Journalists turned Cinematographers: 
The *Cahiers du Cinéma* and the French *Nouvelle Vague*

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

By

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Abstract

Journalists turned cinematographers: Cahiers du Cinéma and the Nouvelle Vague is a reflection of the so-called French “New Wave” cinema and how the Cahiers, one of the most influential film magazines of any language, has helped to shape modern cinema in some way. It reflects the age-old conflict between movie studios and independent filmmakers, where content and substance are judged against big name stars and pay checks.

The four directors specifically mentioned in this paper are among the most influential as they were with the magazine early on and made movies in the late 1950s to the early 1970s, the height of the “New Wave.” Truffaut has always captured themes of childhood and innocence, Godard has political themes (while claiming to be “unpolitical”), Resnais made documentaries films based on literature, and Rohmer demonstrated provincial life and morals.
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In the late 1950s and into the early 1970s France went through dramatic cultural changes as a result of political, economical and turmoil following Germany’s occupation of France in World War Two. An indirect effect of this change is undisputedly one of the most important film journals of all time: *Cahiers du Cinéma*. The magazine was started by André Bazin and a few other film enthusiasts who were enchanted by what is known today as “art cinema” or “independent cinema.” The magazine was also considered groundbreaking for including lesser-known independent and foreign directors.

At this time, France’s cinema was much like America’s Hollywood. The big studios controlled the industry. Commercial films then, like today, were easier to view than independents (due to distribution, well-known actors and actresses, big budgets, and the like). To combat this in their own way, a select group of French students, artists and writers were unhappy with what was being produced. This group had taken an interest in movies by the likes of Federico Fellini in Italy and Ingmar Bergman in Sweden. Fellini and Bergman’s innovations in the film industry encouraged the burgeoning auteurs: François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Alain Resnais, and Eric Rohmer among others to direct their own movies.

The result: the *nouvelle vague*:

Coined by Françoise Giroud in the pages of *L'Express* in 1958, it originally referred to a new, youthful spirit then making itself felt in French film. It quickly gained currency and became a versatile catchphrase to describe any cultural phenomenon that was seen to be new or rebellious or hip. Colloquially, “New Wave” soon degenerated into a synonym for “Avant Garde,” although it had a connotation that was perhaps less stodgy.

The films were hard to make. Much like today’s independent directors, the *nouvelle vague* directors had very limited budgets which meant the actors were not the
stars of the big studio features, and a lot of the shots were done on real streets rather than on customized sets. By critiquing films for Cahiers, the directors had an idea as to what they wanted to change. Their films went on to be tremendous successes for their intended audiences. Many of these movies are now considered classics, are staples at revival theaters, and have won various awards at Cannes and other film festivals.

World War II is a common theme among the directors of the nouvelle vague. It was a collective memory for the entire world and its effect on French culture was as profound as any previous war had been. The “Avant Garde” literature, so-called the “New Novel” of the 20th century also had a profound effect on the young directors as a few of them have worked with authors or adapted these works for the screen. A third effect was the empowerment of women characters opposed to the stereotype found in most films up to this point. In Nouvelle Vague, women weren’t portrayed solely as love interests and female relatives. Women on the screen (as was the trend in French literature, for example Marguerite Duras) were shown more and more as main characters with their own lives to live. Stylistic changes began to emerge as well, such as presenting reality through the eyes of Truffaut’s Antoine Doinel character, showing the characters in conversation through a mirror, or by making statements about society as in Godard’s Weekend.

Truffaut

From Truffaut on, these directors wanted to show a humanity and a universality they felt was missing in commercial films. They turned to American movies by various directors to see what they were doing differently while trying to absorb those themes and techniques into their own films. They also focused on themes of freedom, equality and brotherhood. In doing so, films like Truffaut’s Les Quatre Cents Coups show the child-
like innocence of a boy wanting to be free and what must be done to accomplish that freedom regardless of the consequences.

On why Truffaut entered filmmaking:

"I felt a tremendous need to enter into films. I sat closer and closer to the screen so I could shut out the theater... I am often asked at what point in my love affair with films I began to want to be a critic. Truthfully, I don't know. All I know is I wanted to be closer and closer to films."³

On how he viewed Les Quatres Cent Coups, his breakthrough film:

"J'ai fait le film de façon très instinctive. Le sujet commandait tout. Telle chose devait être vue par l'enfant, donc il fallait la faire de telle façon. De plus, le film avait un côté très documentaire, cela obligeait à une grande neutralité."⁴

François Truffaut began his career as a Cahiers du Cinema critic in order to have something to do with film. He belonged to film clubs when he was younger, and would see the same film as many as five or six times in one month to experience everything from the music to the dialogue to the editing. He eventually wrote for the Bulletin of the Latin Quarter Film Society, where he wrote a review of La règle de jeu and eventually agreed to help André Bazin, creator of Cahiers du Cinéma, write and research a book about the filmmaker Jean Renoir.⁵

After writing reviews and articles about the state of film, he decided to do something about it. Shooting started for Les Quatre Cents Coups one day before André Bazin's death and continued until 1959. The film opened to critical acclaim as the autobiographical story of Truffaut's childhood from the point of view of Antoine Doinel (who returns in later Truffaut films at different stages of his life).⁶

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⁴ Truffaut quoted in Cahiers du Cinéma. 138: 46.
⁵ Truffaut. (5)
⁶ Monaco. New Wave. (13)
Truffaut uses the idea of a search for freedom by starting with Antoine’s unfortunate entrapment in his family. His mother doesn’t care for him enough, as he tells the teacher she died, symbolizing her death to him as a mother (as is Truffaut’s mother to him). Antoine also deals with the quarreling mother and father in the background, knowing that the mother is having an affair while being in a position where he cannot tell his father for fear of betraying his habit of skipping school (another translation for “Les Quatres Cent Coups”).

Some of Truffaut’s trademark techniques emerge as early as Les Quatre Cents Coups. Like many new wave directors, he uses street shots of the city (Paris) in the beginning, to show the griminess of Parisian life as well as the beauty of the everyday. The opening has much action, while nothing related to the plot happens as the credits role.

The absolute neutrality of the outside world provided an infinite field of opportunity for the meetings, surprises, incidents and accidents of the New Wave. Space opened out in all directions. Stripped of any features that would attract our attention, the street became both concrete—the reality of the set—and abstract through its deliberate reduction of this same set to its principal lines.\(^7\)

Paris viewed through Truffaut’s eyes is different from the Paris of previous films. He uses la vie quotidienne\(^8\) to show his Paris. He shows Paris through the eyes of an adolescent for a fresh perspective. Through Antoine, Truffaut contrasts the childlike outlook to the adult view of life. The childlike view is when Antoine attends school, sees a movie with his parents (where Truffaut has placed a rather intelligent critique of the film within the film, Paris Nous Appartient), or waking down the street with his friend. Truffaut shows Antoine’s adult side of being an adolescent when Antoine is smoking,

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\(^7\) Jean Douchet. French New Wave. Distributed Art Publishers, Inc. (124)
\(^8\) Monaco. New Wave, (21)
talking about prostitutes (a scene that was originally the actor’s screen test), reading (and plagiarizing) Balzac, one of Truffaut’s personal favorites.9

Representations of adulthood and childhood mirror each other as the punishment at Antoine’s school is like a prison, while the boys’ home he attends is like school. Both of which he hopes to escape and he succeeds at escaping at the end. His capture, however, is never shown. The most important part is that he was finally able to see the ocean, as he mentioned to his best friend early on in the film. The ocean also can be read as a blank slate as to what he must do now, whatever that might be, or to the uncertainty of what he should do.

Friendship and fraternity are themes in Truffaut’s films. While Antoine has a friend who gives him a place to stay when he runs away from home, the film Jules et Jim, based on the novel of the same name by Henri-Pierre Roché, focuses on the importance of the friendship between the title characters. Both are writers, and their friends are also writers, artists, and anarchists. In fact, a sculpture found by one of their artist friends (Albert) is the inspiration for the two to fall in love with the same woman (Catherine). Catherine is the incarnation of the bust, the “eternal feminine.”

Catherine is always between them physically, like when they are running across the bridge, or psychologically, when Jules is married to Catherine and she falls in love with Jim. Both men have loved her all along. The three live in harmony together for the most part, but are separated by the First World War. As Jules is German, he fights with the Germans. Jim is French, and his side wins the war, yet both men mention their fear of killing the other by accident while in battle.

They remain friends throughout the film, even up to the end when Catherine and Jim are sleeping together in Jules’ house. Catherine’s role in this isn’t just to break the two apart. She is a symbol of freedom. One character explains that her father was a diplomat and her mother wasn’t, so she is always confused as to who she is (a theme in other French films and literature as well when the character has conflict in her life between either classes or other divisions). Because she doesn’t want to choose one life over another, she does things in order to learn lessons about life.

When Catherine dresses up as a man, one of her co-stars says “Tu es fou,” a Freudian slip as fou is the masculine form of the French adjective. It’s also a question of morals because her behavior in general is more of a man’s than a woman’s. She takes on many lovers (other than Jules and Jim), she isn’t always honest, and she likes to get a reaction out of people by doing these things.

“Le scénario de Jules et Jim déplaisait beaucoup aux gens. Les distributeurs disait: la femme est une putain, ou: le mari va être grotesque, etc... Le pari, pour moi, était que la femme émouve (sans recourir a des moyens melo) et ne soit pas une putain, et que le mari n’était pas ridicule. Ce que j’aime, c’est essayer d’arriver à une chose qui n’est pas évident à départ.”

As for filming techniques, Truffaut uses still shots of Catherine to capture her, as in a snapshot. This also compares her to the statue that Jules and Jim fall in love with at the beginning as Truffaut uses shots to relate the real woman to the ideal woman. Jules and Jim also includes one central song that is played over and over in different variations to show the mood of the characters or the feelings the audience should have toward the

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10 Truffaut quoted in Cahiers du Cinéma, 138: 49.
scene. He continues the theme of childlike innocence from *The 400 Blows* through Catherine's daughter Sabine's carefree qualities, making her similar to her mother.¹¹

War is an occasional theme in Truffaut's work. He volunteered for the army (and was taken out by Bazin and his wife claiming to be his parents). The national impact of both World Wars on France is a theme common to many French directors and novelists as well (*Jules et Jim*, *Hiroshima Mon Amour* and *Nuit et Brouillard*, the latter of which will be discussed later). *Le Dernier Métro*, one of Truffaut's later works, is set in a theater during the occupation. A theater is another place where one may find writers, artists and actors. He plays on the idea of entertainment as escape, or freedom, as many citizens attended the theater for this purpose.

Truffaut uses the Second World War to show the national feelings of oppression, as the Germans want to arrest at least four of the theater workers. One is a Jewish actor who is kicked out at the beginning, one is a lesbian costume designer who is caught later on, a third is a young Jewish girl who just wants a job with the theater, and the fourth is the owner of the theater who is also Jewish.

Even during the war the theater (like the proverbial show) must go on. Without it, the owner would be caught and taken to a concentration camp or worse. His ever-loyal wife save for one scene at the end with a young Gerard Depardieu (a change from the overtly unfaithful women in *Jules et Jim* and *Les Quatre Cents Coups*) keeps the theater running with the aid of her husband who lives in the basement. This life isn't without its challenges, however, as one critic has ties with the censorships committee and the Germans and wouldn't hesitate to turn in anyone who worked for the theater.

¹¹ Monaco. The New Wave. (14)
The ending of this movie has an interesting turn as Truffaut toys with his audience. The audience is led to believe that the theater owner is dead, yet he later reemerges from a theater box seat at the very end and holds hands with his wife on stage. The epilogue also includes what happened to the other actors and characters in the movie after the war. Unlike *Jules et Jim*, where Catherine drives herself and Jules into a river at the end, *Le Dernier Métro* has a somewhat happy ending, as only a few people involved with the war are killed off, but no main characters disappear entirely.

"Le rôle du vilain, joué par Jean-Louis Richard, est inspiré par un journaliste théâtral, polémiste important sous l'Occupation. Les antisémites sont assez pathétiques en temps de paix mais, en temps de guerre, ils deviennent dangereux. ... J'ai un élément de menace qui me permet de montrer des histoires du théâtral sans tomber dans le documentaire."

**Godard**

Jean-Luc Godard was of the same movement but instead of making purely fictional movies like those of Truffaut or Rohmer, his movies were more likely to reflect social issues. While writing for *Cahiers du Cinéma*, Godard directed a variety of movies such as *A Bout de souffle* (his first film) in 1959, *Vivre sa vie* in 1962, and *Weekend* in 1967.

The man was born in Paris in 1930. His father was a physician and his mother came from a family of bankers. During World War II he was naturalized a Swiss citizen, and returned to Paris in the late forties to study at the Sorbonne. He obtained a certificate in ethnology. He later became a regular at the ciné-club and met Bazin and the others. He wrote for *Cahiers* between 1952 and 1954 using the Germanized version of his name, Hans Lucas, as a pseudonym. He also traveled to North and South America with his father until he briefly returned to Paris and then a stay in Switzerland as a worker for the
Grand Dixence dam. With the money he made at the dam he filmed a documentary about the dam called “Opération Béton (1954).”13

Godard has been both liked and hated for his films and political views.

“He was attacked not only by the Right but also by many Left-wing critics, who objected to his unconventional treatment of ‘serious’ problems.”14

While A Bout de souffle was a fiction, it was Godard’s answer to American films. He tried to emulate Humphrey Bogart in Casablanca with his lead character, Michel. The lead is also a “rebel without a cause” type by sitting around and trying to figure out what he wants with his life without really doing anything about it. In an interview in the Cahiers du Cinema in an issue devoted to the Nouvelle Vague, Godard tells the magazine that he liked the American style, as did most New Wave critics, yet he wanted to still be able to appeal to a French audience.15

He mentions the plot of a man on the run, and his American character as the love interest (Patricia). She is also an aspiring journalist for a New York paper, and is compared in her “Americanness” to Michel in his “Frenchness” when Patricia asks him how many lovers he’s had. Michel shows both of his hands multiple times and says, “not that many.” Her answer is a full hand and two fingers to show seven. Granted, the girl is 20 years old and the man is older, it’s still an interesting remark as an American audience member.

Dans les notes où je mets tout ce qui peut servir a mon film, je mets aussi une phrase de Dostoevsky, si elle me plait. Pourquoi se gêner? Si vous avez envie de dire une chose, il n’y a qu’une solution: la dire...

13 Monaco. The New Wave. (103)
15 Godard quoted in Cahiers du Cinéma. 138; Douchet. (58, 69).
De plus, *A Bout de souffle* était le genre de film où tout était permis, c’était dans sa nature. Quoi que fassent les gens, tout pouvait s’intégrer au film. J’étais même parti de là.\(^\text{16}\)

Ironically, the best known innovation in *A bout de souffle* is the use of the jump-cut—mere filmic punctuation. It is as if a novelist or poet were to be praised for his ‘revolutionary’ use of the semi-colon! ... it is seldom mentioned that Godard hardly used it again.\(^\text{17}\)

There is a point in film as in literature when style becomes content. For reasons unknown to Godard, this became apparent through various reviews. Then again, maybe that’s what Godard really did want in his stylistic ambiguity.

Then again, as one critic described his use of combining American themes and lines by Apollinaire: “Now this is obviously nonsense. What business have the characters in a vulgar American western reciting one of France’s finest 20\(^{th}\) century lyrics at each other—and antiphonally at that, though they were improvising.” The same source continues “Anyone who thinks movies should do one thing at a time will be confused and disappointed by Godard’s films... they form questions, they don’t draw conclusions.”\(^\text{18}\)

While Godard may not have used the jump-cut all that often, he does show characters talking in a mirror. In *A bout de souffle*, Patricia and Michel make faces at each other while getting ready to leave their room. In *Vivre sa vie*, the whole opening scene is shot between two characters talking in a mirror—showing what they see instead of what’s really there. It is also the idea of “forced distance.”\(^\text{19}\)

In *Vivre sa vie* Godard portrays a woman, as the American title suggests, “Living how I want to live” in 12 episodes. The episodes give the movie the feel of a novel serving as chapters that have their own titles and sub-titles about what the audience can expect. In *Cahiers*, he explained that he was trying to show fiction while mixing-in non-

\(^{16}\) Godard quoted in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 138: 22.
\(^{17}\) Monaco. *The New Wave*, (99)
fiction. Giving a documentary feel to one scene, he has a voice over recite the various
Prostitution Laws in France and how they changed after the Second World War.

He also shows this in the end, he says, by adding in a scene of random violence
where the woman is killed only because she is in the wrong place at the wrong time. She
doesn’t just sell herself and die without showing the depth of her character, however, as
she is also a philosopher (and one of the titles is “She is a philosopher and doesn’t know
it”). It also shows her working in a record store where the employees are watching TV. In
one article, Godard likes how TV is accessible to everyone, yet he doubts it will take the
place of going to the movies.

The purpose of the subtitles, according to Monaco, is to give something away.
They also help to break the monotony when the story becomes too philosophical, but that
is just a personal observation.

He also speaks of his method, as he could finish his movies in much less time
than Hollywood directors who would easily take almost a year to complete one film,
beginning to end.

“Chez moi, c’est une methode: comme j’ai des films à petits budgets, je peux
demander au producteur cinq semaines, sachant qu’il aura quinze jours pour
tournage effectif. Vivre sa vie, tourné en quatre semaines a été arrête toute la
deuxième semaine. La grosse difficulté, c’est qu’il me faut des gens tout le temps
disponibles.”

Weekend (1967) was made when France was having its own internal problems
similar to those in the United States. This movie is also in parts, and it has tongue-in-
cheek headings such as “Film found in a trashcan” at the beginning, and “The Lewis
Carroll Approach” which combines Lewis Carroll’s brand of logic with his characters
from Alice in Wonderland.

18 Monaco. The New Wave. (101)
19 Monaco. The New Wave. (123)
Godard makes many statements with this movie as he does by including non-fiction in *Vivre sa vie*. His main characters are capitalistic, materialistic socialites more interested in getting the family money than anything else. On a seemingly routine trip to the wife’s family home, they run across everyone from literary characters to a Porsche-owing man who sings in the phone booth while talking to someone on the other end. He hints at these scenes in an early interview by saying that he liked the idea of musicals. They hear also a constant drum playing while a few characters wander through the forest with a French version of the Viet Cong (in the Third World portion of the film). In fact, all three of these movies have a sort of musical theme, whether it’s just one song as with *Vivre sa vie*, or thematic background music in *A Bout de souffle*.

The speeches given by the marauders and cannibals in the Third World segment depict a black man telling the white man’s opinion as the camera is on the white man who is eating a sandwich. Then an Arab man speaks for the black man as the black man eats a sandwich. This scene is reminiscent of his use of these subjects in *Un plus un* where social issues of civil rights and the Viet Nam was are brought to light once again.

Resnais

As a person, Resnais is almost an enigma, according to Monaco. His films were deemed “intellectual” and himself, a “filmmaker’s filmmaker.”

Alain Resnais took the idea of mixing fiction with social commentary as seriously as Godard with his own style. While Godard is pretty well-known for his depiction of World War Two in films like *Nuit et Brouillard* and *Hiroshima mon amour*, he had a tendency to direct the literary works of contemporary authors (As *Hiroshima* was written by Marguerite Duras and another of his films, *L’Année dernière à Marienbad* was written...
by Alain Robbe-Grillet). Resnais would often employ the authors to help him with the filming and scripts of the movies.

Alain Robbe-Grillet is famous for his literary style of repetition and perspective changes. Robbe-Grillet worked with Resnais on *L'Année derniere à Marienbad* to give it the feel of one of his other books, *Jalousie*. It is not what the characters say; it is what is left unsaid that is important. The main characters are trying to figure out whether or not they know each other from an earlier encounter or not. The two recall different hotels they stayed at that were similar but not quite identical.

A similar theme is that of adultery (which is present in most of the movies screened for this report). The woman is married and there is a scene of implied rape, yet nothing is really said, and the movie just kind of ends (as do Robbe-Grillet novels). He mentions in *Cahiers* that he wants to keep the authors intentions in the original film as much as possible, and works with them instead of presenting his own interpretations.

"Une des grilles qui m'interressent dans le film, c'est celle des univers parallèles. Il est fort possible que tous les personnages aient raison. Cela dit, ce n'est pas une chose qui est organisée volontairement dans ce sens. C'est ici qu'il faut repérer d'écriture automatique. Ce n'est pas parce que Robbe-Grillet a un style extrêmement précis et une vision extrêmement nette que l'automatisme est à rejeter. ... Nous voulions nous trouver un peu comme devant une sculpture qu'on regarde sous tel angle, puis sous tel autre, dont il s'éloigne, dont on sa rapproche."\(^{21}\)

Alain Robbe-Grillet also has an interpretation of the film:

"Une image est toujours au présent. Je me souviens d'une époque où l'idée passé était introduite par un halo — un halo qui souvent persistait durant tout la séquence au passé. Mais on est revenu très vite à conserver la même image pour le présent et pour le passé. C'est à dire à admettre que tout est, de toute façon, du présent."\(^{22}\)

In *Hiroshima mon amour*, the main characters are a Japanese man and a French woman who lived through the Second World War in their respective cultures, yet the two

\(^{21}\) Resnais quoted in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 123: 2.  

\(^{22}\) Robbe-Grillet quoted in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 123: 10.
can relate to each other after only one night because of the experiences. While it’s a beautiful love story, both parties are married to other people, and their love can never be as the woman must return home after being in Japan only to film a movie about peace.

"L'Année dernière sera toute l’amnésie du monde... Hiroshima, c’était toute la mémoire du monde." 23

When commissioned to write a documentary about the A-bomb, Resnais had problems trying not to repeat Nuit et Brouillard. He mentioned if someone like Duras was interested he would make the film (and she was). The story of the Japanese man and the French woman is compared to that of the French woman and her German lover while the war was still going on. The woman was very young at the time of the affair (16 in the book, 18 in the movie) and was subsequently ostracized and driven insane as a result of her family discovering her secret. Although she married after running away to Paris to start over, the German lover (one of the enemies) and the Japanese lover (a former enemy) were the only men she ever loved.

The script weakly suggests at one point that love among the ruins is a hopeful sign, like the ants that crawled out of the ashes to begin anew on a second day. Moreover, we can rest our case on the necessity of the tension between the love story and the memory of the horror. We see the horror reflected in the love; the personal story serves as an index of history. 24

The opening scene is the Japanese man “Hiroshima” and the French woman “Nevers”—as both are only known as the names of their hometowns—making love. The two have a shimmer to them that is meant to represent the radioactive fallout of the A-bomb, as are many other scenes in the film.

In a *Cahiers* article about *Hiroshima mon amour*, the film was a heavy contender with Truffaut’s *Les Quatre Cents Coups* for the magazine’s annual Top Ten list (*Hiroshima* was in the top five and *Les Quatre Cents Coups* was in the bottom five). In fact, the magazine devoted 18 pages to Resnais’s film, and it mentions Duras’s involvement, as she is a very important author of the time as Resnais is an important director. There was even a second article just about the song and how the themes of Nevers, France, Hiroshima, Japan and other story lines fit in with the overall story. Dr. Adele King, French Professor at Ball State, showed the film in her class and said the music is almost instantly recognizable as would be various American theme songs.

The film also won a double award at Cannes, “becoming an immediate international classic and the opening clarion of the New Wave... *Hiroshima* is a critical puzzle as well. It remains by far Resnais’s most complicated, difficult, confusing, and treacherous essay in the social, political, and linguistic/semiological ramifications of film. This is partly intentional, but by no means necessarily so.”

A third movie, Resnais’ *Nuit et Brouillard* (*Night and Fog*) is also about themes in World War Two. A documentary about German concentration camps it has to be one of the saddest movies ever made. It was filmed close enough to the end of WWII that the audiences will probably remember, but long enough after the end that those who never actually dealt with the gruesome reality would be forced to witness by seeing this film.

Resnais shows the infirmaries and bunkers in the camps both full of bodies during the war and empty at the time the movie was filmed. He shows the soldiers giving orders and the grass that now grows over where they used to stand. After one video-version of the movie, footage of the American release of the concentration camp victims follows *Nuit* (titled *Le Retour*) as an almost bittersweet epilogue to an otherwise horrific story.
Rohmer

Eric Rohmer is 10 years older than his counterparts in the New Wave. "Ten years older than they, and with ten years of critical activity behind him, he nevertheless had to spend nearly another ten years in their shadow, working away unrecognized at his self-imposed program."\(^{26}\)

"... His formation might have fitted him more for a literary than a cinematic career and most of his films can be traced back to short stories."\(^{27}\)

And as Monaco compares him to the other New Wave directors:

He is married and has two children, but maintains that her his family life is strictly separate from that of his career—in direct contrast to Godard and Chabrol, whose marriages have been professional partnerships, and Truffaut, who named his children after films.\(^{28}\)

He wrote for Cahiers for some time, and was its editor from 1957 to 1963. He was very secretive about his private life, and never said the same thing twice in different interviews. Also, he was not intent on changing film, as his Le Signe de Lion was

"Clearly a Rohmer film and therefore quiet, artless, intently concerned with the people he is photographing, the place in which they live and the time of the year, is almost directly contradictory to everything we know about the early films of Godard, Truffaut, Chabrol."\(^{29}\)

Rohmer is best known for his portrayal of women in film. Most if not all of the New Wave directors included strong female characters, yet Rohmer seemed to focus on their roles in his films La Collectionneuse, and Les Quatre aventures de Reinette et Mirabelle.

La Collectionneuse is part of Rohmer’s Contes moraux ("Moral Tales").

\(^{25}\) Monaco. Alain Resnais. (34)
\(^{27}\) Crisp. (14)
\(^{28}\) Monaco. The New Wave. (286)
\(^{29}\) Monaco. The New Wave. (289)
“Rohmer’s description of the moraliste as someone who is concerned with states of mind—the psychology of reason...”

Monaco goes on to compare Rohmer’s moral tales to various authors: Proust for Genou de Claire, Choderlos de Laclos for La Collectionneuse, Pascal for Ma nuit chez Maud, and “possibly” Balzac for L’Amour l’après midi. Journalists have compared Rohmer himself to Henry James as both started as literary writers and tried their hand at performance arts (the stage for James, film for Rohmer).

In La Collectionneuse, the woman, as the title suggests is the main character. The film opens with random segments of various characters (as do all the Moral Tales). Haydée starts out at the beginning of the film as a naïve young woman who soon takes a young lover. She uses her strength as a woman to lure the other men in as she “collects” them. While the main male character, Adrien, rejects her at first, he slowly gets trapped in her web and she takes on lovers throughout the film.

Part of it is that while Adrien and Haydée are close in age, the two are different in styles and values. Monaco describes her as a “protohippie” When the relationship becomes a triangle (Adrien’s friend Daniel, a painter, is the third party) jealousy becomes a theme that will follow in Rohmer’s other women-centered films.

Another interesting point of the film is the two men at the resort who are trying to obtain “nothingness.” They dress in robes and slippers while sitting in lawn chairs and doing, well, nothing.

A later film of Rohmer’s is Les quatres aventures de Reinette et Mirabelle (1984). In this film, it is the classic “country mouse, city mouse” story. One of the girls is a student in Paris, the other lives in the countryside. When the “country mouse” goes to

30 Monaco. The New Wave. (293)
31 Monaco. The New Wave. (296)
Paris, she encounters numerous new adventures. At the same time, the “city mouse” learns about the “blue hour” while visiting the countryside, a minute between dawn and dusk when all is quiet.

The humor between the girls is also apparent when the country girl doesn’t have exact change for a coffee at a city café (the other girl yells out the waiter and they split). The second adventure is the city girl managing to steal in order to prevent another woman from getting arrested. The final adventure is when the country girl (with her painting talent and Dali-esque style) tries to sell one of her paintings pretending to be mute, and then after getting the money, the art dealer ups the price for his customer.

As the New Wave paved way for many independent filmmakers even today, the influence of these directors can still be seen today, whether in innovations of style and cinematography (such as the jump-cut) or in the actual story lines (love triangles, the way war is presented, empowerment of women).

A recent, obvious example was a video on MTV of all places for the song “Kiss Me” by Sixpence None the Richer. The video is a brief version of Jules et Jim, ending with a shot of Truffaut’s grave.

Another example was the film Keeping the Faith. The story itself was about two best friends from childhood who fall in love with the same woman (also a friend from childhood). The comparison is more apparent with the use of stills when showing the woman (Anna). A museum scene also reflects Truffaut’s use of art in the film (the sculpture).

While these two examples are from the same director (in fact, the same film), yet more subtle examples exist in other modern films even if it is just the opportunity for anyone to be able to make a film. In fact, the New Wave continued around the world.
A hundred years after its birth cinema appears more strongly divided than ever between the two choices present since its inception: Méliès or Lumière. ... The New Wave has always fought to undermine both these approaches to film: the former is mannerist, the latter naturalist. ... But imitation alone is not art. ... [Cinema] remains satisfied with a “human” presence that it can drag across the screen and wallows in the tired clichés of a cinéma vérité that the New Wave rejected long ago. ... The true descendants of the sixties [New Wave-influenced filmmakers] continue to restore to fiction its power to represent and question the real.  

Basically, without the directors of the *Nouvelle Vague*, in this case Truffaut with his themes of childhood and innocence, Godard with his themes of politics (although he remains unpolitical) and innocence lost, Resnais with his documentaries and “fictional documentaries,” and Rohmer with his portrayal of morals and provincial life, cinema would be very different than it is today. The movement arose as a result of the feelings of a post-war society, and any society could have had its own version of the New Wave. In fact, “New Wave” was not a term to be used only in reference to the cinema.

Françoise Giraud, after coining the phrase “New Wave” in an article, published a book in June 1958 titled *The New Wave: Portrait of Today’s Youth*. It’s focus was not art or cinema or even culture, but “with the need for change within French society.” It’s original intent was political, but as history proves, it is not seen that way today.

Instead, after time, Pierre Billard used the phrase in *Cinéma 58*, for a desire of a renewal of French film (the French did invent it, at any rate). The expression was used more frequently during the 1959 Cannes Film Festival to describe the amount of young directors. It was known worldwide concept by 1960.  

All four of these directors belonged to the same ciné-club. They all enjoyed older French movies as well as movies of other nationalities. They all felt something was lacking when comparing the older films of Renoir and later Bergman and Fellini to the

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32 Baeque and Tousiana. (314, 315)
33 Baeque and Tousiana. (164)
current films of French cinema. They all shared these views, wrote about them in the
*Cahiers* (many times using pseudonyms to not appear to have too many reviews by the
same writer—also a bit difficult to study all of there reviews in the 1950s and 60s), and
did something about it. They all wanted to reflect their times—mainly French culture
circa post-World War II up to the late 60s and even 80s and 90s as at least Truffaut and
Rohmer continued to direct. All four also gained recognition for their success in film
circles and in worldwide audiences. Most if not all would have bigger budgets to do what
they really wanted as their careers took off, yet they still kept much of their style instead
of bowing to what the public wanted to see (as many commercial films have always done
and continue to do).

Cinema, like all art forms, will continue to grow and change, and as it grows and
changes there will be individuals throwing their own wrenches into the works. Maybe no
one will see their films, but these are the true artists, making art for art’s sake, not just
trying to make money. It just so happens these four did earn money and respect from
their films, but they all remained true to their craft in their own ways.
References


