Olivier Assayas, 1996), in which Léaud plays a washed-up, semi-demented French auteur unwillingly directing a TV remake of an episode from the silent serial films *Les Vampires* (Louis Feuillade, 1915–16). Léaud’s character has chosen the Hong Kong martial-arts movie actress Maggie Cheung to play the silent cinema actress Musidora, who originally acted as *Irma Vep*, one of the film’s eponymous gang of criminals. *Irma Vep* is an interesting and important film that proved to be something of an international cult success. It works with layers of cinematic allusions: to early cinema and the New Wave, to international genre films and contemporary French cinema. In the density of its allusions it is very much influenced by the New Wave and, in that sense, it is a film about cinema, about its numerous pasts, lost possibilities and possible futures, and a number of critics have examined the film’s self-referentiality and its association with the movement (see e.g. Wilson 1999). One of the aspects that reinforces the conjunction between *Irma Vep* and the legacy of the New Wave is the fact that Assayas was once a critic on *Cahiers*, and he is not alone in having made the now time-honoured move from criticism to filmmaking that was a characteristic of the New Wave; other former writers on the magazine have followed the same path and established themselves as directors, including André Téchiné, Leos Carax, Pascal Bonitzer and Danièle Dubroux.

THE FRENCH NEW WAVE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Surely the filmmakers associated with the French New Wave of the early 1960s are now figures of mainly historical interest, their principal cinematic achievements firmly in the past? Far from it. With the exception of François Truffaut, who died in 1984 at age 52, Godard, Chabrol, Rohmer and Rivette from the original ‘Cahiers du cinéma’ gang, as well as Marker, Varda and Resnais from the so-called ‘Left Bank’ group, have all continued to make films. Now in their seventies and eighties, all have recently produced work that is as enduringly alive to the possibilities and challenges of cinema as the

films of their youth. While Chabrol, Rivette and Rohmer have remained faithful to traditional forms of narrative cinema, Godard, Marker and Varda have continued to be open to new ways of working. To assess them collectively, as 'twenty-first-century filmmakers', is to take stock of a set of remarkable achievements. It is also worth noting that a new generation of British and American critics have recently begun to work on these directors, as witnessed by publications such as Catherine Lupton's study of Chris Marker (the first career-length survey in English), Emma Wilson's recent work on Alain Resnais and Douglas Morrey's book on Godard, the latter two as part of the excellent 'French Directors' series published by Manchester University Press, as well as the extremely useful work that appears in the pages of the journal *Studies in French Cinema*.

Having made four films since 2000, Claude Chabrol (born 1930) has so refined his glacially controlled examinations of French bourgeois *mores* that he might be considered now as a kind of French Hitchcock, making work for a mainstream audience while using his favoured genre of the thriller to explore cinematic questions of point of view and working with first-rate actresses like Isabelle Huppert, as in *Merci pour le chocolat* (2000) and *L'ivresse du pouvoir* (2006). Jacques Rivette (born 1928), too, becomes more 'Rivettian' as the years pass, combining the ludic and the spooky in his recent films *Va savoir* (2001) and the Emmanuelle Béart-led ghost story *L'Histoire de Marie et Julien* (2003). Having made two features and a short since the turn of the millennium, Eric Rohmer (born 1920) surprised many accustomed to his defiantly realist, low-budget style of filmmaking when, for his 2001 feature *L'Anglaise et le duc*, he opted to use CGI (computer-generated imagery) – with a twist, of course. Rather than employing such hi-tech means to render the eighteenth-century locations of the film's French Revolution setting, Rohmer re-created the period styles of paintings and artworks within whose digitally animated *tableaux* his characters circulate.

How useful is it still to consider these filmmakers in terms of their New Wave heritage? I suggest that it remains useful for three reasons that have to do with issues of production, technology and film culture. One of the enduring characteristics of these filmmakers is that they have remained steadfastly independent both in terms of their commitment to personal styles of 'auteur' filmmaking but also as regards their approach to how their films are made. Whether it has been through a long-term affiliation with a production company, such as Rohmer's with Les Films de Losange, or a more artisanal, 'cottage industry' mode of production such as Godard's company Periphéria based in his Swiss home town of Rolle, or Varda's Ciné-Tamaris based in her home on the rue Daguerre in the 14th arrondissement of Paris, they have remained defiantly independent. With such independence comes the liberty to experiment with new filmmaking technologies and new methods of exhibition and distribution. One of the most interesting aspects of recent work by Varda, Marker and Godard is its responsiveness to these aspects of what might be called 'twenty-first-century cinema'.

Since the multiple award-winning success of her digital video essay-cum-travelogue *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* (2000), Agnès Varda (born 1928) has produced a follow-up film ... *deux ans après* in which she caught up with some of the participants of the original film. Both films feature on the Ciné-Tamaris-produced DVD, along with a host of what Varda calls 'boni' (the plural of 'bonus'). Through her company, Varda has taken full advantage of the new medium of DVD, releasing restored versions of her own films, such as her New Wave classic *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1961), and those of her former husband Jacques Demy, such as *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg* (1964) and *Peau d'Ane* (1970). Among its lavish cornucopia of 'boni', the DVD of *Cléo* features rare and early works by Varda, including *L'Opéra Mouffe* (1958) and *Daguerréotypes* (1978). Varda has recently declared that she no longer intends to make feature films, opting instead to concentrate on making film installation works for galleries and museums. Coming from a more traditional fine-art background than the other New Wave directors, she has adapted with ease to this new form, making three installations since 2003 – *Patatutopia*, *Les Veuves de Noirmoutier* and *Le Triptyque de Noirmoutier* – and at the time of writing (April 2006), she has recently been commissioned to produce new work

for the Fondation Cartier in Paris. Chris Marker (born 1921) perhaps best epitomises the spirit of multiple-media adventurousness characteristic of the most forward-looking New Wave directors and he, too, has been far from inactive in recent years, producing an essay film for French television (*Chats Perchés* (2004)), an installation work for the Museum of Modern Art in New York (*Owls at Noon: The Hollow Men* (2005)) which will form part of the much anticipated sequel to his 1999 CD-ROM *Immemory*, as well as releasing several DVD version of earlier works, including *La Jetée* (1962), *Sans soleil* (1982) and *Le Tombeau d'Alexandre* (1993). One of the most valuable aspects of the DVD format is that it can provide real research and reference value. For example, the recent Arte DVD releases of classic films by Marker's former colleague Alain Resnais (born 1922), *Hiroshima, mon amour* (1960) and *Muriel, ou le temps d'un retour* (1963), feature a host of rarely seen early works that would otherwise be inaccessible. The DVD of *Hiroshima* includes his magnificent collaborative essay films made with Marker, *Toute la mémoire du monde* (1956) and *Les Statues meurent aussi* (1953), while the DVD of *Muriel* contains four early short films by Resnais on artists (*Gauguin* (1950), *Van Gogh* (1948), *Guernica* (1950–51) and *Le Chant de Styrène* (1958)).

Last, but by no means least, there is the continuing case of Jean-Luc Godard (born 1930). As well as having recently made several shorts, his last two feature films, *Eloge de l'amour* (2001) and *Notre musique* (2004), were more warmly received by international audience and critics than anything he has made for decades. And, to celebrate his fifty years of his filmmaking, the Centre Pompidou in Paris hosted a complete retrospective of his work between April and August 2006, as well as a new exhibition created by Godard, entitled *Voyages in Utopia*, and screening two new films, *Vrai faux passeport* (2006) and *Deux prières pour cinq refuzeniks* (2006). It is perhaps fitting that Godard's generation, which emerged from and was formed in Henri Langlois's cinema museum in years following the Second World War, now appears to have gone full circle (with cinema itself) back to the museum. Clearly, it is still too soon to give a definitive account of the significance of this generation's work for the simple reason that most of them are still working, but it is surely no exaggeration to say that they have been as revolutionary in terms of cinema in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as the Impressionists were for painting in the nineteenth century.

CONCLUSION

Let us remind ourselves of some of the chief components of the 'legend' of the New Wave: a group of rebel filmmakers take on the established order of things and momentarily triumph. Apart from the insistently Oedipal tone of the war waged upon what they called 'Daddy's cinema' ('le cinéma de papa'), the example of the New Wave has been a constant inspiration to many independent filmmakers and, in France, has become institutionalised in a system of subsidy, support and education. The place of technology in the New Wave is crucial, and it would not be overly deterministic to argue that the equipment which the filmmakers used informed the filmmaking styles they achieved. But there were influences other than the role of lightweight cameras and sound equipment. There was the culture of intellectual enquiry into the nature of the cinematic medium that has been an enduring feature of French filmmaking since its earliest days. As I have outlined above, this tendency found its postwar expression in the cinéphilie of clubs, critics and filmmakers.

Writing in 1984, the influential French film critic Serge Daney offered an extremely interesting diagnosis of the legacy of the New Wave in which he argued that the 'worldwide public of cinéphiles' constituted – alongside the international audiences for American, Indian and Hong Kong cinemas – 'the last *universal* public'. Illustrating his contention with a series of provocative thoughts – on the actor Jean-Paul Belmondo, for example: 'Belmondo is an immense star here (in France) but on the global stage he's provincial' – Daney sums up with the following question: 'What does this mean, ultimately? That "national" cinema is almost finished?' (*Cahiers*, January 1999: 65). Almost twenty

years later, it is possible to confirm that Daney didn't get it wrong and that what gets produced for this 'worldwide cinéophile public' is a kind of 'festival film' that might, with the right kind of cinéphilic promotion, still find wider circulation and hence a larger public. The ever-expanding network of film festivals that were crucial to forming the international image of the New Wave in the 1960s has, if anything, become even more important as the traditional distribution system of independent and art cinemas becomes increasingly overwhelmed by multiplex cinemas controlled by multinational media conglomerates. Examples of how 'national cinemas' may still, slowly and with much effort, emerge onto the world stage from festival circulation may be found during the 1990s in the examples of cinema from Hong Kong (the films of Wong Kar-Wai, for example), from Taiwan (e.g. Edward Yang's work) and from Iran (the prime example being Abbas Kiarostami's international success). In the era of globalisation, this begs the question whether it is any longer useful to talk of 'national' and 'international' cinemas rather than 'local' and 'global' cinemas. And if, as critics have argued, the New Wave emerged on the cusp of a 'crisis' in cinema marked by the decline of the Hollywood studio system, the advent of television and the decline in cinema attendance, then it opened up a minority 'breach' in this fragmentation of cinema audiences and contributed to precisely that 'worldwide cinéophile public' which still exists. Daney concludes by paraphrasing a statement made by Jean-Luc Godard: that he and his New Wave colleagues had succeeded in adding another country to the map of the world, and that country was called 'Cinema'.

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FURTHER VIEWING

- 1957 *Les Mistons (The Brats)*, short, F. Truffaut)
- 1958 *Le Beau Serge* (C. Chabrol)
- 1959 *Charlotte et sons Jules* (short, J.-L. Godard)
Les Cousins (The Cousins), C. Chabrol)
Le Signe du lion (E. Rohmer)
- 1960 *Paris nous appartient (Paris Belongs to Us)*, J. Rivette)
Le Petit soldat (The Little Soldier), J.-L. Godard)
Tirez sur le pianiste (Shoot the Pianist), F. Truffaut)
- 1961 *Une Femme est une femme (A Woman is a Woman)*, J.-L. Godard) *Jules et Jim* (F. Truffaut)
- 1962 *Vivre sa vie (My Life to Live)*, J.-L. Godard)
- 1963 *Le Mépris (Contempt)*, J.-L. Godard)
- 1964 *Bande à part (Band of Outsiders)*, J.-L. Godard, 1964)
Paris vu par ... (J. Rouch, J.-L. Godard, E. Rohmer and others)
- 1965 *Alphaville* (J.-L. Godard)
Pierrot le fou (Crazy Pete), J.-L. Godard)
- 1966 *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle (Two or Three Things I Know About Her)*, J.-L. Godard)
- 1967 *La Chinoise* (J.-L. Godard)
Week-End (J.-L. Godard)
- 1968 *Ma nuit chez Maude (My Night at Maud's)*, E. Rohmer)
- 1970 *Le Genou de Claire (Claire's Knee)*, E. Rohmer)

- 1985 *Sans toit ni loi (Vagabond, A. Varda)*
1989–2000 *Histoire(s) du cinéma (J.-L. Godard)*
1996 *Irma Vep (O. Assayas)*
2000 *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse (The Gleaners and I, A. Varda)*
2001 *Eloge de l'amour (In Praise of Love, J.-L. Godard)*

RESOURCE CENTRES

BiFi, Bibliothèque du film, 51 rue de Bercy, 75012 Paris (<http://www.bifi.fr>)

In the same building as the recently opened Cinémathèque Française, the BiFi is an excellent resource for French-language film-related materials; it includes a stock of DVDs and VHS tapes in its vidéothèque as well as a library of books and magazines and a resource for stills and posters.

<http://www.ncl.ac.uk/crif/sfc/home.htm>

Association for Studies in French Cinema publishes the journal *Studies in French Cinema* three times a year and organises an annual conference.

www.cahiersducinema.com

The monthly French film magazine *Cahiers du cinéma* has an excellent website with a selection of articles published in English and Spanish.

British Film Institute Library, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN

Institut Français, 17 Queensbury Place, London SW7 2DT

The Institut's library and médiathèque holds a large selection of French-language books, journals and periodicals as well as videos and CDs.