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The Mid-Atlantic: Fantasmatic Genealogies of the French and American New Waves

By

Jonathan Everett Haynes

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Film and Media Studies

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in Charge:

Professor Kaja Silverman, Co-Chair

Professor Kristen Whissel, Co-Chair

Professor Jeffrey Skoller

Professor Nicholas Paige

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Abstract

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Professors Kaja Silverman and Kristen Whissel, Co-Chairs

This dissertation re-imagines the contexts for the paradigmatic film movement of the sixties. The French New Wave, I argue, was made and remade in translation, as texts circulated among French and American scholars, critics, and filmmakers. Subtending this circulation was a genealogical fantasy, with deep roots in the 19th century of Charles Baudelaire and Edgar Allan Poe. The Baudelaire-Poe liaison has become the defining symbol of *la rencontre franco-américaine* and is often invoked to characterize the transformative effects of Truffaut's and Godard's *politique des auteurs* on the reputations of key American filmmakers, like Howard Hawks and Nicholas Ray. Ambiguously connected to official traffic between the two nations, and manifest in a decades-long labor of translation that Baudelaire himself compared to prayer, *l'affaire Baudelaire-Poe* illuminates the degree to which French-American exchange was transferential. In Poe, Baudelaire saw the reflection of his own desire, and he spent the last years of his life making Poe's work his own.

In so far as the Nouvelle Vague belongs to this lineage, the film movement cannot be confined to France and the early sixties; nor are the texts of the Nouvelle Vague (the films and the criticism) fully answerable to the exigencies of post-War phenomena, such as the Marshall Plan and generation gaps. Rather, these designators of historical specificity mediate a more complex, even subversive, family drama, in which French authors write themselves into the history of American art, while American authors re-invent French works in their own image. To capture the Oceanic qualities of a cultural exchange in which transnational logics are subordinate to intersubjective ones, I produce a new term - The Mid-Atlantic. The Mid-Atlantic refers to the actual space between France and America, where planes and boats crossed, transferring materials between the two nations. But the Mid-Atlantic has its own history, independent of its status as a shipping route. In the dissertation's introduction, I examine how the Mid-Atlantic has been figured by authors like Herman Melville, Gilles Deleuze, and Jean-Luc Godard, in order to make the case that the Mid-Atlantic constitutes a fantasmatic origin for the Nouvelle Vague.

In Chapter One (“Beyond the Zero: Jacques Rivette on Fritz Lang”) I argue that *la politique des auteurs* re-tailored film history in the image of desire. Through a close reading of Jacques Rivette’s 1957 review of Fritz Lang’s *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* (1956), the German emigré’s last Hollywood film, I attempt to show the devious ways in which Rivette assumes “authorship” of Fritz Lang through an act of critical exegesis that re-doubles and sublates the film it describes. *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* and its author dissolve into Rivette’s poetic description (which is also a depiction, the “stylo” transformed into the “caméra”). For the contemporary reader, who can only read this article in the foreknowledge of the legendary Nouvelle Vague films soon to appear, the article is doubly prophetic. It augurs the author Rivette – *Paris nous appartient* (1961) – as well as the future history of the Auteur “Lang,” who ever-after would belong to the past of the Nouvelle Vague.

Chapter Two, “Corresponding Vessels: Truffaut-Hitchcock” develops the larger argument about Franco-American transference through a close analysis of François Truffaut’s legendary book of interviews with the master of suspense. In Truffaut’s “Hitchbook,” each auteur plays a part in the other’s film: Hitchcock becomes a character in *Baiser volés* (*Stolen Kisses* 1968), while Truffaut, his merciless interlocutor, adopts the prosecutorial features of the detectives from *The Wrong Man* (1956). Like its literary ancestor, Baudelaire’s *Histoires Extraordinaires*, which spawned a great deal of 20th century modernist art (from Symbolist poetry to *le policier*), I argue that the “Hitchbook” was the Big Bang of modern film studies in France and America. Published almost simultaneously (in 1967) on both sides of the Atlantic, this classic text was the root of New Hollywood, as well as gaze theory - here, Hitchcock becomes an Absolute Cinematic Value.

In “Downtown Godard,” my third chapter, I examine Amos Poe’s 1976 “No Wave” film, *Unmade Beds*. Poe’s film restages Godard’s *A bout de souffle* (1959) on the bombed-out streets of New York’s Lower East Side, and discloses unexpected affinities between the American Underground of Andy Warhol and Jack Smith and the Nouvelle Vague of Godard and Truffaut. I argue that the eponymous “unmade beds” refer to one unmade bed – the ransacked hotel mattress in Godard’s first feature, around which Jean-Paul Belmondo and Jean Seberg orbited, like twin galaxies of French-American connotation. A Mid-Atlantic figure *par excellence*, the unmade bed stands for the primal scene of sixties and seventies experimental film.

My fourth and final chapter (“The Resurrection and the Life”) examines the preponderance of the “death of the cinema” metaphor in current film and media discourse, in order to bring into focus how this crucial Nouvelle Vague concept (*la fin de cinéma*) operates in Mid-Atlantic terms. I read two “post-cinematic” films – Luc Moullet’s 1971 “western,” *A Girl is a Gun: Une aventure de billy le kid* and Alexandre Aja’s shocking 2003 horror film, *Haute tension* – in parallel. Both films occupy the modality of *le cinéma mort*, as emblemized by important films like Godard’s *Weekend* (1967) and Pier Paolo Pasolini’s *Salò* (1975), which put “revolt” under the sign of

revulsion. Yet, both also demonstrate the degree to which the “death of the cinema,” however taken – as a militant call (Death to Cinema!) or as a simple fact of the mediatic society (the totemistic “cinema” of digital culture) – necessitates the appearance of a new kind of image, which will form the mythological basis for a New Cinema.

In the dissertation’s conclusion (“The Embryonic Image”), I extrapolate the consequences of this “new image” for film historiography and theory. Here I turn to Godard’s *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988-1998), in particular a sequence from that work in which a portrait of a young woman overlays a scene from Charles Laughton’s *Night of the Hunter* (1955). Godard’s image, I argue, brings Mid-Atlantic figuration to a late-20th century apotheosis. It invokes the prayerful mood of Baudelaire’s Poe translations (“Le voyage” is read on the soundtrack), and it postulates that the Cinema Itself was born in a single spasm of recognition: a French poet seeing his own features reflected in the words of an American poet.

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The Townsend Center for the Humanities at UC Berkeley gave me a fellowship in 2008-2009, as well as the opportunity to present this research at an early stage before a formidable group of humanities scholars from across the disciplines.

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I thank my parents, Jane and Michael Haynes, for passing on their love of literature and cinema, as well as their practical and emotional support throughout the writing of the present work. Thanks also to my brother, David. Finally, all my love and gratitude to my wife, Désirée Pries, and my son, Julien Michael.

In memoriam: Peter Kuchera and Harry Taylor

INTRODUCTION

The Mid-Atlantic: Fantasmatic Genealogies of the French and American New Waves

Enfin... j'ai cinquante ans aujourd'hui, je pense que j'ai terminé ma vie, qu'il me reste à peu près trente ans et que je vais... enfin... vivre l'intérêt de ma vie, si vous voulez, comme un capital qui aurait cinquante ans; aujourd'hui, je vais en avoir les intérêts. Et ce qui m'intéresse donc, justement, c'est de voir ce que j'ai fait et en particulier, puisque j'ai fait quelques films, d'en profiter et d'essayer de revenir sur ces films.¹

— Jean-Luc Godard, Montreal Cinéma-thèque, 1978

Now that the New Wave is by some accounts 'officially' fifty, perhaps, like a wise middle-aged person, it can be sober and mature enough to admit its excesses and exaggerations, its *partis pris*, and, finally, come to terms with who 'it' murdered to get ahead.²

— Vanessa Schwartz, *Cinema Journal*, 2010

I. 50th Anniversary Tributes

The fiftieth anniversary of The French New Wave was an especially important one, and not just because any fiftieth birthday is important. Essential to New Wave “mythology” is the idea that François Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard joined the history of the cinema upon its Silver Anniversary — in the “middle of the century, the middle of the cinema,” as Serge Daney puts it, in Godard’s *Histoire(s) du cinéma*. As the myth has it, the criticism and films of the New Wave reprised and reordered the preceding fifty years of cinema, from the dawn of filmmaking in the late-19th century to Italian neorealism in the late 1940s. Thus, the anniversary afforded cinéphiles and film scholars alike an opportunity to reflect on origins — the origins of the French New Wave and the origins of the cinema. In so doing, of course, we also reflected on our own origins, as 21st century scholars and cinéphiles whose roots are somehow entangled with the mythologies of the Nouvelle Vague.

I want to begin by looking at two of these reflections, one a French documentary, the other an introduction to a compendium of critical articles about the New Wave, published in *Cinema Journal*. These examples are not chosen randomly; I mean to reduplicate the intersections of France and America, cinema and critical text, that fostered

¹ “Finally... I am 50 years old today, I think that my life is over, that I have little more than thirty years left, and that I am going... finally... to live on the interest of my life like capital that’s accumulated over fifty years, if you like; today, I am going to receive interest. And what interests me precisely is to see what I have made, and, in particular, since I have made a few movies, to profit from them by attempting to come back to them.” [my translation] Godard, Jean-Luc, *Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma: tome I*. Paris: Éditions Albatros, 1980.

² Schwartz, Vanessa, “Who Killed Brigitte Bardot?: Perspectives on the New Wave at Fifty.” *Cinema Journal* (volume 49: no. 4: 2010).

the New Wave itself. In the process, I will lay out the central hypothesis of *the* present work, in the form of a productive metaphor — the Mid-Atlantic. I will argue that the Mid-Atlantic was a collective fantasy, an unconscious relationship to the very *idea* of living and doing history, that made the New Wave and its particular concept of the Cinema (with a capital ‘c’) possible.

The pieces I have selected are especially appropriate because they not only enact but also *stage* the process of recollection, albeit in different ways. Emmanuelle Laurent’s film is narratively organized around an unnamed woman’s search for information about the French New Wave, while the *Cinema Journal* piece is an explicit call for a new kind of *historiography* of the movement. Recursivity, of course, is built into such a call, which must review the historiographies of the past in order to found the historiography of the future. Thus, each work dramatizes the ways in which the Mid-Atlantic is forgotten — and *unforgotten*, remembered through certain kinds of parataxes and too-blatant redactions — in contemporary times.

1. *Two in the Wave*, 2010

Emmanuel Laurent’s film, *Two in the Wave*, begins with an image of a young woman, played by Isild Le Besco, sitting at a desk, poring over relics of the early Nouvelle Vague. She sifts through a file of newspaper clippings, photographs, and press releases, pausing briefly to study a photo of André Bazin on the telephone, probably agitating for the inclusion of a broken Welles film in the *Festival des films maudits*. Then she turns to a picture of Godard, May 1959, signature dark glasses in place, laughing at something that Claude Chabrol has just said, while the two men smoke cigarettes in the *Cahiers du cinéma* offices. They’re awaiting the news from Cannes. This picture hails from a crucial time in what Raymond Bellour has dubbed “the historical and French cinéphilie,” the years, months, weeks, days, hours before François Truffaut won the best director prize at the 1959 Cannes film festival.³ For New Wave afficianados, the anticipatory moments *just before* the Wave resound like stories about the Kennedy campaign do for American Democrats of a certain age (it was gearing up simultaneously, on the other side of the Atlantic); or perhaps they recall the oft-cited episode of John and Paul meeting for the first time, sizing each-other up at the Liverpool summer fête. This is sixties gospel; Le Besco is pondering the acts of the cinematic apostles.

Truffaut was banned from Cannes the year before he won its best director prize because of an article he had published in *Arts*. In this blistering article, he accused the

³ Raymond Bellour: “French cinéphilie was...from the beginning American. ‘How can one be a Hitchcocko-Hawksian?’ It’s a question of theory, but even more of territory. This is what necessarily divides me from Jonathan [Rosenbaum], in whom cinéphilie was born, like in everybody else, through the Nouvelle Vague, but who, as an American, takes the Nouvelle Vague itself as an object of cinéphilie – whereas the cinéphile, in *the historical and French sense*, trains his sights on the American cinema as an enchanted and closed world, a referential system sufficient to interpret the rest. ‘When Mel Ferrer leans on the seesaw, it’s great!’” [italics mine] *Movie Mutations: The Changing Face of World Cinephilie*, ed. Jonathan Rosenbaum and Adrian Martin, London: BFI, 2003.

French cinema entire of being in thrall to “false legends.”⁴ His tone was so belligerent and so full of personal invective, his very presence would’ve been an insult to the festival organizers, let alone the filmmakers whom he had literally insulted. In the intervening year since that publication, however, the whole context for French cinema had changed. Charles De Gaulle had appointed André Malraux, the legendary novelist, “adventurer,” and art critic, Minister of Culture; the Cultural Ministry had the delicate task of determining which film should represent France at its prestigious international festival. Over the strenuous objections of his more conservative advisors, Malraux, an avid reader of *Cahiers*,⁵ chose Truffaut’s *Les 400 Coups* (1959). His verdict signalled two changes - in Laurent’s film, we see Isild puzzling them over, her face amber in the lamp-light, brushing a lock of blond hair from her watery blue eyes.

First, France had given *le cinéma de jeunesse*, which had been incubating for several years in the first films of Malle, Chabrol, Varda, and Vadim, its benediction. The French New Wave was now the French Cinema *tout court* or at least it had the chance to be. Second, the fact that the esteemed writer of *La condition humaine* was the one to make the choice announced to the world that French *national* politics was now in league with *la politique des auteurs*. Hitchcockso-Hawksianism had become governmental policy.

In *Two in the Wave*, a narrator relates these proto-New Wave moments in clipped tones, reminiscent of the omniscient voice in *Jules et Jim*, Truffaut’s poignant 1963 film about the pre-WWI period. Isild Le Besco herself recalls similar figures in Godard’s films. We might call them *les belles détectives* — Jean Seberg in *Le grand escroc* (1963); Anna Karina in *Made in U.S.A.* (1966); Juliet Berto in *Le gai savoir* (1968); Anne Wiazemsky in *One Plus One* (1968); Anne-Marie Mieville in *Comment ça va?* (1978); Julie Delpy in *Histoires du cinéma* (1994-98); etc. — beautiful young women on a quest for knowledge. These allusion are apt, for Laurent’s film is not just about the French New Wave, it’s about the volatile romance between Truffaut and Godard during the sixties. He has simulated a Truffaut film taking place in a Godard film, or a Godard film taking place in a Truffaut film - yet, clearly, without the passion Godard and Truffaut themselves would bring to such an aesthetic tryst. *Two in the Wave* is a traditional documentary, so it would be unfair to expect to find the same, intoxicating blend of sex and intellect that we

⁴ For a detailed discussion of these events, see See De Baecque, Antoine & Toubiana, Serge, *François Truffaut* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1996), trans. Catherine Temerson, Truffaut (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999): “Before shooting *The Mischief Makers*, François Truffaut, still a star journalist, was careful not to miss the opportunity of a last press campaign. Shortly before the opening of the Cannes Film Festival, he published an article in the April 20, 1957, issue of Arts predicting the worst academicism. On May 15, when the festival was almost over, Truffaut drove the point home, once again in Arts: ‘You are all witnesses in this trial: French cinema is dying under false legends.’” (109).

⁵ And a frequent reference point for the magazine. Quotations from his works served as epigraphs for the two most significant manifestos of author politics, Astruc’s “La caméra-stylo” and Truffaut’s “Une certaine tendance.” Malraux also made an anti-fascist film, *L’espoir* (1945), which Astruc nominated as the first “authored” film...the first film of what would soon be called “La Nouvelle Vague.”

find when we revisit *Le gai savoir* or *Jules et Jim*. Laurent merely pays homage, in the process of finding a way to structure his encyclopedic material.

However, there is a hollowness here that goes beyond these inevitable structural limitations and bespeaks a larger cultural void. This void is somehow connected to what contemporary scholars have diagnosed as the death or waning of “cinéphilie.”⁶ Throughout the film, which expands to incorporate newsreel footage and clips from Godard’s and Truffaut’s early works, we continually return to the isolated figure of Isild Le Besco. Not only is she acting in a Godardian drama, she is exactly Godard’s “type” in actress-models — porcelain skinned, inward-looking, with lanky hair and succulent lips. She doesn’t speak — in a Godard film she would narrate. While she sits at the desk, combing through the archives of the Nouvelle Vague “event,” Laurent plays snippets of radio and TV interviews with Godard and Truffaut on the soundtrack. Le Besco is obviously too young to have heard these voices when they were broadcast. She’s not recollecting, she’s reconstructing; she’s trying to piece together a history. But whose history, exactly? Her’s? The cinema’s? France’s?

Laurent’s framing device thus measures the quality of Le Besco’s youth against the youth of her idols, the ardent, polemical grandfathers of modern French cinema. Their brazen voices crackle with energy on those old tapes, while Isild sleepwalks through depopulated Parisian streets at dusk, visiting settings that recall Rodenbach’s *Bruges la morte* (or Rivette’s *Paris nous appartient* [1961]). She lingers at the locked gates of the Cinémathèque Française, no longer even *haunted* by Nick Ray’s ghost (even the ghosts of the classical cinema have departed from those premises). She sits bundled up in furs in an evacuated movie theater that apparently only plays *Les 400 Coups* and *A bout de souffle* (1959). Over and over again, in a continuous, zombifying loop, the same Champs Elysée, the same *New York Herald Tribune*, the same stolen typewriter, the same pilfered milk bottle, the same jump cuts, the same whirling, wheelchair-bound traveling shots — i.e., the same jittery, black and white inscriptions of jubilant, terrible modernity — roll in front of her eyes.

As scenes of present-day emptiness accumulate, Le Besco’s pristine features express nothing, barely even curiosity. We have now reached *la fin de cinéma* — for real this time. Our remaining task is to sift through the debris, to find among those calcified images of the past that unique publicity still, critical jab, or virtuoso cinematic moment that still connects to youth. Some artefact that can tell Isild Le Besco, living in the Wave’s vaporous aftermath, what it felt like to know you belonged to a history - any history at all.

Meanwhile, the Godard-Truffaut story that *Two in the Wave* tells through its narration and archival footage accentuates the total divorce between our vibrant past and our desolate present. Laurent’s narrative concentrates heavily on the early years. Again, this makes a degree of sense. He’s highlighting the time of collaboration, not the years of separation, when Godard and Truffaut were not speaking to each other. And yet, there’s a hole here, too. As with the images of Le Besco in modern-day Paris, the lacuna is an emotional one. This time, however, the affective void is at the heart of Laurent’s project,

⁶ For the most morbid of these death of cinéphilie arguments (and possibly the most influential), see Susan Sontag’s “The Decay of Cinema,” published in *The New York Times*, February 25, 1996.

not in some imaginary, apocalyptic, post-cinéphilia “present.” Although Godard and Truffaut stopped being friends in the seventies, they were still *communicating*. As Richard Brody’s recent book on Godard attests, their films and videos of the seventies were absolutely in dialogue.⁷ Since Laurent is telling a love story, how could he neglect to include its haunting aftermath? After severing contact with François in a famously brutal series of letters (1972), Jean-Luc still watched his films in secret and took his cues from them, just as he had in the late fifties.⁸ Across an ever-widening personal, ideological and aesthetic gulf, there was still correspondence, cooperation, even compassion between their films. The fact that neither man “officially” acknowledged their abiding connection should make the seventies the heart of the whole *Two in the Wave* project (think *Brokeback Mountain* [2005]). Why does Laurent end with the split?

Compassion, if not reconciliation, underlines the soundbyte with which *Two in the Wave* begins, taken from an interview Godard did in the late-1980s: “After François died, Anne-Marie Miéville told me, ‘Now that he’s dead, *nobody will protect you*...since he was the only one of the Nouvelle Vague who was accepted and tried, in a way, to join the ‘establishment.’”⁹ Laurent’s narrative takes its cue from the last part of this statement. Truffaut’s popular appeal kept the New Wave alive in the public consciousness during the sixties and beyond, thereby sheltering Godard’s ever more difficult, contentious experiments under the umbrella of “culture.” In other words, Laurent implies that Truffaut afforded Godard a kind of *economic* protection. Godard’s practice would not have existed without Truffaut’s “establishment” cinema providing a safe, homogenized “Nouvelle Vague” rubric for European *financiers*. Because there was *Les 400 Coups*, there was *A bout de souffle*; because there would be *Fahrenheit 451* (1966), there was *Alphaville* (1965); because there was *La nuit américaine*, there was *Tout va bien*.¹⁰

Although Godard seemingly ratifies this problematic thesis, Laurent misses the *essence* of Godard’s utterance, which — typically for Godard - resides in his ellipses. Nothing in *Two in the Wave* is prepared to deal with the heaviness of Godard’s pause, his voice breaking a little, after he says, “Nobody will protect you”...as if there were a lot

⁷ ...*Tout va bien* (1972) was Godard’s answer to *La nuit américaine* (1972); *France/tour/détour/deux enfants* (1978) answered *L’argent de poche* (1976); *Sauve qui peut* (1979), *L’homme qui aimait les femmes* (1977); etc.. We might consider Godard’s more recent meditations on the war years to be a long-delayed, agonized response and riposte to *Le dernier métro* (1980), Truffaut’s celebrated, late-period memory film of his years under the Occupation.

⁸ Truffaut furnished the raw footage for Godard’s first great short film, *Histoire d’eau* (1958), and the scenario for his first feature, *A bout de souffle*.

⁹ My italics.

¹⁰ I think there is only a sort-of truth to this hypothesis. In fact, Godard was seemingly more commercially viable than Truffaut during the *sixties* because he made films quickly and cheaply. Also because he was *Godard*, he had a predictable, international audience of disciples who would see his movies regardless of what the critical establishment said about them. Truffaut, by contrast, depended on critical goodwill, and struggled to keep his production company, *Les films du carosse*, afloat after a sequence of expensive box office failures.

more to say here than what he goes on to say, that Truffaut's bourgeois credentials had protected him.

Let us linger in that pause for a moment: While François still lived, he, Godard, was protected; now he is unprotected. Not even his lover, Anne-Marie Miéville, who brings him these woeful tidings, can protect him. From whom? From what? There must be an entire personal — and political — and aesthetic — and philosophical - context for Godard's hesitancy, his fear and trembling, at this point in his speech. But Laurent lets it slip away, along with the anguish proper to an epic love story.¹¹ Instead, he allows the cliché to stand: Godard's work (and by extension the more experimental and political side of the Nouvelle Vague) subsisted on the work of Truffaut (and by extension the "popular" French cinema of the sixties). He represents the French New Wave, and the love affair between Jean-Luc and François, in the image of the welfare state — another sixties relic.

2. *Cinema Journal*, 2010

Two in the Wave was among many "tributes" to the French New Wave that appeared on the 50th anniversary of that legendary Cannes film festival. Summing them up for *Cinema Journal*, Ginette Vincendeau writes, "The year 2009 was awash with fiftieth anniversary celebrations of the French New Wave, from the French consulate in Hong Kong to the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Ciné Lumière in London to the Vielle Charité in Marseille and the Cinémathèque Française in Paris, and many other places in between. Festivals, retrospectives, and conferences commemorated what has become *the* landmark film movement in French cinema, widely seen as 'an alternative cinema that was personal, radical and independent' whose effects 'are still with us today.'" ¹² The fact that Vincendeau chooses to *quote* these seemingly innocuous descriptions (from the Irish Film Institute Program) indicates that we should be wary of endorsing them. The dossier that she introduces here will not be another celebration. Rather, the four articles she has assembled will be a *referendum* on the French New Wave, and particularly the movement's centrality for American and French film students. She writes:

Altogether the four essays [collected here] provide an object lesson in shifting historical paradigms. Whether they look at new objects (Sellier, Neupert, Schwartz) or illuminate familiar ones through a new lens (Mary, Sellier), all writers show that we urgently need to extend the familiar New Wave corpus to new filmmakers (Mocky, de Broca, Deville, Demy, Bardot) and include new film titles, that we have to revise the classic periodization of the New Wave beyond the accepted span of 1959-1963 (or in some readings 1965) to include both films made in the 1950s and later in the 1960s, and that we must, especially, rethink the relationship between the New Wave and popular French cinema. They also

¹¹ In Freud, when a loved-one dies, the survivor is "unprotected" in the sense that his or her libido is still bound up in the object and must be withdrawn and reattached to another object (usually the ego); until that happens, the cathexes are like the roots of a plant, freshly torn from the ground...exposed, unprotected.

¹² *CJ* 2010, 135.

demonstrate our need to understand the novelty of Godard, Truffaut, and others not as some innate artistic quality or stroke of luck, but as a complex interplay of personal and industry circumstances and the efforts — both conscious and unconscious — of young *male* filmmakers to grasp and represent new sexual mores, while still retaining control of the production and aesthetic process.¹³

Cinema Journal is the organ of The Society of Cinema and Media Studies, the core conference for the discipline. Thus, behind this “urgent” call is the recognition that cinema and media students, too, remain under the spell of Godard-Truffaut, both consciously and unconsciously.

Indeed, Cinema Studies (in America, France, and Britain — at least) once defined itself in relation to the movies and critical texts of the French New Wave and has arguably retained a vestigial Godardianism, even as it has switched out its critical paradigms. At its formation (in the sixties and seventies), the discipline took its marching orders from *Cahiers du cinéma* and the films of Godard and Truffaut.¹⁴ Even when their classes weren’t blatantly auteurist, film professors wrote syllabi in accordance with the historiography of *la politique des auteurs*. In the process, they made pivotal substitutions, relegating popular commercial films to the background of a newly minted cinema history in which “personal, radical, and independent” movies played the leading role.¹⁵ *Citizen Kane* (Welles 1941) — not *Gone with the Wind* (Selznick-Fleming 1939); *Notorious* (Hitchcock 1946) — not *The Best Years of Our Lives* (Wyler 1946); *La règle du jeu* (Renoir 1939) - not *Les enfants du paradis* (Carne 1945).¹⁶ Moreover, students of the era tended to distill “national” cinemas down to key auteurs and screen them through the aesthetic priorities of 1950s *Cahiers du cinéma*. Thus “Rossellini” and “De Sica” together comprised the sum total of post-War Italian cinema, and to this day our primary knowledge of their work comes from André Bazin. Before the New Hollywood directors (themselves, obviously, oriented around the salutary figures of Godard and Truffaut —

¹³ *CJ* 2010, 138.

¹⁴ In his anthology about cinematic authorship, John Caughie remarks that auteurism “define[d] the space in which other discourses about cinema take place” (15). His argument is that the *Cahiers* and Andrew Sarris policies of tracing the thematic and stylistic tropes of a director’s work “over a large number of films” established the procedures for a scholarly approach to film, one consistent with the extant practices of humanities departments. See Caughie, John, *Theories of Authorship: A Reader*. BFI: London, 1981, pp. 199-205; also 14-15.

¹⁵ This was precisely what the New Wave wanted to accomplish; the point of the early polemics, even going back to Alexander Astruc in the late 1940s, was to center film analysis on the blind spots of the critical establishment. There was a Hegelian discourse of the “pure negative,” as Astruc (or Rivette) might put it — the future of Cinema resided in the films that the older generation could not or would not see, precisely those films the “establishment” held in contempt.

¹⁶ Of course, this has consequences not only for film history courses, but for theory classes as well; so many of our foundational essays derive from the study of the “New Wave” canon (Hitchcock — Godard), that it is arguable that our basic understanding of cinema rests on the Oedipal premises of Truffaut’s “Certain Tendance.”

and the image of the “Film Director as Superstar”) enthroned Kurosawa as the key Japanese director of the post-War period, we tended to abide by *Cahiers’* beloved Mizoguchi. Later on, of course, our man in Japan was Nagisa Oshima, the so-called “Japanese Godard.” And so on.

My point being: Vincendeau doesn’t merely want to “challenge our vision” of the French New Wave, as she puts it.¹⁷ Or, rather, in order to meet this challenge, we would have to tear down and rebuild the foundations of the discipline. The French New Wave must become for us just another national film movement, not what it once was (and perhaps still is) — the core of our identity.¹⁸

Vincendeau stops short of making her polemic explicit. Instead, she makes us *feel* it in her subtle shifts of emphasis, in the way she tweaks her rhetoric in order to detach the French New Wave from its former lexical supports and reattach it to new ones. For example, although she means to portray the blind *worshipfulness* of those commemorative film festival programs, when she asserts that the Nouvelle Vague has come to represent “*the* landmark film movement in French cinema,” she deliberately understates the case. For cinéphiles around the globe, the French New Wave is the landmark film movement, period. There are historical reasons for this, legible even to other sociologically-minded critics of the Nouvelle Vague.¹⁹ Even if we are naturally reluctant to claim that *la politique des auteurs* directly influenced the New Cinemas that sprang up around the world after Cannes 1959, the “mythology” of the Nouvelle Vague determined the shape of international cinema forever after, for better or worse. Hence, even while chiding the obsessiveness of the 2009 festival programmers, Vincendeau narrows the scope of their obsession.

¹⁷ *CJ* 2010, 135.

¹⁸ This claim is “experimental.” I believe, in any case, that *CJ’s* intervention operates on the hypothesis that the discipline remains locked in its imaginary relationship to the New Wave and its categories (paramount among them, authorship). I support this hypothesis, to the degree that the “field” remains “Film/Cinema Studies” as opposed to “Media” studies. It does not seem to me that the ever-growing discourse on television, seriality, media culture, the digital, et al., maintains more than an ironic or accidental connection to the Nouvelle Vague. On the other hand, the 21st century explosion of Film and Media Studies has ensured that there is more writing being done about the French New Wave and its key authors than ever before. Indeed, it might be argued that the Nouvelle Vague constitutes its own sub-field within Film and Media Studies in the United States and Britain (at least), and — moreover — that it is now possible to speak of a Godard *scholar*, just as one can identify Joyceans in English departments and Baudelaireans in French departments. Here I would cite Daniel Morgan as an exemplary Godardian, whose terrific book, *Late Godard and the Possibilities of Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), addresses with remarkable assurance a like-minded reader who is interested in unpacking the specificities of Godard’s philosophical constellation.

¹⁹ “One of the New Wave’s direct consequences was to impose the idea that cinematic creation requires a regular renewal by young directors,” Michel Marie writes, in *The French New Wave: An Artistic School*, trans. Richard Neupert (Malden: Blackwell, 2003), pg 136.

Above all, she assumes that the French New Wave was *French* - more precisely, that its context was “France,” 1960s. Moreover, it was a *film* movement, as opposed to all of the other things it might have been, such as an international, generational, or mediatic “event.” Redefined in this way, the Nouvelle Vague’s achievement becomes available to the instruments of cultural studies and historical positivism. “Not that there is not a lot to celebrate about the French New Wave,” she continues:

Undoubtedly the Nouvelle Vague represented a break in filmmaking practice at the turn of the 1960s, introducing new ways of making films outside the mainstream industry, spreading the use of lighter technologies, ushering in an entire new generation of directors, stars, cinematographers, producers and composers. It also, significantly, revolutionized the way people saw films and the way they wrote about them, in particular popularizing the *politique des auteurs*. This familiar “legend,” or “myth” in Antoine de Baecque’s terms, whose gods are François Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard, has been remarkably successful at perpetuating itself.²⁰

As an important French filmmaking movement, it can and should be studied. But it must be shorn of *myth*.²¹ We must limit our studies to the observable and measurable, eliding the Nouvelle Vague that encompassed — and to a large degree still encompasses — a devotional relationship to the cinema itself.

Curiously, even while advocating a disciplinary *coupure épistémologique*, *Cinema Journal*’s referendum on the Nouvelle Vague is organized on the model of the classic Nouvelle Vague binaries — America/France, man/woman. Vincendeau’s dossier includes two articles from American historians (Vanessa Schwartz and Richard Neupert) and two from French scholars (Geneviève Sellier and Philippe Mary). She has arranged the articles so that the Americans appear first, followed by the French, and so that the authors appear in the order boy, girl, boy, girl. *Cinema Journal* therefore “recollects” the Nouvelle Vague as an event that transpired between French and Americans, operating within a sexualized framework, even as the scholarship on display allocates the “inventiveness” of the New Wave to technical achievements and pop culture. This is a curious gesture of historical continuity, when some would claim that what the discipline most needs now are the Taiwanese, Romanian, Brazilian, Nigerian, and Iranian perspectives on the French New Wave.

More than that, there is a deeper problem with this organization - a void, not dissimilar to the voids that I have pointed out in Emmanuel Laurent’s nostalgia film. It resides in the way gender and nationality structure this discourse, versus how those

²⁰ *ibid*, 135-6.

²¹ Note that this position ironically overlaps with those of Christian Metz, et al, who wanted to shear the cinema from Bazinian “idealism” in order to subject it to a different kind of “materialist” analysis. This overlap brings into focus, I think, the *militancy* of the new historiography which, in the end, is not so different from the militancy of the *politique des auteurs*: again, there is a *cinéma de papa* — the auteurist cinema of the French New Wave — and a new generation of *cinéastes* wanting to draw attention to its “false legends.”

categories structured the “mythology” of the French New Wave. In fact, I would argue, gender and nation *don't* structure the *Cinema Journal* dossier; they simply pay homage.²²

This difference is reflected most of all in the choices of Sellier and Mary as the ambassadors of contemporary French film studies.²³ Sellier and Mary both position their work in opposition to what they perceive to be a still-pervasive “Godardo-Hitchcockianism” in the French academy. In her 2005 book, *Masculine Singular*, for example, Sellier makes explicit her desire to address the “blind spot in the French historiography of the New Wave,” which is gender studies. She goes on to claim that, in the seventies and eighties, French film historians missed (or purposely avoided) encountering the work of anglophone feminists, whose contributions were radically transforming the objects of humanities research at that time. “[*Masculine Singular*] would not have been possible,” she writes,

...without the Anglo-American theoretical contributions that, thirty years ago, ‘invented’ gender and cultural studies — the two research orientations that were born in Great Britain and later experienced an extraordinary development in the United States. Their establishment during the 1960s and 1970s took place within a context of political debate about academic knowledge, which began with a critique of patriarchal power and cultural elitism that had no equivalent in that form in France, even if, paradoxically, it was in part the texts by French theorists — Bourdieu, Kristeva, Derrida, Irigaray — that were used as the basis for the emergence of the new orientations.²⁴

With this account, Sellier points out another French-American axis of exchange, (mis)translation, and re-invention. She identifies the foundational role that French philosophy played in the creation of cultural and gender studies. What she finds to be “paradoxical” here - the fact that American feminists looked to Kristeva and Derrida for warrants, when there appeared to be no corresponding gender studies revolution in

²² For a point of comparison, consider how gender and nationhood structure an English language text like *Men in Feminism* (1987) which also addresses aporias in the humanities in the form of a manifesto. The very grounds of this book, in which women respond to men responding to women on the subject of feminist literary criticism, reproduce as a chapter organization the very struggle that the authors work through in their essays. Furthermore, as the editors acknowledge, the issue of cross-gender “translation” was forced by the French insistence that the “feminine” has its own, specific *language*; thus, the heterosexual struggle articulated in the *form* of the book is redoubled by the *thematic* struggle between/among French and American feminisms, one accentuating sexual difference, the other sexual equality.

²³ “While Neupert and Schwartz [the Americans] draw on industrial as well as cultural history parameters,” Vincendeau notes, “the two French scholars...revisit the New Wave through a methodological turn away from the dominant French aesthetics and auteurist approaches, turning instead to, respectively, gender and cultural studies, and sociology” (*CJ 2010*, 138).

²⁴ Sellier, Geneviève, *Masculine Singular: French New Wave Cinema*, trans. Kristen Ross (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), pg. 7.

France — is in fact part and parcel with the psycho-politics of the age, which were *transferential*. In this respect, the mid-seventies were continuous with the early Nouvelle Vague period, when Godard looked to Hitchcock and Bogdanovich looked to Godard for cues. Whatever was happening in France was not happening in America; whatever was happening in America was not happening in France. On both sides, a course correction had to take place in order to bring French or American scholarship *and* filmmaking *and* theorizing *and* political praxis in line with the revolution that was always-already going on in the Other Place.

If Geneviève Sellier models her work after what she perceives to be the “latest developments” in Anglo-American theory, Vincendeau’s choice of Sellier and Mary to represent the “new word” in French criticism thus illustrates a kind of *mauvais foi*. Regardless of how important Sellier’s and Mary’s work has been for the French Academy, *Cinema Journal* positions their research in the theoretical “past” of the arguments by Neupert and Schwartz, American scholars who presumably absorbed the lessons of Laura Mulvey thirty-five years ago. Gender and cultural studies are part of our “inheritance” as film students in the U.S. - and they’re unquestionably the dominant research orientations at SCMS. We officially dispensed with “auteurist procedures” more than a generation ago.

What’s missing, then, is a corresponding reflection from the American side on what *we* missed when we adopted cultural and gender studies paradigms. What were the French doing in the mid-seventies? As contemporary French scholars, Sellier and Mary have every right to respond, “Nothing but more goddamned Godardo-Hitchcockianism.” But this is a very tendentious representation of what occurred during those years of theoretical and political ferment in France, even (especially?) in the pages of *Cahiers du cinéma*. If Vincendeau had chosen Nicole Brenez and Alain Bergala to represent contemporary trends in French film studies, rather than Sellier and Mary, then American scholars would have to acknowledge that we, too, have a lot of catching up to do. Brenez and Bergala take their cues from scholars like Serge Daney and Jean-Louis Shefer, whom *we* missed, while we were attending to Laura Mulvey. Why aren’t we anxious about this?

II. *Qu’est-ce que la Nouvelle Vague?*

What’s going on with these two, very different — yet mutually illuminating — commemorations of the New Wave’s Silver Anniversary?

An attempt to define the New Wave as something that happened in the past, a cinematic movement which no longer involves us directly, but which is still *all about us*. *Two in the Wave* and the *Cinema Journal* dossier both posit that the New Wave is or was central to “our” cinema, both as an object of desire (cinéphilia) and of knowledge (epistephilia); we belong to the New Wave as much as it belongs to us. At the same time, both the film and the critical articles seem to want to sever the umbilicus — to trim our historical, theoretical, and aesthetic attachments. This is conscious and strategic for *Cinema Journal*; more a failure of imagination in the case of Emmanuel Laurent’s film. But these works share a definition of the New Wave that cordones its cultural field to France, 1950s and 1960s, and to the cinema, strictly defined.

Beyond their shared periodization, *Two and the Wave* and *Cinema Journal* have in common a new orientation toward this enigma, and one which arguably strains against the Nouvelle Vague’s legacy. For contemporary historians, the cinema signifies a

particular, specifiable nexus of technological and discursive sites (in terms of sixties French cinema, these included lightweight cameras, ciné-clubs, the popular press, etc.). During the time of the French New Wave, of course, “Qu’est que le cinéma?” was the big question, and it was presumed to be unanswerable. Now, in the age of New Media, the problem of the cinema’s ontology no longer vexes — or, at least, it vexes only a monkish few, mostly of the Nouvelle Vague generation: Mulvey, Bellour, Rosenbaum, etc. . . . and of course Godard himself. If it’s still not *philosophically* possible to consign the cinema to its social and technical bases, it may be desirable and even necessary for us to do so, so that we can shed light on our own historical moment. Whatever the cinema *was*, it is *now* another media “content” or a kind of aesthetic glaze, liberally applied to HBO programs and Pixar movies.

The seventies seem important. That decade is in the blind spot of Laurent’s film and the *C.J.* dossier, and it’s coming up fast. As I’ve noted, it’s easy to see *why* one wouldn’t talk about the seventies in relationship to the Nouvelle Vague, even if that omission is unsatisfying. Laurent concentrates on the sixties because that’s when Truffaut and Godard were friendly; *Cinema Journal*, on the other hand, believes that the historical margins should be extended, but mostly in the other direction — toward the early 1950s and the popular French cinema that Godard and Truffaut “rudely” interrupted. Following Kristen Ross, Jill Forbes, and others, *Cinema Journal* argues that the Nouvelle Vague timeline terminates in the late-sixties, when . . . what happened? Political events, largely external to the cinema, intervened to put an end to . . . what, exactly? It was Mai ’68, more or less, that severed Truffaut from Godard and put the filmmakers on divergent paths, one toward militancy and the other toward the commercial art cinema. Perhaps we can think of “militancy” and “art cinema” as complementary modes of absorption and recuperation, dissolving the Nouvelle Vague into other filmmaking currents, themselves historically specific to the 1970s. Yet it was also ‘68 that midwived the theorists that Geneviève Sellier mentions — Derrida, Kristeva, Bourdieu, Irigaray — and, of course, modern film theory in Europe and the U.S.. Does the New Wave end where film studies begins?

To be sure, definitional problems have always plagued scholars of the Nouvelle Vague. Even in the early seventies, when historians in England and the U.S. first began writing histories of the New Wave (as opposed to reciting New Wave historiography, in auteur criticism), there was an open acknowledgement that the tag was supposed to refer to French youth who came of age in the Fourth Republic; that Françoise Giroud coined the term, in an article for *L’Express* about the emerging generation gap; and that the rhetoric of “Newness” was omnipresent in De Gaulle’s France. In the late fifties and early sixties, intensive “modernization” programs were happening everywhere, from Renault plants to *les lycées* to the Catholic Church. There was a French New Wave in music; in film; in literature; in painting; in philosophy; in politics; in religion; in sex. Godard, Truffaut and the other big New Wave directors were, at best, *metonymic* of these larger cultural developments. At worst, they were a fetish, a way of collapsing, not only French Cinema, but modern France entire into a conversation about *auteurs* and their great “tracking shots.” It has taken several decades for us to acknowledge that “Algeria” was the larger portion of what disappeared while we were talking about *A bout de souffle*. But even James Monaco began his auteur-centric history of the French New Wave, the first comprehensive study in English, with the caveat that *most* of French history of the fifties and sixties was a subject for “future research.” He knew very well, but all the

same...he divided his book into chapters on Truffaut, Chabrol, Rivette, Rohmer; Godard got two chapters.²⁵ So what is the New Wave — or what *was* it?

III. The Mid-Atlantic

The French New Wave was formed in the juncture of French and American national projects, in the interval or gap between them. It was the product of transference and counter-transference, missed appointments, misunderstood directives, bad or simply incomplete translations, the Subject Who Knows. As such, it has a much longer history and complex ancestry than generally acknowledged. Most importantly, it includes “us.” To a large degree, film studies crystallized in “translation” between French and American authors. Our inclusion in the history of the New Wave is reflected in some of our foundational texts — Bazin, Metz, etc. — and in most of our important objects; to this day, Hitchcock and Godard are the most written-about filmmakers in the United States, and each “author” incorporates the other, as a kind of shadow or “after-image.” Again, we’re in the precincts of a myth or a fantasy: Truffaut, along with the other writers for *Cahiers* of the 1950s, wrote “Hitchcock” into existence, to serve as his own artistic progenitor.²⁶

Myriad books and articles, of course, treat the cross-fertilization of American and French national projects in the post-war era and they do so from a myriad of perspectives, looking at business culture, the automobile, television, labor relations, the art trade, and even cooking (Julia Child is also part of the epoch). Historians, particularly American ones, have been as fascinated with the so-called “Americanization” process, whereby France went from a largely agrarian society to a full-bore consumerist one in a matter of months, as cinema scholars have been with the films of Godard and Truffaut.²⁷

In this project, I will ask certain questions about this history, or set of histories. This will entail a change of perspective, one that takes for granted that *all* New Wave scholarship is involved in cultivating familiar fascinations, even as the classic fantasmatic supports of the New Wave itself — the reciprocally sustaining categories of nation, authorship, and “cinema” — have begun to disintegrate.

What is - or was - the nature of this mutually transferential relationship? What rhetorical figures did it engender? How did filmmakers, artists, and critics figure the relationship, when not representing it in narrative terms as, for instance, a French-American love affair? If, as I have noted in passing, the cinematic “auteur” is one such figuration, how did — and how does — mis-translation structure the authorial politics that the French and the Americans generated together? Did Godardo-Hitchcockianism

²⁵ Monaco, James, The New Wave: Truffaut, Godard, Chabrol, Rohmer, Rivette (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

²⁶ Moreover, as we will see in Chapters 2, concerning Truffaut’s Hitchcock book (1966), New Wave directors were keenly aware of how their critical legacy was informing the institutionalization of film studies in the U.S., and responded to these developments in their works.

²⁷ See, for example: Richard Kuisel’s Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization (Berkeley: University of California Press 1993); Kristen Ross’s Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture (Cambridge: MIT Press 1996).

have a primal scene, buried in the mythic past of the Nouvelle Vague — in the *co-naissance* of French and American Revolutions? Behind the received image of Godard watching Hitchcock, there is the image of Charles Baudelaire reading Edgar Poe...if we follow these images “all the way back,” do we ultimately find Saint-Juste reading Thomas Jefferson? If so, did this scene structure the New Wave like a phantasy, or was the transference more along the lines of a traumatic repetition, a compulsion to restage some terrible breach that happened the long-dead past (e.g., was some covenant broken in the Revolutionary project)?

Turning to specifically cinematic questions, to what extent does the Nouvelle Vague myth touch the very ontology of the cinema? Certainly cinéphilia has Nouvelle Vague coordinates. Is the object itself something that has materialized in the interstices of these crisscrossing, searching looks? In other words, was some *wish* generated in this transnational “shot-reverse shot,” with its perennially mismatched eyelines, answered by the invention of cinema? Finally, do the structures of the cinematic experience reproduce the French-American gaze? When we are at the cinema are we at the primal scene?

This project, then, explores origins: not of the French New Wave “in itself,” but of the lineage of the unconscious between France and America. In the modern epoch, discourses — of modernity, of cinema, of sexuality, of politics, of theory, of subjectivity, of history itself — cycled between these two countries, always in translation and yet never well-translated. One might say that the exchange was typified, on both sides, by continuous “faux raccords,” misinterpretations and missed connections. Exchange was always partial, in that what was received, by either side, was always much more — and much less — than what was given or taken.²⁸

It is not that France and the United States are one another’s unconscious, although 20th century cultural critics from André Siegfried to Jean Baudrillard allegorized America as the European id, given its own continent to run amuck.²⁹ Rather, I suggest of the two systems that each *has* an unconscious — a national unconscious, perhaps — and that the real exchange between these two systems takes place exclusively in the register of fantasy. Between the two countries is an embryonic gulf, a productive site in which each system takes an interpretation of the other and puts it to social, political, artistic, and discursive use. These translations are intrinsically Oedipal in that the questions they are intended to answer are always questions of origin, of authorship, of lineage. If the Nouvelle Vague films focused on heterosexual couplehood, then it must be said that the binaries it produced were, and are, stretched between two nations; this relay is an exchange in which — on the French side — one of the two terms is always “America.”

²⁸ Continuously, in their works, artists and thinkers returned to the interval between France and America, as though pulled in by Atlantic tides. In fact, this tidal pull may define the 20th century in the West. And beyond? Consider how every national “cinema” must in some way orient itself toward this intersection — how every New Wave, whether Korean or German or Senegalese, must somehow touch base with it, must become a Korean, German, or Senegalese New Wave.

²⁹ For a complete account of this kind of work, see Mathy, Jean Philippe, *Extrême Occident: French Intellectuals and America*, Chicago & London: Chicago University Press, 1993. Even Freud produced this allegory, in his late metapsychology works like *Civilization and Its Discontents* ... Which suggests that the Id is America *by definition!*

But the two terms are always defined by the distance between them; between any man and any woman, there is an ocean — just as any ocean is always defined as the gulf between the two halves of a couple. France and America are always coming together, always kept apart; they are always making love, yet always out of reach of one another. In terms of an historical unconscious, then, one might say that France and the United States, in so far as they partake of and are defined by modernity, are one another's parents.

The gulf between these two national systems, this productive gap, I shall call “the Mid-Atlantic,” a term that acknowledges the ocean that spatially separates the two countries as well as the history of art that sutures them together. In regards to the Cinema, I would suggest that this metaphor, a discursive figure that brings together the ocean, the womb, the horizon, the primal scene, is the defining feature of the Nouvelle Vague. If it does not “exist” — that is to say, if the Mid-Atlantic is neither an object nor a figure with form and volume — then perhaps it “in-sists,” both locally and globally; it informs every aspect of every cultural exchange, every mistranslation, every “return of the letter” between France and the United States. In relation to this project, the “Mid-Atlantic” is the name I give to the conditions (discursive, historical, psychoanalytic, political) that made the Nouvelle Vague, in its specificity, possible.

Before describing the organization of this dissertation, I will offer four ways in which the “Mid-Atlantic” operated — four modalities or “master tropes.” Although there are undoubtedly others, these tropes will structure the films and texts that I will discuss here. They are, “The Womb of the Western Hemisphere,” “The Zero Degree of the Self,” “The Gateway to the Modern,” and “The Embryonic Image.”

Master Trope #1: The Mid-Atlantic is the Womb of the Western Hemisphere

For oceanographers, the Mid-Atlantic is a line of volcanoes on the floor of the Atlantic Ocean, descending from Greenland to the Bouvet Triple Junction. The British crew of the H.M.S. Challenger discovered the Mid-Atlantic Ridge in 1872, while sounding the bottom of the ocean for a possible route for a trans-continental telegraph cable.³⁰ Their accidental discovery of that string of underwater volcanoes, interceding precisely between the United States and France, was a harbinger of things to come. The history of the Mid-Atlantic is always bound up with the evolution of modern media and communication technologies and especially with deliberate efforts to synch Europe with the United States.

Scientists soon confirmed the H.M.S. Challenger's discovery and advanced a hypothesis about the Mid-Atlantic Ridge. It was the key to understanding the organization of continents in the “modern” world. In prehistoric times, volcanic activity sundered the landmass that used to harbor North America and Eurasia to the north and South America and Africa to the south, thereby creating the Atlantic Basin. From a geological standpoint, therefore, the Mid-Atlantic is the womb of the western hemisphere.

In the spring of 1967, around the time that Jean-Luc Godard's great film, *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle*, was released in Paris, American scientists aboard a globe-

³⁰ Redfern, Rob, *Origins: The Evolution of Continents, Oceans and Life*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001.

circling research vessel noticed that their instruments were detecting some strange and ominous rumblings along the ridge. They set a course to investigate. In observance of Cold War and scientific protocols, they stopped off in Odessa, USSR, to consult with Russian geologists, apparently on the set of Eisenstein's momentous political drama, *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925); and in Monaco, France, to meet with Jacques-Yves Cousteau, the famous oceanographer and documentarian, whose Academy Award-winning first film, *Le monde du silence* (1956), was shot by Louis Malle.³¹

Together, this international cohort of scientists postulated that a gap had opened in the ridge, and that molten material was now bleeding out on the floor of the Atlantic. This seepage testified to the former consanguinity of far-flung territories and to the galvanic violence of their separation.³²

Master Trope #2: The Mid-Atlantic is the Zero Degree of the Self

In Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, the Mid-Atlantic is a quality of soul that can also be accessed by ship, somewhere, anywhere, in the aqueous reaches between the "civilized" worlds of North America and Europe. It is a state of bracing loneliness and supreme isolation, a nautical-spiritual frontier that we pursue in the interest of exposing the "self" and its frivolous entailments to a blast of sheer otherworldliness.

Ishmael observes, of a young whaler keeping watch over the Mid-Atlantic: "...lulled into such an opium-like listlessness of vacant, unconscious reverie is this absent-minded youth by the blending cadence of waves with thoughts that at last he loses his identity; takes the mystic ocean at his feet for the visible image of that deep, blue, bottomless soul, pervading mankind and nature; and every strange, half-seen, gliding, beautiful thing that eludes him; every dimly-discovered, uprising fin of some undiscernable form, seems to him the embodiment of those elusive thoughts that only people the soul by continually flitting through it." Here, on a limitless expanse of blue waves and infinite horizons, the poet's ego floats like a fishing bobber: "There is no life in thee, now, except that rocking life imparted by a gentle rolling ship; by her, borrowed from the sea; by the sea, from the inscrutable tides of God. But while this sleep, this dream is on ye, move your foot or hand an inch; slip your hold at all; and your identity comes back in horror."³³

We are not looking for "mother" out there on the Mid-Atlantic. The whole point is to relinquish the vain consolations of shore-life, to accomplish what Gilles Deleuze calls *detritorialization*.³⁴ Perched on the masthead, the poet projects himself beyond

³¹ "Mid-Atlantic Fault," *Science News*, Vol. 91, No. 15 (Apr. 15, 1967), p. 351.

³² "Study of the earthquake line and its peculiarities under the mid-Atlantic is directly related to the theory that the Americas and Europe and Africa were once one huge continent and have slowly drifted apart. According to the theory, the drifting is still going on as molten material deep in the earth wells up in the mid-Atlantic and spreads out toward the continents, pushing them apart." (ibid)

³³ Melville, Herman, *Moby Dick: An Authoritative Text*, New York: W.W. Norton & Co. 1967, page 140.

³⁴ Deleuze, Gilles, and Carnet, Claire, "On the Superiority of Anglo-American Literature," in *Dialogues*, trans. Janis Tomlinson, New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.

good and evil, beyond the Oedipus complex. His whole existence is suspended above a vortex that could swallow him at any second. And yet, perhaps Mother is there in a transcendental sense, in the form of the undulating, briny body, in and on which he travels; as an obscure passage that consumes his beginnings and endings in a direct confrontation with infinity; and in the mystic darkness below his feet, intermittently lanced by a ray of sun that causes astral effects near the surface and hovering organisms to appear, swirling like dust motes in a projector beam.

Master Trope #3: The Mid-Atlantic is the Gateway to Modernity

In the 1950s and 1960s, the Mid-Atlantic was the juncture of Franco-American modernity and the thronging gateway to a rejuvenated West. Far from being the desolate whaling grounds of Melville's description, the Mid-Atlantic swarmed with commerce, as the United States and France discovered and rediscovered each other in a frenzy of cultural reinvention. Myriad vessels crossed the Mid-Atlantic, carrying books and films. These were radical works, formed in the interstices of the French and American projects after WW2 — novels and plays by Albert Camus, Marguerite Duras, William Faulkner, and Ralph Ellison; movies by Nick Ray, François Truffaut, Alfred Hitchcock, Agnes Varda, and Jean-Luc Godard; philosophical treatises by Simone de Beauvoir, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jacques Lacan, and the Students for a Democratic Society; criticism by Jean-Paul Sartre, André Bazin, Manny Farber, and Elie Faure; monographs by Jackson Pollock, Yves Klein, Andy Warhol, and many others — far too many to list. A veritable New Wave in art and theory.

In *Moby Dick*, the Mid-Atlantic had been the objective correlative of an internal, subjective experience, a place where historical consciousness gave way to a lonely, treacherous patch of water and sky. During the New Wave epoch, it was the *mise-en-scène* of Franco-American *rapprochement*, the site where Paris, the Capitol of the Nineteenth Century, met Los Angeles, the City that Plays Itself, and the two metropolises dovetailed.³⁵ Governments propagandized the Mid-Atlantic: here was an “Atlantic Civilization,” a monument to freedom of thought and a bulwark against Stalinism.³⁶ Some people invoked the ancient unity of France and the United States in Enlightenment and Revolution; if the Atlantic Ocean could be imagined as a Venn Diagram, its middle was the “universal set” of universality itself — *liberté, égalité, fraternité*.

Politicians, engineers, efficiency experts, and venture Capitalists ventured into the ocean, often with important works of art in their luggage. Herman Lebovics reports that André Malraux, the First French Minister of Culture, crossed the Mid-Atlantic with the Mona Lisa in tow, en route to a viewing with Jackie Kennedy. A fleet of black CIA sedans escorted Leonardo's famous painting from the airport in New York City to the

³⁵ “Paris, the Capitol of the Nineteenth Century” is the title of one of Walter Benjamin's classic essays about Charles Baudelaire; *Los Angeles Plays Itself* is a 2003 film by Thom Anderson.

³⁶ Malraux, André, “The Conquerors 1949,” in *Literary Debate: Texts & Contexts*, ed. Denis Hollier & Jeffrey Mehlman, New York: The New Press, 1999.

National Gallery, in Washington, DC, as if it were a Third World despot threatened with assassination.³⁷

Master Trope #4: The Mid-Atlantic is the Embryonic Image

Those films in their cans, those books in their crates... they have arrived at one threshold, connecting France with the United States. In and among themselves, they form another precipice. They are consubstantial with the medium through, over, and in which they are traveling, the nautical Mid-Atlantic. Immersed in the “blending cadence of waves with thoughts,” their sounds and images and words are in ovo. Like Melville’s lookout on the masthead, they’re neither here nor there. Not French, not American. Not yet “Beauvoir” — not the Beauvoir we know - not yet Godard. Or, depending on which side of the Atlantic you’re standing on, *no longer* Beauvoir, no longer Godard.

We can think of the Mid-Atlantic as a chemical bath for photographs. A New Wave is developing out there on the waters, but it’s not yet resolved: its features are unclear, still hazy. Sometimes the French strike a positive from an American negative. François Truffaut retrieves some throwaway bit of film grammar from a Howard Hawks screwball comedy from the thirties and gives it an exalted frame in *Jules et Jim* (1962). Periodically an American affixes the subtitles or furnishes the translation that brings the French image into better focus (this was the case with “French Theory,” according to François Cusset³⁸). The mood is anticipatory, fraught, experimental — a delicate extraction, a labor of vision, is taking place. Odd metamorphoses occur in the darkroom of the Mid-Atlantic: a book by Camus emerges as a painting by Jackson Pollack.³⁹ Many years later the Pollack resurfaces, changed into a film by Chantal Akerman.

In other words, the Mid-Atlantic is composed of books and films before they have reached the other shore — before they have been seen and read by those who need to read and see them in order for them to become *those* books, *those* films. Audiences are spooled in those cans, packed in those boxes, along with authors. French cineastes and American readers, American activists and French philosophers — at this point they’re all

³⁷ “...the small (30 by 21 inches) painting was transported to Le Havre in a well-padded, air-tight, temperature and humidity-controlled aluminum case and placed — alone — in first-class cabin M-79 aboard the *France* for the trip to New York... On landing, the painting was loaded into a van outfitted with ambulance-like springs. Bracketed front and behind by vehicles carrying armed Secret Service agents, the vehicle with its precious freight took the road to Washington. The convoy passed through the Lincoln and Baltimore Harbor tunnels — cleared of all traffic during its traversal. The masterpiece ended the journey safely at the Nation Gallery in Washington, where it was locked in a temporary storage site in the basement to await installation upstairs.” Lebovics, Herman, *Mona Lisa’s Escort: André Malraux and the Reinvention of French Culture*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999.

³⁸ Cusset, François. *French Theory in America: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States*, trans. Jeff Fort, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008, pp. 17-18.

³⁹ Mathy, pg. 135. See also: Kristeva, J, M. Pleyne, and P. Sollers. “Why the United States?” in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi, New York: Columbia University Press: 1986, pp. 275-276.

nascent, embryonic qualities of the works themselves, “without the remotest inkling of what they will have to become within a creation that would create them so that they might create it.”⁴⁰

Not yet a cultural moment, not yet a Nouvelle Vague, but on the verge of being one.

* * *

Here, then, are four ways in which the Mid-Atlantic has been figured by artists, politicians, scientists, and theorists. The Oceanographer views the Mid-Atlantic as a cesarean scar, a ripple of volcanoes that traces the geographical origin of the “modern” world; Herman Melville sees it from the point of view of a lonely watchman, leaning over the rails of the masthead, the pulse of his thoughts synchronized to the beat of waves on the hull; André Malraux, hoping to ally France with the U.S. after the War, conceives of an Atlantic Civilization, composed of the universalist values France and America held in common at *la fin du 18e siècle*; and Godard finds the Mid-Atlantic in “embryogenesis,” the making and receiving of images. The Mid-Atlantic is like a cinema screen onto which each of these visions have been projected in turn, sometimes simultaneously, like a lap dissolve or *surimpression*. Because it is a “primal scene,” it is difficult to talk about directly. Rather, we feel its presence in certain works and phenomena; in others we don’t. It is an atmosphere, like François Cusset says of “French Theory.” Cusset writes that some American graduate students *inhabit* French Theory, in an emotional climate as perilous and painful and all-consuming as a love affair.⁴¹ Godard was such an atmosphere, which the cinema inhabited for thirty years or so.

Overall, then, the Mid-Atlantic is a site that comes into being when it is necessary to establish the origins of something (the Western world; the subject; the modern; the “cinema” or the image more generally). It is discursive, but it is not *just* discursive. In Melville and in Godard, the Mid-Atlantic designates a place at the limit of what can be talked about, a place where language and identity fall away. Thus, it remains, even in discourse, an uncoordinated, unmappable body of water, somewhere between France and America...a someplace at sea, where two ships or two airplanes once crossed wakes. And precisely because of its extrinsic relationship to territory, it lends itself to obstetric

⁴⁰ A paraphrase of Blanchot on Lautréamont. See Hollier, Denis, “The Pure and the Impure: Literature After Silence,” in *Literary Debate: Texts & Contexts*, pg. 11.

⁴¹ Speaking of young, contemporary American scholars, Cusset writes: “...this subjective and, it might said, atmospheric connection to the works of French theory (in spite of the difficulty of these texts) becomes a general tactic for all those who, without a published work to their name, and without a recognized discourse in which to contextualize theoretical references, never mastered them...[in] this fantastical world of Derridean specters and Lyotardian antiheroes, and marginal or transgressive figures taken from Foucault or Deleuze, is an alternative to the conventional world of career-oriented choices and the pursuit of top grades: it *arms* the student, affectively and conceptually, against the prospect of alienation that looms at graduation under the cold and abstract notions of professional ambition and the job market.” *French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States*, trans. Jeff Fort, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008, pp. 225-226.

representations. Just as a womb is a womb only so long as it harbors a fertilized egg, so there is a “Mid-Atlantic” only to the degree that this crossing of wakes left a promise behind, marking the advent of an unimaginable and utterly transformative future.

IV. Argument

I claim the following:

The Nouvelle Vague is neither a French story, nor an American story. It’s a Mid-Atlantic story. This means that the Nouvelle Vague addressed and enacted the colossal events that organized the “modern” world; it was about a leaning figure on a creaky wooden beam over the ocean, in the seconds before it lost its footing and its “identity” flashed out of the void in horror; it was about an authorship politics braced, equally precariously, between French and American national imaginaries during the post-War period; and it was about embryogenesis, the formation of new “subjects” on the edge of a cultural revolution.

As a movement, it encompassed roughly thirty years, during which it was constantly replenished by fresh influxes of films and theory. Those thirty years obviously included far more than just the films made within the circle of well-known (and even less well-known) French directors. The Nouvelle Vague period also saw the beginnings of what would eventually be called “postmodernity;” it witnessed the birth and the death and the rebirth of the author; it oversaw the academization of Film Studies in the US and Britain, along with the invention of “French Theory in America;” and it harbored all of the Third Cinemas, militant cinemas, feminist cinemas, and New Cinemas that grew from Godard and Truffaut’s “author politics” of the fifties. Here was a great, tectonic movement in Western culture, involving at every stage the subduction of massive blocks of French and American history.

Although periodization can be a messy and unsatisfying business, I claim that the historical parameters of the Nouvelle Vague were 1954 to 1984. Truffaut published “Une certaine tendance du cinéma français,” the founding document of *la politique des auteurs*, in 1954; he died from cancer in 1984. The Nouvelle Vague was thus bracketed, on one side, by a social and literary event: an eruption of world historical significance - an explosion of authorship politics - the first shot the New Wave cadre fired across the bows of the old cinema. On the other side there is a solitary body’s slow, miserable declension into history. Truffaut’s was among the last in a series of important deaths, beginning with Nicholas Ray’s, in 1979. Alfred Hitchcock died in 1980; Fassbinder died in 1982. I do not claim that the Cinema itself died during this period, when its immortal Auteurs fell back to earth and became suffering humans (although I believe that Godard believes this). However, I do argue that the cinema became something else at that point - something euphemistically or at least optimistically called “visual culture.”

V. Plan of Work

Each chapter of the following work builds upon a fundamental premise: the Mid-Atlantic, as “Ur-metaphor” and “embryonic image,” enables a drastic and necessary rethinking of the objects and methods of film historiography. The Mid-Atlantic, making its preposterous claims for statehood, somewhere out there in the interstices of French and American cultures, is not and cannot be an object of historical research in the customary ways. It stands, rather, for the inscription of a doubt — mine, if it must be

subjectivized — that nation and culture *give rise to* art. I have chosen to make these claims through a discussion of the Nouvelle Vague because, while operating within the nationalist rhetorics at their most grandiloquent, Truffaut, Godard, Rivette, and their American exegetes introduced “*une commotion singulière*” into the hoary categories of *liberté, égalité, et fraternité*; it is (or was) their poetic and cinematic activity on the national signifier — the question of a “real” French Cinema — that, for many around the world, vouchsafed the authenticity of these concepts as universals. If, then, I seem to affirm French-American exceptionalism in my discussions, such is far from my intention: indeed, the Mid-Atlantic *insists* that art and intertextuality comprise the avant-garde of History, and that politics cede their economic and militaristic entitlements to the concept.

Indeed, the attempt here has been to find a form in which “text” and “context” retain their essential openness, so that precession (*fantasmatic genealogies*) can assume the place normally claimed by the subordinating logics of territory. Thus, in place of the traditional Cultural Studies emphasis on homology — the figural defined in economic and populist terms — I stress the analogical, specifically the coupling of texts in a relationship predicated on differences within similarities. Consequentially, the Mid-Atlantic also *insists operationally* in an analytical procedure that moves through and not over the material; the argument is inter- and intra-textual, positioning itself within the immanent phase of a transition from one text to another (a translation in permanent medias res).

This has radical effects on the temporality of the dissertation as well. Begging the reader’s patience, the past tense in what follows refers to an *experimental* past. In what follows, biography, production histories, and all of the other conventional markers of a film’s “situation” must weigh their claims to precedence against the equally urgent insistence of books, films, and art on the *present*.

For example, the “context” for my reading of Jacques Rivette’s 1957 review of Fritz Lang’s *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* (1956) is an argument for the poetics of *la politique des auteurs* (Chapter One, “Beyond the Zero”). Put simply, I make the case that Rivette is not simply reviewing a film, but writing himself into the Langian position, thereby commanding authorship of the movie. But this argument cannot proceed linearly. It requires a “present” in which “our” contemporary knowledge of the New Wave films (the world debut of the French New Wave at the above-mentioned 1959 Cannes film festival) plays a significant role. The contemporary reader imputes to the past of Jacques Rivette her foreknowledge of those films in the bewildering form of a *passé simple* not yet concretized, a definitive past that (while we read the review) is still to come: the article allegorizes the advent of Jacques Rivette, author of *L’amour fou* (1969), *Out 1* (1971), and *La belle noiseuse* (1994). At the same time, I argue that the future of the historical “Fritz Lang” is included in Rivette’s *becoming-author*: hereafter, Lang’s work (at least his American films) will be inextricable from the critical labor that made it visible, in *Cahiers du cinéma*. I attempt to represent the emergence of this figure — the New Wave Lang, or the Lang who helped “father” the New Wave — through a close reading of Lang’s 1934 film *Liliom* that proceeds from and alongside my analysis of the Rivette review.

A similar, looping antecedence is the subject of Chapter Two (“Corresponding Vessels”), which concerns François Truffaut’s book of interviews with Hitchcock. I argue that the influential book’s form is dramatic: as much as it produces a certain

knowledge of Hitchcock's body of work (and a technical knowledge of cinema, in the form of detailed shot descriptions), it is finally an experiment in intersubjectivity. The book describes and instantiates a tense but finally loving dialogue in which each director progressively cedes his mastery (his authorship) to the Other. It is this inter-psychic drama (a Jamesian one, in which each man contemplates his reflected look in the other man's eyes) that gives rise, I argue, to the modern "Hitchcock" of gaze theory.

In Chapter Three ("Downtown Godard"), I turn from the New Wave "proper" to study an overlooked and fascinating artifact of the 1970s "Downtown" culture, Amos Poe's *Unmade Beds* (1976), a remake of Godard's *A bout de souffle*. As I have argued thus far, the Mid-Atlantic defies sociology's attempts to delimit the New Wave to a narrow span of years in France. Rather, the movement is renewable and transferrable; in fact, especially after 60 years of intense critical and scholarly scrutiny, it seems to me that the Nouvelle Vague is at its most potent when it erupts in a bizarre "elsewhere" and "when." Here, in the grubby boroughs of an impoverished, drug-ridden New York City, Amos Poe re-invents the early Nouvelle Vague film as its mirror opposite: instead of an American film made in France (which he believes Godard and Truffaut to have attempted), *Unmade Beds* is an American film made in France "made in U.S.A." In the process of redoubling the "originary" translation event of Godard's salutary Mid-Atlantic film — *A bout de souffle* being the only Godard which *gives itself*, without hesitation, to American films and filmmakers — Poe renews affiliations between the French New Wave of Godard and the American Underground cinema of Andy Warhol and Jack Smith. In so doing, I argue, he remakes *la recontre franco-américaine* of the Nouvelle Vague in order to accommodate a vital American avant-garde in place of a long-dead "classical Hollywood cinema." This has the effect of dragging the late fifties and early sixties into the mid- to late-seventies for a critical overhaul and an historical rewrite.

In Chapter Four ("The Resurrection and the Life"), I return to the "death of cinema" themes raised in the early pages of this Introduction. Far from endorsing the preponderance of "death" imagery in some current cinema discourse, I move through a parallel reading of two "post-cinematic" films toward the revelation of the "embryonic image," which I define as the flitting appearance of a "Real" in the creation of one fable or myth from the ashes of another. Both the post-May 68 film *A Girl is a Gun: Une aventure de billy le kid* (Moulet 1971) and the more recent *Haute tension* (Aja 2003) accede to the verisimilitude of an "end of cinema"; each movie brims with the apocalyptic violence that Godard's *Weekend* (1967) and Pasolini's *Salò, or The 120 Days of Sodom* (1975) long-ago established as the proper modality for *le cinéma mort*. Yet, finally, I argue, the death of the Cinema (however understood) is the prerequisite for "seeing the invisible," the production of an "impossible" image — which it will be the business of a theoretical New Cinema to disclose. In the conclusion, then, I examine the embryonic image and its complex Mid-Atlanticism in detail. Readers looking for a more comprehensive understanding of the subjects and methods of this dissertation will find some answers there.

Behind the scenes of every chapter, Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma* finally takes center stage in the conclusion. Godard himself turned 50 behind the podium of the Montreal Cinéma-thèque in 1978, where he gave the series of lectures on cinema history that formed the rubric for this *chef d'oeuvre*. He was keenly aware that turning 50 brought him into synchrony with the cinema's age, when he "came into it." Rather like a

person who arrives at the age his father was when he was born, Godard used *Histoire(s) du cinéma* as an opportunity to interrogate his own personal and aesthetic choices, vis-à-vis the Cinema's fathers and grandfathers: no longer conceived as the filicidal *cinéma de papa* of the Tradition of Quality, but as the mostly benevolent cinema of the auteurs, Hitchcock, Ray, Hawks, Mizoguchi, Renoir, Lang... Thus, the conclusion brings the dissertation full circle, back to the middle of the century, the middle of the cinema.

CHAPTER ONE

Beyond the Zero: Jacques Rivette on Fritz Lang

“Voilà le seul chef d’oeuvre de l’Histoire du Cinéma dont on n’aie rien à dire justement parce qu’il ne dit rien, et qui ne serait plus un chef d’oeuvre si l’onpouvait en dire quelque chose, parce qu’alors il dirait quelque chose.”¹

-Luc Moullet, Fritz Lang.

INTRODUCTION: The poetics of *La politique des auteurs*

1. Reading Rivette

Cahiers du cinéma criticism of the fifties is, or was, foundational for Film Studies.² Yet the criticism itself goes mostly unread. Even when read today, it is for info about Hitchcock (see next chapter), or for clues to the development of the soon-to-be-filmmaker who wrote it. Thus, Richard Brody reads Godard on Mankiewicz in order to establish a Godardian thesis, to assign a “beginning” to the public Godard;³ Tag Gallagher reads Rivette for great quotes about Rossellini.

Historically, *Cahiers du cinéma* of the fifties — the period of *la politique des auteurs* — has been read in a parallax of positions, distributed across continents, languages, and critical assumptions, the most salient of the last being “authorship” itself. Does the critic believe himself to be an author or merely one who writes about authors? Does the act of writing about films imply, or carry overtones of, *cinécriture* — what Godard called “filmmaking by other means”? Or does the critic perceive herself to be

¹ “Here is the only masterpiece in the History of the Cinema about which one has nothing to say, exactly, because it says nothing, and which would no longer be a masterpiece if one could say something about it, because then it would say something.” [my translation]

² See, for instance, Cavell, Stanley, The World Viewed, Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 1979, esp. pp. 7-9. On the first page of his preface, Cavell queries: “What broke my natural relation to movies? What was that relation, that its loss seemed to demand repairing, or commemorating, by taking thought?” He refers to the European films of the sixties, “because while they invited reflection they also (perhaps thereby) achieved a continuity with Hollywood movies — or, generally, with the history of movies — that Hollywood itself was losing” (Cavell xiv). With these words, along with his subsequent defense and discussion of the auteur theory, he suggests that his own film scholarship (begun in 1963) arose out of a need to address and perhaps repair the rift in his “natural” relationship movies — a loss of innocence he associates with the advent of the New Wave. The idea that the auteur becomes “historical” at the moment when Hollywood loses its historicity is an important one for this chapter (“Beyond the Zero”). Moreover, Cavell’s argument is significant because it suggests that “authorship” did not merely serve as a platform for introducing film studies into humanities departments hung up on literary categories. Instead, the advent of the auteur implied cinema “taking thought” — a *thought* in which American humanities scholars like Cavell were implicated.

³ Brody, Richard, Everything is Cinema: The Working Life of Jean-Luc Godard, New York, New York: Metropolitan Books, 2008, pp. 1-3.

operating on the *outside* of the image, in a language that is felt to be altogether incompatible with cinema for institutional or semiological reasons (e.g., because language is arbitrary, so putting the cinema in words is putting it to death — an argument I associate with Raymond Bellour and Christian Metz⁴; or because the study of film takes place in a kind of laboratory environment, a classroom, where the “cinema” becomes an object of discourse, a research specimen extracted from its natural environment)?

These positions can be nationalized, given stereotypical dimensions. For example, it may seem that the French are on the side of *cinécriture* and the Americans on the side of an irrational objectivity. However, it’s important to recognize the transferential side of auteur criticism, which, in my view, scrambles any coherent sense of who is making (writing, filming) “history” here. A judgment, or a next-direction, is always imputed to another, when it belongs to the self (the French impute to the Americans, while Americans impute to the French, irrational objectivity — or, as the case may be, astonishing ingenuousness — in their criticism). If there was an Oedipal component to the “original” *Cahiers* critique — killing off the *cinéma de papa* and replacing it with a cinema of authors — a French-American Oedipality also informs the subsequent history of *l’auteur*.

Who brought “Hawks” into existence? The American Cinema that made him? Or the French critic who found, or created him there (in the American cinema), in the process of trading in his own patrimony?

Andrew Sarris read *Cahiers* avidly, as did Peter Bogdanovich, Jonas Mekas, and the other American *passeurs* of the French auteur idea in the early 1960s (the British — Wollen, Wood, *et al.* — read them, too, at the same time). American film students, when grappling with the advent of *l’auteur* idea, look now (and have often looked in the past) to Sarris for program notes, along with Bazin’s “Evolution of the Language of Cinema” and sometimes Astruc’s “Caméra Stylo: A New Avant-Garde.” More rarely, they’ll read Truffaut’s “Une certaine tendance,” initially published in *Cahiers* (1954) and usually Xerox’d into course readers in an English translation. This translation appears in Bill Nichols’s anthology *Movies & Methods* (v.1), and in the reissued *New Wave: Critical Landmarks* (Vincendeau/Graham 2009) (Graham excluded it from his original edition). In both anthologies, Truffaut’s manifesto carries a content advisory from the book’s editor, after the fashion of a prescription medication or an X-rated movie.⁵

⁴ Thus Raymond Bellour: “...any true detailed [film] analysis carries the murder of the object to its extreme: through an inevitable reversal, it goes so far as to institute itself as a new body in which the maximum intimacy with the object becomes the condition of a certain process of knowledge.” “A Bit of History,” in *The Analysis of Film*, ed.

Constance Penley, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000, pg. 2.

⁵ Nichols introduces the article with a recommendation that it be supplemented with John Hess’ devastating critique: “John Hess’ two-part article in *Jump Cut*, nos. 1 and 2, ‘*La Politique des Auteurs*,’ examines the political viewpoint expressed here and in other early French auteurist writings quite thoroughly, stating: ‘*La politique des auteurs* was, in fact, a justification couched in aesthetic terms, of a culturally conservative, politically reactionary attempt to remove film from the realm of social and political concern, in which the progressive forces of the Resistance had placed all the arts in years immediately after the war.’ Hess’ article is highly recommended as a supplementary

In Sarris, the auteur becomes a critical tool, an instrument for analysis. On the American side — if Sarris can be said to represent that side — *mise-en-scène* presumes an *auteur*, a *metteur en scène*. The critic's first job is to confirm the existence of an author, a "Hitchcock" or "Ford," behind an often indifferent or flawed Hollywood product. In the process, he ratifies the basic theoretical-historical hypothesis behind his labor: cinema history is (has been, will be) a history of authors. American-style auteurism, even at its most complex, continually returns to and affirms its own premises. This is its very American task. (Rivette, by contrast, proceeds from *mise-en-scène* analysis to the disclosure of an author where there wasn't one before. Even two authors: Fritz Lang and Jacques Rivette.)

In other words, the horizon of auteur theory in the US (and to a lesser extent in Britain) was the perennial problem of American authorship: what makes an American writer *American*? Like the Anglo-American proponents of Edgar Poe in the mid-nineteenth century (like Poe himself, actually, in his lifelong advocacy of a truly American literature), Sarris often took cues from the French but carried the author idea in a different direction. As Sarris noted,⁶ this was partly because he believed that he was addressing other critics, while *Cahiers* believed itself to be addressing filmmakers — including the filmmakers they hoped one day to become.

Yet there is also a *formal* Americanism to American auteur criticism.⁷ Here, the critic continually discovers and celebrates personhood, the individual's struggles with, and ultimate triumph over, the juggernaut of systematicity (distribution of labor, genre product, the *dream factories*). In Orson Welles, John Ford, Howard Hawks, etc., the critic heard "sensibility" over the crush and clang of machines, like the flutter of butterfly wings. Yet, in the appendix to *American Cinema: Directors and Directions 1928-1962*, the factory din returns. In his widely-read (often *memorized*) "Director Categories," Sarris transposed *la politique* into a rationalized structure — a grid, a chart, an abstract — analogous to the industrial hierarchies the auteur was supposed to transcend, or to have transcended. *Cahiers* usually conceived *l'auteur* as a "thought," or a constellation of images (a *mise-en-scène*), even if he/she/it was there in person, sitting for an interview: e.g., Nick Ray did not precede *Bigger Than Life* (1957), but because of *Bigger Than Life*, there was a "Nick Ray."

text." Nichols, interestingly, stresses the "polemical context in which [la politique] developed," without, however, acknowledging the polemical context for Hess' brilliant and tendentious critique. Nichols, Bill, ed., *Movies and Methods Vol. 1*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976, pg. 224. See also: Hess, John, "La politique des auteurs," *Jump Cut*: no.1, 1974, pp. 19-22.

⁶ Sarris writes: "Truffaut was involved in nothing less than changing the course of the French Cinema. His bitterest quarrels were with filmmakers, whereas the bitterest quarrels of the New Critics in England and America were with other critics." "Toward a Theory of Film History," *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions, 1929-1968*, New York: Da Capo Press, pp. 28-29.

⁷ It should also be mentioned that American auteurs — and British too — mostly centered on the Hollywood polemic, rather than what the French had (usually) done with that polemic, which was to find a basis for comparing Nicholas Ray to Ingmar Bergman.

For Sarris, on the other hand, “authorship” followed the peaks and valleys of a career. It had graphable low and high points. Note how the criteria behind Sarris’s rankings is often expressed in a Taylorist language of “energy” and “fatigue.”⁸ The author’s body becomes the crux of the matter, the place where judgment rests:

Pantheon Directors: These are the directors who have transcended their technical problems with a personal vision of the world...⁹

The Far Side of Paradise: These are the directors who fall short of the Pantheon either because of a fragmentation of their personal vision or because of disruptive career problems...¹⁰

Subjects for Further Research: These are the directors whose work must be more fully evaluated before any final determination of the American cinema is possible...¹¹

Behind formulae like “technical problems,” “disruptive career problems,” and “must be more fully evaluated” (a passive construction that ominously elides the One Who Evaluates, putting critical labor under the sign of the Panopticon), there is the “odor of the shopkeeper,” as Baudelaire might put it. These are performance evaluations, fit for slotting into personnel files.

Of course, French critics of the late-sixties, including the then-editors of *Cahiers* themselves, read the fifties work systematically and ungenerously, looking for Christological tendencies and realist fallacies. They overwrote fifties *Cahiers* with theory, as if *la politique des auteurs* were a bad scientific proof, now jettisoned in light of new experimental findings. Or, if you prefer, as if *la politique des auteurs* was the irrecoverable “knowledge” available to a pre-modern cinéphilia, but literally unthinkable after the epistemological break of Mai ‘68. In both instances, the ideologue presumed (not altogether falsely, nor altogether correctly) that the business of *Cahiers* had been the production of *knowledge*.

French divides “knowledge” into two words — *connaissance* (f), which belongs to the etymological family of “consciousness of” and “conscience,” and implies awareness, familiarity, *with birth* (con / naissance) — and *savoir* (m), which usually refers to acquired knowledge, the stuff of which one is or can become cognizant. On *sait* le cinéma; on *connait* Nicholas Ray.

So, a third metaphor for the late-sixties re-reading, with unsettling resonances of The Terror, the Stalinist Purges, and Joan at the Stake: at this time (1968-1972), the auteur politicians were dragged in front of a tribunal for a ceremonial recitation of their pre-Revolutionary texts, which they had to renounce in front of theory, under penalty of excommunication or worse. Theory would judge the “verisimilitude” of the confession,

⁸ Rabinbach, Anson, The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origin of Modernity, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.

⁹ Sarris, pg. 39.

¹⁰ Sarris, pg. 83.

¹¹ Sarris, pg. 227.

the sincerity of the confessor — a matter of appearances: Godard OK (for now), Chabrol exiled, Rohmer exiled, Rivette OK, Truffaut...“disappeared.” Since this kind of terrorism (in the Paulhanian, rhetorical sense of purification rites exacted on discourse¹²) was also a strong (if usually self-satirizing) tendency in the work of the fifties, we must be cautious about taking the theoreticians of *la rupture* — Cahiers 1968 — at their word.

Many younger historians of the New Wave, especially French historians, return to *Cahiers* of the fifties in a spirit similar to their more radical parents, i.e. for evidence of Fascist sympathies.¹³ This is a curiously a-historical enterprise for scholars who are trying to break from the generalities of theory into the specificities of history: given the political entropy of the European postwar period, how can we retrospectively gauge the Rightness or Leftness of a past life lived in the historical parallax-ing of those very positions?¹⁴ From whose Left, from whose Right do we take our cues? (The orthodox Left of the period took its cues from Stalin.) There is a terrorism — and terrorism of a not-just-Paulhanian variety — in a Nazi hunt that proceeds through close analysis of old film reviews toward a public denunciation of Jean-Luc Godard as an Anti-Semite.

The textuality of these apparently foundational texts is (and has been for a while now) an “accursed share.” It is a surplus produced when — in histories of film theory, in histories of the French New Wave, in introductions to anthologies — critics assemble key articles and argue for their historical importance. In so doing, they herd the particular case (*this* writer, *this* film, *this* article, *this* choice of word) inside the boundaries of a general law (evidence of, symptom of, characteristic of, typical of). The general law, moreover, reigns over what is simultaneously acknowledged to be the protean, absurd, contradictory, mystical, self-satisfied (*idiographic*) character of the texts there congregated, anthologized, summarized, re-contextualized (as a film studies discourse or as a discourse about authors). Thus, as Thomas Elsaesser remarks, it is inappropriate to speak of a “French Tashlin,” given the multiplicity of “Tashlins” and “French [critics]” collapsed into this phrase. However, one can ground this multiplicity of “Tashlins,” French and otherwise, in the period itself, when French Tashlins flourished.

I propose to analyze a single article, Jacques Rivette’s review of Fritz Lang’s *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*, published in *Cahiers du cinema* No. 76, November 1957, under the title “La Main,” simply to make the case that these reviews can and should be read as “poetry” — at least in such distinguished cases as this. Far from diminishing their value as critical comments (on particular directors or films) or as specific kinds of historical evidence (e.g., of positions within French film culture of the 1950s), reading “La main” as poetry is the key to understanding the historiographical imagination of the New Wave. Indeed, New Wave historiography was poetic, to the extent that it took place in short reviews, each of which attempted to give linguistic form to a memory of images,

¹² See Paulhan, Jean, *The Flowers of Tarbes: Or Terror in Literature*, trans. Michael Syrotinski, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006.

¹³ Ginette Vincendeau cites some of this scholarship in her introduction to *The French New Wave: Critical Landmarks*, ed. Peter Graham with Ginette Vincendeau, London: BFI, 2009.

¹⁴ See Kelly, Michael; Falliaze, Elizabeth; and Ridehalgh, Anna, “Crises of Modernization,” in *French Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, ed. Jill Forbes and Michael Kelly, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1995, pp. 109-118.

a film. Ordinarily, the stakes of magazine reviewing are very low; yet, here, in part because of the strong literary current running through *Cahiers du cinéma*, the *forms* taken by these fugitive impressions have their own verdure. The poetry of the review is also a function of our reading, which implants the foreknowledge of “Jacques Rivette, le veilleur”¹⁵ into what otherwise might be considered disposable discourse, of no greater or lesser value than other critical reviews of the period. What I have identified as the “critical surplus” here — its textuality — is the site where criticism, in its endeavor to produce a *perspective* on a film, becomes a *discours amoureux*.¹⁶

Rivette takes *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*’s hand-me-down juridical themes and recasts the film as a philosophical treatise, a parody-cum-repetition of the 18th century philosophical turn. In histories of philosophy, this turn is typically represented as a shift from the Cartesian obsession with “incorrigible truth” (beyond a reasonable doubt) to a post-Kantian concern with “appearance” (*le vraisemblable*, that which looks true, that which resembles truth). Rivette means to suggest that what was then happening in the offices of the *Cahiers* comprises, or will be seen to have comprised, an epistemological shift along those lines. The cinema as it was — in and for itself (as a Bazinian inscription of the real; as a Hollywood cinema, on the cusp of its dubious recasting into a pre-Vague “classical” cinema; etc.) — was *breaching*, making a breach: it passed/will have passed through the pages of *Cahiers* as if into a hall of mirrors. By November of 1957, Chabrol had finished *Le beau serge* (1958); Truffaut’s “Les mistons” (1957) had won prizes (thereby giving some *authority* to the *succès de scandale* of his criticism, which had made him a public figure, albeit a notorious one). Rivette’s first major film, the 28 minute short *Le coup du berger*, had recently appeared to mild acclaim; and he was preparing a feature, *Paris nous appartient* (1961), commonly cited as his most “Langian” film.

The Rivette review captures, even incarnates, this ongoing *coup d’état* — Rivette’s (and his cohort’s) migration from the dark cinema chair into the beyond of the screen. It is from within the perspective of this imminent change of state, this crossing over in to the *cinematic interior* (Paris will soon belong to us!), that we should understand the significance of the *coup de théâtre* for Rivette. In a footnote, comprising a “dialectical inversion” to mirror the final twist in the film he describes, Rivette overturns his original premise (that Fritz Lang’s film is a “totally closed world”) by opening the film to include “all important recent films.” “I know the objection that will undoubtedly be raised,” the footnote reads,

... that what we are concerned with here [le coup de théâtre] is merely a classic device of the detective novel, particularly the second-rate variety characterized by a sudden dramatic revelation in which the basic premises are turned upside down or altered. But the fact that we find this notion of the ‘coup de théâtre’ reappearing in the scripts of *all* recent important films may mean that what

¹⁵ The salute comes from the title of Claire Denis’s wonderful documentary about the director, *Jacques Rivette, le veilleur* (1990).

¹⁶ “...the lover’s discourse is today of an extreme solitude.” Barthes, Roland, *A Lovers Discourse: Fragments*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1978, pg. 1. This solitude, as we learn from the ensuing fragments, is the place where theory and poetry coalesce in an erotic hymn to the metaphorphosis of the subject in its often-anguished approach to another.

seemed at first to be in the order of arbitrary dramatics is in fact necessity, and that all these films, despite their diversity of theme, no doubt assume precisely the same inner process which Lang makes his immediate subject.¹⁷

Rivette goes on to cite Rossellini's *La Paura* (1954) and *Voyage in Italy* (1953), Renoir's *Elena et les hommes* (1956), Welles' *Mr. Arkadin* (1955), and several others (he pointedly excludes Hitchcock's *The Wrong Man* [1956] and Bresson's *A Man Escaped* [1956], two important "causes" for *Cahiers* at the time).¹⁸ If Rivette's grouping of "important films" points back to the cluster of films with which Astruc began his manifesto on the "new avant-garde" (*Les dames du bois de boulogne* [Bresson 1945], *Lady from Shanghai* [Welles 1944], *Paisà* [Rossellini 1946]),¹⁹ it points forward to an even more rarefied assembly, which Godard, in 1965, will call the New Cinema: the early Straub-Huillet films, Resnais's *Muriel* (1964), Jerry Lewis's *The Errand Boy* (1961), Skolimowski's *Rysopis* (1966), etc.: films grounded in a paranoid logic, whereby the film we believe we are watching is apparently covering for another film (or another history)

¹⁷ "The Hand," from *Rivette: Texts and Interviews*, ed. Jonathan Rosenbaum, London: BFI, pg. 67. [all citations from the Rivette review come from this woefully out of print source]

¹⁸ "...it is clearly the absence of this [dialectical] movement that is the most serious deficiency in the scripts of films like *Oeil pour oeil* or *Les Espions*; and that the sense of dissatisfaction left by films in other respects as accomplished as *Un Condamné à mort s'est échappé* or *The Wrong Man* probably has no other cause...there is an element of wager in Fontaine's escape [in Bresson's film], but more particularly the logical consequences of his persistence...Or again, one simply has to compare the miracle in *The Wrong Man* with the one in *Voyage in Italy* to see the clash between two diametrically opposed ideas..." He continues: "In the former film [Hitchcock's], a reward for zeal in prayer; in the latter, pure deliverance lightning, within the very moment of despair." It should be noted that Rivette is bringing the "twist" definitively under the sign of dialectics, where it can be observed as an historical inscription in films that would not otherwise be thought to contain "twists": *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* is recuperated as the pure grammatical form of a new conception of "freedom" as a function of "necessity," pure deliverance lightning. This freedom he opposes to the Catholicism of the Bresson and Hitchcock works, both of which depend on divine intervention (i.e., Fonda is exculpated from his terrible situation — the "Right Man" is caught by the police — when he falls on his knees and prays to Christ). In the case of the Hitchcock film, Rivette may be forgetting that the movie does not end there. In fact, the final scene takes place in a psychiatric ward with Fonda telling his wife, Vera Miles, that he's been "saved"; she mutters, without affect, "That's fine for you." His redemption is her destruction, pure *damnation* lightning — bringing to perfection the *Hitchcockian* dialectic, which Rivette, I believe, was the first to identify as the "transfer of guilt."

¹⁹ Astruc writes: "The cinema of today is getting a new face. How can one tell? Simply by using one's eyes. Only a film critic could fail to notice the striking facial transformation which is taking place before our very eyes. In which films can this new beauty be found? Precisely those which have been ignored by the critics." "The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Caméra-Stylo," from Graham and Vincendeau (2009).

that is all the time transpiring within its “continuity cuts,” as Rivette says elsewhere of *Gertrud*.²⁰

For, when *Cahiers* of the 1950s is read, no matter *how* or *where* it is read, it is read from the perspective of the films, particularly the first films. The significance of this basic truth for a broader understanding of the history of the New Wave and its “concepts” — authorship, for example — has rarely if ever been examined. It is impossible to read this review — or any other review from the period — without fantasizing about what is to come, what (we) will know is about to happen, what happened. We supply the known future of Rivette’s article (prolepsis), our knowledge of the storied Nouvelle Vague (even the set-backs and disappointments that will beleaguer *Paris nous appartient*, which Rivette will not finish for several more years), in the form of an expectation — ours, imputed to Jacques Rivette in (what must have been the supercharged) November 1957. We identify with the *yet-to-come*, which for us is history. But in re-reading this criticism, we re-cast history in the image of desire.

Despite the arrogance of the critic (Rivette) who claims (or seems to be claiming) that the film he has selected for his review, in the process of passing into the very words of his own description, has reached the sublimity of self-consciousness itself — despite even the impossibility of *conceiving* such a claim — there is nonetheless a case to be made here. Maybe there is no way to *do* cinema history without crossing the interval that Rivette (and the others) opened up, and which we re-open, when we re-open *Cahiers* of the fifties. With the New Wave, Cinema crossed over into meaning, like Lacan’s subject entering the Symbolic order (what Godard calls Big History). Henceforth, the cinema cannot be removed from these written contexts, its historical supports, and still remain “cinema.” Example: there is no getting back to a Fritz Lang who exists (existed) prior to his mediation by Rivette. There is only the bad faith that such an excavation is possible and desirable, that we should attempt to shave a real “Lang” from a French critical encrustation which is/was its mycelium.

In sum, I argue that this review, minor as it might at first appear, concerning a little-seen film, rarely screened and mostly disliked — a film which Lang himself later disowned — is the *mise-en-scène* of *mise-en-scène* analysis. Here, the desire for cinema, even to *be* cinema, a desire misleadingly and patronizingly tagged “cinéphilie,” finds its quintessential staging: “Where Fritz Lang was, Jacques Rivette will be” — and, moreover, “Where Jacques Rivette was, Fritz Lang will be.”

II. Reading Lang

Despite the fact that my concern here is with the Rivette piece (which I believe to have taken the place of its object, to have become *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* and more) some additional context for Fritz Lang’s film is necessary. As Jonathan Rosenbaum notes, *Cahiers du cinéma* had a very small circulation in 1957. Rivette probably assumed that only people within the “totally closed world” of Parisian cinéphilie would read his article, and that inhabitants of this demimonde would have a basic familiarity with Lang’s most recent film.²¹

²⁰ See “Interview with Jean-Luc Godard,” in *Godard on Godard*, trans. and ed. Tom Milne, New York: Da Capo, 1986, pp. 171-196.

²¹ Rosenbaum, Jonathan, “Introduction,” *Rivette: Texts and Interviews* (1977), pp. 2-3.

Beyond a Reasonable Doubt was Lang's last American movie before he returned to Germany to make his "Indian Epic." For Tom Gunning, the fact that it was Lang's last American film accounts for the peculiarities of its discourse, particularly its absurd piling on of plot twists.²² While *Fury* (1936) and *You Only Live Once* (1937) gave us "innocence with all the appearances of guilt" (Rivette's phrase), *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* gives us the exact opposite — "guilt with the appearances of innocence." For Rivette, such a reversal promised the advent of a vision of the numinous. Gunning, taking his cues from the Lang biography, sees a more outraged image, that of an aggrieved lover dropping letters into a fire, one after the other, before leaving the country in a furor.

With this film Lang nullifies the Hollywood Fritz Lang, the American Lang. Lotte Eisner, in an interview she conducted with Lang near the end of his life, documents the German emigré's retrospective disgust with the Hollywood system within which he had labored for almost thirty years. There, the director reveals his contempt for the "social problem" pictures he had frequently been "coerced" into making by studio bosses.²³ Arguably, the social problem film was the mode in which Hollywood most explicitly engaged with issues pertaining to the American democratic experience. The social problem films of the mid-20th century made drama, suspense, or comedy out of newspaper materials. Furthermore, they tended to model liberal values of consensus, community, and tolerance. *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* is a social problem picture, a courtroom mystery, turned inside out and shown to be a self-devouring "Truth-producing" machine.

It is no coincidence, then, that the last image of the last film Fritz Lang made in America is a prison door clanging shut, as Gunning points out. With this image, Lang leaves the strong implication that his final American film is not only shutting the door on his Hollywood experience, but is condemning the Hollywood Cinema itself to the gallows of its imaginary. For Lang, the film was an act of *negation*, even before it entered the modality of the "pure negative" in Rivette's review.

At one point in Rivette's article, he claims that the images of Lang's film — all but *one* image, as we shall see — serve a "strictly mediatory" function. Insignificant in

²² Gunning, Tom, "Inside Out," in *Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity*, London: BFI 2000, pp. 447-456.

²³ "'Social' themes, such as the exposure of corruption and similar subjects seemed passés to me. How many more films on that subject? People enjoyed these films, having become indifferent to VIOLENCE [Lang's capitals] (not by watching films or by daily life around them!) — a 'social' film serves no other purpose but that of killing time...More and more over the past few years I pondered the question: *what* or *who* is the cause or the reason of people's increasing alienation?" as quoted in Eisner, Lotte, *Fritz Lang*, New York: Da Capo 1976. This was a key question (alienation) for art filmmakers of the sixties, from Godard to Antonioni to Imamura to Pasolini: it must be assumed, pace McElhaney's mention of Lang's "different historical circumstances," that Lang felt a.) that it couldn't be raised directly in American cinema (only through the annihilation of that cinema's basic principles *chez Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*), and that b.) other American filmmakers weren't raising it or were raising it "incorrectly," even the German emigrés, like Wilder and Sirk, who *constantly* dealt with modern alienation in the terms of the social problem film.

themselves, images here serve only to carry the film's concept. A less credulous viewer might see in these mediatory images, rather, the mark of the film's ultra-low budget: indeed, Lang made his late fifties Hollywood films in a scramble from one collapsing studio to another. *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* is a key artifact from the time that Joe McElhaney calls "the death of classical [Hollywood] cinema." McElhaney argues that the Nouvelle Vague took root in this "death," while monumentalizing it at the same time — the Hollywood cinema became "Classical" in the same historical movement that made the European cinema the sixties "modern" (it's as if the Nouvelle Vague, in its obsessive culling Hollywood cinema for signs of the New, sucked the modernity out of it, like a vampire)²⁴. Writing of Lang's last film, *1,000 Eyes of Dr. Mabuse* (1960), made in Germany, McElhaney argues:

The film appears at the beginning of a decade in which Lang's work was to become central to such major figures as Jacques Rivette, Claude Chabrol, Jean-Luc Godard, and later Wim Wenders and Jean-Marie Straub and Danielle Huillet, some of whom would produce work outside of the forefront of the commercial film industry — something that Lang himself never did. But the issues that his work raised would become fundamental to certain nonclassical filmmaking practices beginning to emerge in the 1960s. In their admiration for Lang, these younger directors did not work by pastiche or emulation. Lang's work and the issues it raised was the site of an epochal moment in the cinema, but it was a moment that, within certain discourses of the 1960s, was fading. The richness and complexity of Lang's work now became the site of an absence that allowed these later filmmakers to rearticulate, fill in, revise — a position seemingly unavailable to Lang, the product of very different historical circumstances.²⁵

This is an important point: the Nouvelle Vague did not simply appropriate styles and forms from the Hollywood cinema to make its own "avant-garde" films. Rather, Rivette and co. made use of destructive currents, immanent to American movies during the late fifties. *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* defines itself as the "site of an (historical) absence," and it does so by turning the realist codes of the classical Hollywood cinema against us. Rivette claims it plays like "the reading of a script without embellishment." At stake, though, may have been a critique of courtroom drama and its intricate relationship with the American *judicial* imagination.²⁶

²⁴ To some extent, McElhaney's careful film readings validate the critical truism that the work of directors like Hitchcock and Lang faltered when they started to seriously believe the reviews they were getting in French film journals.

²⁵ McElhaney, Joseph, *The Death of Classical Cinema: Hitchcock, Lang, Minnelli*, Albany: State University of New York Press, pg. 28.

²⁶ I take this term from Carol Clover's "Judging Audiences: The Case of the Trial Movie," in *Reinventing Film Studies*, ed. Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams, London: Arnold Publishers, 2000, pp. 244-264. Referencing Tocqueville, Clover asserts in this article that the peculiar feature of American life is that any of us might be called upon to be a juror, and that the "trial" is a key form of Hollywood's spectatorial address.

Tzvetan Todorov offers another way to read the movie's allegory, this time in terms of genre. He argues that all mystery stories posit a gulf between "verisimilitude" and "truth." Within this gulf lies the question at the root of the mystery's suspense: when and how will the *verisimilar* and the *true* be made to coincide? However, the discrepancy between "truth" and what the writer of mysteries has *glossed* as "truth" is also a matter of convention: the reader habituated to mystery stories — and what modern reader isn't? — is accustomed to regard the first suspect with which she or he is presented as "not guilty," precisely because the author gives this individual a guilty aspect. In fact, the avid mystery reader learns to regard the character who looks the *least* likely to be guilty at the outset of the tale as the *real* culprit, because this reader has learned to follow, not the forensic procedures of the detective within the story (Hercule Poirot, Phillip Marlowe), but what Todorov calls the "simpler law of the author of murder mysteries" (Agatha Christie, Raymond Chandler).

Todorov goes on to say that our acculturated response to the "antiverisimilar" cliché sounds the death knell for the classic murder mystery. "Verisimilitude," he writes,

is the theme of the murder mystery; its law is the antagonism between truth and verisimilitude. But by establishing this law, we are once again confronted by verisimilitude. By relying on antiverisimilitude, the murder mystery has come under the sway of another verisimilitude, that of its own genre. No matter how much it contests ordinary verisimilitude, it will always remain subject to *some* verisimilitude. And this fact represents a serious threat to the life of the murder mystery, for the discovery of this law involves the death of the riddle.²⁷

One hundred and fifty years of "ratiocinative tales" have trained us to trust our distrust in appearances, to reflexively "bracket off" the evidence immediately available to our gaze. What at first looks "true" is a priori *not* "true," according to our genre patterning — and, as a corollary to this principle, what *cannot* be true, according to initial appearances, will ultimately be shown by the author to be true in fact. A sort of "obsolescence" is thus built into the very mechanism of the genre, which cannot function indefinitely, so long as it is even minimally predicated on the interlocking propositions that verisimilitude vouchsafes truth and that truth is the final guarantee of verisimilitude; the paradox becomes de rigueur, subject to readerly fatigue, and is canceled out.

Todorov puts Lang's *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* at this very limit, where the mystery story's "iron-clad law" of antiverisimilitude represents itself as the "death of the riddle":

The [final act] revelation, that is the truth, is incompatible with verisimilitude, as we know from a whole series of detective plots based on the tension between them. In Fritz Lang's film *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*, this antithesis is taken to extremes. Tom Garrett wants to prove that the death penalty is excessive, that innocent men are often sent to the chair. With the help of his future father-in-law, he selects a crime which is currently baffling the police and pretends to have

²⁷ Todorov, Tzvetan, *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. Richard Howard, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 86.

committed it: he skillfully plants the clues which lead to his own arrest. Up to this point, all the characters in the film believe Garrett to be guilty; but the spectator knows he is innocent — the truth has no verisimilitude, verisimilitude has no truth. Then a double reversal occurs: the police discover documents proving Garrett's innocence, but at the same time *we* learn that his attitude has been merely a clever way of concealing his crime — it is in fact Garrett who has committed the murder. Again the divorce between truth and verisimilitude is total: if we know Garrett to be guilty, the characters are obliged to believe he is innocent. Only at the end do truth and verisimilitude coincide, but this signifies the death of the character as well as the death of the narrative, which can continue only if there is a gap between truth and verisimilitude.²⁸

By posting *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* at this edge — asking the film to officiate at the “death” of the mystery genre — Todorov is almost certainly operating under the influence of Rivette's classic review, where Lang's work is presented in the very image of such dire conjunctures. In fact, “La main” serves as the scaffolding for most, if not all, critical treatments of Lang's film (Gunning begins his chapter with a reference to it).²⁹ For now, I'd like to parse the four stages or movements that Todorov identifies in his plot description:

1.) *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* begins in the mode of the social problem picture, giving dramatic form to a “real world” controversy, i.e., the “excessiveness” of the death penalty. A crucial component of the evidentiary chain Garrett constructs against himself is a series of photographs, taken by his father-in-law, which will be produced the moment after the jury delivers its guilty verdict. These photographs depict Garrett *planting* the clues that will [falsely] damn him, and validate for all eyes the father-in-law's hypothesis — that an innocent man can get the chair — in the process, presumably, winning Garrett, a fame-hungry journalist, the Pulitzer Prize.

2.) The scheme goes perfectly: based on the evidence he has levied against himself, Garrett is convicted of murder in the first degree. On route to the courthouse to hear the sentencing, his father-in-law dies in a fatal accident, and the envelope containing the negatives of the exculpatory photos burns up with him. Garrett is sentenced to death.

²⁸ Todorov 85-86.

²⁹ ...just as Rivette's celebrated article about *Monkey Business* lay the foundations for subsequent auteurist treatments of Howard Hawks (e.g., Peter Wollen's). So we begin to see how certain *Cahiers du cinéma* positions furnished the “imaginary lining” for film critical and theoretical positions that took root later. The often-unacknowledged centrality of the work produced under the rubric of *la politique des auteurs* to later scholars — regardless of the fate of “the Author” within the humanities — is a factor in the epistemological break I identified as the real significance of the French New Wave in my introduction. The cinema recognizes itself here, in these articles from *Cahiers* of the 1950s, and this is partly because *la politique des auteurs* has operated as a vanishing mediator, causing an array of *Cahiers*-centric objects to appear (and other worthy films to disappear), even — and maybe especially — when the auteur itself/himself is in doubt.

There seems to be little hope of a reprieve, for a key element of the plan was that no one, aside from Garrett and his future father-in-law, knew that he had created the damning evidence. At this point in the plot's evolution, as Rivette observes, the film becomes very much like *Fury* and *You Only Live Once*, Lang's first and better-known Hollywood pictures. Those films concerned people who were wrongly prosecuted, and they portrayed Lang's "great theme" — the mercilessness of Fate and the existential situation of the *accused* ("innocence with all the appearances of guilt").

3.) Although she has no material proof, Garrett's fiancée (Joan Fontaine) believes him when he confesses the scheme from behind bars; she sets about re-tracing the forensic path that Garret and her father had prepared earlier, re-interviewing witnesses, examining the bloody fingerprints, and so forth, in the hope of unearthing some overlooked detail that will get Garrett released. On the eve of his execution, after all hope seems lost, a second envelope appears, containing duplicates of the photos. Unbeknownst to Garrett, his future father-in-law had sent them to the police before he died, just in case. Garrett is on the verge of being acquitted... Lang inserts a shot of the governor's hand, hovering by a telephone...

4.) Thinking he's been reprieved, the exuberant Garrett lets slip the murdered woman's nickname, a crucial bit of evidence that his fiancée had uncovered during her own snooping. As Todorov notes, the climax of the film is thus a "double reversal": "The police discover documents proving Garrett's innocence, but at the same time *we* learn that his attitude has been merely a clever way of concealing his crime — it is in fact Garrett who has committed the murder." Rivette writes about this moment:

At this point the *coup de théâtre* intervenes: five minutes before the dénouement, the terms of the problem are suddenly reversed, much to the dismay of Cartesian spirits, who scarcely acknowledge the technique of dialectical inversion.

Although the solutions may also seem to be modified, however, it only seems so. *The proportions remain unchanged*, and, all the conditions thus being fulfilled, poetry makes its entry. Q.E.D.³⁰

Garrett searches his fiancée's horrified face; he knows she is going to turn him in. The governor's hand, "so near to pardon," withdraws, relaxes. Garrett pivots and returns to his death chamber ("He conceives *himself* innocent or guilty," Rivette writes). The cell doors clang shut behind him, on Fritz Lang's career in America — and, arguably, on the Hollywood cinema as a whole. At least, the Hollywood cinema as it was *for itself* — before, in other words, the cinema of poetry made its entrance.³¹

³⁰ Rivette 66.

³¹ "The word poetry may astonish here, doubtless being hardly the term one would have expected. I shall let it stand provisionally, however, since I know no other that better expresses this sudden fusion into a single vibration of all the elements hitherto kept separate by the abstract and discursive purpose. So let us proceed to the most immediate consequences" (Rivette 66).

III. Le Coup du berger

1. First Move: The Unsuspecting Spectator

When Rivette wrote “La Main,” he had already released his first significant film, a short subject, *Le coup du berger*, the only survivor of his apprentice films. Depending on the English-speaking chess player you consult, the French title translates “Fool’s Mate” (the official translation of Rivette’s film), “Shepherd’s Mate,” “Scholar’s Mate,” “Children’s Mate,” or — in its Hebrew gloss — “Shoemaker’s Mate.” These are chess stratagems in which the Queen and the Bishop “combine in a single mating attack” to take the King in four moves. *Le coup du berger* is about infidelity, naturally (a “mating attack”) — a married couple and their respective lovers — and an attempted deceit, which the intended deceived turns around on the deceiver.

The scenario: A man (Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, co-founder and editor of *Cahiers du cinéma*³²) gives his married lover (Virginie Vitry) an expensive fur coat. Since she must find a way to explain the coat to her husband, she secrets it away in a locker at the train station and contrives a story about finding the locker key in the street (I’ll just go and see what’s there, curiosity, you know). Her husband (Jean Paul Brialy) knows she’s lying, and swipes the key, replacing it with a dummy. At the train station, he trades out the lover’s gift for another, shabbier, coat. He returns the key. She makes her own trip to the train station locker and returns, visibly upset, shaken. The husband, relishing her discomfort, twists the knife (but what’s the matter? you didn’t know what you’d find in the locker... how can you be disappointed?). In the movie’s final moments, the wife spies her lover’s gift on another woman’s shoulders. Her spouse had contrived to re-direct her lover’s gift to his own lover.

The nature of the “coup du berger” in chess is that it can only be played against a lousy or inexperienced opponent: a worthy player will recognize it immediately and take appropriate moves to guard against it, and an attentive amateur will usually protect his king as a matter of instinct. Friends of mine who are regular chess players tell me that the “coup du berger” is only successful against an opponent who is experienced enough to know the rules but is over-thinking, probably expecting his partner to play a more sportsmanlike game — i.e., a game that doesn’t end with him being bested in four moves. This is the exact mentality of the “unsuspecting spectator” in the opening paragraph of Rivette’s review:

The first point that strikes the unsuspecting spectator, a few minutes into the film, is the diagrammatic, or rather expository aspect instantly assumed by the unfolding of the images: as though what we were watching were less the *mise-en-scène* of a script than simply the reading of this script, presented to us just as it is, without embellishment. Without personal comment of any kind on the part of the storyteller either. So one might be tempted to talk about a purely objective *mise-*

³² If criticism was “making cinema by other means,” as Godard put it, the first films are often about *Cahiers du cinéma*. Beyond the realm of Rivette cultists, *Le coup de berger* will be of interest to New Wave enthusiasts looking for rare glimpses of François Truffaut (looking very young and smoking a cigar), Claude Chabrol, Eric Rohmer, and virtually everyone else among the Right Bank cinéphiles.

en-scène, if such a thing were *possible*: more prudent, therefore, to suppose this to be some strategem, and wait to see what happens.³³

Right off the bat, Rivette assimilates Lang's film to a set of certainties, embedded in the cinema culture that was built up around the *Cahiers du cinema* group during the fifties. Most crucially, his "unsuspecting spectator" is supplied with pre-fab conceptions of cinematic authorship. She has only the crudest idea of what an author, a great author, is capable of — and, like the anxious chess player in the "coup du berger" analogy, she is perhaps "over-attached" to this received wisdom, enough to be troubled by the film's failure to confirm it.

The first thing she knows, or assumes, about authorship, is that an auteur — especially one of Fritz Lang's stature — takes a script written by somebody else and *makes it his own*. He does this by translating the words of the script into visual terms; he "puts [the screenplay] in scene." The second thing the "unsuspecting spectator" knows about cinematic authorship is that it includes an element of "personal comment." Here things get ambiguous. Presumably, "personal comment" is something like style. Fritz Lang takes a script, puts it in scene, then "embellishes it" with personal or idiosyncratic flourishes — an *impressive* style. From the standpoint of the "unsuspecting spectator," an author's style hovers a little bit above the film itself and muses on it (is "amused" by it). Perhaps "style" offers insight into the correct perspective the spectator should take on the action — an interpretative or reading strategy.

There is nothing like this kind of comment — there is seemingly no *style* — in *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*. As Rivette scathingly remarks, "connoisseurs will find [in Lang's film] none of those amusingly sketched silhouettes, the sparkling repartee, or the brilliant touches due more to surprise than to invention, which are currently making reputations, after so many others, of film-makers like Lumet or Kubrick. [The film is] conducted with a sort of disdain which some have been tempted to see as the film-maker's contempt for the undertaking; why not, rather, for this kind of spectator?"³⁴ The examples of Stanley Kubrick and Sidney Lumet were skillfully chosen. At the same time that *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* was in circulation in Paris, so were *Paths of Glory* (Kubrick 1957) and *12 Angry Men* (Lumet 1957), breakthrough works by these important American post-War directors. They were modern social problem films, and they were highly acclaimed, even by the usually dissident *Cahiers du cinéma* critics. In fact, the Lumet and Kubrick films ranked much higher than Lang's did, on *Cahiers'* year-end poll (1957). As Rivette notes, *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* was typically felt to be a distaff work, a knock off.

In other words, even among those critics who would be predisposed to like a Fritz Lang movie on auteurist grounds and to withhold praise from over-rated Lumet and Kubrick movies, *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* was roundly disliked and *Paths of Glory* was acclaimed as a masterpiece. Rivette was staking out an extremely contrarian position on *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*, and not just against the "average" viewer or the misguided critic from a competing film journal. The connoisseur whose inner monologue he is ruthlessly satirizing here was probably one of his own colleagues. In fact, one

³³ Rivette 65.

³⁴ Rivette 65.

suspects that André Bazin himself stands accused. In the same issue where Rivette's article appeared, both Rivette and Bazin sat on "Le conseil des dix," a regular feature of *Les cahiers du cinéma* from 1955 to 1968. Each month, ten *Cahiers* contributors were empanelled to adjudicate the "historical" value of films that had just come out in Paris. While Rivette gave Lang's film his highest rating — "Chef d'oeuvre" — Bazin gave it a "bullet": "Not worth bothering with."

Like *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*, *Paths of Glory* and *12 Angry Men* are courtroom dramas. But they differ in nearly every other respect from Lang's work. They are humanist films, reflecting in typical ways the political atmosphere of McCarthy-era Hollywood. Each of them is centered on an exemplary man (Henry Fonda in *12 Angry Men*; Kurt Douglas in *Paths of Glory* — both icons of the Hollywood Left) who takes a stand against official corruption and knee-jerk social prejudices. The outcome of each man's protest is different: while Fonda successfully persuades his fellow jury members to look past their racism to see the evidence, *Paths of Glory* does not vindicate Kurt Douglas's crusade for justice on behalf of his murdered troops. Still, both movies fall short of critiquing the legal system *per se*. Rather, it is the backward-thinking or corrupt individual who sullies an institution that can and *should* be salvaged by more, not less, rationality (one thinks of the Hollywood Ten, who idealistically — and fatally, career-wise — sought sanctuary in their constitutional rights against the Congressional witch-hunters). This is clearly not what's going on in *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*. As Todorov observes, Lang's film does not simply critique an otherwise *just* system of justice. It only appears to be doing so, in its first scenes, which masquerade as a social problem film. Fundamentally, the business of the film is to undermine our ability to make any judgment *at all*.³⁵

Already, with his opening lines, Rivette amplifies Lang's "critique of judgment." "Judgment" is a problem for the film critic — and the polemics of *Les cahiers du cinéma* at this moment were geared toward unseating traditional evaluative criteria. Rivette's "unsuspecting spectator" frantically sifts through her *a priori* categories for watching things — where is the sparkling repartee? The personal comment on the part of the storyteller? The brilliantly sketched silhouettes? — any of those scenic elements that would tell me how to *adjudicate* this experience? Meanwhile, this cold, sterile, anomalous movie unscrolls before her eyes. And, while her eye is turned inward, on these questions, Rivette prepares the second move in his "coup du berger": a purely objective *mise-en-scène*: "So one might be tempted to talk about a purely objective *mise-en-scène*, if such a thing were possible: more prudent, therefore, to suppose this to be some strategem, and wait to see what happens."³⁶

2. Second Move: *Mise-en-scène*

³⁵ See also Gilles Deleuze's discussion of the film, in *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989, pp. 138-139. Deleuze amplifies, by making explicit, the philosophical stakes of Lang's project, to which Rivette only punningly alludes: "Everything is appearance, and yet this novel state transforms rather than suppresses the system of judgement...For Lang, it is as if there is no truth any more, only appearance."

³⁶ Rivette 65.

What *is* a purely objective *mise-en-scène*? Rivette doubts that such a *mise-en-scène* is possible — it seems like an oxymoron. *Mise-en-scène* is always putting *something* in scene. Yet he gives us an image of what it might be: the reading of a script without embellishment.³⁷ For Jacques Rivette cultists, this is a very important, even prophetic, moment in his criticism. Rivette’s films, which often focus on theatre companies, are stuffed with scenes featuring the “readings of scripts without embellishment.” Most famously — or notoriously — in Rivette’s *Out 1: Nolo Mi Tangere* (1971), an experimental theatre troupe is shown painstakingly reading through a few passages of Aeschylus’s drama, *Prometheus*, in real time and in a single take: for almost an hour, we are literally present at the “reading of a script without embellishment.” But, of course, even in *Out 1*, this doesn’t make for a purely “objective” *mise-en-scène*; the staging of a script reading is still a staging. Rivette is gesturing toward a “beyond” of the Cinema, *mise-en-scène* in its most abstract, purified, and even mystical sense. The “reading of a script without embellishment” stands in place of another, more primal or originary “scene of production.”

This becomes clearer in the second paragraph, in which Rivette takes his “unsuspecting spectator” beyond *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*. While elaborating the “purely objective *mise-en-scène*” of Lang’s film, Rivette’s own rhetoric slides into a more philosophical, reflective mode, a mirror of the extreme abstraction the unsuspecting spectator is discovering and rediscovering in the film itself — its pure objectivity, its “diagrammatic” or “expository” aspect. Rivette brings his language into collusion with Lang’s, at the same time as he is slyly cancelling out the film itself. We are “in” the film’s second movement — and yet there is no future father-in-law, no death penalty, no exculpatory photos taken, and no Garrett either: only a “proliferation of denials”:

The second point at first seems to confirm this impression [that the purely objective *mise-en-scène* is a “strategem”]: this is the proliferation of denials underlying the very conception of the film, and possibly constituting it. The denial, ostentatiously, of reasonableness, both in the elaboration of the plot as well as in that other more factitious reasonableness in setting up situations, in preparation, in atmosphere, which usually enables scriptwriters the world over to put across plot points ten times more capricious than the ones here without any difficulty at all. No concession is made here to the everyday, to detail: no remarks about the weather, the cut of a dress, the graciousness of a gesture; if one does become aware of a brand of make-up, it is for purposes of plot. We are plunged into a world of necessity, all the more apparent in that it coexists so harmoniously with the arbitrariness of the premises; Lang, as is well known, always seeks the truth beyond the reasonable, and here seeks it from the threshold of the unreasonable.³⁸

³⁷ Lang goes further — [Somewhere] he explains that he left Hollywood because filmmaking in the post-Classical era had become the shooting of a shooting schedule. (Note to self: find note in the Irma Vep materials)

³⁸ Rivette 65.

Articles published in *Cahiers* about imported films gave their titles, in the header, in both their original languages and in their French translations. The header for “La main” reads *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt (Invraisemblable Verité)*. To my knowledge, Rivette’s article is the only instance of a *Cahiers* critic exploiting this convention — the listing of the French and English titles together in the masthead — to argue a thesis about the film’s significance. This is rather surprising, considering the provocative discrepancies that frequently occurred when titles were translated into French — e.g., Frank Tashlin’s *Hollywood or Bust* became *Hollywood ou Mourir* — and the *Cahiers* enclave’s enthusiasm for word games.

An untranslatable pun runs through the paragraph quoted above. What has been translated into English as a play on “reasonable/unreasonable” is a play on “vraisemblable/invraisemblable” in the original French.³⁹ But Rivette means for his reader to keep both binary sets in his mind throughout the paragraph. This puts an incredible strain on the reader, even the most adept bilingual reader — yet another way in which Rivette is transferring himself into the Langian “position.” Like Lang, he is plumbing the “threshold of the unreasonable”; he is intentionally mobilizing a false cognate, “reasonable/vraisemblable,” in order to create a problem of translation for his “unsuspecting” reader. Also like Lang, he wants us to experience some pain at this threshold, which, in this case, is the very limit of what either the French or American language can say alone, without reference to the other language. We must hew closely to his phrases, turn a cold, empirical eye on the actual words he is using and not just what they are pointing to; from this alienated perspective, the threshold of the “unreasonable” is the place where it becomes “invraisemblable” (or the other way around).

By putting pressure on the false cognate between the French and American titles of Lang’s work, Rivette is suggesting that the film’s export (from America to France) effected an epistemic shift, analogous to the great philosophical revolution of the 18th century. Allen Speigt says that this philosophical revolution encompassed the transition from a Cartesian to a Hegelian (or post-Kantian) framework. Before Kant, Speigt claims, the philosopher believed that his task was to prove certain well established, “incorrigible” truths — usually, the existence of God. For example, in Descartes’ Meditations on First Philosophy (1641), a self-reflecting consciousness progressively strips away all those objects of contemplation whose “self-hood” it cannot establish “beyond a reasonable doubt”; it does this in order to affirm that the only “being” that can be indubitably proved by thought’s own procedures is thought itself — “I am thinking, therefore I am.” Because this tautology demands another explanation to explain itself, God (the “transitional subject” of the Cogito, the *metteur-en-scène* of *thinking*) exists. With the advent of Hegel, writes Speigt,

Philosophy no longer sees itself as being on a search for an ‘incorrigible’ or indubitable Given, but instead responds to the traditional query of the skeptic in a new way: not by a direct ‘refutation,’ but by taking up what Hegel comes to call a

³⁹ A more exact translation of Rivette’s sentence makes a complete jumble: Fritz Lang always seeks the *vérité* [the truth] beyond the *vraisemblable* [the resemblance of truth] and this time he seeks it from the thresh-hold of the *invraisemblable* [the improbable, the thing that doesn’t look true].

‘thoroughgoing’ or ‘self-consummating’ skepticism — the weighing of all knowledge claims, including the claim of Hegel’s system itself, as claims that must count *as appearances*, and the examination of what contradictions may be involved just on the terms of those claims themselves. The employment of such a strategy with respect to skepticism has been well characterized in terms of a general philosophical move from a Cartesian concern with ‘certainty’ to a Kantian concern with ‘necessity’ — a move, that is, from a concern with the hold we can have on a particular claim to a concern with the hold that various claims may have on us.⁴⁰

Rivette’s unsuspecting spectator has pre-given ways of seeing things. What she can’t see is the way in which *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* has already “seen” her seeing it in precisely these ways; it anticipates and bars her every move to understand it (she tries to look beyond *mise-en-scène*, when Lang is coaxing her to look *beyond* his habit of looking beyond). Thus, she is plunged “into a world of necessity, all the more apparent in that it coexists so harmoniously with the arbitrariness of the premises.” Hegel also utilized the theatrical metaphor; he called this “world of necessity” *Darstellung* — the *mise-en-scène* of History.

Rivette’s second move therefore calls into question another of the “unsuspecting spectator’s” certainties: she is certain he is watching a film called *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*. But *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* was released a year earlier, in 1956, in the United States. In fact, she’s watching something called *Invraisemblable Vérité*, and she is watching it in Paris, in late 1957. In other words, confused and frustrated but altogether *taken in* by the extreme “negativity” of the film’s *mise-en-scène*, the unsuspecting spectator has failed to objectively account for her own material circumstances: she believes that it’s one year earlier and an entire Ocean’s distance from when and where it really is.

A.) The French Lang

Part of the argument of this chapter is that a picture of the “historical” Lang arises as an after-image of Rivette’s poesis (where Rivette was, Fritz Lang will be). At this point, then, I turn to another modality of the “French” Lang. Through Rivette’s dialecticization of *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*, the unsuspecting spectator is made aware, at least subliminally, of the migration of the text from one situation to another (or, rather, how the film’s export has given rise to two contexts on either side of the Atlantic). Fritz Lang defines the paradoxical *minority* of the emigré filmmaker. Subject to the violent uprootings of history, he was forced to create in new languages (both spoken and cinematic), each of which had its own eschatologies.⁴¹ If, in the process of his migratory creation, he became *emblematic* — his is the key name for *film noir* — Rivette’s review

⁴⁰ Speigt, Allen, *Hegel, Literature, and the Problem of Agency*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 2-3.

⁴¹ Like Brecht, with whom he briefly (and very agonistically) worked, on *Hangmen Also Die*, Lang had no patience for Hollywood endings. Brecht apparently shopped a script around Hollywood called *Boy Meets Girl: So What?*, which characterizes both artist’s feelings about “closure” *à la mode hollywoodienne*.

compels us to consider that it may be his fraught, difficult, borderlands works, the films of an exile on the edge or in the midsts of leaving, that are his most important: thus, *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*, made on the verge of his return to Germany, and *Liliom* (1934), made in the process of *fleeing* Germany, are *sui generis*.

Tom Gunning argues that the Fritz Lang authorial myth turns on a single incident from the biography, itself more legend than fact — the oft-told story of his migration to the United States.⁴² In 1933, Joseph Goebbels asked Fritz Lang to make the “Big Nazi Pictures,” as Lang later put it. Although the Nazis banned his sound films, *M* and *Das Testament des Dr. Mabuse*, on the grounds that they were an insult to the German character, the Führer loved the grandiose, and, as its own author admitted, meretricious *Metropolis* (“The mediator between the Mind and the Hand must be the Heart”). Hitler, Goebbels proudly reported, felt that the great cinéaste of *Metropolis* was the ideal person to make his propaganda films. According to Lang’s report of the exchange — part of his Whitman-esque self-mythology, for, as Tom Gunning reports, Lang was the quintessential “self-made” man, who came to believe his own lies — Lang smiled and nodded through this disquieting interview. When Goebbels dismissed him at last, Lang instantly gathered what money he could (the banks were closed) and set out for Paris, leaving his wife, the Nazi sympathizer Thea von Harbou, behind.

At that time, Paris was a way station for the passage of European exiles en route to the United States. Walter Benjamin and Sigfried Kracauer were already there when he arrived. While awaiting his visa for North America, Lang made a film, *Liliom*, which was based on a popular stage play by the Austro-Hungarian Ferenc Molnár.

Liliom, Lang’s only film in French, was — as Lotte Eisner writes — the first proof of Lang’s “infallible instinct for catching the atmosphere of the country in which he happen[ed] to be working: the life of the colourful little suburban fairground is presented with popular humour and much comic detail, at once playful and homely. The joys and sufferings of ordinary people are depicted with a musical lightness which [René] Clair could not have bettered, and which mingles earthy reality with the seductive, ephemeral atmosphere of the fairground.”⁴³ In Eisner’s account, Lang takes on the features of a Henry James “ambassador,” whose capacity to soak in the cultural medium where he finds himself is counterbalanced by the “inveteracy of [his] indirect perspective.”⁴⁴ Lang watched with affection the “joys and sufferings of ordinary people,” and the French appreciation for same, without losing himself. He remained Fritz Lang, a “subtle, percipient vessel,” as James might put it — a diplomat, a continental man, a bit like Orson Welles. *Liliom* is Lang done in the “French” manner, and a witty homage to Clair.

But Lang carried the unconscious in his valise like a plague. It was the sexual predator of *M*, driven to destroy the “young” and “innocent,” finally ensnared and ritually destroyed by other criminals (in the interest of keeping the police out of their own nefarious business). And it was the diabolical Mabuse, capable of projecting his staggering will to power from beyond the grave, moving like a virus from host to host

⁴² Gunning 9.

⁴³ Eisner 149.

⁴⁴ James, Henry, “Preface to the New York Edition (1908),” in *The Portrait of a Lady: Norton Critical Edition (2nd)*, ed. Robert D. Bamberg, New York and London: 1995, pp-8-10.

and breeding terror and dissimulation — a demand to be dominated — among the populace. Indeed, built into the very title of Lang’s last German film (before he returned in the late-fifties, after *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*) is the paranoid formula par excellence: the French reflexive verb, “m’abuse,” with its implication of a triad of possible subject positions — “tu m’abuse” — you are abusing me; “je m’abuse” — I am abusing myself; or, more starkly, “on m’abuse” — I am being abused.

And, just as Freud and Jung (“Don’t they realize we’re bringing them the plague?” Freud is said to have remarked, upon seeing the welcoming committee on shore) were arrested at the gates to the New World and subjected to a thoroughgoing decontamination,⁴⁵ neither did Lang make it to Hollywood “intact” — he was dissected, scrubbed, and immunized against; shunted by the studio bosses into a series of increasingly “implausible scripts” and low budgeted genre films.⁴⁶

From another perspective, Lang never crossed the Atlantic; he remained in France, in *Liliom*, in the doorway between the German future and the American one, attempting to craft a perfect image of judgment. As Lotte Eisner rightly observes, *Liliom* is abundantly true to the atmosphere of French popular cinema of the 1930s. Lang’s achievement is all the more remarkable because, as Gilles Deleuze notes, the French and German styles of the period were antithetical.⁴⁷ Compared to the “violent perspective geometry” of a film like *M*, with its overt affinities with newspapers and crime blotters, *Liliom* is sumptuous, lyrical, based in a notion of time as *une ronde*, an eternal dance between Man and Woman (Eisner also invokes Schnitzler in her description of Lang’s film). *Liliom*’s allegory develops out of the carousel where the boisterous, drunken Liliom (Charles Boyer) works as a barker, belting out nostalgic tunes and flirting shamelessly with *les bonnes*. The carousel is the emblem of “earthy” reality — the redundancy of the present — and the “seductive, ephemeral” nature of things; it is the spinning wheel that garlands these experiences of time together.

One night, on the carousel, Liliom falls in love with the ethereal Julie (Madeleine Ozeray). Although the *dragueur* Liliom tries to hide his passion behind a show of bluster, Julie is serene, confident in the spontaneous intensity of her love for him, which is immediately imbued with qualities of the “divine” and the incorrigible. Liliom is the One. The lovers carve their initials into the park bench where they spend their first night together. Lang then uses a lap dissolve to mark the passing of an unspecified number of years. Their carving deliquesces into other names, carved over theirs in a palimpsestic *discours amoureux*, as the wood itself blanches, grows old, absorbing all of these love

⁴⁵ It was traditional for European travelers to be washed down upon arrival, even bourgeois travelers. See Duhamel, Georges, *America the Menace: Scenes from the Life of the Future*, New York: Houghton Mifflin 1931. I don’t know for certain if this happened to the weary Doctors Freud and Jung, but it’s amusing to imagine that it did.

⁴⁶ Truffaut, François, *The Films in my Life*, trans. Annette Insdorf, New York: Da Capo, 1994, 64-68.

⁴⁷ “The French school could be contrasted point by point with German Expressionism...[Lang’s films] are characterized by “a violent perspective geometry, which works through projections and expanses of shadow, with oblique perspectives...” Deleuze, Gilles, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, pg. 49.

affairs into its texture. This temporal bridge is in the quintessential French manner *qua* Deleuze; it is an image of time as “liquidity,” the absorption of the “human” into the natural cycle. *Liliom*’s emblematic transition contrasts sharply with the famous scene of Elsie Beckmann’s disappearance in *M*, which measures a much smaller section of time in a series of shots as measured as the ticking of a clock on a factory wall: a mother waiting, an empty stairwell, a dark and desolate street, a child’s balloon snagged in telephone wires. In the German film, the “human” is progressively relinquished to the “non-organic life of things”: Fate. *Liliom* is about Eternity: there is no cut in *Liliom* that is not soft, deliquescent. Misty.

Liliom and Julie are now living in a house together; due to an outbreak of temper, Liliom has been fired from his job at the carousel and now subsists Julie’s wages as *une femme de chambre*. It is immediately apparent that Liliom is a vicious, spiteful man — a parasite — and that Julie is a “saint,” an inexhaustible well of religious platitudes and tearful apologies for Liliom’s abusive behavior. She pours him a cup of coffee; he drinks it in a single gulp and asks for another; she says there is none left; the fact that there is none left, she cautiously asserts, is a compliment to her, because it means he liked the coffee she made; he, furious, snatches the coffee pot from her hands and hurls it to the ground, shattering it; she falls apart as he storms out of the house. We are still in the realm of “cyclical” (or at least frequentive) time. This scene is another carousel, both because the episode is one that Liliom and Julie have repeated, every morning, with or without broken dishes, since they were married, since, in fact, there was “marriage”; and because it is a vignette, a lyric from the *chanson française*, hearkening to the earlier dissolve on names carved in wood; the broken coffee pot whorls into the carousel of life.

Periodically, someone will ask Julie to justify her exasperating love for the loutish Liliom. At those moments, Lang will compose a *pietà*, with Julie peering directly at the lens, haloed by white light, testifying to her transcendent devotion. These scenes are so overdetermined by the repertoire of poetic realism, they almost play like a parody of the French style. And this “almost” is crucial to my thesis that Lang is more a Tom Ripley-like than a Strether-like figure. (His fluid “French” is a false cognate, a forgery...).

Liliom is not quite “ironic,” for Lang well and truly absorbed the French mode; and we can grudgingly accept that the film belongs among the best “French” films of its period, as Eisner asserts. And yet, *Liliom*’s “Frenchness” is excessively precise. The Langian algorithm is perceptible, albeit indirectly, in the contempt that we cannot help but feel for these paltry lives: their religious piety, their shabby entertainments, their overt sexual warfare, their vulgar “peasant” humor — and, above all, the alibi of a genre which naturalizes these indignities as the vicissitudes of “life,” varnishes them with a poetic style and an overly-emphatic mood of “musical lightness.”⁴⁸ Perhaps it is only because we know that Fritz Lang has composed these frames that a shadow fleetingly crosses Ozeray’s chaste features, eclipsing the Virgin — the face of the mental patient in *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*, its lines shadowed by the specter who possesses and dispossesses him; or maybe the shadow that flits over the Madonna is one of the lynch mob in *Fury*, Lang’s first American film, contorted with wrath.

⁴⁸ To some degree I am arguing that *Liliom* is Truffaut’s “Une certaine tendance du cinéma français” *avant la lettre*.

So there is a processional of faces here, just as, in the Rivette article about *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*, there will be a parade of hands, dissolving into one another in a restless sign of Absolution.⁴⁹

* * *

At this point in the plot, Fritz Lang seems to be anticipating his own forthcoming migration (although it was undoubtedly a fantasy shared by many Europeans of the period): Liliom and a pal arrange to rob a payroll clerk; their plan is to kill him and take the money and embark for North America, making a tabula rasa (Liliom has a baby on the way). The robbery grows awry; Liliom stabs himself in the heart to avoid capture by the police. Two angels, garbed in black, appear to tell him that he won't get off that easy — that God's justice still awaits him. The three ascend.

Heaven duplicates the police station on earth, where Liliom was earlier carried off for gambling and fighting (everything up here is bigger and fluffier). Heaven is even classist. Because Liliom is poor, he does not get to plead his case before the Big Judge; and in another affront he has to wait in the lobby, where signs defend against smoking, talking, and spitting. When he gets his turn before the clerk, there is some funny business with an ink blotter — a repetition of a moment that took place earlier in the film, tiresome then, obnoxious now, the inveterate stupidity of a bureaucrat, etc. Then the clerk turns on a movie projector. Lang added this detail to the Molnár work — the Cinema as an omniscient surveillance device, an Objektif, quite literally the eye of God. Lang is continuing a line of research (into what Rivette will call a “purely objective *mise-en-scène*”) that he began in *Frau Im Mond*. In the earlier film, a camera mounted on a rocket was able to peer into the dark side of the moon, finding evidence of life, maybe even civilization, where the naked human eye could see only coldness and destitution. In *Liliom*, the Objektif is pointed in the other direction, toward earth, into *Liliom*'s past. The coffee pot scene is replayed. This is the evidence against him.⁵⁰

I have already identified two ways in which the scene with the coffee pot instantiated the film's representation of cyclical time. It was an anecdote from Liliom and Julie's life together. And it was a vignette, the lover's quarrel played as “une ronde.”

⁴⁹ Claude Chabrol might well have been thinking of these spectral images in *Liliom* when he made *Les bonnes femmes* (the closing scene of the nightclub with the spinning glitter ball might even be quoting from *Liliom*'s opening shot of the carousel); in fact the whole Mabuse/m'abuse thing is central to my idea, admittedly underdeveloped at this point, that *Liliom* augurs Vichy. For decades, Chabrol has been called the “French Hitchcock,” and he has always maintained that he is, in fact, the “French Lang.” Chabrol's first feature *Le beau serge*, also about a brutish country-man, is another film that seems haunted by the only genuinely French Lang — *Liliom*.

⁵⁰ In Lang's next film, *Fury*, prosecutors show newsreel footage of a jailhouse burning down, to prove that “respectable citizens” were part of the lynch mob responsible for the arson. One of the defendants, recognizing her own face in the crowd, shrieks, and has to be restrained by bailiffs. In an existential sense, she wasn't there; the defense has already shown the court that a mob has a “life of its own.” Her shock when confronted with the film has to do with the fact that the camera captured her where she was not, at the level of rage and instinct.

When the scene is re-screened as evidence, it is not only Liliom who stands accused, but the temporal premises of the film that we (Lang's unsuspecting spectators) have been watching up until now. The scene recasts the Eye of God as an omnipresent surveillance camera. Liliom (and the spectator of Lang's film) review a scene he — and we — believed “no one” was watching.⁵¹ His accusers replay the scene in slow motion, building to the moment when Liliom strikes Julie. Liliom is bored. So they show the film *again*, this time with a soundtrack — Liliom's inner monologue as he slaps her! The speech of his unconscious, perhaps: his own, panicky voice warning Julie that she is about to be hurt, and afterwards expressing pity for her. He stands accused — Molnár's play (Lang's source) along with him — of bad faith. Of betraying “the love in his heart,” that pitiful little voice that is powerless to stop him from doing whatever terrible thing it is that he's about to do.

Liliom remains unmoved by these arguments. Agents of heaven's court deliver him to purgatory; he is given a final chance to renounce his sins — the footage is replayed yet again. This time, when the slap approaches, the moving image is arrested, exfoliated into photograms, still images that cut the “slap” like a hand of cards. Liliom, still unwilling to repent, is sentenced to purgatory. After sixteen years, he is released to spend one day on earth. His task is to do something “beautiful” for his daughter, not yet born when he killed himself. At this point *Liliom* becomes *It's A Wonderful Life* (Capra 1946) as re-imagined by the Fassbinder of *The Merchant of Four Seasons* (Fassbinder 1971). On Earth, Liliom meets his daughter on a park bench. She is startled to see him — Julie had told her deadbeat father had died in North America, after abandoning his family. Contrary to the man her mother had prepared her for, she finds Liliom to be “good” and “decent.” These words annoy Liliom. They get in an argument, which ends with Liliom insulting his daughter and slapping her viciously on the hand.

Now a twist ending, even more rancorous than that of *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*. Liliom is snatched back to “heaven” for a thorough dressing down by the clerk. But just when he is about to be sent to hell, the angels overhear a discussion between his wife and daughter: “Mother, have you ever been slapped and it felt like love?” “Yes, darling” ...welling tears, swelling music... The scales of justice tip decisively toward “innocence”... Liliom beams: he's redeemed. Curiously Gunning does not mention this detail: that Liliom is finally reprieved because his wife and daughter feel the love in his beatings.

The ending is significant because it reflects — as Rivette will say of *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* — a dialectical change of state. Liliom is acquitted, neither because he repents nor because God is merciful, but because of an unsubpoenaed testimony that turns the original basis for judgment on its head. His brutishness becomes the very grounds for his redemption. Yet, there is neither “grace” nor “irony” in the twist. If the effect of the final scene is to de-naturalize an image (a popular image) of a suffering woman who is gratified by her suffering, this is not a matter of “theme” or “tone,” strictly speaking. Rather, it's a demonstration of story mechanics pushed to their *ne plus ultra*,

⁵¹Somewhat like the Maysles compelled The Rolling Stones to watch, and re-watch, the murder of Meredith Hunter in *Gimme Shelter*; or like the Allied liberators dragging the Germans at Auschwitz in front of George Stevens's camera to bear witness to their atrocities.

where the formulaic becomes “formula.” After *Liliom* has been rolled through Heaven’s projector, it can no longer be seen from an “earthbound” position — the image has become radically objectified, the intimacy of a close-up sublated by what has just been unveiled as a permanent “god’s eye view.” In the process, as Godard might put it, the film goes from a “just” image to “just an image.”⁵²

3. Third Move: Experimental Descriptions

There is a distinctly Mabuse-ian quality to the Lang who materializes in the third movement of “La Main.” “The hand” of the director now wields scientific instruments, and *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* is re-cast as a human experiment:

Then, as the film continues on its way, these first impressions find their justification. The expository tone proves to be the right one, since all the data for a problem — two problems, actually — are being propounded to us: the first derives from the script, and being quite clear, need not be dwelt on for the moment; the other, more subterranean, might reasonably be formulated as follows: given certain conditions of temperature and pressure (here of a transcendental order of experience), can anything human subsist in such an atmosphere? Or, more unassumingly, what part of life, even inhuman, can subsist in a quasi-abstract universe which is nevertheless within the range of possible universes? In other words, a science fiction problem. (For anyone doubting this assumption, I would suggest a comparison between this film and *Frau im monde*, where the plot served Lang primarily as a pretext for his first attempt at a totally closed world).⁵³

Frau im monde (Lang 1929) concludes at an odd extreme. The film’s central couple is reconciled, but in outer space, in a rocket that is rapidly losing oxygen. Closure, in the classic, Western sense of sexual closure, is accomplished — at the price of asphyxia.

We return to the existential situation of the “unsuspecting spectator,” who also finds it difficult to breathe. The moment corresponds to the third movement of the film *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*: Joan Fontaine is frantically searching for those clues that will exonerate her fiancé. And, in the process, she *will have* found the evidence that damns him forever (note the future anterior). Thus, the third move in Rivette’s “coup du berger” is to put *la politique des auteurs* under the sign of “paranoia”; he implies that the labor of finding *auteurs* is conspiratorial. There’s something to this idea: *la politique des auteurs* retroactively gave the Hollywood Cinema a *subterranean* history, an authorial “plot” that functioned, quite literally, within its “continuity cuts.” The classical Hollywood cinema believed that it was operating according to the rules of genre and the

⁵² In 1945, Molnár’s play *Liliom* would mutate into the comparatively innocuous Rogers and Hammerstein Broadway musical, *Carousel*; *Carousel* would subsequently transformed into an Academy Award winning film, with Gordon MacCrae and Shirley Jones; the film would be released in Paris the same month (November of 1957) as Lang’s *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*, his last work for the Hollywood studios.

⁵³ Rivette 66.

marketplace. In fact, Hitchcock, Hawks, Ray, Fuller, Aldrich, and Fritz Lang were pulling the strings all along.

To retrace the three moves so far: Rivette began with “Fritz Lang” — the Fritz Lang that the “unsuspecting spectator” expects to find, but doesn’t find (except in the reflected image of her own creeping paranoia), in *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*; then he replaced “Fritz Lang” with Hegel; now he puts Dr. Mabuse in the Hegel position. The significance of the Mabuse substitution is that it makes the question of “*mise-en-scène*” terrifying. Mabuse becomes the “invisible hand,” putting history in scene.

In redefining *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* as science fiction, Rivette also redefines science fiction. Modern science had just unveiled its own *coup de théâtre*, the Hydrogen Bomb, putting universal annihilation at the end of every story about the future. When Rivette keys us into the diagrammatic aspects of *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*, then, he implies that the film has an immanent relationship with this historical probability. The existence of the bomb has affected the film’s sequencing and stripped its scene bare.

This proposition gains layers of historical meaning when we consider that Lang owed his Hollywood career to the technological prowess of his Ufa films. *Metropolis* (1927) and *Frau Im Monde* are generally regarded as the “first” science fiction movies; his American reputation (at the time he fled Germany) rested on these works (*M* [1931] and *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* [1933] had not yet been released in the US). For the studio bosses who ensured quick processing of his visa to the U.S., Lang had the potential to become what Wernher von Braun would be for American science after the 2nd World War: a German prodigy who would help to consolidate the “American Century” by building magnificent “rocket ships” (cinematic ones, in Lang’s case) to illuminate the technological superiority of the US for the rest of the world. In fact, the idea of counting down to a rocket launch — “10, 9, 8, 7...” — comes from *Frau im Monde*.⁵⁴ Lang was therefore associated with the construction of the American “future” in a rather tangible way.⁵⁵

Yet, in a “twist” that almost seems appropriate to *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*, Sigfried Kracauer records that Lang got the idea for *Metropolis* in a nightmare view of New York City from the deck of a ship (a much earlier visit). This implies that the invention of the modern science fiction film (a *German* film) was precipitated by a need to work through the bleaker implications of The United States as the “city of the future”:

⁵⁴ “On the night of the première [of *Frau im Monde*],” Eisner writes. “A postal rocket was to be sent off. The attempt, undertaken rather unwillingly by Oberth, failed dismally: in those days rockets were even less predictable than now. The launching of the rocket in the film however was so authentic in all its technical details, as were the drawings, still valid today, on which the trajectory from the earth to the moon was mapped, that the Nazis withdrew the film from distribution. Even the model of the space ship was destroyed by the Gestapo, on account of the imminence of the V1 and V2 rockets on which Wernher von Braun was working from 1937 onwards.” Eisner 109-110.

⁵⁵ Lang did not wind up making those rocket pictures; in fact, his German expertise was deployed in another way, in the service of making films about Nazi Germany (*Cloak and Dagger*, *Hangmen Also Die*, *Man Hunt*)...these played upon the “imaginary” Lang he had projected when he first got to HW (the flight from Goebbels, etc...)

Lang relates that he conceived the idea of this internationally known film when from shipboard he saw New York for the first time — a nocturnal New York glittering with myriad lights. The city built in his film is a sort of super New York, realized on the screen with the aid of the so-called Shufftan process [sic], an ingenious mirror device permitting the substitution of little models for giant structures. This screen metropolis of the future consists of a lower and an upper city. The latter — a grandiose street of skyscrapers alive with an incessant stream of air taxis and cars — is the abode of big-business owners, high ranking employees and pleasure-hunting gilded youth. In the lower city, shut off from daylight, the workers tend monstrous machines. They are slaves rather than workers.⁵⁶

Frank Clark describes the Schufftan Process: “A photograph, painting or miniature is placed at the side of the camera, and a mirror is mounted in front of the lens so that the image of this secondary scene is reflected into the camera lens. Where the image of the miniature or plate is not desired, that portion of the mirror silvering is scraped away, allowing the camera to see through the clear glass and photograph the primary scene, which is usually the foreground and live action.”⁵⁷

Curiously, the mechanics of this effect suggest another “experimental description” that took place in Paris, two or three years before Rivette described *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* as the description of an experiment. It deserves to be mentioned here, because the purpose of the description in question — Jacques Lacan’s trick of the “inverted bouquet,” from his first seminar (1953-1954) — was to demonstrate the optics of paranoia (or paranoia as an “optic”). The Hydrogen Bomb looms over both Lacan’s demonstration and Rivette’s Mabuse/m’abuse allusion. Moreover, Lacan’s “inverted bouquet” transpires out of a close reading of a passage from Freud, suggesting that both authors sought within the works of German Masters clues to the American future. (I take for granted that a science fiction question was usually an American question, in so far as America in the post-War period was positioned as the “future of Europe.”)

Like the Shufftan Process, Lacan’s inverted bouquet trick consists in grafting an “imaginary” object (an image of a bouquet of roses) into a “real” object (a vase); the trick is performed with the use of a concave mirror. A bouquet is placed, upside down, in inside of a box stood on end; a vase is placed on top of the box. Placed directly in front of the box is the mirror, so that, if one stands in a particular spot, the roses (now right-side up, because of the concavity of the mirror) appear to fill the vase. Lacan puts the inverted “bouquet trick,” the sort of physics game one might encounter in a children’s museum, to uses that are far too complex and varied to go into here. Because the trick constitutes another representation of the “mirror stage,” it is one of the building blocks of his entire philosophical system. The crucial point to note is its formal similarity with Lang’s trick.

⁵⁶ Kracauer, Sigfried, From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966, pg. 148.

⁵⁷ Clark, Frank P., Special Effects in Motion Pictures — Some Methods for Producing Mechanical Special Effects. Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers Inc., New York, 1966, pp. 93-115.

Lacan constructs a “magic lantern” device that projects an image of roses into a real vase; Lang uses the Schüfftan Process in order to integrate live actors into simulated backgrounds (the future city of *Metropolis*). In each case, the trick is used to unveil another trick that operates on the same principle but is concealed in culture.

Fritz Lang transposed flesh and blood actors into fantasmatic worlds in order to expose the “split” in modern technological civilization, the caesura between the “incessant stream of air taxis and cars” above and the “workers tending monstrous machines below.” The political argument of *Metropolis* is reflected in the Schüfftan device itself, which substitutes “little models for giant structures” — a figure for “mass deception.” The reality of *Metropolis* is the homunculus, “more slave than worker,” breaking his back to sustain the image of a future world where no one labors. In the film’s famous Tower of Babel scene (explicitly cited in Rivette’s first feature, *Paris nous appartient*), we glimpse the future of an illusion, hordes of slaves organized to transform megalomaniac visions into architecture. The lesson here, a fairly common early 20th-century Marxist one, is that the laborer’s body is the “spectacle.” The slaves “working their monstrous machines” are exhausting themselves solely in the service of reproducing the conditions of their own servitude. The Tower of Babel can never be accomplished; like *Metropolis* itself, it is a fantasy that serves the construction of an image, a Mass Ornament, which can only be seen from above — the gods-eye view of thousands of people amassed to achieve an monstrous task. (According to Gunning, a young Alfred Hitchcock watched appreciatively as this scene was being filmed, admiring especially Lang’s ability to orchestrate/terrorize his own cast of thousands.)

Lacan, on the other hand, uses the optical trick of the “inverted bouquet” to elucidate the paradox of the subject. The subject, he argues, is composed of an “Image of the Real” and the “Real of an Image.” The political underpinnings of Lacan’s “special effect” are considerably more difficult to define. Lacan stresses the amount of libidinal energy the subject must expend in order to keep the image of the roses situated in the vase. We must labor to convince ourselves that the two objects, one obviously a mirage and the other more tangible, belong to the same order of reality:

This is what happens when you look at an image in the mirror — you see it where it isn’t. Here, on the contrary, you see it where it is — on the one condition that your eye is in the field of the rays which have already crossed each other at the corresponding point. At that moment, while you do not see the real bouquet, which is hidden, if you are in the right field, you will see a very peculiar imaginary bouquet appear, taking shape exactly in the neck of the vase. Since your eyes have to move linearly in the same plane, you will have an impression of reality, all the while sensing that something is strange, blurred, because the rays don’t cross over very well. The further away you are, the more parallax comes into play, and the more complete the illusion will be.⁵⁸

Lacan’s strong emphasis on the anxious, paranoid underpinnings of the game mark this as a discourse of the Fifties: the inverted bouquet demonstration has less to do with the

⁵⁸ Lacan, Jacques, *Seminar One: Freud’s Papers on Technique 1953-1954*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller and trans. John Forrester, New York: W.W. Norton, 1991, pg. 78.

question of how the “mass consciousness” is introjected by the individual ego, or with how fundamental tensions within the subject are projected on to a large social formation like the state, than it does with an analysis of the sorts of “pleasures” that the subject takes in alienation.

Lacan begins his “description of an experiment” with a close analysis of an oft-quoted passage from *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in which Freud attempts to pinpoint “psychical locality” — the exact place (in consciousness, a no-place) where an image of “subjectivity” comes into being. Freud compares the psychic apparatus to the interior of a microscope or camera:

I propose simply to follow the suggestion that we should picture the instrument which carries out our mental functions as resembling a compound microscope or photographic apparatus, or something of that kind. On that basis, psychical locality will correspond to a point inside the apparatus at which one of the preliminary stages of an image comes into being. In the microscope and the telescope, as we know, these occur in part at ideal points, regions in which no tangible component of the apparatus is situated.⁵⁹

Freud minimizes the importance of his metaphor. The microscope is simply a representation, designed to show something that otherwise cannot be shown. He advises that we look through the metaphor, as if his image of the microscope were itself a microscope, toward the object it discloses — the “topic” of the imaginary, the ideal point in space where the picture of a “subject” materializes, like an amoeba mounted on a slide.

Lacan defies Freud’s advice; he claims that Freud’s advice is a ruse, and that Freud is actually advising us to ignore his advice through the very act of giving it. He transfers our attention to the poetic form that Freud’s objectification of the psychical apparatus takes; he puts Freud’s “microscope” under a microscope, in order to demonstrate the mystical bases of the scientific imagination.

In Lacan’s view, psychoanalysis is a branch of optics — “a strange science which sets itself up to produce, by means of apparatuses, that particular thing called images”⁶⁰. Yet it is clear from Lacan’s subsequent remarks that he regards “optics” as the rootstock of the physical sciences as well; the scientific instrument — including a working metaphor, like Freud’s — operates as a vanishing mediator, establishing the proof of a mirage, and, conversely, the mirage of provability. Lacan calls this image of a proof “the virtual object” (it will become “l’objet petit a” in his later work): “Optical images possess a peculiar diversity — some of them are subjective, these are the ones we call virtual, whereas others are real, namely in some respects, behave like objects and can be taken as such. More peculiarly, we can make virtual images of those objects which are real images. In such an instance, the object which is the real image quite rightly has the name of virtual object.”⁶¹ Lacan cites the example of a rainbow, a “subjective” phenomenon that can be verified with a photograph. But a photo should not convince us

⁵⁹ as quoted by Lacan 75.

⁶⁰ Lacan 76.

⁶¹ Lacan 76.

of the reality (the beyond of image) of the rainbow. Instead, the photo only proves the “intricacy of the relation” that obtains between “subjectivity” and “objectivity” in perception.

This relation is structured into the mechanism of the camera itself, which is built on the model of the eye. Lacan intends a pun with the English “I” here — the “eye” is the subject, and he wants to underscore the optical trick that makes this subject, an I, take itself for an object, an eye. But these eyes are reversible, because, as Lacan continually reminds us in this discussion, nothing is where it should be when it comes to optics: the same legerdemain that makes the subject look like an object also transforms the object into a subject (it trades an eye for an I). The subject who heeds Freud’s admonishment and disregards the language Freud uses, in order to see the thing toward which that language is pointing, will not find the ideal point in space, because he/she/it *is* that point. Seduced by Freud’s sleight of hand, this subject produces a *something* where there was, in essence, nothing, and thus becomes the topic [as in ‘site’] of the imaginary.

Yet this nothing boomerangs, because the subject knows, even if he is unaware that he knows, that the joke is on him/her/it — that what has been taken for the object of his/her/its look is actually the reflection of his/her/its own looking. The same effect occurs when the subject overlooks the agency of the camera in the production of the rainbow as real image. And this realization, through which the virtual object bounces back, is conducive to paranoia.⁶² The subject must maintain the integrity of the imaginary unit he has made, which consists of the fusion of his act of looking with the object of his look. If this imaginary unity is disturbed, he will have to concede that his objectivity (which also means object-hood) is an optical illusion, and that his I, his subjectivity, is just an effect of the apparatus (the creation of a machine). In other words, the subject is always looked at as well as looking, but tries to negate that dualism, in order to become the transcendental subject of empiricism. The camera eye that grasps the total form of the Mass Ornament in *Metropolis* is a figure for this transcendental subject: it perceives the constellation of slaves, lugging their rocks endlessly up the teetering Tower of Babel, as ideal pattern.

On these bases, Lacan promulgates a critique of modern physics. Although this critique will be more fully developed a few years later, in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan is already beginning to mark an important distinction between the psychoanalytic “optic” and the “objectif” of the so-called hard sciences, which “import[s] into nature a cutting up, a dissection, an anatomy.”⁶³ Science is always an operation in which a “subject” is displaced onto an object; but the scientist usually disavows that this displacement has occurred. Physics projects its “eye” into the material world, and then dissects that I as if it were something other than an ideal, geometric point in space.⁶⁴ Psychoanalysis dissects the psychic mechanism that projects the empirical subject into

⁶² It is also the psychic structure that subtends the “transfer of guilt” that Chabrol and Rohmer — following Rivette, actually — find in Hitchcock.

⁶³ Lacan 76.

⁶⁴ This is the “Temptation of Infantilism” that Rivette claims Hawks demonstrates with his own parody of the scientific imaginary, *Monkey Business*. See “The Genius of Howard Hawks,” in *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave*, ed. Jim Hillier, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985.

virtual existence; but when psychoanalysis is *real* psychoanalysis (as Lacan puts it), it is centered on that abstract point where the preliminary stages of an image come into being — in the mirror assembly where the gaze of the scientist, peering through the microscope, is returned to him as a picture of his eye. It is the psychoanalyst's job to teach the scientist not to stick his scalpel into that eye.

Lacan speaks from within 'l'univers concentrationnaire',⁶⁵ and so does Rivette, when he writes about the quasi-abstract universe. Both of them are oblique in their reference to the contemporary moment; Lacan makes a passing remark about the "days when physics was actually fun, when it was real physics,"⁶⁶ and Rivette speaks of the "most important recent films," *Ordet*, *Voyage in Italy*, *Elena et les hommes*, and *Mr. Arkadin*. But the day when physics was actually fun was the day before physics took its game seriously, and "imported into nature a cutting up, an anatomy, a dissection" — before it mistook its virtual object for a real object, and tore into the atom. And the most important recent films have in common the narrative device of the *coup de théâtre*, a sudden last-act reversal that reveals in a single blow that the film we have just watched was not the film we thought we were watching.

Ultimately, Lacan organizes a sort-of-path through his labyrinth of overdeterminations, notably by making a crucial distinction between the gaze — the point from which the subject sees himself looking (here associated with language itself, the Symbolic Order) — and the look, where the subject and its object are unified. For now, he follows the slide of the signifier, playing language games, and leading us, like Alice, through the looking glass of the Freudian text. This is Lacan's dream of Freud's book on dreams, and, by extrapolation, his dream of an earlier generation's way of thinking through the science of perception.

"La main" is Rivette's dream of Fritz Lang, who, in his words, always seeks the truth beyond the reasonable, and here seeks it from the thresh-hold of the unreasonable.⁶⁷ Note that Lang fulfills for Rivette virtually the same role that Freud filled for Lacan. Lang's work constitutes a scientific investigation of the truth beyond reason — an X-Ray of X-Rays. For Rivette and Lacan, these German fathers were founders and Grand Masters — their contributions were not only textbook instances of a discourse (the cinema or psychoanalysis), they were that discourse itself. Freud was the Word of Psychoanalysis; Lang was the Word of Cinema. Like Lacan's re-reading of the Freud passage on the "psychic apparatus," Rivette's article on *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* is a model translation. "Where a text is identical with truth or dogma, where it is supposed to be 'the true language' in all its literalness and without the mediation of meaning, this text is unconditionally translatable," Walter Benjamin writes. "...Just as, in the original, language and revelation are one without any tension, so the translation must be one with the original in the form of the interlinear version, in which literalness and freedom are united."⁶⁸ Such a unity of literalness and freedom is most evident in the verbal pun at the core of Rivette's review of Lang's film — in the last move of Rivette's "coup du berger"

⁶⁵ David Rousset's expression.

⁶⁶ Lacan 75.

⁶⁷ Rivette 65.

⁶⁸ Benjamin, Walter, "The Task of the Translator," trans. Harry Zohn, in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, New York: Schocken Books, 1968, pg. 82.

— the checkmate. Lacan famously decreed that the unconscious is structured like a language. The French word he uses is *langue* — but Freud or Lang would have used the word *Lang*.

4. Last Move: Coup de grace

If Rivette's review begins in diagrammatic mode, it ends with a hymn to humanism:

So all of this obliges us to pass this second stage as well, and finally attempt to reach, *beyond*, that of truth. I think I see a solution: which is that it might be pointless to attempt to contrast this latest film of Fritz Lang's with earlier ones like *Fury* or *You Only Live Once*. What in fact do we see in each case? In the earlier films, innocence with all the appearances of guilt; here, guilt with all appearances of innocence. Can anyone fail to see that they're about the same thing, or at least about the same question? Beyond appearances, what are guilt and innocence? Is one ever in fact innocent or guilty? If, in the absolute, there is an answer, it can probably only be negative; to each, then, to create for himself his own truth, however unreasonable it may be. In the final shot, the hero finally *conceives himself* innocent or guilty. Rightly or wrongly, what matter to him? Remembering the last lines of *Les Voix du Silence*, 'Humanism does not mean saying: what I have done, etc...', let us salute that scarcely wrinkled hand in the penultimate shot, ineluctably at rest near to pardon, and which does not cause even a tremor in this most secret form of the power and the glory of being man.⁶⁹

From his very first sentence, Rivette has cast his object — the film — into “doubt.” He does not describe its plot (only its *plotting*), and provides little else that would give one a sense of what the film actually “looks like.” If you were compelled to seek out *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* on the basis of Rivette's endorsement, you may struggle to find the epochal significance he locates here. Admittedly, you might feel a *frisson* when you arrive at Lang's penultimate shot, from which Rivette derives his title, “La Main” — that “scarcely wrinkled hand... ineluctably at rest *near* to pardon, and which does not cause even a tremor in this most secret form of the power and the glory of being man.” The image in question is luminous, surcharged with significance beyond its status as “plot point” (the governor on the verge of pardoning Dana Andrews). Without Rivette pointing it out to us, in other words, we might still recognize the hand of the author “Lang” in this portentous, hovering extremity, this luminous “main” — we might perhaps flash to a memory of *M*'s title card, the fateful accusation (Murder!) inscribed on an open palm, or remember the Hand that mediates the Heart and the Mind in *Metropolis*.⁷⁰

Aside from the figure of the hand, Rivette claims, images serve a strictly “mediatory” function in *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*. The film that leads up to this image is nothing but the restless turning over of the “concept” (judgment) in its inexorable progress toward “Absolution” — a glimpse of the authority in whom/which the power to “pardon” is vested. Yet despite the weight Rivette attaches to this particular image, it,

⁶⁹ Rivette 68.

⁷⁰ See Gunning's reflection on this figure, in the preface to the above-cited book.

too, is meditated. Lang's "scarcely wrinkled hand... ineluctably at rest *near* to pardon" is shifted from its juridical coordinates in *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*, as well as its position within a well-established auteurist orthodoxy (the Langian "Hand of Fate"), in order to find itself in André Malraux's art-historical text, *Les Voix du Silence*.

Like Fritz Lang, Malraux concludes his (massive) book by invoking a Hand — the "most secret form of the power and the glory of being man" — that Rivette quotes directly. For Malraux, *La Main* signified something like a humanist Holy Spirit, Authorship itself, conceived as a supernal, transhistorical entity, the hand behind all art, all histories of art, from the beginning until the end of time:

Humanism does not consist in saying: 'No animal could have done what we have done,' but in declaring: 'We have refused to do what the beast within us willed to do, and we wish to rediscover Man wherever we discover that which seeks to crush him in the dust.' True, for a religious-minded man this long debate of metamorphosis and rediscoveries is but an echo of a divine voice, for a man becomes truly Man only when in quest of what is most exalted in him; yet there is beauty in the thought that this animal who knows that he must die can wrest from the disdainful splendor of the nebulae the music of the spheres and broadcast it across the years to come, bestowing on them messages as yet unknown. In that house of shadows where Rembrandt still plies his brush, all the illustrious Shades, from the artists of the caverns onwards, follow each movement of the trembling hand that is drafting for them a new lease of survival — or sleep. And that hand whose waverings in the gloom are watched by ages immeorial is vibrant with one of the loftiest yet compelling testimonies to the power and the glory of being Man.⁷¹

By superimposing these hands, causing the first hand (Lang's hypertrophied image of judgment) to cascade into the second hand (Malraux's trembling, "secret form" of "being man"), Rivette casts the Nouvelle Vague as Cinematic New Testament (the Law incarnated, become man). Lang (langue) — language — the Word — made "flesh" — Jacques Rivette.

At the same time, he re-enacts this breach for us, incarnates it in his text. Rivette, the critic, in his (this) suspended form of judgment, subsumes both film and Lang to his (Rivette's) *own* becoming-Author. Over the *surimpression* (the fantasmatic conjugation) he has produced — Lang's hand, the hand of "the cinéaste of the concept," covering over Malraux's "hand," the hand of the author of *La condition humaine* and the subject of Astruc's "new avant-guard" (Malraux's *L'Espoir*), and the hand which (soon to perform its function as an appendage of the First Minister of Culture) is on the brink of putting *la Nouvelle Vague* in scene — there is Rivette's own hand, arrested over the keys of a typewriter, on the verge of a judgment that he does not make. The review never tells us we should see the film; he only tells us (in *le Conseil des Dix*) that's it's an *essential* film: a masterpiece. In fact he argues that there is nothing to see in *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* but the description of an experiment already (here) described.

⁷¹ Malraux, André, *The Voices of Silence*, trans. Stuart Gilbert, New York: Doubleday, 1953, pg. 642.

Thus, Rivette's last paragraphs don't merely *anticipate* the New Wave to come, when Rivette and his Cahiers cohort (will) put down their pens and pick up their cameras. That transition *happens (ed)* here, at the climax of Rivette's review. This is the very *mise-en-scène* of that crossing, the precise point where the "pen" shirks (shirked) its limited function as a describer of films and becomes (became) the film it describes (described) along with all the films that will follow (have followed) from that act of description: *la caméra-stylo*.

CHAPTER TWO

Corresponding Vessels : Truffaut-Hitchcock

“Qu’est-ce qu’un metteur en scène? Un metteur en scène c’est quelqu’un qui en pose sans arrêt des questions, des questions à propos de tout. Quelquefois il a des réponses, mais pas toujours.”

– François Truffaut, *La Nuit américaine*

I. The Truffaut-Hitchcock Correspondence

Apart from the scholastic uses to which it has mostly been put, Truffaut’s massive book of interviews with Alfred Hitchcock is a Truffaut work through and through.⁷² This is obviously the case to the extent that Truffaut orchestrated the conversation, the true dimensions of which Hitchcock himself, like one of his own hapless protagonists, caught in someone else’s “plot,” did not and could not know. But the book is also Truffaut’s because it partakes of the very universality that Truffaut imputes to Hitchcock himself *within* the book — a universality that is keyed to Truffaut’s particular sense of what a book is. For the maker of *Fahrenheit 451* (1966) and *L’Homme qui aimait les femmes* (1977), after all, a book is nothing less than a person.

The “Hitchbook” (Truffaut’s pet name for the project) was precisely that sort of book for Truffaut. He began the project at the crest of both his career and Hitchcock’s, in the wake of *Jules et Jim* (1962) and *The Birds* (1963). It was finally published for the first time in 1967, when both men were reeling from commercial failures. He wrote the epilogue, which amounts to a eulogy for its subject, in 1983, very near the end of his own life. The epilogue is among his very last works. Thus, we might think of the Hitchbook as an autobiography that runs alongside the “official” one, the Antoine Doinel cycle, which encompassed the same span of years (insofar as the Antoine films became a cycle with *Antoine et Colette*, in 1962; the last Antoine film was *L’Amour en fuite*, released in 1979). This is a reference book and a technical manual — the go-to source for Hitchcock specialists seeking his signature pronouncements and an explanation of “how he did it” — into which Truffaut poured his entire, evolving sensibility. Indeed, the final edition resembles nothing so much as a photo album, replete with documents — postcards, fragments of notes, letters, inside jokes, and personal photos of Truffaut together with Hitchcock at various ceremonies and public events — that evoke the accumulations of a marriage.

Often in the book, especially in the 1983 epilogue, we have the impression that Truffaut is superimposing his own features on those of his idol. Truffaut’s Hitchcock is nothing like the Jansenist exegete of Chabrol and Rohmer’s monograph, let alone the “murderous gazer” or ominous “Absent One” of later theories. Instead, he is lovelorn and familial, utterly dependent on the women in his life, yet incessantly in pursuit of an “ideal” — a Grace Kelly, an Ingrid Bergman; a painfully shy person who cloaks his

⁷² Subsequent footnotes refer to the definitive edition of this book: François Truffaut (with the collaboration of Helen G. Scott), *Hitchcock*, rev. ed. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983); the parallel French edition is Truffaut, François, *Hitchcock: Édition Définitive* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003).

social discomfort in scrupulous pre-planning and in an art of rigorous, empirical effects; a successful businessman who always calculates the “public” into the equation and is heartbroken when it rejects him; an anachronism, who quixotically tries to prolong a feeling for classical cinema into a period characterized by “visual culture,” prurient sex, and radical politics; and a sensualist for whom love scenes and murder scenes are indistinguishable. He is very much like the alter egos Truffaut imagines for himself in films like *La Nuit américaine* (1973) and *Tirez sur le pianiste* (1960). At the same time, his interlocutor, “Truffaut,” often displays characteristics that we might associate with Hitchcock — a ruthlessness and cunning during the interview that evoke scenes from *Psycho* (1960) and *The Wrong Man* (1956).

Nonetheless, the dominant figure by which we should understand the Truffaut-Hitchcock relationship, as refracted through the text, is not the Hitchcockian “double,” with its overtones of the uncanny and Edgar Allan Poe (although Truffaut once wrote an influential article about the doubles in *Shadow of a Doubt*, 1943). Instead, the book transpires under the sign of “correspondence.” This term hearkens to Charles Baudelaire’s poetic “unisons” and to what we might call the “epistolary imagination” underpinning Truffaut’s work. Both meanings of correspondence come into play in the Hitchbook. From their meeting in 1962 onward, Truffaut and Hitchcock are inexplicably harmonized, to the point where to speak of one is to speak of the other. At least, to speak of either of them is to speak of the *book*, the record of their correspondence — their duet.

This statement may be startling, considering that we traditionally think of Truffaut’s relationship to his other artistic “father,” Jean Renoir, as the harmonious one, lending the generous spirit of “everyone has his reasons” to Truffaut’s humanist masterpieces. Critics usually find Hitchcock’s “influence” on Truffaut more troubling, associating it with Truffaut’s late-sixties *films maudits*, *La Mariée était en noir* (1968) and *La Sirène du Mississippi* (1969). With this notion of “correspondence,” however, I mean to suggest something much deeper and more elusive than “influence,” while also complicating the idea that Hitchcock was only “father” to Truffaut. He was also the subject of Truffaut’s book and thus inextricably linked to Truffaut’s personhood. Within that book Hitchcock plays multiple roles for Truffaut; and the book, in turn, has played multiple roles in film history. The significance of this argument is that “Hitchcock” — surrounded by the quotation marks appended to the name by English and American film students in the 1970s, the period of the book’s greatest influence — was a major result of the book. “Hitchcock,” therefore, should be counted among Truffaut’s children.

Letters played a privileged role in Truffaut’s creativity, even launching his two most indelible pieces of criticism, “Une Certaine Tendance du cinéma français” and the “Hitchbook.”⁷³ Furthermore, an epistle is often the key to the particular *suspense* in

⁷³ Truffaut’s “Une Certaine Tendance du cinéma français” lay the *political* groundwork for the *politique des auteurs* by militating against the French “Tradition of Quality” films, France’s festival-ready movies of the 1940s and 1950s. Truffaut’s notorious polemic began with a ruse. Truffaut approached Pierre Bost, an important screenwriter of the “Tradition of Quality” variety, claiming to be a devoted fan. Flattered by the young critic’s compliments, Bost gave Truffaut access to his drawer of un-filmed screenplays, which turned out to be a fatal act of hubris. In “Une Certaine Tendance,” Truffaut published extracts from these scripts to illustrate the moral and aesthetic bankruptcy of

Truffaut's films, which frequently pivot on the great expectations that are aroused by the transmission and reception of a heartfelt note. In the frontispiece to the final version of the Hitchbook, from 1983, Truffaut writes, "Alfred Hitchcock made 53 films and one daughter. I dedicate this book to Patricia Hitchcock O'Connell" — and prints the dedication in his own handwriting. Was he thinking of his own children? Or was he imagining Adèle H., the daughter of Victor Hugo and heroine of his 1975 film, who devoted her tragic life to writing fervid and unanswered love letters to a callous English soldier?

II. Pneu-ma-tique!

It all began with a love letter.

"Dear Mr. Hitchcock," François Truffaut wrote from Paris, on 2 June 1962.

"Allow me to remind you who I am." He then proceeds to relate the anecdote that will also begin the finished book, the funny, humiliating story of his first meeting with Alfred Hitchcock. In 1954, while still fledgling *cinéastes* on assignment for *Cahiers du Cinéma*, Truffaut and his colleague Claude Chabrol approached the venerable filmmaker for an interview in Saint Maurice, where he was polishing the soundtrack for *To Catch a Thief* (1955). Overcome with joy after witnessing some tantalizing images from the work in progress, and blinded by the dazzling sun in the courtyard, the two young journalists stumbled into an icy lake and had to be fished out by a "charitable bystander." Hitchcock, sizing up his trembling, semi-frozen petitioners and their ruined tape recorder, tactfully proposed that they reconvene for the interview at his hotel later that evening.⁷⁴

The scene could have appeared in one of the Antoine Antoine films. Truffaut, the precocious young private investigator, bungles his first encounter with an awe-inspiring grown-up, the object of a thousand lonely reveries, who responds to his embarrassment with kindness and thereby acknowledges an affinity. The punch line of the frozen lake story, too, seems to belong to the chronicle of Antoine's sexual misadventures. It specifically recalls those moments when Truffaut's maladroit hero attempts to cover a narcissistic wound with a show of good-humored bravado, revealing by the cracks in his smile and by his very insistence that he's not over it yet. "Subsequently, each time you visited Paris, I had the pleasure of meeting you," Truffaut writes. "And the following year you even said to me, 'Whenever I see ice cubes in a glass of whisky I think of you.'"⁷⁵

the contemporary French cinema. See Antoine de Baecque and Serge Toubiana, François Truffaut (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1996), trans. Catherine Temerson as Truffaut: A Biography (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), pp. 72-76 and 399 (for Bost's aggrieved letter to Truffaut: "In any case, sir, you lack elegance. I'm sorry to tell you so, but I'm entitled to say at least that."); and Antoine de Baecque, La Cinéphilie: Invention d'un regard, histoire d'une culture 1944-1968 (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2003), pp. 135-136.

⁷⁴ François Truffaut to Alfred Hitchcock, in François Truffaut: Correspondance, ed. Gilles Jacob and Claude de Givray (Paris: Librairie A. Hatier, 1988), trans. Gilbert Adair as François Truffaut: Correspondence 1945-1984 (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1989), p. 177; Truffaut, Hitchcock (1983), pp. 13-14.

⁷⁵ François Truffaut: Correspondance, p. 177.

* * *

Baiser volés (1968), the third film in the Antoine cycle, has a great scene that portrays Antoine's unendurable embarrassment in the presence of an older person to whom he is painfully devoted. It therefore owes more than a formal debt to Hitchcock. Indeed, beginning with *La Peau douce* (1964), the first film he made after his epochal 1962 meeting with Hitchcock, Truffaut's work not only reflects, but also *thematizes* an "anxiety of influence." The later Antoinettes, for example, put Truffaut's alter ego into confrontation with a new set of Hitchcockian rules, both cinematic and social.

The scene in question begins when Antoine is left briefly, terrifyingly alone with the dazzling ("astonishing, magnificent, superlative!") Fabienne Tabard, when her husband — his boss — leaves the room for a moment. We know that she knows that Antoine is in love with her, for in the previous scene we witnessed her eavesdropping on a conversation between two shop girls about Antoine's obsession. Antoine does not know that she knows, however, and there is awkwardness between them as he tries to control his trembling coffee cup. She smiles coquettishly and twirls her spoon. They squirm in their chairs for a full minute, not talking. Finally she goes to the record player, asking him if he likes music. "Oui, *monsieur*," he blurts.

Seeing her startled expression, Antoine realizes the enormity of his error. Yes, *sir* — had he unconsciously mistaken Madame for Alfred Hitchcock?⁷⁶ The tension

⁷⁶ Truffaut on what the scene owes to Hitchcock: "We know that Jean-Pierre is in love with Delphine but we also know that she knows and that Léaud doesn't know that she knows so the game goes three ways. The scene is not between Jean-Pierre and Delphine. It's between Jean-Pierre, Delphine, and the audience. It's much stronger with three players, much more intense, which means you can take your time. The long silences make you expect something unusual. Perhaps he'll lunge at her for a kiss. We don't know what to expect, but we expect something. My only direction to them was, stir the sugar not once but six times. Don't sip it right away. We have all the time in the world in a scene like this where the situation is so intense. The anticipation comes to a climax with this 'Yes, sir.' The wrong way to do the scene would be to fade to the next scene. This 'Yes, sir' is like a moving locomotive. To keep it on track, you have to keep the momentum. Your only salvation is flight. So the music becomes very frenzied. I asked Duhamel for something like a chase scene in American movies, and, most importantly, not to break the tension. The music mustn't stop, even when there's dialogue. It's a frenzy. The camera is constantly moving. . . . It's a lesson from Hitchcock, who said: 'You work hard to create an emotion, and once the emotion is created, you work even harder to maintain it.' You mustn't dissolve or break it." Interview with Truffaut, in Jean-Pierre Chartier (dir.), *Cinéastes de notre temps: François Truffaut* (1970), from François Truffaut (dir.), *Stolen Kisses* (1968; The Criterion Collection, 2003), DVD. Delphine Seyrig, the actress who plays Fabienne, is a classically Hitchcockian blonde. Moreover, she was the star of Alain Resnais's *Muriel* (1963), which Truffaut reviewed as if it were a Hitchcock film. In that review, Truffaut reports that he conveyed a morbid letter from Hitchcock to Resnais about another, unfortunate "Muriel"; see François Truffaut, *Les films de ma vie* (Paris: Flammarion, 1975), trans. Leonard Mayhew as *The Films in My Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978), p. 327. Finally, the toppling coffee cup

explodes. He drops his coffee, which topples across the tray — Truffaut registers the seeping black liquid in a woozy camera tilt — then dashes out of the apartment, down the winding steps of her building, through a chaotic shop, and out into the busy street. Some time later he slinks dejectedly up the stairs to his meager, depressing flat. There by his front door he finds three silk neckties in a box, garnished by a droll card from Fabienne Tabard. Like her gift — three phallic symbols and instruments of strangulation — the card is Hitchcockian. It's a ribald parable, intended to reassure Antoine and to provoke him at the same time:

A college professor of mine explained the difference between politeness and tact. A gentleman mistakenly opens a bathroom door and finds a woman totally naked. He quickly steps back, closes the door and says, 'Pardon me, madam.' That's politeness. The same gentleman opens the same door and finds the same naked woman, and says, 'Pardon me, sir.' That's tact. I understand why you ran off, Antoine. Until tomorrow.

Accompanied by the insinuating gift of the neckties, Fabienne's card amplifies the first humiliation by redoubling its sexual confusion. Here, according to the message's logics of substitution, Antoine is both the woman in the toilet and the man who stumbles in by mistake. Thus, he has been multiply exposed in the nakedness of his longing for Fabienne. But Fabienne is equally stripped. By her letter Antoine knows that Fabienne has made herself *available*. Seizing the opportunity of his inadvertent self-exposure, she has put herself at risk. She is at risk, because she suspects what we have guessed, that Antoine's crush is predicated on the closed doors that she is now hurling open — he admired her when she was taboo; she also knows that Antoine probably did not know this about himself, until he read her note.

Until tomorrow. . . . Earlier in the film, Truffaut showed Antoine in front of his bathroom mirror, chanting, "Fabienne Tabard, Fabienne Tabard," over and over, until it became his own name. "Antoine Doinel, Antoine Doinel," he said with increasing vehemence, flexing his hands, until he was out of breath from slinging the words at his reflection. Is this the "bathroom" into which Fabienne has just barged? The private space of his fantasy life, where his narcissism is in full view?

Antoine composes his miserable response — "I'm unworthy of your generosity. You'll never see me again. I've quit my job at the shop. . . . I'm a worse imposter than you could ever imagine. . . . Adieu" — and thrusts it into a mail slot. "Pneu-ma-tic," he pronounces in voiceover, one distinct syllable for each necktie, as his missive wends its fateful course.

* * *

Now imagine a transatlantic system of pneumatic mail tubes, along the lines of the one in *Baiser volés* that conducts Antoine's anguished reply through the labyrinthine tunnels below the streets of Paris and into the presence of Madame Tabard. From Truffaut's desk in Paris, in June 1962, the Hitchcock letter rocketed to Helen Scott, in

suggests the poisoned coffees that Sebastien and his mother administer to Ingrid Bergman in *Notorious* (1946), as well as other tainted liquids in Hitchcock's works.

the French Film Office in New York (“She carries out simultaneous translations at such a speed that we would have the impression of speaking to one another without any intermediary,” Truffaut told Hitchcock)⁷⁷; Scott dispatched it to Los Angeles, where it ricocheted off Hitchcock’s agent (“It’s essential we avoid going through that very unpleasant agent of his, with whom I exchanged a few bitter-sweet words” Truffaut instructed)⁷⁸ to land directly on the Bel-Air doorstep of the man who, thanks to Truffaut’s ministrations, would soon be universally recognized as “the greatest film director in the world” and the only *auteur* “left standing” if and when the cinema goes mute.⁷⁹ “I come now to the point,” Alfred Hitchcock read:

Since I have become a director myself, my admiration for you has in no way weakened; on the contrary, it has grown stronger and changed in nature. There are many directors with a love for the cinema, but what you possess is a love of celluloid itself and it is that that I would like to talk to you about. I would like you to grant me a tape-recorded interview which would take about eight days to conduct and would add up to about thirty hours of recordings. The point of this would be to distil not a series of articles but an entire book which would be published simultaneously in New York . . . and Paris . . . then, probably later, more or less everywhere in the world. . . . Awaiting your reply, I beg you to accept, dear Mr. Hitchcock, my profound admiration. I remain
Yours sincerely, François Truffaut.⁸⁰

Hitchcock cabled his acceptance at once. The “stops” in his telegram gasp with emotion: “Dear Monsieur Truffaut — Your letter brought tears to my eyes and I am so grateful to receive such a tribute from you — Stop — . . . I think we will wait until we have finished shooting *The Birds* and then I will contact you with the idea of getting together around the end of August — Stop — Thank you again for your charming letter — Kind regards — Cordially yours — Alfred Hitchcock.” The successful suitor received Hitchcock’s message with triumph. Truffaut wrote to Scott that he “never doubted for a moment what his answer would be,” and immediately began plotting his itinerary for the historic interlude.⁸¹

III. The “Hitchbook”

The result is one of Truffaut’s most enduring contributions to global film culture and a book that nearly everybody loves. The Hitchbook is a singularity. Not only is there no other book like it — it is impossible to *imagine* another book like it, so perfectly does it fit its contradictory moment and the sensibilities of the two men (and one woman — Helen Scott, who is the main character on the tape recordings, indefatigably injecting perfect French into Hitchcock’s languid pauses and peppering Truffaut’s darting, tense French with crisp English; she is the hyphen in *Hitchcock-Truffaut*, just as Catherine is

⁷⁷ François Truffaut: Correspondence 1945-1984, p. 178.

⁷⁸ François Truffaut: Correspondence 1945-1984, pp. 181-182.

⁷⁹ François Truffaut: Correspondence 1945-1984, p. 179.

⁸⁰ François Truffaut: Correspondence 1945-1984, pp. 178-179.

⁸¹ François Truffaut: Correspondence 1945-1984, p. 183.

the “et” between *Jules et Jim*) involved in its production. It’s a book that one can as easily imagine holding pride of place on Christian Metz’s desk as on Steven Spielberg’s.

By now, of course, the book is recognized as the essential Hitchcock concordance. In France, the book was originally published with the New Testament-tinged title, *Le Cinéma selon Hitchcock* — and, indeed, it’s become the standard Hitchcock gospel for film scholars and biographers: within its pages is the famous parable about the MacGuffin (demonstrating that what interests the characters within the film and what interests the film’s audience are rarely the same thing); Hitchcock’s instruction on the nature of “suspense” (the audience knows there’s a bomb under the table, but the characters don’t); the lesson on the difference between a mystery plot and a Hitchcock plot (the Hitchcock plot is grounded in suspense, which is the opposite of “surprise”); the enumeration of the cinematic sins committed by “our friends the plausible” (those critics and filmmakers who valorize narrative credibility over pure cinema); and so on. As with Shakespeare, virtually every page is filled with a piquant anecdote or a witty aphorism that we recognize as a familiar quote. On parallel lines, the published work captures Truffaut’s criticism at its most accessible, controversial, and astute. Here we find Truffaut’s definitive observation that Hitchcock filmed his love scenes like murder scenes and his murder scenes like love scenes; his incendiary hortatory on the antithesis between “Cinema” and “Britain;” his passing, but crucial for cinephiles, remarks on “great flawed films” . . . and his overarching argument, made much more forcefully here than in the book’s obvious forebear, Chabrol and Rohmer’s *Hitchcock: The First Forty-Four Films* (1957), that Hitchcock’s Hollywood films dispense with all “contexts” other than the passionate vision of their creator.

Here, too, are the technical details that grounded the filmmaking of the burgeoning New Hollywood *auteurs* in Hitchcock’s pedagogy. Hitchcock’s gripping demonstrations for Truffaut of precisely how he achieved *tour de force* shots in films like *Psycho* and *Vertigo* (1958) galvanized Scorsese, De Palma, and Spielberg and the other seventies “superstars.” The Hitchbook, I assert, is the root of all Hitchcockianisms. Every shot that usually goes by the designation “Hitchcockian” is described somewhere in the book.⁸² American film students from that generation also absorbed the fundamental principles of the Hitchcock oeuvre *qua* Hitchcock: plausibility should always be sacrificed to emotion; style should serve the needs of the story (and point of view); character cedes to situation; and every shot within a sequence should be storyboarded for “maximum impact.” The book is more nuanced and dialectical about such matters than Hitchcock himself is. In fact, the drama of the text resides in its tense moments when there is a methodological disagreement between the two men — when Hitchcock sanctions Truffaut for a laxly edited sequence in *Jules et Jim*; or when Truffaut offers his

⁸² Indeed, the book has made fleeting, Hitchcock-like cameo appearances in other films. For example, it shows up on a shelf in Brian De Palma’s counterculture classic, *Greetings* (1968), many years before De Palma was recognized as the book’s best pupil. My favorite walk-on of Truffaut’s Hitchcock tome is in Sam Fuller’s *White Dog* (1982). Kristy McNichol brings the book as a gift to a friend in the hospital who is recuperating from a savage attack by the titular creature — a German Shepard that was trained to attack black people. Fuller never clarifies why McNichol is giving her friend this particular gift or how it will aid in her convalescence.

opinion that Hitchcock was the wrong director for *The Wrong Man* because he had no feel for documentary.

The Hitchcock myth really begins here, with the US publication of Truffaut's *Hitchcock*, a truth that even the usually proprietary Peter Bogdanovich acknowledges (Truffaut consulted Bogdanovich's 1961 interview with Hitchcock in preparing for the book).⁸³ The watershed impact of the book was no doubt partly attributable to the "cultural laundromat" effect the French New Wave had on America's relationship to its own cinema (one has to remember that Truffaut was held in higher esteem than Hitchcock in the US in the sixties, a situation that the book, ironically, had a part in overturning); but it also had to do with the book's physical presentation, in particular, its lavish pictures and big soft covers, which allowed readers in the pre-home video days to have the illusion of experiencing the Hitchcock catalogue in its entirety, to the accompaniment of the greatest "director's commentary" ever conceived. This is a book — I can attest — which even *children* read, thereby fulfilling Truffaut's highest expectations for the project: "In my opinion," he wrote on 5 July 1962,

the interest of the book will lie in the fact that it will describe in a very meticulous fashion one the greatest and most complete careers in the cinema and, at the same time, constitute a very precise study of the intellectual and mental, but also physical and material, "fabrication" of films. I'd like everyone who makes films to be able to learn something from it, and also everyone whose dream it is to become a filmmaker. There you have it as far as Hitchcock is concerned.⁸⁴

* * *

Despite its breathless beginnings, the interview did not appear in print until 1967, five years after Truffaut and Hitchcock first met for a fifty-hour conversation in Hitchcock's office at Universal Studios, and thirteen years after Truffaut and Chabrol "broke the ice" in Saint Maurice. For *Cahiers du Cinéma*, soon to be radicalized by the 1968 events, Hitchcock's legacy was secure. What was needed was a more flexible "politique" that could take account of the new cinemas emerging in Europe and elsewhere in the world. By 1967, in fact, French literati were proclaiming the death of the author, and soon thereafter Jean-Luc Godard would bury his father's name in the so-called Dziga Vertov Collective. At the same moment, in a kind of historical parallax, American critics and filmmakers were enshrining "auteurism" as their dominant critical and industrial paradigm, under the acknowledged influence of Godard and Truffaut. Just as European cinephile communities were abolishing the "author," fifties-style "authorial politics" were forming the philosophical nucleus of a New Hollywood cinema. (This was evidently a reversal of the usual axiom that the French get everything ten years after the

⁸³ "It was François Truffaut's interview book . . . that finally altered the balance: certain of us have an insecurity/snobbishness about things homegrown so that it usually takes foreign approval to make such work respectable." Peter Bogdanovich, *Who the Devil Made It?* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), p. 474. Robin Wood's *Hitchcock's Films* was first published in 1965, and also contributed to Hitchcock's worldwide critical reputation in the mid-sixties.

⁸⁴ *François Truffaut: Correspondence 1945-1984*, p. 192.

Americans.) Truffaut had firsthand experience with the latter development, for in 1964 he gave some structural lessons, no doubt gleaned from Hitchcock, to the screenwriters of *Bonnie and Clyde*.⁸⁵

Truffaut wanted the Hitchbook to mediate between French and American film contexts. As implied in the above-quoted letter, he imagined a work that would appear on both sides of the Atlantic at once — a simultaneous transcription, made possible by Helen Scott's dexterous cross-linguistic renderings. This was not to be. First, Truffaut probably underestimated the difficulty of producing a readable transcript from a prolonged conversation in two languages. Despite the almost eerie focus and precision that presides over the voices on the tapes — listening to them, you almost feel like Truffaut could have realized his plan, so eloquent are the conversationalists — one must always construct the *illusion* of improvisation, as we learn from a key conversation in the book about *Murder!* (1933). Second, the vicissitudes of obtaining the necessary film stills and the relevant permissions for using them caused endless delays. Third, film projects intervened and claimed the better part of each man's attention (*La Peau douce* and *Fahrenheit 451* in Truffaut's case; 1964's *Marnie* and 1966's *Torn Curtain* in Hitchcock's). And fourth, Truffaut was apparently reluctant to relinquish the solitude of his memories of his Hitchcock idyll. From the correspondence, one gets the sense that Truffaut — laboriously tracking down and printing photographic stills from Hitchcock films for his book — was delaying the moment when he would have to open those tender, cherished hours he had spent in Hitchcock's thrall to the gaze of the world.

Nevertheless, and in ways Truffaut could not have anticipated, the Hitchbook accomplished its objective. In retrospect, *Hitchcock-Truffaut* forges an unlikely bridge between the French “death of the author” and the “American authorial apotheosis,” absorbing the transatlantic *décalage* into its dialogic structure. On the one side it emblemizes a triumphant auteurism — the ultimate meeting of cinematic titans (the 1983 reprinting puts their surnames in bold, capital letters and even makes an imposing palindrome of them on the spine). On the other side, it almost unwittingly models a post-structuralist critique of “the subject” and builds a Hitchcockian foundation for *l'analyse du film*.

IV. The Man We Love to Be Hated By

In the preface to the book, and also in his letters, Truffaut illuminates several reasons for writing it, among which his encounter with American critics was probably the most significant for determining the book's final intellectual shape. While in the United States promoting *Jules et Jim*, he says, journalists constantly quizzed him about the French fascination with Alfred Hitchcock. “I noticed that every journalist asked me the same question,” he writes:

“Why do the critics of *Cahiers du Cinéma* take Hitchcock so seriously? He's rich and successful but his movies have no substance.” In the course of an interview during which I praised *Rear Window* [1954] to the skies, an American critic

⁸⁵ For a wonderful account of Truffaut's part in the development of *Bonnie and Clyde*, see Mark Davis, *Pictures at a Revolution: Five Movies and the Birth of the New Hollywood* (New York: Penguin, 2008), pp. 34-37.

surprised me by commenting, “You love *Rear Window* because, as a stranger to New York, you know nothing about Greenwich Village.” To this absurd statement, I replied, “*Rear Window* is not about Greenwich Village, it is a film about cinema, and I *do* know cinema.”⁸⁶

What was needed, Truffaut realized, was a book that would do for Hitchcock in America what *Cahiers* had already done for Hitchcock in Europe — establish his credentials as a great artist, arguably the greatest artist in the cinema. To accomplish this, Hitchcock’s artistry would have to be made understandable to the critics Truffaut encountered on his trip. “When talking to American journalists,” he explained to Scott, “I came to realize that, even though Hitchcock is very popular in America, he’s only understood very superficially and, above all, he’s considerably underrated as an artist by the critics. In France, on the contrary, he’s been supported, especially on the part of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, by a major critical movement, though one that’s too excessively intellectual, and what we have to achieve in this book is something between the two, something closer to the truth and above all very exhaustive.”⁸⁷

This would require not only polemic but also *pedagogy*. Truffaut had to teach Americans to see *cinema* where before they had seen Greenwich Village. Correspondingly, he would have to reinvent Hitchcock. The fact was, *Cahiers du Cinéma*’s Hitchcock was intellectual in the extreme — both in the sense that his art had been made visible by the critical labors of intellectuals who wrote passionately, and intellectually, about it; and also because the dominant theme of these writings was that Hitchcock’s art was superlative for the reason that it manifested *la caméra-stylo* — an intellection in images. Arguably, *Cahiers* even based its critique on the premise that Hitchcock’s artistry was imperceptible to the very American mindset Truffaut hoped to reach with his book. For Alexandre Astruc, who first theorized the concept, *la caméra-stylo* was the blind spot of the critical establishment.

Chabrol and Rohmer’s monograph, *Hitchcock: The First Forty-Four Films*, for example, presents itself as a summing-up of the *Cahiers* position and the final word on Hitchcock’s artistic seriousness. A characteristic passage concerns a line from *Saboteur* (1942), one of Hitchcock’s most self-consciously “Hitchcockian” films from the forties. The authors extract runic significance from what seems like a throwaway line:

The hero of the film tells a blind pianist that when he was young he played the triangle but had to give it up. To which the blind man replies that he was wrong to do so, that the triangle is a noble instrument. We like to think that this is an allusion to *The Manxman*, the failure of which forced Hitchcock to give up that noble dramatic instrument known as the 'triangle.' He was not to attempt it again until *Under Capricorn*.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, p. 11.

⁸⁷ François Truffaut: *Correspondence 1945-1984*, p. 191.

⁸⁸ Claude Chabrol and Eric Rohmer, *Hitchcock*, Paris: Editions Universitaires, 1957. trans. Stanley Hochman as *Hitchcock: The First Forty-Four Films*, New York: Frederick Unger, 1979, p. 70.

Chabrol and Rohmer's argument rests on the idea that Hitchcock's most important films were *I Confess* (1953), *The Manxman* (1929), and *Under Capricorn* (1949), all commercial failures. In their view, these grim movies revealed Hitchcock's moral imagination at its bleakest and most pure, precisely because they were shorn of the usual Hitchcock trappings — the humor and spectacle to which his public had grown accustomed. They weren't necessarily his best films — but they were *martyrs*, literally incarnating the Catholic themes of universal guilt and punishment that ordered the Hitchcock universe.

This was not exactly Truffaut's position on Hitchcock, and it seems clear that part of his objective in reinventing Hitchcock for Americans was to rewrite the Chabrol and Rohmer monograph. He structures his book chronologically, as they do, moving in sequence from film to film, and he more or less follows their demarcation of the major Hitchcock periods. However, even in the early days, Hitchcock was first and foremost a commercial artist for Truffaut. "There are two kinds of directors," he wrote about *Rear Window*, in 1954. "Those who have the public in mind when they conceive and make their films and those who don't consider the public at all. . . . For Hitchcock as for Renoir . . . a film has not succeeded unless it is a success, that is, unless it touches the public that one has had in mind right from the moment of choosing the subject matter to the end of production."⁸⁹ In other words, to borrow a later terminology, Hitchcock's cinema is by definition one in which our "gaze" is included. *Rear Window* is *about* the cinema, not simply because of its voyeuristic themes, but also because Hitchcock has calculated the spectator's "wretched" desires into its total effect.

Rear Window is a film about indiscretion, about intimacy violated and taken by surprise at its most wretched moments; a film about the impossibility of happiness, about dirty linen that gets washed in the courtyard; a film about moral solitude, an extraordinary symphony of daily life and ruined dreams. . . . To clarify . . . I'd suggest this parable: the courtyard is the world, the reporter/photographer is the filmmaker, the binoculars stand for the camera and its lenses. And Hitchcock? He is the man we love to be hated by.⁹⁰

This may seem obvious to us today, after forty years of film theory premised on this very insight into *Rear Window*. But it marks a significant reorientation of the "excessively intellectual" Hitchcock that *Cahiers* propagandized elsewhere. For Chabrol and Rohmer, *I Confess* and *The Wrong Man* were as isolate and guilt-ridden as their respective protagonists. For them, these movies were *sui generis* — a self-affirming proposition, in so far as it was vouchsafed by the fact that these movies had failed to find an audience (and of course by the films that Chabrol and Rohmer made themselves, under the influence of their "Jansenist" Hitchcock).⁹¹

⁸⁹ Truffaut, *The Films in My Life*, p. 77.

⁹⁰ Truffaut, *The Films in My Life*, pp. 78-79.

⁹¹ In an interview given in the early 1960s, Truffaut pinned the box office failures of recent New Wave films on their lack of structure. "[Truffaut] blamed Chabrol for the failure of his 1960 film *Les Bonnes Femmes* — specifically for being unwilling 'to imagine how Hitchcock would have undertaken a film like *Les Bonnes Femmes*' — and

For Truffaut, on the other hand, Hitchcock's great accomplishment was to use the means of cinema to share his very particular obsessions with a large public. We are made to experience his fears, his loneliness, his desires, his guilt, and his (self)-contempt along with him. Hence, Hitchcock's most commercial films — his most "Hitchcockian" — are also his most personal. For Truffaut, this seeming paradox made Hitchcock's work universal. "Hitchcock is almost unique in being able to film directly, that is, without resorting to explanatory dialogue, such intimate emotions as suspicion, jealousy, desire, and envy," he writes in his introduction to the Hitchbook. "And herein lies a paradox: the director who, through the simplicity and clarity of his work, is the most accessible to a universal audience, is also the director who excels at filming the most complex and subtle relationships between human beings."⁹²

Truffaut concludes scandalously, challenging Hitchcock's puritanical American critics to admit to their own *jouissance*: "To reproach Hitchcock for specializing in suspense is to accuse him of being the least boring of filmmakers; it is also tantamount to blaming a lover who instead of concentrating on his own pleasure insists on sharing it with his partner."⁹³

* * *

A pedagogical impulse is evident in Truffaut's decision to structure the book as an interview with Hitchcock himself, who "exhaustively" demonstrates his sophisticated understanding of those "complex and subtle relationships between human beings." No doubt this testimony would satisfy the American reader Truffaut probably imagined, for whom artistic importance equaled serious intentions realized. But the interview form also brought new layers of complexity to the project. In the first place, the conversation at times resembles an interrogation from one of Hitchcock's own films. More centrally, the drama of the exchange often turns on misrecognitions, whereby each man seems to be responding to his own ideas of what he believes the other to be seeing in him. Such a dynamic is especially evident in those moments when Hitchcock, finding in Truffaut the reflection of his own, clichéd image of a French intellectual, asks him to verify his understanding of a symbolic detail from one of his works. Truffaut, perceiving in this gesture an evasion, evades — although it is possible that Hitchcock is simply trying to *connect*:

Truffaut: The finale of *The Lodger*, when the hero is handcuffed, suggests a lynching.

Hitchcock: Yes, when he tried to climb over the railings. Psychologically, of course, the idea of the handcuffs has deeper implications. Being tied to something...it's somewhere in the area of fetishism, isn't it?

he described the film that Chabrol should have made, calling it *The Shopgirls Vanish*. The editors of *Cahiers* summarized Truffaut's remarks in a telling caption: "Let's Imitate Hitchcock." Brody, Richard, *Everything is Cinema: The Working Life of Jean-Luc Godard*, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2008, pg. 123.

⁹² Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, pp. 17-18.

⁹³ Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, pg. 16.

Truffaut: I don't know, but I have noticed that handcuffs have a way of recurring in your movies.⁹⁴

Of such exchanges, when Truffaut deflects one of Hitchcock's self-analytical gestures (which are themselves "deflections"), William Rothman writes:

Truffaut's book reads like the script of a play or, more exactly, the transcript of a trial. Hitchcock's intelligence can be discerned, but only by reading the dialogue as a scene in a Hitchcock film, imagining Hitchcock as, say, Norman Bates and Truffaut as Marion Crane. The author of *Psycho* could not be oblivious of how Truffaut changes the subject or speaks for him every time a "serious" matter comes up. Viewed in the Hitchcock spirit, Truffaut's obtuseness is often very funny, but the poignancy of Hitchcock's situation is all too real: unable to enter into a serious conversation with a man who thinks he is his intellectual superior but is far from his equal, Hitchcock remains isolated and unacknowledged.⁹⁵

Rothman exaggerates. It's hard to see how Hitchcock is unacknowledged by a book that exalts him from first word to last. However, it is clear that Truffaut wants to avoid the modality of the "excessively intellectual" Chabrol and Rohmer text, with its emphasis on deep symbolic structures (those "triangles" which communicate subliminally from film to film). If this avoidance doesn't have the effect of isolating Hitchcock in the way that Rothman suggests, it does alienate Hitchcock the person, with his all-too-human prejudices and preconceptions, from the "Hitchcock" of the films, which (not who) is the dominant subject of the conversation.

Two consequences follow from this alienation within the Hitchcock persona. On the one hand, the discussion becomes flagrantly auteurist: Hitchcock is asked to describe his original intentions for each of his projects, and then to comment on how well he believes the finished films have realized them. The object of this exercise is to *handcuff*, so to speak, Hitchcock the man to the "Hitchcock" we imagine when watching the films. And yet, Truffaut's dramatic presence in the book establishes a fraught and sometimes perilous situation. Under pressure to delineate the meanings of the work as a whole for another who seems to possess all the interpretative keys, Hitchcock is often compelled to acknowledge his absence from the screen. *The Lodger* (1927) is Hitchcock. *The Skin Game* (1929) is not. *The Wrong Man* isn't *fully* Hitchcock — "Let's file it among the indifferent Hitchcocks."⁹⁶ *Blackmail* (1929) is Hitchcock; so is *Notorious* (1946). *Rebecca* (1940) is Hitchcock as re-imagined by David O. Selznick.

So a second consequence is that a role reversal begins to take place in our reading of the book. Hitchcock begins to assume the Truffaut part, while Truffaut becomes more like Hitchcock (or how we imagine each man should be — Socrates and his disciple). Hitchcock admits to Truffaut that he sometimes makes bad Hitchcock imitations, just like

⁹⁴ Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, p. 47.

⁹⁵ William Rothman, *Hitchcock: The Murderous Gaze*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982, p. 344.

⁹⁶ Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, p. 243.

Truffaut will soon be accused of doing. And Truffaut finally allows Hitchcock to convince him of what both men knew all along, that the quintessential Hitchcocks are those that have had the best success with the public.

* * *

Where Rothman sees *Psycho* in the tensions of this interchange, Raymond Bellour sees Henry James. In a brilliant early review of the book, from the May 1967 issue of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, Bellour compares the Truffaut-Hitchcock correspondence to the finely grained, intra-subjective field of James' 1897 novel, *What Maisie Knew*. His article, called *Ce que savait Hitchcock*, begins with a key quote: "If Beale had an idea at the back of his head she had also one in a recess as deep, and for a time, while they sat together, there was an extraordinary mute passage between her vision of this vision of his, his vision of her vision, and her vision of his vision of her vision."⁹⁷

For Bellour, Hitchcock's work is centrally about the "way desire and fear are bound up in the act of seeing/knowing."⁹⁸ He distills this idea from Truffaut's investigatory procedures. Bellour's conceptual insights into those "extraordinary mute passages" taken up by the spiraling "visions" of Truffaut and Hitchcock lead him to impute the Hitchcock's "imaginary" to Hitchcock's films.⁹⁹ Hitchcock's cinema, he argues,

irremediably ruins any objectivity of representable content by a violent regression that articulates, in the sole gaze of he who organizes them, the shimmering series of representations. This is what explains those games of interposed visions that always return to the home from which they originate, thus determining between Hitchcock and his characters even more directly than between the characters themselves, a perpetual relationship of consensual doubling that finds in the scissions and oppositions of characters an echo as perverse as it is essential.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Henry James, *What Maisie Knew*, New York: Modern Library, 2002, p. 137.

⁹⁸ Constance Penley, preface to Raymond Bellour and Constance Penley (ed.), *The Analysis of Film*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000, p. xi.

⁹⁹ Intriguingly, these moments *are* "extraordinarily mute" on the tapes — filled with *caution*. We might also recall that Truffaut's introduction to the book accentuates the fundamental silence of Hitchcock's work; Hitchcock's cinema accesses the subtleties of human emotion without "explanatory dialogue."

¹⁰⁰ "ruine d'une manière irrémédiable toute objectivité des contenus représentables par une régression violente qui articule, dans le seul regard de celui qui les dispose, la série miroitante des représentations. C'est là ce qui explique ces jeux des visions interposées qui toujours en reviennent au foyer d'où elles s'originent, déterminant entre Hitchcock et ses personnages bien plus directement encore qu'entre les personnages eux-mêmes, une perpétuelle relation de dédoublement consenti qui trouve dans les scissions et les oppositions de personnages un écho tout aussi pervers qu'indispensable." Bellour, Raymond, "Ce que savait Hitchcock," *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 190 (May 1967), p. 36. (I wish to thank David Pettersen, University of Pittsburg, for his help with the translation.)

Here Bellour announces the strategies of his own later film analyses and promulgates an incipient version of the “gaze theory” that will be elaborated by Christian Metz and Laura Mulvey. Furthermore, he definitively assigns to the “gaze” what will come to feel like its native coordinates — the films of Alfred Hitchcock.

V. What Truffaut Knew

Bellour’s Henry James analogy is also fortuitous in another way, for Maisie might as well be a Truffaut character. In the book, Maisie is the troubled but perspicacious child of divorce, shuttled between the new couples that her parents have formed with other people. As Bellour observes, Maisie is constantly seeking the “form of her life and the reality of her desire” in the eyes of the adults who surround her. Her parents and her parents’ lovers dodge Maisie’s visits out of guilt. When in her presence, they implicitly beseech from her an outward sign of forgiveness or accusation. Maisie can neither forgive nor accuse, because her knowledge of the total situation is confined to her own need to have her emerging identity ratified by a sympathetic adult. By the end of James’s novel, Maisie has completely lost her “moral sense.” She has, at first uncomprehendingly, and then with full self-consciousness, manipulated every grown-up in her orbit. But, with her newfound awareness of her existential solitude, she has also put herself on the path to “*all* knowledge.”

Bellour concludes his review with an allusion to Hitchcock’s childhood memory. Early in Truffaut’s book, Hitchcock recounts an incident when his parents, aided by the neighborhood constabulary, put him in jail to teach him an inexplicable lesson. Bellour imagines little Hitchcock as Maisie, seeking an explanation for his senseless punishment in the empty stares of the police. Bellour postulates that it was then that Hitchcock lost his “moral sense” and was put on the path to the omniscience that shapes his cinema around dovetailing visions.

The image of little Hitchcock in his jail cell also inevitably recalls *Les 400 Coups* (1959), Truffaut’s first Antoine film. It evokes the famous scene near the end of the movie, when Antoine’s parents imprison him for stealing his father’s typewriter. Antoine, pulling up the collar of his turtleneck sweater so that his mouth is covered, hunches against the cement wall of his cell. His eyes register wary calculation as they take the measure of his new, oppressive surroundings. Bellour’s Henry James comparison thus strings several children together in a sequence of shrewd “looks” between texts — Hitchcock and Maisie, Antoine and Maisie, Truffaut and Hitchcock.

* * *

Hitchcock certainly put Truffaut “on the path” to a different kind of knowledge about himself and his works. From an April 1963 letter to Helen Scott, it is clear that Truffaut is already starting to judge his previous films through Hitchcock’s eyes.¹⁰¹

I’m not convinced by what you say about Hitch concerning *Jules et Jim*, since, on the contrary, it was to be expected that he wouldn’t like it. At best, he probably

¹⁰¹ I have retained Truffaut’s exclamatory underlining. He hurls this discourse at a mirror, like Doinel in *Baisers volés* — “Alfred Hitchcock, Alfred Hitchcock” — “François Truffaut, François Truffaut.”

thinks that, of its type, it's not bad or that it deserves its reputation, but he cannot genuinely like a film which was shot in ignorance and defiance of the laws which he himself has been laying down for thirty-five years to keep audiences on the edge of their seats. For that matter, he's obviously a puritan and therefore opposed to any favourable [sic] depiction of adultery, etc.¹⁰²

His next film was a far more somber, if not necessarily puritanical, treatment of adultery than *Jules et Jim*. *La Peau douce* everywhere shows the influence of Truffaut's Hitchcock experience and his incorporation of the "laws" that he was busily putting down in the book at the same time. From the first scene of the movie, in which Lachenay races to catch a flight for which he is already late, *La Peau douce* declares itself to be about the Hitchcock. With this opening, in fact, Truffaut is illustrating his *own* Hitchcockian lesson in suspense, from the book's introduction.¹⁰³ Truffaut's Hitchcock is also present in the film's detailed attention to the object world of late-modern culture — in the extreme close-ups of fingers dialing telephones; in the repeated scenes of clothes heaping into suitcases; and so on — as well as in its anxiously protracted scenes of the hero's sexual and social embarrassments. Truffaut regards his protagonist with markedly *colder* eyes, instantiating the gaze of the man we love to be hated by. A celebrated intellectual who falls helplessly, tragically in love with a stewardess, Pierre Lachenay is among Truffaut's most troubled and troubling alter egos. Incapable of choosing between his wife and his young mistress, the middle-aged intellectual falls into an ugly pattern of lies and dissimulations, until his wife, in the film's histrionic final moments, kills him with a shotgun in his favorite café. This is a movie about implacable rules and the consequences not just for breaking them but also, cinematically speaking, for following them.

The film's most compelling Hitchcockian inscription binds *La Peau douce* to Hitchcock's contemporaneous project, *Marnie*. Both Hitchcock's film and Truffaut's circulate the "enigma" of female desire. *La Peau douce* often feels like it developed out of a series of exquisite portraits of Françoise Dorléac, who plays Lachenay's mistress. The mood of these portraits is doleful, rather like Godard's painterly studies of Anna Karina in *Vivre sa vie* (1962). As a function of *La Peau douce*'s plot, however, they are probing the stewardess's cryptic countenance for a clue to her affections for the ineffectual *bourgeois* who is haphazardly pursuing her into his own grave.

Marnie, too, is about an enigmatic woman and, by extension, the Enigma of Woman. Critics generally understand *Marnie* to be Hitchcock's response to European art

¹⁰² François Truffaut: Correspondence 1945-1984, p. 215.

¹⁰³ "Suspense is simply the dramatization of a film's narrative material, or, if you will, the most intense presentation possible of dramatic situations. Here's a case in point: A man leaves his home, hails a cab and drives to the station to catch a train. This is a normal scene in an average picture. Now, should that man happen to look at his watch just as he is getting into the cab and exclaim, 'Good God, I shall never make that train!' the entire ride automatically becomes a sequence of pure suspense. Every red light, traffic signal, shift of the gears or touch on the brake, and every cop on the way to the station will intensify its emotional impact." Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, p. 15.

cinema.¹⁰⁴ I would argue that *Marnie* is specifically Hitchcock's response to his analytical session with Truffaut. The film's suspense builds to the revelation of Marnie's secrets, but Hitchcock's primary focus is on the masculine figure's bewildering fascination with the disturbed woman and on the bizarre form that his obsession takes. By blackmailing Marnie into marrying him, Mark Rutland hopes to coerce her into answering unanswerable questions about herself — Why is she sexually frigid? What has caused her to be a kleptomaniac? Why does she go “blank” when she sees the color red? *Marnie*'s plot is consumed by his relentless interrogations, during which Mark's own sordid desire to invade the locked cabinet of Marnie's befogged memory constantly surges into view. Ultimately, it seems, what Mark really wants is to catch Marnie in the act of stealing from *him*.

Unconsciously, of course, Marnie wants to be caught. Near the end of the film, both characters get their wishes. Marnie, in the grip of her kleptomania, enters Mark's office, where Mark's safe is already unlocked. Mark is waiting for her. He urges her to take the money and run, but she can't do it. . . . Her hand hovers over the tantalizing packets of bills, trembling. . . . He grips her wrist. . . .

* * *

The scene from *Marnie* returns us to another Hitchcockian fantasy of interlocking exhibitions and voyeurisms — the fantasy that underpins the moment from Truffaut's *Baiser volés* when Antoine receives the salacious note from Madame Tabard. Recall that Fabienne's text, explaining the distinction between “politesse” and “tact,” also turns on a scene in which a man stumbles into the sight of a woman who is in the grip of her “compulsion.” Recall, too, that the letter implicates Antoine and Fabienne as mutual bearers and objects of this forbidden look; and that the reading of the note, with Fabienne's voice resounding in Antoine's ears, has drawn them into an even closer subjective complicity.

While composing this letter on Fabienne's behalf, Truffaut might have been remembering a story that Hitchcock related in the course of their discussion about sexuality. Hitchcock defines “true love at work” as a situation in which looking and being looked at does not acknowledge bathroom doors.

Hitchcock: I was on a train going from Boulogne to Paris and we were moving slowly through the small town of Etaples. It was on a Sunday afternoon. As we were passing a large, red brick factory, I saw a young couple against the wall. The boy was urinating against the wall and the girl never let go of his arm. She'd look down at what he was doing, then look at the scenery around them, then back again at the boy. I felt this was true love at work.

Truffaut: Ideally, two lovers should never separate.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ See, for example, Joseph McElhaney, *The Death of the Classical Cinema: Hitchcock, Lang, Minnelli*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006, pp. 86-88.

¹⁰⁵ Compare to the quotation from *A bout de souffle* that serves as the epigraph to section 5, Chapter 3 of the present work (“Downtown Godard”).

Hitchcock: Quite. It was the memory of that incident that gave me an exact idea of the effect I was after with the kissing scene in *Notorious*.¹⁰⁶

The scene to which Hitchcock refers — everybody knows it — is astonishing in its raw passion and in the brazenness of its duration.

In this essay, I have tried to divulge the “stolen kisses” between the works of these two authors, who often seem to me as close as Cary Grant and Ingrid Bergman in that swooning close-up from *Notorious*, staggering together from one end of film history to the other. From the Hitchcock’s voluptuous clinches — where the usual discretions are unobserved, the barriers between cinematic universes disintegrate, and each artist is caught “stealing” from the other the intimate fears and desires that belonged to him in the first place — come the various “Hitchcocks” and “Truffauts” that have populated cinema culture on both sides of the Atlantic since the book first appeared.

¹⁰⁶ Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, p. 262.

CHAPTER THREE

Downtown Godard

“The truth is in all things, even, partly, in error.”

—Jean Luc-Godard, as quoted in the opening title of Amos Poe’s *Unmade Beds* (1976)

I Introduction: Old as New as New as No¹⁰⁷

“Allo, je suis Amos Poe, le directeur du film, *Unmade Beds*,” a woman’s voice informs us, over the opening frames of what is — for all intents and purposes — the first feature film of the incipient No Wave Cinema. *Unmade Beds* was Poe’s second full-length movie, after the redoubtable *Blank Generation* (1975). *Blank Generation* remains the quintessential punk rock documentary, and not only because it features priceless, hard-scrabble views of groups like The Ramones, The Patti Smith Group, Blondie, Wayne County, and Television in their blistering early-seventies heydays, but also because Poe carried the punk-rock ethos into filmmaking. The production was DIY to the point where Poe shot the 16mm concert footage *silent*, overdubbing the studio recordings in post-production. Later in the 1970s, he would be involved in Glenn Branca’s seminal public-access show, *TV Party* (1978-1982), which seems to transport Dick Cavett into the cocktail-lounge radiator from David Lynch’s *Eraserhead* (1976); he would also author a couple of important independent features, notably *Subway Riders* (1980), which got a fair amount of international attention. Poe got his “big break” in 1984 with *Alphabet City* (1984), a neon-streaked gangster pic with Vincent Spano, shot in 35mm for Warner Brothers. Although a cult classic, *Alphabet City* is most notable now for having been made on the razor’s edge of gentrification. As Poe recalls, it was filmed just ahead of the excavators and police raids that would utterly reshape the titular neighborhood, which was still, at that time, a bombed out landscape of rubbish-strewn lots, burned-out buildings, and city-sanctioned drug dealing.

Unmade Beds was made for \$4,000, with actors (*friends* — including Duncan Hannah, the artist, Eric Mitchell, the future filmmaker, Debbie Harry, the Blondie chanteuse, and many other Downtown notables) who didn’t get paid for their work. Joan Hawkins lists Amos Poe’s first two films, along with *Eraserhead* and *Blood* (Krasilovsky 1975), as the most important forerunners to the Downtown Cinema. *Unmade Beds* is unique in this group for being hyper-aware of *inaugurating* something. Here, Poe capitalized on the extreme self-consciousness and vitality of the punk scene that he famously documented in his first feature. He redirected punk’s DIY energy toward the cinema, with an eye toward inspiring *other people* to make films.¹⁰⁸ *Unmade Beds*,

¹⁰⁷ Andrew, Dudley. “*Breathless: Old as New*,” from Godard, Jean Luc, *Breathless*, New Brunswick & London: Rutgers University Press, 1987. (All quotations from Godard’s film come from this book, which contains the English-language script of *Breathless*.)

¹⁰⁸ “I wanted to do something that approximated the French Nouvelle Vague movement in New York. I had this attitude then that I didn’t know how to make a film, but I wasn’t going to let that stop me, which was kind of like the aesthetic of punk in a way. So, I figured if I couldn’t make a film, I could make a film movement, predicated on the idea

therefore, is considerably more ambitious than *Blank Generation*; if the earlier Poe feature was about the East Village *scenes* — the punk scene, the burgeoning avant-garde art scene, the neighborhood social scene, etc. — then *Unmade Beds* is about *mise-en-scène*.

Or, rather, it interlaces all of these other “scenes” with *mise-en-scène*, the great critical concept of the French New Wave.¹⁰⁹ In the “prologue” that I’ve just begun to quote — “Allo, je suis Amos Poe” — we are informed that *Unmade Beds* will reproduce the definitive Nouvelle Vague film, in reverse (“Now the Wave has reached the other shore,” the ‘Amos Poe’ of the prologue proclaims, over an image of the 58th St. Paris theater, with Michel Carne’s *Les enfants du paradis* on its marquis¹¹⁰). With *A bout de souffle*, ‘Amos Poe’ explains, Jean-Luc Godard tried to make a “Hawks” or “Walsh” film on the streets of Paris, for very little money.

Tried — and failed: “The only thing is,” Godard remarked, in a famous interview with *Cahiers du cinéma* that Poe surely read,¹¹¹ “one never does what one intended.

of ‘do it yourself,’ and if I could do a feature film for let’s say, under \$4,000 in black and white reversal, and get other people to make films like that, maybe we could start a movement.” Amos Poe, interview with Glenn Andreiev, *Films in Review* (April 7th, 2011) [<http://www.filmsinreview.com/2011/04/07/interview-amos-poe-and-the-no-wave-cinema/>]

¹⁰⁹ *Mise-en-scène* is a contested and often confusing term for film students. Literally, as a phrase borrowed from the theater, it means “put in scene.” Bordwell and Thompson call virtually everything in a film that is not “montage” *mise-en-scène* — in other words, everything that is put in front of the camera, or, in front of which, the camera situates itself. *Les cahiers du cinéma*’s definition, such as it was, was more expansive and more ambiguous. *Mise-en-scène* analysis revealed the “hand” of the author, the director; in so far as *mise-en-scène* received its most thorough-going theorization in the writings of Alexandre Astruc, a dyed-in-the-wool dialectician, we can assume that theatrical metaphor passed through Hegel before it became a central tenet for French film critics. In that case, the Auteur is like God — he puts *history* in scene.

¹¹⁰ A joke here? Is the East Village “paradise,” the Downtown artists its “children?”

¹¹¹ Tom Milne’s collection of Godard’s critical writings, *Godard on Godard*, published in 1972, belongs among the French works in translation which defined the American intellectual experience of the period. Many of these books are directly cited in *Unmade Beds*. There is, of course, the epochal *Hitchcock-Truffaut*, which I’ve written about elsewhere, as well as Hugh Gray’s pink and green-covered translations of André Bazin’s *What is Cinema? Volumes One and Two*. On the literary side: Sartre’s *Nausea*, translated by Hayden Carruth in 1964 (black, brown, and white, with a sketch of a man’s face with gouged-out features); the Vintage paperback edition of Stuart Gilbert’s 1946 translation of *The Stranger*, by Albert Camus (vividly painted street performers, wearing strange hats); Rimbaud’s *Illuminations*, translated by Louise Varèse in 1957, with a haunting Rimbaud photo-portrait on the cover. The last accompanied Patti Smith on all of her travels, her migration to New York City, as well as her sundry “vision quests” (see also Walter Fowlie’s *Rimbaud: Complete Works*). To be clear — these are *books*, not texts: specific paperback editions, often published by New Directions, that virtually any U.S. humanities scholar of the era could be expected to have on her shelf, or on her bedside

Sometimes one even does the opposite.”¹¹² *Unmade Beds* will take this lesson, above all, to heart. Poe will try — and fail — to make a Nouvelle Vague film in 1970s New York, just as Godard tried and failed to make Hollywood films in 1960s Paris. Godard claimed that he began *A bout de souffle* with the idea that he was making *Scarface* (1933) and only later saw where the movie really “belonged” — with *Alice in Wonderland*. Poe begins his *Breathless* remake with the foreknowledge that the enterprise is doomed, as fated as the gangster hero of Godard’s film, ignominiously gunned down by cops in the final reel (a grand, quasi-cinematic moment that Poe reproduces to the letter in *Unmade Beds*). He’ll set out to make a Nouvelle Vague film and, in the process, he’ll make a No Wave Film.

But why remake *Breathless* in 1976? It was the extraordinary privilege of Downtown artists (of the mid-70s and early-80s) to be able to approach the modernist canon without the guilt or neurosis that plagued modern art itself. Andy Warhol never silkscreened *Guernica*; The Ramones never played “Giant Steps.” Yet here is Amos Poe’s *Breathless*. Roughly a decade after *Unmade Beds*, the experimental Downtown composer, John Zorn, would similarly debut his influential “file card” method with a tribute to Godard — like Poe, apparently without shame. Neither man’s “Godard” is purely an object of parody (Zorn’s comes closer to intentional parody than Poe’s); but nor is he an object of veneration. Rather, he is an “extreme” stylist (the characterization comes from Zorn’s depiction of Mickey Spillane¹¹³); a “machine-type apparatus,” to be mobilized in the service of opening new territories for art (key here were Godard’s quasi-improvised cinematic “digressions” — the forerunner to something like the file-card method, which allowed for wild shifts in tone while remaining within the framework of an overriding concept),¹¹⁴ and, in filmmaking terms, an urban guerilla, a French exemplar of the DIY method (for Downtown filmmakers like Poe and Eric Mitchell, Godard signified the virtues of “amateurism” — a way of importing the punk ethos into movie-making: no technical credentials necessary, just grab a camera and go make your film¹¹⁵).

table, like ‘Little’ Rico in Amos Poe’s film. They are the undergrad books of *la rapprochement culturel*; their French counterparts were probably *Le livre de poche* translations of Edgar Poe (Baudelaire’s *Histoires Extraordinaires*), William Faulkner (for which Albert Camus, Andre Malraux, and Jean-Paul Sartre wrote key introductions), and Raymond Chandler. On American campuses, these particular spines were arguably the cornerstones for book collections that would soon be built up with Foucault, Derrida, Barthes, et al.

¹¹² Godard, Jean-Luc, *Godard on Godard*, ed. Tom Milne, New York: Da Capo, 1972, pg. 175.

¹¹³ Zorn, John, liner notes to *Godard-Spillane*, Tzadik CD, 1999.

¹¹⁴ “There exists a machine-type Godard apparatus” (Leutrat, Jean-Louis, “The Declension,” in *Jean-Luc Godard: Son + Image, 1974-1991*, ed. Raymond Bellour & Mary Lea Bandy, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1992, pg. 23).

¹¹⁵ Both Eric Mitchell and Amos Poe are quoted to this effect in *Blank City* (Celine Danhier 2010). Let’s call this a “productive misunderstanding” of Godard’s praxis (35mm, professional camera man, Hollywood actress) and technical expertise at the time he made his first feature. Without question, la Nouvelle Vague rebelled against the hierarchical structures of the French cinema of the time, holding in special contempt

Above all, however, “Godard” was a psychology, a specific relation to motion pictures that informed sixties cinematic culture from *Breathless* onward. If I can pinpoint that psychology, it rested somewhere in the idea that there was no essential difference between watching films and making them.

Unmade Beds is a historiographical film. It made history — not in the *Citizen Kane* (1940), *The Godfather* (1972), or even *Breathless* sense of being a Big Important Movie that everyone should watch — but as a work that was fundamentally about its own conditions of “historical” existence. At the threshold of the No Wave, it looked back, with remarkable clarity, at the threshold of the sixties.

Of course, by 1976, *Breathless* itself was, indisputably, “Out of Breath.” To remake the film, especially with an eye toward re-kindling the spirit of the French New Wave, was like putting the genie back in the bottle. Or, to deploy an uglier but more apt analogy: to remake *Breathless* in 1976 was like unscrewing a virgin. For, in the late-sixties and early-seventies, *everybody* was remaking *Breathless*, even if he didn’t intend or want to. The Hollywood renaissance of the late-1960s, for example, began with a virtual *Breathless* remake — *Bonnie & Clyde* (1967), a stylized re-imagining of 1930s Hollywood gangster films, as refracted through a “French” sensibility (and on which Truffaut and Godard briefly consulted) — and ended with an *actual Breathless* remake, Jim McBride’s 1983 adaptation, with Richard Gere. For Robert Ray, the critically lionized New Hollywood filmmakers did *nothing* but remake *Breathless*, over and over and over again. This chiefly means that, for the film school generation, the Godardian prototype was a bridge back to traditional Hollywood genre filmmaking. *A bout de souffle* vouchsafed the gritty little crime drama as art, and this was the primary level on which Coppola, et al., engaged “Godard.”¹¹⁶

But even filmmakers who resented Godard’s stranglehold on film culture somehow anchored themselves in Godard’s signature achievement, even if they did so ironically. Fassbinder’s *Liebe ist kälter als tod* (Love is Colder than Death; 1969), his first feature, is the Neues Deutches Filme’s sickened rebuff to The French New Wave — all American gangster pic references, sucked into the cultural vacuum of late-60s Germany. Fassbinder apparently hated Godard — “I felt as if [he] had touched my cock, but not because he wanted to do something for me; he did it so that I would like his film”¹¹⁷; nonetheless, Fassbinder himself inevitably became the “Godard” of the seventies (the horizon of cinematic modernity, dusky as it was then), partly on the basis of his very New Wave-ish reworkings of Sirkean melodramas. Even Godard’s own, contemporaneous film, *Numéro deux* (1975), was conceived as a *Breathless* remake. Dudley Andrew reports that its original title, which Godard’s producer, Georges

those older directors, Godard says somewhere, who showed up on set every morning wearing suits and ties and carrying briefcases. Nonetheless, the *Cahiers* bunch weren’t amateurs — they were arguably the first film *students*; instead of industry apprenticeships (they occasionally had “internships” — Rivette worked for Renoir; Truffaut assisted Rossellini), they entered the cinema after several years of writing and research.

¹¹⁶ See Ray, Robert, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema, 1930-1980*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.

¹¹⁷ Fassbinder, R.W., as quoted in Elsaesser, Thomas, *Fassbinder’s Germany: History, Identity, Subject*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996, pg. 348.

Beaugard, used to stake the project, was *Numéro deux: A bout de souffle*.¹¹⁸ Given the finished film's scatological bent (it's about the political, moral, and *actual* "constipation" of the post-68 Left), it's safe to assume that Godard wanted us to read: "Shit: *Breathless*." To attempt to remake *Breathless* in the mid-seventies was to pretend that *Breathless* (numéro un) hadn't already passed through the successive digestive tracts of Algeria, Vietnam, and May 1968.

What distinguishes *Unmade Beds* from all of these other *Breathless* remakes — indeed, from a European-American cinema culture reigned over by the "ideal" *Breathless* remake — is that Poe has seemingly metabolized *nothing* of Godard's paradigmatic achievement. In a weird way, then, *Unmade Beds*'s "re-invention" of the French New Wave parallels the French New Wave's "re-invention" of Cinema. Poe sees *Breathless* anew, like Godard had seen the American cinema anew. *Breathless* took the grammatical disjecta of film history — iris shots, lens flares, jump cuts, etc. — and made them the bases for a theoretical post-Griffith, post-Eisenstein film *language*. Poe, in turn, re-invented *Breathless* as a set of cinematic behaviors, as rigidly set — as mannered — as a late-forties American noir. Indeed, from the perspective of *Unmade Beds*, the French New Wave's "re-discovery" of Hollywood had become the ultimate "hand-me-down" strategy for re-invigorating the always-already moribund Cinema — well-worn, with big holes in the knees.

From the first moments of Poe's movie (that obnoxious pronouncement, "Allo, je suis Amos Poe"), the viewer wants to scream, "*Not Godard!*" Everything is exactly as it should be, yet nothing is right — it feels less like a homage to Godard, and more like a "body snatching." However, it is precisely because *Unmade Beds* hews so closely to the behaviors of cinema, qua Godard, without mocking them, that the question of what is or is not Godard arises in the first place.¹¹⁹

It is the same question — or provocation — that the transvestite forces upon us, here in the context of cinematic (as opposed to gender) normativity. *Unmade Beds*, in other words, isn't merely a Nouvelle Vague film in reverse — an American French film along the lines of the French American films Godard was making in the early-1960s. It's

¹¹⁸ Andrew, Dudley, "*Breathless* Then and Now," liner notes to *Breathless* (Criterion DVD/Blu-Ray 2010).

¹¹⁹ How does one situate *Unmade Beds* in relation to the Downtown concept? If postmodernism, in this phase, signifies the demise of the modernist "anxiety of influence," *Unmade Beds* — along with the films that followed its paracinematic trajectory in the No Wave, such as *Rome 78* (Nares 1978) and *Underground U.S.A.* (Eric Mitchell 1978) — flaunts its non-neurotic relationship to the Nouvelle Vague (the "jump cut" becomes a mere fetish object, equivalent to Kenneth Anger's grandmother's dresses or Andy Warhol's Marilyn). As such, the film unexpectedly calls forth heretofore unexamined correspondences between Godard and the American Underground of the 1960s, while demonstrating strong affinities with the post-Nouvelle Vague works of Jean Eustache, Phillippe Garrel, Maurice Pialat, and Chantal Akerman (several of these directors also reworked Godard in light of Cassavettes, Warhol, and Jack Smith). This suggests, in turn, that the European films that transpired under the rubric "The Death of Cinema" were spiritual kin to the No Wave cinema.

an American Underground film, dolled up as *Breathless*. It's *Breathless*, turned inside out and illuminated by the American Underground.

II. New York *nous appartement*

“Nous sommes tous Américains.” — *Le Monde* headline, September 12th, 2001

“Oh! You *are* sick!” — Jack Nance, *Eraserhead* (1976)

In the introduction to her forthcoming anthology, *Downtown Film & TV Culture 1975-2001* (Intellect Press, 2015), Joan Hawkins defines “Downtown” as the “late-20th century avant-garde.” Two consequences follow from this designation. In the first place, we can no longer construe “Downtown” as a strictly local emergence, limited to some shabby neighborhoods and an artistic enclave in New York City in the late 1970s. Rather, Downtown must be understood as a theoretical and aesthetic environment (a “structure of feeling”) that effloresced in other U.S. cities at roughly the same time — Pittsburgh, Muncie, Little Rock — everywhere and anywhere a DIY, punk ethos emerged as a reaction against Reaganomics and its accompanying ideologies (“Morning in America”). Secondly, if “No Wave” art, cinema, TV, and music is the “late-20th century avant-garde” *tout court*, then “Downtown” must, in fact, have an *international* scope — or, at least, Downtown must have an international frame of reference.

Obviously, the “Downtown” sensibility in art defined itself against the prevailing mainstream culture of late-1970s and 1980s America. If this mainstream, like “Downtown,” can also be given a symbolic “Middletown” address, we might call it “Main Street,” after Walt Disney. “Main Street,” of course, is a vision of the world, as refracted through a nostalgic representation of the quintessentially American civic center. As an actual destination in Disneyland, “Main Street, USA” consolidates miniaturized versions of international landmarks — the Eiffel Tower, the leaning Tower of Pisa, etc. — onto a few city blocks, patterned after a turn-of-the-century, white suburban neighborhood.¹²⁰ Disney’s “Main Street” was the collective fantasy underlying Ronald Reagan’s geopolitics. Reagan naturalized the Americana of hot dogs, ice cream, and Little League baseball as universal signs of Freedom and Democracy. Everybody, even the Red Chinese, enjoys an ice-cold Coke after a hot day’s work (killing intellectuals); all boys want to be Pete Rose, even Nicaraguan boys. The world’s kids are hankering to set up their lemonade stands, to show off some of that good old American, entrepreneurial spirit. “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!” Reagan famously pronounced. He left the implication that East and West Germany might be re-joined across a Main Street, replete with soda fountain, barbershop, and carousel.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Disney’s architects might have taken their cue from the ending of Vincente Minnelli’s *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944): “The whole world right here,” Judy Garland gushes, her eyes welling with tears of joy, as Technicolor fireworks blossom over the World’s Fair. “Right here in our backyard. Right here in St. Louis!”

¹²¹ Steven Spielberg provided the cinematic counterpart to Reagan’s vision. Interestingly, *Close Encounters* should have been shot in Muncie, IN, simultaneously with the PBS *Middletown* series (1982; Hawkins cites *Seventeen*, from this series, as an important

Relative to “Main Street,” then, Downtown is the overdetermined “wrong side of the tracks.” It’s the industrial wasteland of *Eraserhead*. Paranoid faces peek out from behind nicotine stained kitchen curtains; dead animals litter the streets. Smog belches from factory smokestacks — factories which manufacturer corpses, or pencil-erasers made from human brains (pencil erasers for a community in which nobody writes, ever). Here, too, you can find a carousel — you can hear its calliope, gasping in the radiator pipes, somewhere in the ulcerous belly of the beast. Your chicken dinner squirms on your plate, excreting pus and blood when you cut into it (“*Midnight in America*” is that “frozen moment when everybody sees what’s on the end of every fork,” to paraphrase William S. Burroughs, a spiritual forefather of Downtown). Little boys scrounge through the ubiquitous wreckage like the war orphans in Roberto Rossellini’s *Germany: Year Zero* (1948). They wear baseball hats turned ‘round, just like kids in a Norman Rockwell painting, but they don’t play ball; they cash in severed human heads, for money. Somewhere, in a galaxy far, far away, milk-fed Americans link arms in a baseball stadium, while Whitney Houston warbles, “I believe children are the future.” Children are the future here, too, wretched and terrifying. An un-aborted fetus (hard to call it a “baby”) lies wrapped in receiving blankets, whimpering and crying, unfeedable, demanding to be fed. It has no stomach, only an alimentary canal.

But perhaps these aren’t distinct places at all, simply two modes of inhabiting the same place: “middle America” (whatever, wherever that is or was) in the post-Vietnam years. Between the two modes, there obtains what Jacques Lacan would call an “ex-timate” relationship. In Lynch’s *Blue Velvet* (1986), a tree-lined suburban neighborhood, replete with white picket fences, passes, without transition, into an urban inferno (compare to Samuel Fuller’s *The Naked Kiss* (1964), in which you have to cross a river to get to the depraved, criminal underbelly of “Main Street”).

On the one hand, a return, in fantasy, to a benighted American past that never existed (“Main Street”); on the other, a nightmarish re-discovery of the traumas that precipitated the nostalgic “turn away” to begin with (“Downtown”). Even devout Reaganites were conscious of living in *Eraserhead*, although they undoubtedly preferred *Star Wars* (1977): the black ghettos, teeming with angry, teenaged crack-heads, weaponized, ganged-up, and totally homicidal; the ever-brewing Central American shitstorm (not to mention the Iranian one — but El Salvador seemed to be creeping North!); the hippie burnouts and homeless maniacs, sleeping in piss-soaked Army surplus on the courthouse steps; the Cuban craziness in Miami; the rampaging feminists; the AIDS epidemic (*et tu*, Rock Hudson?)...etc., etc. This was the exorbitant “reality” that the collective fantasy of “Main Street” was supposed to hold at bay.

Downtown work). He obviously wanted the paradigmatic Middletown association for his sci-fi fantasy: when the “visitors” finally arrive, their first stop is Anywhere, USA. What his location scouts found in the *real*, historical Middletown was a struggling industrial city rife with racial tension and very down on its luck; this place fell short of Spielberg’s *Pinocchio*-inspired concept. Thus, he shot “Muncie, IN” in the clean, mountain air of Wyoming and on closed L.A. soundstages instead. When I was growing up in Muncie in the late 1970s, there were tourist billboards on I-69 declaring, “Muncie, IN: Steven Spielberg almost had a Close Encounter here!” These signs gave the unfortunate impression that the Muncie residents were aliens from outer space.

Yet the “grim reality” was also, of course, a fantasy — it was merely the rat infested alleyway behind “Main Street,” and the trash had to go somewhere. Or, to carry the Disney analogy further: Downtown was the underground tunnel where the theme park employees worked, in the dark, like Troglodytes, to bring off the glittering illusion of “Main Street”: a small world after all.

“Downtown,” then, signifies a psychological zone which produced a “late-20th century avant-garde.” This, as opposed to the geographical Downtown, NYC — or, if not *opposed*, then at least in an ambiguous relation to the SOHO and East Village sites from which it seemingly draws its name. “Downtown” was as accessible to the disenfranchised teenager living in the urban sprawl of Indianapolis, with a VHS camera and a 2 a.m. slot on public access TV, as it was to Philip Glass, who maintained a rehearsal space in the East Village in the 1970s and 80s (because the rents were cheap; because he was hiding out from the elite music press; because there he could find liberated minds to play his experimental music). This suggests that the fate of the late-20th century avant-garde was to be radically “up for grabs.”

The common denominator between Glass (for whom Middletown was, at most, a place you moved to Manhattan to get away from) and the Indiana punk (occupant of the real Middletown, site of the famous Middletown Studies, *mise-en-scène* of Peter Davis’s monumental follow-up to his classic Vietnam documentary, *Hearts & Minds* [1974]) was an historical situation and its corresponding, negating mind-set. No aesthetic, not even an anti-aesthetic, binds these artists together. Properly speaking, the teenager might not even *be* an artist.

The “classic” avant-garde evokes the image of a group, operating in some kind political-artistic solidarity, even if it’s only a *de facto* group, composed of artists distributed across the planet, working in isolation from one another (symbolism, surrealism, futurism, the sixties New Cinemas, etc.). In this new formulation, “Downtown” is virtually defined by solitude — a consciousness that artworks don’t travel, that there is no “collective,” that nothing ever leaves these gritty, hopeless precincts, this Alphabet City of the mind. If, in the works themselves (the music, the paintings, the posters, the TV broadcasts, the 8mm films), the accent usually fell on *local* politics, as opposed to national or international politics, this was not merely reflective of a self-conscious change of activist direction — a course correction in the anti-Vietnam, Feminist, or Civil Rights Movements (although sometimes it was that, too). It also indicated a forlorn withdrawal into the nexus of the Self and a concomitant “fall” into the redundancy of the present — this here, this now, this only. At the center of this politics was a lonely “particular,” for whom the only “universal” was the human body itself, isolated within its drives, its fantasms, its maladies, its addictions, its routines, its unwanted pregnancies, and its decayed futures.

In many respects, then, the late-20th century avant-garde resembled the end of avant-gardes. In the final analysis, the interwoven Downtown-Main Street fantasies that I have just described refer to a hypostasized “United States,” severed from outside influence, quarantined off from the rest of the world. This “quarantine” might, in fact, be a pre-condition for “Downtown.” Although Reagan diligently exported his “Main Streets” around the globe, they only went one way — there was no turning around. Nothing came back to us in the way of a Nouvelle Vague, to cast “Main Street” in a different (French, Swedish, Brazilian, Vietnamese) light — to respond, belligerently,

“This is what your Steven Spielberg *really* looks like.” At an earlier moment in the globalization process, the years of the Marshall Plan, the world had answered back: Now, here is *our* Jackson Pollack, *our* William Faulkner, *our* Alfred Hitchcock. And this response mattered. Suddenly *their* Jackson Pollacks, William Faulkners, and Alfred Hitchcocks were the essential ones, against which *ours* were meager imitations. Godard’s *A bout de souffle*, of course, was all about this response. It took the re-circulation of American pop culture through the European sphere as both “theme” and mission statement.¹²² During the Reagan years — the Downtown years — no answer was needed or wanted.

From this perspective, it is instructive to revisit Downtown *New York* in the early -to-mid-1970s. Let’s say that this Downtown (the East Village, SOHO Downtown) was not the model for or even harbinger of the other, later Downtowns: that would go against the nature of 80s Downtown, since the point was that there *was* no beacon, broadcasting the avant-garde from a legitimate cultural center, only a fantasy which many people, scattered across the U.S., shared without being *quite* conscious that others were sharing it, too. Let’s say, rather, that it was a place where “Downtown America” came briefly into contact with a “planetary Downtown.” There is lots of evidence that the white, middle-class emigrants to SOHO and The East Village, drawn by cheap rents and eager to convert halfway-demolished buildings into gallery and concert spaces, were all fleeing real and imaginary Middletowns.

Moreover, many of them brought with them a different kind of spatial fantasy, one which would link this culture — the culture of Downtown New York — to the historical avant-garde, specifically the French avant-garde.¹²³ MOMA’s *Downtown Book* is flush with instances of artists getting off the Greyhound with dog-eared copies of Roger Shattuck’s *The Banquet Years*, a chronicle of La Belle Epoque, in their luggage. Patti Smith’s National Book Award Winning memoir, *Just Kids*, is as much a tribute to Rimbaud’s influence on her work, as it is a portrait of her friend and lover, Robert Mapplethorpe. Smith’s New York exodus was apparently instigated by her discovery of *Illuminations*, which opened her mind to the world, in all senses; in fact, when the French Ministry of Culture named her *Chevalier de l’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* in 2010, her affection for and affinities with Rimbaud were cited as evidence of her fitness for the commendation.

Indeed, at some flabbergasting point, the origins of punk rock — the definitive anti-aesthetic — are interwoven with Symbolism, a French poetic movement that developed out of *l’art pour l’art* discourse, in the mid-19th century. For example, the founder of the proto-New Wave band Television, Tom Wilson, arriving in New York from Minneapolis, assumed the moniker Tom *Verlaine*, in homage to Paul Verlaine, author of *Poèmes saturniens* (1866). His compatriot, Richard Meyers, from Lexington, Kentucky, correspondingly took the patronym “Hell” — presumably in homage to Rimbaud’s *Une saison en enfer* (1873). Their own fraught relationship would play out

¹²² “You Americans are dumb,” Michel tells Patricia. “The proof is that you admire Lafayette and Maurice Chevalier, when they’re the dumbest of all Frenchmen” (*Breathless* script, pg. 82).

¹²³ By extension, they linked to earlier instantiations of the American avant-garde; of course, I call that spatial fantasy “The Mid-Atlantic.”

like a parody of the notorious Rimbaud/Verlaine affair, which climaxed with Verlaine shooting his teenaged lover in the hand.

On a certain level, *Unmade Beds* allegorizes this Downtown — the Downtown of Tom Verlaine, Patti Smith, et al., in its “becoming-France” phase. The film’s main character is named Rico (Duncan Hannah), a handle that probably originated in William Wellman’s *Little Caesar* (1931), starring James Cagney (“Is this the end of Rico?”). But the reference is decidedly second-hand — in fact, “Rico” should be the name of a character in a French New Wave film that *alludes* to *Little Caesar*. (One of the extraordinary things about Poe’s work is that it grasps that much of what is purely “French” in the New Wave was *Hollywoodien*; if Rico had been called “Ferdinand” or “Michel,” like his Jean-Paul Belmondo-assayed counterparts in Godard films, *Unmade Beds* would be an homage, instead of a re-invention.) For, we quickly learn, Rico is an inhabitant of 1976 New York who believes that he is a character in a 1959 film by Jean-Luc Godard. The narrator tells us that Rico is a photographer, constantly on the “look out” for girls who appear to be French. He’s inevitably disillusioned when he finds out that they hail from Tennessee. His conversation is littered with “existential footnotes”; he believes his camera is a gun, loaded with “bullets” of film: an awkward proposition, but in key with Rico and the movie overall — to believe oneself to be a JLG film from 1959, or a character in one, is to exist in a bad (because slavishly literal) translation. He is the last “Romantic,” etc., etc.. Thus, Rico “models” the movie in which he features: *Unmade Beds* is a 1970s New York movie that dreams of being a 1960s French one, which itself dreams of being a 1950s American one.

It is instructive to compare Belmondo’s Michel, from *Breathless*, swerving through Paris 1959 in a sleek gray Italian suit, dark sunglasses, and fedora, a cigarette mashed in his lips, with the diminutive, childlike, and introverted “Rico” in *Unmade Beds* (“Rico, not *Little Rico*,” he whines). Michel was what Pier Paolo Pasolini, in a famous essay about the 60s Cinema of Poetry, called a “new anthropological type.”¹²⁴ He was the first of Godard’s “parentless” children, a pure creation of the cinema (even if this type *existed* in real-life — the idea behind a character like this was to point up the penetration of modern “reality” by movies). If we ever get a POV shot from Michel’s position, it doesn’t instantiate a thought or even signify a “perception” (in fact, we never get such a shot — I don’t think there’s a point of view shot in all of Godard); nor is the film that surrounds him, *Breathless*, necessarily the one in which Michel would have wanted to appear, even if Godard obligingly pays stylistic or narrative homage to the American gangster pictures that “formed” Michel. Michel’s gestures (his costume, his speech) are always “wrong”: he slices through the crowds on the Champs-Élysées like a purple mohawk and a lip ring. Even in stills from *Breathless*, Belmondo looks a little cartoonish, more like an animated character than a real one. He’s a *fiction* superimposed on a documentary. He’s an American fantasy about gangsters, superimposed on the body of a

¹²⁴ “...Godard’s protagonists are also sick; they are exquisite flowers of the bourgeoisie, but they are not under medical treatment. They are extremely ill, but vital; they have not yet passed over the threshold into a pathological condition. They simply represent the average of a new anthropological type” (Pasolini, Pier Paolo, “The ‘Cinema of Poetry,’” from *Heretical Empiricism*, ed. Louise K. Barnett, trans. Ben Lawton & Louise K. Barnett, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988, pg. 181).

Frenchman. Rico, on the other hand, belongs to 1970s Downtown; his francophilia and his artistic pretensions make him perfectly adequate to the culture of Patti Smith and Television. Nobody in this world is really *of* it: those Tennessee girls are perfectly willing to submit to Rico's delusion, becoming his Jeanne Moreaus, his Jean Sebergs, his Stephane Audrans, while he snaps their pictures; it's another kinky sex-game, or a redoubling of the identity-swap that already happened in the migration from Nashville to NYC (I'm assuming that *The Banquet Years* and *Illuminations* gave future Downtown artists a way of thinking about "NYC" as a Bohemian center, along the lines of La Belle Epoque Paris — the bus to New York wasn't going to Manhattan, it was going to "Art").

There's an important scene early on, featuring Patti Astor (for a while, Downtown cinema's favorite actress) as Moreau (for a while, the Nouvelle Vague's favorite actress). She and Rico are in Rico's apartment; their love scene plays out in the form of Godard's mid-sixties works, in which something "new" is happening in every shot — an ad, a quote, a performance. First, Astor rests her head on Rico's bare stomach while he silently reads Sartre's *Nausea*, propped up in bed; there's a close-up of her face, while she soliloquizes about her girlhood in the French countryside. "Soliloquizes" is the proper word: she is addressing us, not Rico, and the mode is lyrical reminiscence. Cut to an extreme close-up of Astor's mouth: "Now dig some Camus," she snarls, before reciting a short passage from the end of *The Stranger*. Then she strips off her shirt, doing a bump and grind, while Rico watches from the bed — shades of *Vivre sa vie* (1962) — before going into the kitchenette and returning with some domestic products, which she "advertises" in an exaggerated "commercial speak" that recalls an early scene in *Pierrot le fou* (1965). Finally, she smears his chest with shaving cream, groaning lasciviously, before jumping up with a snap — "Shit, I've got to go to work!"

Two things are going on here. In the first place, Amos Poe cleverly uses a Godard-style *bricolage* to stitch together a series of Godard quotations, where Godard himself might have quoted Maurice Sachs, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Poe — Edgar Allan Poe, that is. But there's another reference here, too, subtending the Nouvelle Vague one. Astor is trying to *arouse* Rico, who sits watching her, impassively, his book resting in his hands. This is "Godard" filtered through the opening scenes of Paul Morrissey's *Trash* (aka *Andy Warhol's Trash*, 1970), in which a "bored little rich girl" works in vain to get a "rise" out of Joe Dallesandro's heroin-addicted, impotent hustler. Just as Holly Woodlawn tries out various turn-ons, from talking dirty, to fondling Joe's limp penis, to putting on a grotesque strip-show, so does Astor run through the stations of 1960s Godard quotations, in an effort to stimulate Rico. From an ethnographic standpoint — and let's not forget that JLG trained as an ethnographer, which justifies Pasolini's description of Michel as a "new *anthropological* type" — Poe seems to be suggesting that the Downtown mode of social-sexual exchange was "I'll let you be in my pretentious European art film, if I can be in yours."

On the other hand, Rico's blindness to the 1976 all around him — his misperception of his real, material existence in the East Village as a 1959 Godard film — also seems to me "symptomatic," in ways that go beyond deliberate anthropology and into the realm of "repression" (the repressed of *Unmade Beds* itself). Poe's "Rico" is emblematic of the white, middle-class immigrant in New York City, finding "Art" in the socio-economic wreckage of the Lower East Side. Instead of impoverished black neighborhoods, he perceives the *mise-en-scène* of a cultural experiment — a *new new*

wave, a modern *quartier bohème*, in New York City. First, he scrounges the streets for girls who look “French” to be in his photographs; then, after a disappointing love affair, he gives up girls as subjects completely, photographing buildings with French-sounding names instead. But these French-sounding names are often, also, African American sounding names. For example, Rico has his last reel, Belmondo-style, slapstick death scene in front of a place called Lafayette Electronics.

From this perspective, *Unmade Beds* only *seems* to be a “failed” *Breathless* remake. In fact, it is a *successful* documentary about a white artist who is culturally, economically, and racially blind to the very environment that he and his friends are busily usurping.

* * *

Intriguingly, this “unconscious” allegory points to subterranean affinities between *Unmade Beds* and *Made in U.S.A.* (1966) — Godard’s first attempt, prior to *Numéro deux*, to “negate” *Breathless*.¹²⁵ There are above-ground affinities, of course: Poe directly cites *Made in U.S.A.* in the prologue, and his central conceit — to portray 1970s New York as 1950s Paris — is, in a way, the reverse-mirror image of the Godard film’s “dislocated” location. Although obviously shot in the suburbs of Paris, *Made in U.S.A.* is set in a hallucinatory Atlantic Cité, two years into the future (1968). In *Unmade Beds*, when Rico and his friends are driving around Downtown, somebody calls the Washington Square Arch, the gateway between NYU and the East Village, “L’Arc de triomphe.” At that moment, we’re in Amos Poe’s “calque” of Godard’s Atlantic Cité.

With *Made in U.S.A.*, Godard took his central, retrospective insight into *A bout de souffle* — that it belonged not with Howard Hawks, but with Lewis Carroll — as his starting place. *Made in U.S.A.* is *Alice in Wonderland* set loose in *The Big Sleep* (Hawks 1946). Anna Karina plays a Phillip Marlowe-like detective, garbed in a baggy trench coat, desperately seeking her missing lover (played by Godard himself as a craggy voice on a reel to reel tape, spouting Fredrick Engels). She follows his ghost through a “looking glass” of *film noir* references, which on some level seem to be re-narrating the kidnapping and murder of the freedom fighter, Mehdi Ben Barka, by “parallel” police, in 1965.

Godard’s point seems to be that the French — including his early self — were so seduced by the flash and violence of Hollywood films during the post-War period, they became inured to their own traumatic history, a history of colonizing (Vietnam, the

¹²⁵ With this “negation” in mind, it might be more accurate to say that *Made in U.S.A.* critiques Poe’s project *avant-la-lettre*. However, I think that judgment would be short-sighted; my objective is to take note of all of the corresponding histories, cinematic and otherwise, that Poe’s travesty of Godard renders visible — and, in many cases, makes *possible*. Thus, it is equally the case that *Unmade Beds*’s representation of the French-infatuated Downtown Artist as “White Colonizer,” whether unconscious or not, compels this re-reading of *Made in U.S.A.* in racial terms. In 1976, *Made in U.S.A.* was banned in the U.S.A., for copyright reasons (Godard neglected to pay the author of the book on which his film was putatively based); *Unmade Beds* thus “recalls” *Made in U.S.A.*, in roughly the same way that *Made in U.S.A.* recalls the banned, neglected, and violently suppressed cinemas that it stands in place of.

Congo) and of being colonized (by the Nazis and now the Americans). It's a Plato's Cave type of argument, advanced from deep within the shadows. Godard urges his audience to climb out of their cinema chairs into the piercing light of "reality"; "Atlantic Cité" is the American dream as Freudian dream, the function of which is to keep the European dreamer (like little Alice, dozing in the branches of her tree) asleep.

Made in U.S.A. also bridges Godard's early Nouvelle Vague films with his politically committed late-sixties work. Heretofore, his filmmaking would be in solidarity with Straub-Huillet, Bertollucci, Rocha, Chytilová, Marker — the heralds of a New International Cinema — and *not* with Truffaut, Chabrol, Rivette, and Rohmer. As such, it's a "blackening of the breast" movie. Here Godard painfully weans himself from the sources, cinematic and extra-cinematic, that nourished *A bout de souffle* and sustained him through his blazing first period of creativity: the Hollywood Cinema of Preminger, Ray, and Fuller; *la politique des auteurs* (anticipating Barthes's Death of the Author argument, Karina early on finds Godard's character dead in a chair, a skeleton swathed in bandages, with one Cyclopien eye glaring); Anna Karina herself (they'd divorced the previous year); and, arguably, Roberto Rossellini (*Atlantic Cité* is about as far as you can get from a traditionally neo-realist location).

Made in U.S.A., in short, is a *profoundly* ironic film — a welter of obscure references to Hollywood movies (Jonathan Rosenbaum once described it as the best extant commentary on American films of the fifties¹²⁶) that stands as the ultimate rebuke to the "cinema of references" — a film which *exists* to make the statement, "This is not the film that should be made." What would we see if we could peel away these luminous images, awash in primary colors that correspond to some infernal, Parisian-Hollywood *pays merveilleux* — *Atlantic Cité*? What would we hear if we weren't hearing fake "tough guy" speak, derived from the French subtitles of imported Otto Preminger films? What, finally, is the movie *buried alive* in *Made in U.S.A.*, ferociously trying to claw its way out? Probably the film that Ben Barka, the Moroccan dissident, was on his way to discuss at the Brasserie Lipp with Marguerite Duras and Georges Franju, when French cops snatched him off the sidewalk, threw him into a van, and tortured him to death at an undisclosed location.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ "Students of American cinema in the 50s who are looking for the best critical treatment of the subject should head for neither bookstore nor library, but straight for this movie"

(Rosenbaum, Jonathan, "Walt Disney plus Blood [*Made in U.S.A.*]," *The Soho News* [September 15, 1981]).

¹²⁷ During the summer of 1976, just around the corner from Amos Poe's "set," Sam Rivers recorded *Wildflowers* in his Rivbea studio — 10 days of "Great American Black Music," ultimately released in a landmark, 5 LP set. The joyful, mournful sounds on these records form a melancholy background to punk music's inexorably ascendancy as the music of the disenfranchised white kid. Furthermore, they form the basis for a kind of counterfactual narrative of 1970s Downtown. For, in the late-1960s, the jazz avant-garde had its own "Mid-Atlantic" experience. Prompted by the closing of prominent East Side venues, like Slugs, which briefly harbored free jazz in the mid-sixties, many experimental, black musicians — Archie Shepp, Don Cherry, Sunny Murray, among others — went to Paris. There, they played for enthusiastic French students, whose

III. The Murders in the Mid-Atlantic

Presiding over the labyrinthine plot of *Made in U.S.A.* is a mysterious Uncle Edgar, spiritual progenitor of the film's "David Goodis" and "Don Siegel." (In Godard's next film, *La Chinoise* [1967], Edgar's "throne" will be usurped by another patriarchal imago, Uncle Brecht, in whose name Godard will make his transition to agit-prop films). Lest there be any doubt about who this Uncle Edgar is supposed to be: in the trailer that Godard himself cut for *Made in U.S.A.*, he affixed a subtitle: "Un film Po — *policier, politique, policier.*"

"Hello, I'm Amos Poe, the director of *Unmade Beds*," the subtitles reiterate, 'translating' the spoken introduction into English. *Translating*, as subtitles normally do, but in this case, the 'French' on the soundtrack was obviously "thought" in English, then hacked out in French (it's "French 101" French). It is unlikely that a French film director would refer to himself as "un directeur"; according to *Le petit Robert*, the word "directeur" usually specifies the director of a company, or the director of a civic or business project. The term Amos Poe probably wants here is *réalisateur* (one who renders "reality"), *metteur-en-scène* (one who puts in scene), or, more in key with the French New Wave archetype, *l'auteur*. Director/*directeur*, in short, is a false cognate — a word that only *looks* the same in French and English (sometimes called a "false friend"). As we shall soon learn, the "false cognate" is the linguistic version of the sort of cultural cross-dressing that abounds in *Unmade Beds*, a French American remake of an American French movie.

Take, for example, the voice that calls itself "Amos Poe," the *directeur du film*. In a swish pan, covering some scintillating leaves, it is revealed that it belongs to a young black woman — not, of course, Amos Poe, a white guy. She sits in what appears to be a window sill, reading the narration from a sheet of typing paper with a musical, humorous lilt. It seems to me that she is reading the words for the first time and is also a bit camera shy. Her French is good, but not native. In fact, it is possible that she is not only reading, but translating as she goes. If that is the case, then Poe has written the words in English, to be spoken in an improvised French translation, which has then been re-translated into English for the subtitles. The "voice," then, in the larger sense of "the voice of the text," occupies some gooey interval between French and English. This isn't what linguists call "franglais," or a sort of New Wave Creole, but "translation" in permanent *medias res*. Neither text can fully detach itself to become the *original* text, of which the other is the French or English gloss. Moreover, this voice has been provisionally attached to a body other than the "biographical" author's: a black woman's body. The actress gives signs of resisting the script, albeit playfully. Her narration will ultimately collapse when, for her,

clothes still reeked of the dust and smoke of Mai '68. (For a wonderful account of the jazz avant-garde's Parisian summer, see Lewis, George, "Americans in Paris," from *A Power Stronger than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music*. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008.) It's noteworthy that *Les cahiers du cinéma* took notice of these radical Americans in Paris — as well as their American neglect, of course. Then-*Cahiers* editor, Jean-Louis Commolli, best known for his co-authorship of the influential *Young Mr. Lincoln* (Ford 1939) article, published a book in 1970 about Free Jazz and Black Power.

the ridiculousness of what she is expected to say becomes too much and she breaks off, laughing.

Perhaps Amos Poe — the biographical Amos Poe, the one who made *Blank Generation*, collaborated with Glenn Branca on *TV Party*, and got his big break in 1984 with *Alphabet City* — is in the same boat? Putting on “Authorship” like a Halloween costume, with an acute sense of imposture? If there is an analog to the *Unmade Beds* prologue in the Godard canon, it’s probably the opening moments of *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d’elle* (1966).¹²⁸ In *Deux ou trois choses*, Godard portrays a whispering, meditative voice on the soundtrack. The film’s protagonist is introduced *à la mode Brechtienne*. Addressing the camera from the balcony of a flat, the “elle” of the title identifies herself first “in character,” as Juliet, then as “herself,” the actress, Marina Vlady. She does not, of course, identify herself as “Jean-Luc Godard” — like Marissa Gallagher, the actress in *Unmade Beds*, identifies herself as Amos Poe (although, in fact, *Gallagher* doesn’t identify herself as Amos Poe — the page that she is reading from does; Brecht is still operative, on some level, introducing a rift between actor and part). In a Godard film, I think, it would never be necessary for an actor to identify herself as “Godard,” for we presume that everything and everyone we see and hear is a figment of Godard, in the grander scheme of things. Even when Godard himself is present on-screen, or off-screen, as a whispering, humbled voice, he is there on behalf of the transcendental “God-Art” (allegedly Harun Farocki called him this), before which even the mortal Godard is prostrate.

Thus, Amos Poe introduces his project under the conjoint signs of “false cognates,” “transvestitism,” and “[racial] masquerade.” Varied forms of cultural imposture, which might, in this case, signal Poe’s reluctance to assume the transcendental function of “Auteur.” Godard, even when he buried his patronym in a Maoist Collective, *Le Groupe Dziga Vertov*, could never shirk that function.

About those subtitles — they, too, “masquerade” as subtitles, playing all kinds of tricks with our expectations. As Marissa Gallagher proceeds to read the script aloud, to the accompaniment of various views of Downtown New York (many taken from later scenes in the film), they progressively detach from her voice, sometimes racing ahead, sometimes chasing behind the spoken French.¹²⁹ Sometimes they make a sly comment in

¹²⁸ *Deux ou trois* is also cited in the image track of *Unmade Beds*’ prologue — at one point we see a toy Shell station with adult hands hanging over it, manipulating Matchbox cars. Someone blows cigarette smoke across this miniature. The image condenses at least three scenes from Godard’s classic: its ending, depicting a city built of detergent boxes; the central, poetic sequence at Juliet’s husband’s gas station (“Should I speak of Juliet or the leaves?”); and an early shot of some radio tubes, belching cigarette smoke as the air waves carry news of Vietnam. *Deux ou trois choses* was possibly Godard’s first foray into the genre of the *film essai*; since the film also looms large in Zorn’s *Godard*, the “Essay Film” might have also been an important Godardian function for Downtown artists.

¹²⁹ Thirty years before *Grindhouse* (Tarantino-Rodriguez 2007), Amos Poe emulates a damaged film-print, not, in this case, one that’s been mauled in the nicotine-encrusted bowels of a grindhouse theater projector (the grindhouse is present-tense, NYC reality for Poe), but one that’s been man-handled by a series of 16mm, campus film society

the orthographic register, as when the voice mentions Truffaut's *Domicile conjugal* (1970), the fourth Antoine Doinel film, and the subtitles translate "Bed and Bored" (instead of *Bed and Board*).

Most intriguingly, the subtitles are augmented by pictures, which furnish their own, graffiti-like meta-commentary on the film, while also carrying the "false cognate" idea into the visual register. For example, to the immediate left of the lines I've just quoted — "Hello, I am Amos Poe, the director of *Unmade Beds*" — there is a picture of a tree, so perfect in its "treeness," it might suffice as an illustration in Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*. The picture's referent, presumably, is the tree that we see in the moving images, from an angle so close it appears as just a ripple of sunlight, leaves, and branches. The point here seems to be to highlight the "false cognate" between iconic signs (the picture) and indexical signs (the leaves and branches, indices of a "real" tree). But also, perhaps, Poe means to include Peter Wollen in the overall Godard reference. Recall that Wollen ends his now-canonical article, "The Semiology of the Cinema," by praising Godard for demonstrating that the Cinema can make use of the whole trinity of signs, Symbolic, Iconic, and Indexical, while privileging none of them.¹³⁰

But the pictures, like the subtitles they adorn, are by no means systematic. In fact, they seem to revel in their asystematicity. For example, in the very next shot, following the swish pan that reveals Gallagher in the window seat, there is a jump cut: from a medium shot that includes Poe's script paper in her lap to another, taken from exactly the same angle, now framing her at the shoulders. This cut, which also transits from a moving to a stationary shot, is so abrupt (especially coming only a few seconds into Poe's film) that it swallows up some of her lines, which were recorded in synch sound. Fascinatingly, though, Poe supplements the jump cut with a picture of a leaping stag. If the "tree" refers to the rustling leaves we see in the moving pictures, the stag is a pictorial representation of the choppy edit.

In the first shot, it's in the lower right hand corner; in the second, it's in the top left. It's a blink or you'll miss it effect, but wonderful to discover. Here is the most alienating, controversial device in Godard's *Breathless* repertoire, metamorphized into an image of delicacy, fleetness, and grace: the notorious "jump-cut" displaced onto the sinewy leap of a deer.

The "tree" through, across, and over which this deer leaps is also, I believe, a family tree. Amid the clamor of scattered, masked, and deflected "Amos Poes" who speak to us in the prologue of *Unmade Beds*, the voice of another, grandfatherly "Poe" resounds. Edgar Allan Poe, of course, figured prominently in the Symbolist trajectory that Patti Smith *et al.* imagined themselves to be a part of. But he was also the "inventor" of the modern crime story.

projectors. Like other sixties icons — The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan — *Breathless* emerged from the sixties with ripped clothes, torn by adoring fans.

¹³⁰ "More than anybody else Godard has realized the fantastic possibilities of the cinema as a medium of communication and expression. In his hands, as in Peirce's perfect sign, the cinema has become an almost equal amalgam of the symbolic, the iconic, and the indexical" (Wollen, Peter, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972).

Prominently displayed on Rico's wall is painting called "Crimes of Passion," by Duncan Hannah himself (he's the actor who plays Rico). Amos Poe gives this painting as much attention as he gives to the adjacent *Breathless* poster — indeed, almost as much attention as he gives to Hannah. The camera constantly scrolls over this canvas, swimming in and out of focus, excerpting micro-details, finding frames within frames. "Crimes" is organized around the image of revolver in acrylics, its snub-nose pointing to the left; above and below the gun is blocky text, composed of Army-like stencils. Above the revolver's barrel, this script reads: "NEW YORK NEW YORK: ... I toss my hair as the fleece below... How deep we go... And what we dredge up... The silent wash from my espresso cup... Completes the crime... of passion." Below the trigger guard, more of the same: "PARIS... A bottle and two glasses... In the black mystery of night... Shot a full charge into a blank verse... Kiss me kiss me again... Down long big streets to the bloodshot dawn..." Rico's own voice-over narration is a variation of this kind of *film noir* patois, spliced with Symbolist poetry: "There are eight million stories in the naked city," he croaks early on, over a noir-ish panoramic shot of Manhattan building tops. "But I can't remember a single one!"

It's no coincidence that John Zorn's follow-up to his first file-card experiment, Godard, was about Mickey Spillane. In the American cinematic imaginary of the period, *noir* (tough guy movies, tough guy books) and the Nouvelle Vague (author politics, jump cuts) blended together. Both, of course, were creations of what I call "The Mid-Atlantic" — the hyper-charged intersection of American and French artistic cultures. As such, each phenomenon was a palimpsest of American critical re-readings laminated over French critical readings of American movies, to be rendered into new movies on both sides of the Atlantic: *Point Blank* (Boorman 1967), *Le flic* (Melville 1970 — Rico also has a poster for this one), *La femme infidèle* (Chabrol 1969), *Chinatown* (Polanski 1974)... and on and on. It's not quite correct to call these "*neo-noir*," for, strictly speaking, they're the very first movies made under the banner of "film noir" (Paul Schrader's influential article, "Notes on Film Noir," was published in 1972; and we would have to consider the article influential even if it only influenced its own scribe, who wrote *Taxi Driver* [1976]). It follows that the standard Baudrillardian argument about *le mode rétro* misses the fact that these films originated in an historical thesis, first propounded by French surrealists in the late 1940s, then taken up twenty years later by American "Godardians." Schrader and his colleagues re-theorized *film noir*, in order to provide a genealogical context for the "Vietnam" and "Watergate" movies to come. Twenty years earlier, JLG and François Truffaut looked at many of the same movies — *On Dangerous Ground* (Ray 1951), *Pickup on South Street* (Fuller 1953), *Fallen Angel* (Preminger 1945) — to find the premises for their forthcoming Cinema of Authors, la Nouvelle Vague.¹³¹

"Crimes of Passion" X-Rays this 1970s crime film imaginary, in the way that Edgar Allan Poe's "Man of the Crowd" X-Rays the detective story, according to Walter Benjamin. On Hannah's canvas, the Mid-Atlantic is portrayed as a snub-nosed revolver,

¹³¹ As a method of sorting films, *la politique des auteurs*, which posited that "Hawks" transcended the various genres in which he worked, was distinctly at odds with *film noir*, to the degree that one might almost say that they were two, diametrically opposed answers to the same problem: where can we (young French critics) locate Art in Hollywood Cinema?

over and under which “New York New York” and “Paris” appear in mirroring concatenations of *noirish* text. “Crimes” therefore suggests that Paris and New York convene around a murder story, related in a stuttered language, trailed by ellipses... a speech “in between” French and English, or, more precisely, Mallarmé and Spillane. It’s *Breathless*-speak, reproduced with a keen consciousness of how the “false cognate” in Godard’s title spawned two distinct “New Waves,” on either side of the Atlantic.¹³²

But the Mid-Atlantic is more womb than tomb — it’s a briny chasm, suspended like a uterus in the aqueous reaches between Paris and New York. Those checked phrases on the Hannah painting — “I toss my hair as the fleece below...”; “Down long big streets to the bloodshot dawn...”; “Shot a full charge into a blank verse...” — aren’t broken, aborted attempts at meaning, but little embryos, containing a multitude of scenes *en naissance*. Similarly, each “file card” in Zorn’s *Spillane* or *Godard* evokes a whole musical world; each shot in *Unmade Beds* could potentially begin a new movie. Hannah’s “X-Ray,” therefore, doesn’t sketch the *bones* of the *rencontre français-américain* in the 1970s — this isn’t a picture of a structure, a scaffolding, or a skeleton. Rather, it’s an *ultra-sound*, tracking a heartbeat — the emergence of a new artistic language in the union of French and American cultures.

An embryo, as Godard reminds us — in *France/tour/detour/deux enfants* (1978) — harbors both a future and a past; the umbilicus stretches back through generations of couplings, winding inexorably toward some unimaginable “origin” of the human species. Just so, Duncan Hannah’s painting — arguably the “zero degree” of *Unmade Beds* — returns us to the origins of the modern crime story, in “Poe,” the quintessential issue of the French-American couple.

* * *

Edgar Allan Poe published “The Mystery of Marie Rôget,” his — *the* — second detective story, in 1842, in *Snowden’s Ladies Home Companion*. “Marie Rôget” is unique in Poe’s “Alexandre Dupin” trilogy (the other two stories are “Murders in the Rue Morgue” and “The Purloined Letter”) because it’s about a true crime — the unsolved murder of Mary Rogers, whose bloated corpse had been fished from the Hudson River the previous July. Rogers had worked in a cigar store in New York City; she was good-looking and well-liked by the male clientele (Poe apparently knew her). The circumstances surrounding her disappearance and death eerily presage the mysteries surrounding Poe’s own, equally baffling demise several years later. Both deaths inspired — and continue to inspire — a lot of scandalous conjecture. In “The Mystery of Marie Rôget,” Dupin, a proto-Sherlock Holmes “amateur” detective, rifles through the sensationalistic newspaper accounts of the Rogers (here called “Rôget”) investigation.

¹³² Although *Breathless* is a perfect translation of *A bout de souffle* — “at the end of breath” — the connotations might have been *felt* differently, for cultural reasons. In The U.S., *Breathless* must have resonated with the 1958 Jerry Lee Lewis song (“You... leave... me... breathlessUH!”). If *a bout de souffle* means “exhaustion” as well as surpassing happiness, “BreathlessUH!” is unquestionably the pant of an exhilarated lover. The New Hollywood remade *this* Godard — the rock’n’roll Godard, vouchsafed by those ragged, ultra-modern “jump cuts,” hip and angular as bent guitar strings (note the prominence of the Lewis song in the Richard Gere remake).

From a whirlwind of dead ends and licentious speculation, he attempts to distill a rational *method* for solving the crime. The entirety of Poe's tale transpires in Dupin's sitting room, where he reads and re-reads these newspapers aloud to his American friend (our unnamed narrator), pointing out discrepancies in and among the various testimonies, sorting out "fact" from "fantasy."

If "The Mystery of Marie Rôget" is the least of Poe's Dupin stories, as most critics maintain, that's probably because it's true place in the Poe oeuvre is not with the "tales," but with his meta-criticism; "Marie Rôget" is more like "The Rationale of Verse" and "The Poetic Principle" than it is like "The Murders of the Rue Morgue." Poe took the real-life murder case as an excuse for a full-fledged demonstration of his analytical powers, and as a justification for the newly minted "ratiocinative tale" as an experiment in deductive reasoning. The story was a broadside, aimed both at the thick-skulled New York police, whose judgments were obviously befogged by the sordid details, and at the equally murky-headed literary establishment of his day: American literature can, and should, apply the scalpel of logic, to trim its fatty excesses.

For my purposes, the story's relevance is that, like his "ancestor," Amos Poe, Edgar Allan Poe restaged the whole *affaire* Mary Rogers in an imaginary "Paris," transporting the Hudson Bay Area to the banks of the Seine and turning Mary Rogers into Marie Rôget. Both the first and last Dupin tales are also set in Paris, yet here Poe has left the work of fictionalization — which is actually just a Frenchification — hyper-, even annoyingly, visible. Just as the subtitles in *Unmade Beds* detach themselves from the spoken words they're putatively translating, refusing to close the gap between speech and writing (and thereby refusing the illusion of a seamless translation "proper" to a genuine foreign film), Poe, Sr.'s text is dogged by footnotes. These footnotes denominate the actual American newspaper, suspect, or locale, wherever the author has substituted an imaginary French one.

For example, when we are told that "the mother and daughter had dwelt together in the Rue Pavée," or introduced to the proprietor of the cigar store where Marie worked ("Monsieur Le Blanc"), or reminded of the fact that Marie's corpse was discovered "floating in the Seine, near the shore which is opposite the Quartier of the Rue Saint Andrée, and at a point not very far distant from the secluded neighborhood of the Barrière du Roule" — we're hectored by little numbers, tugging at our suspension of disbelief, insistently dragging our eyes from their horizontal scan into a steep vertical plunge. At the bottom of the page, we stand corrected: the Rue Pavée was actually "Nassau Street"; Le Blanc's real-life, New York counterpart was named Anderson; for La Seine we should read "The Hudson"; and our presumed Barrière du Roule was, in actual fact, "Weehawken."¹³³ If the murder of Mary Rogers was unsolved — a fact that both Poe and his literary counterpart, Dupin, respect, to the detriment of narrative closure — "The Mystery of Marie Rôget" is *irresolute*. The unhappy life and death of Rogers-Rôget unravels in an intermediate nowhere, somewhere between France and America, American and French.

Charles Baudelaire translated "The Mystère de Marie Rôget" for his fifth and final volume of Poe stories, *Histoires grotesques et serieuses* (1867). He thereby rendered

¹³³ Poe, Edgar Allan, *The Complete Tales & Poems*, New York: Vintage Books, 1975, pg. 171.

into French what Edgar Poe had already rendered into “France.” Baudelaire left intact Poe’s scrupulous footnotes, and even added one. Believing his French reader might stumble on an ill-observed moral point, resting on a subtle distinction between American and French manners, he cautioned:

To amateurs of the strict local truth, I will observe, relative to this passage and to some others that follow, as well as several in “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” that the author recounts American incidents, and that the adventure is only very superficially disguised; but the imagined Parisian morals don’t invalidate the value of the analysis, any more than the imaginary map of Paris does.¹³⁴

Analysis, indeed. For Poe, the commutation of the Mary Rogers murder onto an imaginary map of Paris involved a kind of sterilization. He was extricating the crime from its confusing local coordinates, to re-examine it in the cold light of reason. Poe’s *Paris imaginaire*, then, was a laboratory, wherein the “factual” became “fictional,” and “American” became “French,” for the purposes of a rhetorical autopsy.

Intriguingly, it was also Poe’s post-mortem literary fate to be “ripped” from a foul, American context, marked by obscene gossip and calumnious rumor, and turned into a fictional “Parisian.” In Baudelaire’s translations, as everyone from Paul Valéry to T.S. Eliot to Edmund Wilson to Jonathan Culler has pointed out, the French poet plucked Poe from what he called “the stuffy atmosphere of the shopkeeper” (for Baudelaire, Poe choked on this atmosphere — he was strangled by Ben Franklin) and planted him in the more rarefied environs of French poetry.

IV. Le Gai Savoir

This transplantation drove American intellectuals of the early 20th century absolutely crazy. As Jonathan Elmer reminds us, American academics (and poets, with a few exceptions) tended to reject “Poe” as puerile, childish, everything a true literary modernism should not be.¹³⁵ Yet there were complications here, because of the esteem in which the French — the model “avant-garde” — held him. Mallarmé, Rimbaud, Verlaine, and most centrally, Baudelaire, enshrined Edgar Allan as a literary absolute — a spirit that pervaded poetry at its most pure, exalted, and “for itself.” For the French, “Poe” also stood as a constant reminder of the cruel fate in store for the “genius” in the modern (more precisely: rapidly Americanizing) world. Writing of Poe’s Baltimore grave marker, Mallarmé wrote: “Calm block here fallen from obscure disaster/ Let this granite at least mark the boundaries evermore/ To the dark flights of Blasphemy hurled to the

¹³⁴ “Aux amateurs de la stricte vérité locale, je ferai observer, relativement à ce passage et à d’autres qui suivent, ainsi qu’à plusieurs de Double Assassinat dans la rue Morgue, que l’auteur raconte les choses à l’américaine, et que l’aventure n’est que très superficiellement déguisée; mais que des moeurs parisiennes imaginaires n’infirmant pas la valeur de l’analyse, pas plus qu’un plan de Paris imaginaire.” [My translation] Poe, Edgar Allan, *Histoires grotesques et serieuses*, trans. Charles Baudelaire. Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1865, pg. 10.

¹³⁵ Elmer, Jonathan, *Reading at the Social Limit: Affect, Mass Culture, & Edgar Allan Poe*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.

future.”¹³⁶ The Death of the Author, in Mallarmé’s tribute, signifies not the birth of the reader (pace Roland Barthes), but the “resurrection” of the one “Tel qu’en Lui même enfin l’éternité le change.” Everybody from Paul Valéry to Jean Cocteau quotes this line, like a mantra. Poe was “such as eternity changes into Himself.” For “eternity” in this formulation, read: French poets. Paul Valéry: “...In exchange for what he had taken [a “whole system of new and profound thought”], Baudelaire gave Poe’s thought an infinite extension. He proffered it to the future. It was Baudelaire’s act, translation, prefaces, that opened this expansion which, in Mallarmé’s great line, changes the poet in himself, and assured it to the shade of the unhappy Poe.”¹³⁷

If Baudelaire’s translations gave Poe’s thought “an infinite extension,” they nevertheless reflected a very *partial* reading of Poe — one which deliberately neglected, first of all, the very “American” nature of Poe’s writings themselves (as well as his exemplary status as a mid-19th American author, Walt Whitman’s contemporary, blazing trails into what was still, then, a literary “wilds”). Secondly, as Harold Bloom (the literary scholar who, to this day, refuses to give ground on the “Poe” problem) and T.S. Eliot assert, it was only thanks to Baudelaire’s scrupulous translations — perhaps thanks to the relative clarity of the French language itself — that anyone could mistake Poe for a “great” writer. French *pruned* Poe’s baroque English of its stylistic infelicities, its clunkiness, its pretentiousness (Poe never used an English word when ancient Greek or a mathematical rune would serve), and its dilapidated Romanticism. (Ironically, these are some of the very elements that Baudelaire himself appreciated in Poe — a stylistic recklessness that he hoped to smuggle into the rigid, rule-governed French language, like a bomb.) Early twentieth-century English and American modernist writers (T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats, J. Joyce, G. Stein etc.), in flight from their own “Middletowns,” rooted themselves in the Baudelairean lineage. For them, this line passed from Baudelaire to Mallarmé to Valéry, without — however — also passing through Edgar Poe, Jules Verne, and Conan Doyle.

Eliot, in fact, devoted his post-Nobel lecture to the problem of “Poe” *vis-à-vis* modern literature. In this key work, he compares a stanza from “The Raven” (?) to a stanza from Tennyson, concluding that Tennyson was (by any *reasonable* measure) the better poet. However, he also casts a doubt: “And yet one cannot be sure that one’s own writing has *not* been influenced by Poe.”¹³⁸ The “influence” of Edgar Poe was like a sexually transmitted disease, an inevitable, discomfiting, and possibly even humiliating consequence of English poetry’s copulation with French poetry.

¹³⁶ “Calme blo ici-bas chu d’un désastre obscur/ Que ce granit du moins montra à jamais sa borne/ Aux noirs vols du Blasphème épars dans le futur” (Mallarmé, Stephan, “Le tombeau d’Edgar Poe,” trans. Weinfield, Henry, *Collected Poems*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994, pg. 71).

¹³⁷ Valéry, Paul, “The Position of Baudelaire (La situation de Baudelaire),” trans. William Aspenwall Bradley, *Variety: Second Series*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1938. (Re-published here:

http://supervert.com/elibrary/charles_baudelaire/the_position_of_baudelaire)

¹³⁸ Eliot, T.S., “From Poe to Valéry,” *The Hudson Review*, vol. 2, no. 3 (Autumn 1949), pg. 327.

* * *

Just as “Edgar Poe” drove early American modernists crazy, *Unmade Beds* would probably drive Yvonne Rainer, Chantal Akerman, and Jon Jost crazy. These experimental filmmakers, of course, had a very studied — careful, well-theorized — relationship to Godard; purged of his Americanism, situated in relation to “French Theory,” and re-tailored as a proto-feminist filmmaker, “Godard” could finally be assimilated to the American avant-garde in the early seventies, as a way of breaking out of the impasses of “structuralist” film. The originality of *Unmade Beds* lies elsewhere, in its DIY “Godard.” In this instance, “DIY” means that the film doesn’t have an academic bone in its body; it’s not even rigidly, polemically anti-academic, like Nick Zedd’s “Cinema of Transgression.” Zedd’s appalling films were accompanied by manifestos that abominated the “classic” avant-garde, while propounding the virtues of an *abjection* that could only be felt as abject in relation to an official, institutional film culture. As Georges Bataille (patron saint of the Cinema of Transgression) noted, there is no Transgression without a Law — and no Law without Transgression.

After *Unmade Beds*’s prologue, the titles appear: the words “Unmade Beds” splayed across a woman’s T-Shirt, its wearer’s erect nipples lewdly poking through (she’s nothing but a torso). Then the click of a camera’s shutter, and she’s changed her T-shirt — it now reads “Un film de Amos Poe” (a signature that Poe uses to this day). *Unmade Beds* does not transgress; it is simply without shame.

The Catholicism of *la politique des auteurs* is often cited as a strike against it. For Marxist theorists like John Hess, writing about *la politique* for *Jump Cut* in 1974, “unveiling” the Christianity in Godard and Truffaut’s early writings was tantamount to exposing *Cahiers du cinéma* as a fascist journal.¹³⁹ However, it was obviously the *guilt* embedded in the auteur idea — see Chabrol and Rohmer on Hitchcock as a Jansenist — that gave the Nouvelle Vague its phenomenal force in the sixties, a remarkably guilty decade.¹⁴⁰ The “historical and French cinéphilie” was always guilty in advance.¹⁴¹ Whether expressed in terms of a French Hitchcockso-Hawksianism or an Andrew Sarris “Pantheon,” the Auteur imputed to cinema the qualities of divine judgment. In France, Hitchcock was always watching, and always finding your work not up to snuff (before embarking on *Made in U.S.A.*, Godard pointedly observed that Hitchcock was “no longer

¹³⁹ Hess, John, “*La politique des auteurs* (part one): Worldview As Aesthetics,” *Jump Cut*, no. 1, 1974, pp. 19-22; “*La politique des auteurs* (part two): Truffaut’s Manifesto,” *Jump Cut* no. 2, 1974, pp. 20-22.

¹⁴⁰ From the perspective of Reaganism, we see recreational drugs, long hair, Beatlemania, and political naïvete — *hedonism*: but all of these expressions, I think, came from an *unendurable* sense of complicity with 20th century atrocities — and here I’m speaking of both American and French, and specifically *white*, counter-cultures.

¹⁴¹ “It’s a question of theory, but even more of territory. This is what necessarily divides me from Jonathan [Rosenbaum], in whom cinéphilie was born, like in everyone else, through the nouvelle vague, but who, as an American, takes the nouvelle vague itself as an object of cinéphilie — whereas the cinéphile, in the historical and French sense, trains his sights on the American cinema as an enchanted and closed world, a referential system sufficient to interpret the rest” (Bellour, Raymond, ‘Movie Mutations,’ *Film Quarterly*, vol. 52 no. 1, pg 51).

speaking” to him; behind this utterance one should see the outlines of an Ingmar Bergman character, bemoaning the silence of God). In America, your political cinema was never good enough, right enough, true enough, or political enough to suit Godard. You’re too busy worrying about your precious *tracking shots* — do you think the Vietnamese peasants can *afford* to make tracking shots? You’re too worried about the Vietnamese peasants — it’s not the subject, but the *form*, that makes a political cinema political!

As I’ve already remarked, *Unmade Beds* knows that “failure” was constitutive of the French New Wave, and of Godard’s work in particular. But Amos Poe goes further: he reappropriates “failure” as a rationalization for his own filmmaking amateurism. This tactic, I think, allows him to significantly rewrite the cinema of the sixties, summing up the American and French avant-gardes, while dissolving the neurotically cultivated walls between them.

I’ve already noted how, in the above-described scene with Patti Astor, Poe assimilates “Godard” to a “Warhol” situation; the scene plays like *Vivre sa vie*, re-routed through *Trash*. (Or, perhaps, it’s *Trash* “de-constructed” by Godard.) In what is arguably *Unmade Beds*’s most famous scene, the enunciation similarly hovers between “European Art Film” and “American Underground” film. We have just been introduced to Rico, the francophile photographer; now we see him at work. Rico makes his living by taking publicity shots of beautiful models (i.e., French girls from Tennessee), but, naturally, he is sick to death of prostituting his art and plans a serious monograph of urban scenes (later we see him solemnly taking pictures of the Brooklyn Bridge in the rain).

In the meantime, a young Debbie Harry stops by his studio for her “close-up.” When she arrives, Rico is sitting in an arm-chair, smoking, wearing a black fedora, black socks (with clocks, of course, as well as straps), a fat tie, white boxers, and nothing else — probably a riff on Michel Piccoli’s garb in the famous apartment scene from Godard’s *Le mépris* (1963). Harry preens her hair in the mirror. Rico snaps a couple of pictures. Then she sings *à cappella*. In a tight overhead shot from a slight angle, Poe shows Harry, now in black lingerie (she arrived in a white dress), straddling a straight-back chair. “Sweet thing,” she pipes, in a husky voice that aims at Julie London but falls short, somehow — a bit too girly, too New Yawk. (Duncan Hannah’s Rico is like this too — he’s too boyish to remind us of Belmondo or Piccoli, and he’s preposterous doing Mitchum or Bogart.) When she finishes singing, Rico’s bare legs appear beside her chair, leaving the strong impression that the song was a synecdoche for sex.

It’s a very cleverly constructed sequence — indeed, Godard-like in its ellipses, its presentation of each line of dialogue or bit of actorly business as a semi-autonomous “event” within a larger structure, a “scene,” which is barely more than the sum of its shots. From moment to moment, associations of past movies accumulate. We ricochet from *Le petit soldat* (1960; the “Cinema is Truth at 24 Frames per Second” sequence, in which Butor photographs Anna Karina while interrogating her about her political allegiances) to the famous Hemmings-Verushka interlude in *Blow-up* (memorably parodied in *Austen Powers* [1997]), in which Hemmings straddles her chest, his camera bearing down on her face, phallus-like, while she writhes orgasmically beneath him and the shutter clicks, clicks, clicks. It even references Jacques Démy’s *Lola* (1961): Debbie Harry’s black lingerie resembles Anouk Aimée’s costume in that film, in which she portrays a prostitute trying to make it as a singer.

But if the *content* — even the stylistic “content,” the framings, the ambiguous continuity, and so forth — evokes European Art cinema and especially Godard, the sensibility at work might be closer to Andy Warhol’s. Part of this is merely the “superstar” effect of Debbie Harry’s appearance; *Blondie*’s first album debuted in 1976, so she is literally on the cusp of international superstardom here (this, no doubt, is why the scene is “iconic” — indeed, why it’s the only reason many people even see *Unmade Beds*; the DVD box gives the impression that she’s the star of the film!). But “Warhol” doesn’t end there. Throughout the scene, beginning with an introductory pan across a world map, upon which Paris is indicated by “c. 1959,” written in magic marker, the image constantly slides in and out of focus. The focus problem, Poe explains on the DVD’s commentary track, shows his lack of cinematic chops at the time. However, he says elsewhere, his technical inexperience was *excused*, even justified, by Warhol’s *Poor Little Rich Girl* (1965), the first reel of which was entirely out of focus.¹⁴²

What does this Warholian “blurriness” allow us to perceive in the Debbie Harry sequence? An overdetermined “art film” situation, the Artist and His Model, passed down from Guy De Maupassant, Balzac, and, indeed, Edgar Allan Poe (“The Oval Portrait” is a touchstone of Godard’s films with Karina, including *Made in U.S.A.*, his film “Po”). There is the beautiful, slightly whorish girl, a naïf trying to make it in a crummy business; there is the oversexed, disaffected male photographer, “slumming” in commercial art; and, finally, there is the Auteur, their invisible “third,” who presides over their tryst. The alienated photographer is only a functional surrogate for the film’s director; in fact, Antonioni or Godard has already made — is in the process of *making* — his serious modern art, his ground-shaking “book” of urban scenes. Thus, the Auteur is poised to lord it over his pretentious, social-climbing counterpart, toiling away in the “obscurity” of fashion photography, where his role is to stoke female narcissism on behalf of “the sickness of Eros” (Antonioni) or “*la civilisation du cul*” (Godard).

But there is a structural hypocrisy to this situation, too, which the Auteur enjoys. From his lordly vantage, he can also disclose the sexual fantasy that subtended so much of the fashionable cinema of the sixties, and which, surely, drew so many precocious European boys to filmmaking in the first place: the brilliant young artist, scintillatingly *alone* — preferably in his studio-cum-loft — with a beautiful and desperate actress, an Anna Karina or an Anouk Aimée, who *depends* on him for her “image.”

¹⁴² Amos Poe: “I didn’t give a shit. Ever see *Poor Little Rich Girl* by Andy Warhol? Andy had a 16mm Auricon (a metal camera used mostly by news crews). The first half hour is really interesting because the camera just sits on Edie Sedgwick, who is talking, all crazy and neurotic. She’s talking, and the whole first half hour of the film is out of focus because they didn’t have the lens mounted on the camera right. But the second half of the film is in focus, and it’s fantastic! You’re watching it, and straining, asking “Where are my glasses” then you are so relieved when the film goes into focus. Your eyes were almost adjusted to the out of focus image, and your brain is making focus out of something out of focus. Andy didn’t believe in editing because — who could make the decision to keep a scene in or throw it out.”

[<http://www.filmsinreview.com/2011/04/07/interview-amos-poe-and-the-no-wave-cinema/>]

To be clear, however, this is Amos Poe's "Warhol."¹⁴³ An actual Warhol film, of course, would compel us to witness the wretchedness of the primary situation, the girl's *hunger* for exposure, the way she falls, in every sense, for the photographer's camera (she is a "fallen woman"); and it would alert us to her shabby clothes, the pimples on her skin, her bloodshot, alcoholic eyes — all the markers of her protuberant, grubby personhood. But the countervailing force here is Amos Poe's "Godard," which, in fact, drags that third figure — the Auteur — under the hot, bright lights, displaying *His* rather pathetic desire to please.

* * *

For Poe, apparently, the cinemas of "Godard" and "Warhol" coalesced in their insight that there was no longer a "ruling" film grammar in the sixties; thus, it was impossible for a modern filmmaker to know for certain where a shot should begin and end. However, in each case — whether we're talking about Warhol or Godard — the filmmaker's confrontation with the impossible decision that *had* to be made (do I turn the camera off or on?) played out in very different ways. By splitting the difference between Godard and Warhol, I think Poe is on new ground.

To copy sixties Godard is to mobilize certain "tics" — it's a very "tic-y" cinema (even if copying him outright is to risk looking like a pretentious kid). To copy Warhol, by contrast, is to adopt a "gee, that's *great*," innocent-jaded attitude toward whatever you've just got in the can. If the two artists, Warhol and Godard, dominated Sixties artmaking, their actual works had little to do with each other. Or perhaps it would be better to say that there were only *abstract* correspondences between Warhol and Godard: both occupied the very fungible category of "Pop Art," both attempted to re-narrate the history of the cinema in the sixties, and both came to symbolize important tendencies in what was soon to become the "post-modern" sensibility.

Nevertheless, each artist seemingly defined his trajectory by resisting the extremes of his counterpart on the other side of the Ocean (well, Godard resisted Warhol, whereas Warhol resisted *resistance*). Godard took his "Pop Art" decisively in the direction of Marxist-Leninist films (*Pierrot le fou*'s comic book panels became *Lutte in Italia* [1971]'s Maoist cartoons); Warhol became ever more libertarian in his politics, even valorizing Reagan in the early eighties. According to Robert Hughes, in an important article for *The New York Review of Books* (later re-published in the signal Downtown anthology, *Art After Modernism*), the "factory" was never the irreverent hoax on the art establishment that it seemed, for a while, to be: in fact, the factory was exactly what it always *claimed* to be, an indolent, non-reflective, and *total* colonization of American Art by marketplace logics.¹⁴⁴ Godard's post-*Breathless* career, by contrast, instantiated an ever more violent rejection of the "Pop" element in his early work,

¹⁴³ Among Poe's most recent films is a "remake" of Warhol's notorious *Empire*, which consisted of eight hours of the Empire State Building in a static, silent shot. In *Empire II*, it seems to me that the emphasis of *Unmade Beds* is reversed. Shot in gorgeous color DV, from Poe's windowsill (Warhol's *Empire* is black & white), it feels like a reimagining of Warhol's film from the perspective of late Godard, particularly *Eloge d'amour* (2001).

¹⁴⁴ Hughes, Robert, "The Rise of Andy Warhol," in *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984.

culminating with his shunning the commercial mainstream entirely, for a decade at least. At the same time, intriguingly, this brought his actual praxis *closer* to a Warholian one; he became an independent, underground filmmaker, his works taking up residence somewhere between the museum and the grindhouse. *Numéro deux* is a self-defined “political porno.”

Most importantly, of course, “Godard” and “Warhol” indicate apposite organizations of “sexuality” in Art. As Kaja Silverman notes, Godard’s cosmology is grounded in an “ideal” heterosexuality, which structures every other significant anti-thesis in his work — sound/image, man/woman, montage/mise-en-scène, America/Europe, inside/outside, here/elsewhere, documentary/fiction.¹⁴⁵ This is not to say that Godard’s oeuvre is hetero-*normative*; although the “couple” in Godard might derive from an early insight into American cinema, it operates much differently from the way “gender” operates in, say, the musical. In the musical, according to Rick Altman, man/woman is the “master” opposition, which subordinates a series of other oppositions — jazz/classical, art/commerce, city/countryside, New World/Old World, etc.. In a film starring Fred Astaire and Cyd Charisse, each character will be affiliated with a set of characteristics that refer to one side of a deeply entrenched social contradiction (he’ll be jazz; she’ll be classical; etc.). Thus, when they finally dance together at the end of the movie, all of these other binaries (insurmountable in political, social, cultural reality) are symbolically “resolved.”¹⁴⁶ This implies, of course, that “man” and “woman” are equalized in dance — both genders are subsumed to the couple, in a kind of sexual melting pot. Hence, the musical’s utopian imaginary: “entertainment” can suture back together, “Cheek to Cheek,” the immemorial splits between East and West, Old and New, and Man and Woman, with a show-stopping climactic “coupling.”

Godard’s “couple,” by contrast, must be understood in relationship to *écriture féminine* — Irigaray, Cixous, Kristeva — and the psychoanalytical thesis that, in Western Culture, *la femme n’existe pas. Masculin-féminin* (any Godard film could be called this) signifies, not necessarily *absolute* difference, but the basis for an unprecedented recognition of difference; a neither this nor a that, but an “and” — an *Ici et ailleurs*, as Gilles Deleuze puts it.¹⁴⁷ From this standpoint, Godard’s cinema of the sixties — including *Breathless* — broke even more radically with the strategies of the classical Hollywood cinema than is usually supposed. Where a Hollywood film moves inexorably toward the “closing” of the couple, Godard’s films proceed to the revelation of the radical “open-ness” of couplehood. His work literally never *ends*.

If this made Godard the quintessential director of the Nouvelle Vague — a film movement (as Serge Daney noted, in his final interview) fanatically devoted to the

¹⁴⁵ Although several of Silverman’s published works anticipate this thesis, notably *Speaking About Godard*, co-written with Harun Farocki (New York City: NYU Press, 1998), here I am mostly drawing from my personal conversations with her, as well as her seminars and lectures at the University of California, Berkeley. Hopefully, Silverman will eventually publish the definitive book on “heterosexuality” in Godard.

¹⁴⁶ Altman, Rick, “The American Film Musical as Dual-Focus Narrative,” in *The American Film Musical*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.

¹⁴⁷ Deleuze, Gilles, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson & Robert Galeta, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985, pp. 179-180.

project of making Woman “appear”¹⁴⁸ — then it was Warhol’s fascination with the figure of the transvestite that made Warhol the defining filmmaker of the 1960s underground. As David Ehrenstein points out, the structural underpinnings of American experimental cinema were “bohemian daring” and “homoerotic imaginativeness.”¹⁴⁹ However, Godard’s algebraic “masculin-féminin” and Warhol’s “transvestite” aren’t necessarily irreconcilable — in fact, they’re like a Godardian “couple”; their overdetermined *differences* constitute the grounds for a revealing comparison. Holly Woodlawn and Candy Darling, too, are neither this nor that — they’re “ands.” They represent two separate sexual “universes,” brought into tenuous constellation in a single body. Just so, *Breathless* represents the conjugation of two gendered “realities” in a single film.

V. “They Say Sleep Together”

PATRICIA: It’s sad to fall asleep. You have to... separ...

MICHEL (*helping her with her grammar, finishing the word*):...ate.

PATRICIA (*continuing sadly*):...to separate. They say, “sleep together,” but it’s not true.

*She turns, looks down sadly, then back at Michel, and directly into the camera. Fade out.*¹⁵⁰

Why is *Unmade Beds* called *Unmade Beds*? And how should we understand these “unmade beds” in relationship to the tangled histories that I’ve just related — all of those other “Poes” clamoring for our attention (not just the multiplicity of Amos Poes in the prologue, but the deeper voices they sound, from the depths of the Mid-Atlantic); Godard’s fraught legacy for American filmmakers and critics (academic, Underground, and New Hollywoodian); the *shit* that *Breathless* had become, even for its maker, by 1976? Most urgently, what does Amos Poe’s *Unmade Beds* tell us about *its* Downtown — specifically downtown New York City — in the rose-streaked twilight of the international avant-garde, with “Main Street, USA” looming?

First, we should recognize that the “unmade bed” was *the* key setting for Godard’s early films (even his short subjects), and possibly for the New Wave more generally. Unmade beds figure prominently in virtually all of Godard’s 1960s work (prior to his Marxist-Leninism), usually as the axis around which a “battle of the sexes” (or at

¹⁴⁸ “The New Wave (in France in particular, but also throughout the New Waves of the world) was stuck doing something completely different [than previous cinematic movements, such as neorealism]: a man and a woman, the war of the sexes, and the eventual resolution of this war. Between 1960 and 1980 all artistic and creative energy is invested there. The cinema of ideals, the masculine cinema (only men had ideals), had to be exchanged for a cinema that would allow women to appear” (Daney, Serge, *Postcards from the Cinema*, trans. Paul Grant, Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2007, pg. 92).

¹⁴⁹ “...*Flaming Creatures* exemplifies the bohemian daring and homoerotic imaginativeness that are the true roots of the American avant-garde” (Ehrenstein, David, *Film: The Front Line 1984*, Denver: Arden Press, 1984, pg 23).

¹⁵⁰ *Breathless* script, pg. 134.

least a heated conversation between the sexes) turns. Secondly, the unmade bed is also a significant place in a number of European post-Nouvelle Vague movies, more or less contemporary with Poe's. This suggests an "alliance" between Amos Poe and the Second Wave directors, many of whom were also contending with the *Breathless* heritage, while groping through their own, post-68, European "No Wave."

Jean Eustache's *La maman et la putain* (1973), for example, cast Jean-Pierre Léaud (the iconic star of Truffaut's *Les 400 Coups*, i.e. Antoine Doinel himself) as a burnt-out case, compulsively living out a Nouvelle Vague-type existence in the void of an actual Nouvelle Vague. His gestures are precisely those of Doinel's (we particularly recognize his tense pursuit of "freedom"), but they've become strained, manic. A great deal of Eustache's four hour masterpiece takes place on a mattress in Léaud's girlfriend's apartment, a perpetually unmade bed, on which the three principals — including another woman he can't make up his mind about — rage, booze, have sex, sleep, and listen to old Marlene Dietrich records. (On the DVD commentary for *Unmade Beds*, Poe remarks that he saw *La maman et la putain* during pre-production — there are undoubtedly traces of Léaud's character in Rico, a similar sense that Rico is a "text" inserted into the wrong "context.") Similarly, Chantal Akerman's *Je tu il elle* (1976) begins with its protagonist (Akerman herself) arranging and re-arranging her bed, until she becomes so frustrated with this activity, she jettisons both mattress and box-springs, shoving them into the hallway of her apartment building. There are many other examples — Fassbinder's *Bitter Tears of Petra Von Kant* (1972), for example, takes place in and around Petra's unmade bed.

All of these "unmade beds" have one "unmade bed" in mind, I think — Patricia's hotel bed in *A bout de souffle*. Michel (Belmondo) shows up in Patricia's room, uninvited, hoping to have sex with her; Patricia (Jean Seberg) avers — she has an interview with an important writer that afternoon. He patiently corrects her anglicisms; she haltingly translates her English expressions into French ones. She asks him if he thinks she looks like the girl in the Renoir portrait (yes, with qualifications). He says he wants to sleep with her again. They drift from bathroom to bedroom and back, chattering, seducing and annoying each-other in equal measure. He makes a few phone calls. The flirtations, the rejections, the boring chatter (rife with translation problems and "existential footnotes"), the passionate love-making, the concealed pregnancy, and (ultimately) the delivering over to the police — in this *discours amoureux* is the matrix figure for French and American film culture of the sixties (for Belmondo-Seberg, for example, we might read Truffaut-Sarris).

Patricia's *unmade bed*, in other words, was the site of a primal scene. It is the fantasmatic "origin" for all later films, made under the sign of Godard and the New Wave. Yet, historically, the American Underground — not just Warhol, but Jack Smith, Brakhage, Jacobs, Cassavetes, etc. — would have nothing to do with this place or this scene. In fact, my sense is that Poe is among the first — Phillippe Garrel is his French counterpart — to overcome and sublimate the "narcissism of little differences" that kept the Nouvelle Vague and Underground from recognizing each other as they emerged.¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ Indeed, Garrel's *Les hautes solitudes* (1974) is *Unmade Beds*'s closest French kin; it's an 80 minute, silent, black & white film, consisting of parallel studies of Nico — associate of Warhol — and Jean Seberg, star of *Breathless*.

In the monologue that gives *Unmade Beds* its title, Patti Astor (again) leans out of a window, addressing the camera. Her lover — played by Eric Mitchell — stands in the kitchen behind her, in deep shadow. Rico has been killed. (... or so I think; in pursuit of a strange person he has found in one of his photographs, he is shot. The end of the film seemingly collapses *Blow-up* with Chris Marker's *La jetée*: the "corpse" the photographer thinks he sees in the picture turns out to be his own.) But from scene to scene, his body appears and disappears from the sidewalk. Like Edgar Poe's *tombeau* in Mallarmé's poem, Rico's deathbed (calm block fallen from obscure disaster) is apparently the site of a transubstantiation, where the "man" is made over by eternity into what he was in Himself. Astor's fleshly features display post-coital satisfaction, or amphetamine come-down, or both, as she intones:

You know someone well. And then you realize you don't know them at all. One moment they're alive. And the next they're dead. It's all taken for granted that one can choose between despair and feeling nothing. [Mitchell: "Or the difference between the two. Or the difference between the two." *A churchbell rings. A dog barks.*] The only strength one can find in life is an unmade bed. When the limbs and the sheets are as one. You're free and mean nothing... 'cause it's just the moment and the senses... and then two people... or three... or more...

One long, hot summer afternoon, in 1959, sitting on the edge of an unmade bed, an American girl (becoming-French) opened the book on her bedside table and read a passage aloud to her French boyfriend (becoming-Bogart): "Between grief and nothing, I will take grief." She asked him which he would choose. "Grief is stupid," he replied, undoubtedly framing his answer according to the way he imagined Paul Muni or James Cagney would respond, if asked the same thing in one of the Hollywood gangster films he admired. "It's not any better, but grief, it's a compromise. You've got to have all or nothing."

The "grief or nothing" line — arguably made famous by *A bout de souffle* — is often described as the last sentence in Faulkner's novel, but it's not. In fact, it's the last line of *one* of the two novels which together comprise *The Wild Palms*. Faulkner's original title, finally restored to the 1990s Vintage edition, was *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem*. In Faulkner's complete text, "The Wild Palms," a melodrama about the "last romantic couple," tragically trying to live on "love alone," lies side by side, chapter by chapter, with "The Old Man," an essentially comedic tale about a convict, whose ridiculous career as an armed robber was inspired by Hollywood movies. Both are love stories, both end in prison, and both involve parenthood. "The Wild Palms" ends with a botched abortion that kills the mother (and with the conviction of her husband for manslaughter; it's he who elects "grief" over "nothingness"). In "The Old Man," the convict's fate becomes intertwined with a very pregnant woman's when he rescues her from a treetop during a flood of Biblical proportions. She gives birth on his raft, careening over central Mississippi, amid pounding debris; they live for a while as a "married" couple. Doubtless, it is the book's insistent theme of childbirth and tragic love that has drawn Patricia to Faulkner's novel, and gives her question to Michel its piquancy. Patricia herself is pregnant, with Michel's child. Thus, she takes his answer to heart, and, in the film's final moments, she gives him his nothingness.

For Godard, on the other hand, it was obviously Faulkner's *structure* that was crucial: the idea of two interlinked stories that corresponded without dovetailing. Faulkner claimed he decided on the book's parallelism when he realized that "The Wild Palms" was too "histrionic" on its own.¹⁵² It required off-setting with something outlandish and funny, so that the reader wouldn't be overwhelmed by pathos. Obviously, behind this insight were gender assumptions. "The Wild Palms" was too *feminine* by itself, too involved in the intimate, pain-soaked lives of its characters. It required a yang to its yin, a fiction to its documentary: not precisely an opposite number, but a re-telling, this time in a "masculine" mode, with outrageous peril and boyish adventure. Godard wasn't the first French cinéaste to recognize the cinematic possibilities of such a juxtaposition. Indeed, Agnes Varda's *La pointe courte* (1954), one of many candidates for "first" Nouvelle Vague film, also drew inspiration from *The Wild Palms*, alternating studiously composed, painterly episodes with more ragged, documentary-like footage of a fishing village. But Godard took the idea much further, into a brand new conception of montage. There is no shot in *A bout de souffle* in which a "masculine" and "feminine" don't co-exist... always separate, but always "together." On Patricia's "unmade bed," in fact, two movies — Patricia's and Michel's — unfold, *en pareil*.¹⁵³

Astor's monologue, then, situates Poe's film at the "navel of the dream," so to speak — the place where *A bout de souffle* is closest to the primal phantasy. We are on the edge of Patricia's unmade bed, where the cinema of the sixties was/is about to be conceived; we are also in between "grief" and "nothing," in the pages of *The Wild Palms*. Faulkner's bisected novel furnished the structural grounds for Patricia and Michel's coupling; it also announced the primacy of *couplehood* for Godard. From *Breathless* onward, the French and American cinemas would form a kind of "parallel movie," lying side by side, chapter by chapter... corresponding, never converging. But Amos Poe's embedded citation of *The Wild Palms* — his allusion to Godard's allusion — is also

¹⁵² "[Faulkner] invented the story of the 'tall convict,' he later said, as a counterpoint to the story of Harry and Charlotte, in an effort to maintain the intensity of the latter story without allowing it to become shrill" (Noel Polk, "Editor's Note," from Faulkner, William, *The Wild Palms [If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem]*, New York: Vintage, 1990).

¹⁵³ In fact, it might be argued that there are two *Otto Preminger* films happening here at once - *Bonjour Tristesse*, a "woman's picture" with Jean Seberg, and *Fallen Angel*, a tough guy film with Dana Andrews. Kaja Silverman argues that you can track Godard's work according to the status of the "couple" in his life and work. Through the sixties, at least, it means almost the same thing to say that he was consistently trying to reckon with *The Wild Palms*. See, for example, McCabe and Mulvey's influential feminist critique of Godard's dual trajectories through the 1960s; each roughly corresponds to one of Faulkner's stories, with *Vivre sa vie* occupying the "feminine" (intimacy, documentary) to *Alphaville* (1965)'s "masculine" (genre, Hollywood) side. This "duet" climaxed in 1966, with *Made in U.S.A.* and *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle*, which Godard made virtually simultaneously, and — according to Richard Roud — wished to be screened in "alternating reels, à la *The Wild Palms*." See Mulvey, Laura, and MacCabe, Colin, "Images of Women, Images of Sexuality," *Godard: Images, Sounds, Politics*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980. See also: Roud, Richard, *Jean-Luc Godard*, New York: Doubleday, 1968, pg. 101.

presented in the form of an open question. Do you (now, in 1976) choose grief or nothing? This question continued to vex Eustache, Fassbinder, and Akerman, too; yet, in their films, it seems to me, the query — grief or nothingness? — is a bind. You make your impossible choice, or you don't; if you don't, you end up to your neck in *Shit: Breathless*, all over again.

In *La maman et la putain*, for example, the Léaud character doesn't recognize that he might *grieve* (for the spirit of 1968; for la Nouvelle Vague), and so he defaults to nothing. His bed is unmade for him, now he must lie in it. Astor, on the other hand, rejects *choosing* — there *is* no choice between grief and nothing, so she chooses “freedom” and the “senses.” So, by extrapolation, does Poe; he *feels* his way into the Godardian universe, learning how to focus his camera as he goes, becoming an auteur.

* * *

“Or three...or more....”

It's unlikely that Godard would make this joke; Fassbinder might, and Warhol almost certainly would. But it's with the anomalous suggestion of polyamory, vis-à-vis the emphatically hetero Godardian Ur-text, that Amos Poe's film becomes *historiographical*.

I began this article by asserting that *Unmade Beds* made history; now it is important to clarify. In the recent documentary, *Blank City* (2010), several important Downtown filmmakers (Susan Seidelman, Jim Jarmusch, Steve Buscemi, Eric Mitchell) testify to the importance of Amos Poe's *example* in their decision to make films. However, their work did not significantly capitalize on *Unmade Beds*'s formal innovations — nobody took Godard *further* Downtown than Poe did (not even John Zorn). Moreover, one could argue that *Unmade Beds* didn't significantly contribute to the political or aesthetic originality of the emerging Downtown Cinema. Compared to the corruscating super 8 films of Scott and Beth B., for example, *Unmade Beds* might seem archaic and silly, like a New Wave-themed Halloween party. In other words, *Unmade Beds* was not *A bout de souffle*; it was not epochal. Rather, it was the key film of an important interval — between two Undergrounds, between two Downtowns. Before its heirs apparent (James Nares, Eric Mitchell) turned remakes of European art films into a boho *cliché* — and before the Reagan Revolution put cordons around the American avant-garde, cancelling all New Waves in advance — *Unmade Beds* re-invented *Breathless*. In the process, it re-invented the “unmade bed,” the wellspring of the French-American New Cinemas of the sixties. The consequences of this re-invention were postponed, indefinitely.

“Or three...or more....”

Here, in fact, there are at least *two* unmade beds: first, there is the one around which Jean-Paul Belmondo and Jean Seberg orbited, like twin galaxies of French-American connotations, in Godard's film. Then there is the “unmade bed” in Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures* (1963), on which protean, sexually undifferentiated bodies multiplied, entwined, separated, became indistinct, drifted out of focus, then snapped into *ultra-sharp* focus. Passing through the New Wave, Amos Poe finally arrives in “New York” — the 1960s New York of Andy Warhol and Jack Smith. Detouring through the Underground Cinema (Mekas famously called it the “Baudelairean” Cinema), he finds an alternate route to “Godard.”

“Do it yourself” has always implied a very crowded “self”; as an ethos and as a praxis, the DIY-er has always gotten by with a lot of help from his friends. “Amos Poe,” as I have shown, is legion; here, in these *Unmade Beds*, Jean-Luc Godard cavorts with the flaming creatures; the New Wave (Blondie) conjugates the Nouvelle Vague; Edgar Allan becomes Amos Poe, as the Hudson River once more spills into the Seine, hurling exquisite corpses onto its banks; and Paris becomes New York becoming Paris, in perpetuity.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Resurrection and the Life: Two allegories of *la fin de cinéma*

...of course Empire took its way westward, what other way was there but into those virgin sunsets to penetrate and to foul?

—Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*

As Film Studies metamorphoses into Media Studies, it reflects on its first and most beloved object: not necessarily with nostalgia, but perhaps with guilt, an uneasy sense of complicity in the cinema's long anticipated death — a death once so adamantly *called for* yet now arriving so unexpectedly.¹⁵⁴ The corpse is still in the room with us, of course. But this corpse is not like those dead bodies stowed away in trunks and couches in Hitchcock's *Rope* (1944) and Brian De Palma's *Sisters* (1973) and subjected to elaborately sadistic games of hide and seek. The "cinematic body" is more like the suicide played by Dominique Sanda in Robert Bresson's *Une femme douce* (1969), stretched out serenely, even demurely, on the conjugal bed, after throwing herself from a top-floor balcony.

For the duration of Bresson's film, the corpse lies there, while its husband paces around the master bedroom, ruminating on their life together. He never knew this person, not really, and now she is forever unknowable. As he narrates her existence in a guilty, self-justifying monologue, he consistently misconstrues his failure to *see* her as a failure to *understand* her. If only he had stopped talking, stopped *reading* her, he might have seen that all the time that it was attempt to *know* her that was killing her, which finally killed her. And now he is still not seeing her: this impassive, beautiful creature, dead on the couvertelet, remains primarily an *epistemological* problem for him. Why did she do it?

For both ardent and reluctant media scholars, the *cinema's* death likewise designates an epistemological (and perhaps existential) problem. Bazin's classic query,

¹⁵⁴ The books and articles on the "fin de cinéma" are too numerous and diverse, in subject matter and even how they define "death" and "cinema," to cite in full. Laura Mulvey's *Death at 24 Frames Per Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (Reaktion Books: 2006) is emblematic of the elegiac mode I'm trying to capture here; and, while its compass is literary, Jane Gallop's *The Deaths of the Author* has affective parallels with Mulvey's book and obvious resonances for cinema scholars, in so far as *la politique des auteurs* was a premonition of the death of the author arguments that came later. By far, the most rigorous treatment of the "death of the cinema" trope in contemporary (and sixties) film culture is Thomas Elsaesser's article, "The Uses of Disenchantment." Although I don't cite this piece in what follows, I've taken historical cues from his article, notably in putting his two "cinéphilias" in parallel. For Elsaesser, the 21st century cinéophile (post-auteur, post-theory) is diligently engaged in a polyvalent "remastering" of the cinematic canon, one which includes DVD fetishism as well as something like an "oppositional reading" *vis-à-vis* the libidinal economies of the New Wave. Elsaesser, "Cinephilia, or The Uses of Disenchantment," *Cinephilia: Movies, Love and Memory*, ed. Marijke de Valck and Malte Hagener, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005, 36-37.

posed in the title of a key film studies book — What is the cinema? — echoes back from the other side of the 20th century: What *was* the cinema? The cinema was “the modern optic”; a “passion for indexicality”; the pre-history of digital culture; a documentary impulse; a mummy complex; the fantasy of French cinéphiles; “death at 24 frames per second”; “the expression of *beaux sentiments*”; a fleeting moment in the history of visual culture; montage... Death itself. Life itself. For us, the cinema has become, in Nicole Brenez’s marvellous phrase, “a grand melancholy theme.”¹⁵⁵ After all of the ink spilled on the subject (both when she/it was alive in the 20th century and now that she/it is well and truly dead, in the 21st), the only thing we can say for certain is that the cinema is what died when the cinema died.

Here I present two allegorical moments in the “death of the cinema.” For me, this phrase inevitably calls to mind Godard’s shattering, final title card for *Weekend* (1967). At the end of this film (a prophesy for the “crisis of functionalism”¹⁵⁶ soon to grip all departments of French life, if only for a month or two, as well as the French *cinéma* [for much longer than that]), the phrase appears as a kind of stuttering of letters: the customary “Fin” is augmented, first, by “de conte” (End of Story), and then amended to “de cinéma.” It is as if Godard’s first attempt to put a period on the utterance, End of Story, We’re Done Here, did not give full expression to the speaker’s absolute contempt for the conversation. The whole discursive context, maybe the whole world (le cinéma), had to be “finished,” over with, before Godard could finally slam the door.

Indeed, the first film I discuss here, *A Girl is a Gun: Une aventure de billy le kid* (Moulet 1971), is a consequence, even a restaging, of *Weekend*’s end title. In this case, the significance of the proclamation (Death to the Cinema!) is reasonably clear: it can be understood retrospectively, in light of Mai 1968 and the films that Godard made as a militant, under the auspices of the radical Dziga Vertov Collective. The second work I analyze, Alexander Aja’s shock-horror film, *Haute tension* (2003), is an emblem of our current, more ambiguous “death of the cinema” moment. There is arguably a speech act at the root of this ongoing “death,” to parallel Godard’s “fin de conte, fin de cinéma”: Susan Sontag’s melancholy and infuriating *Village Voice* article, “The Death of Cinéphilia,” published in 1996. *Haute tension* illustrates in complex and often upsetting ways the truth of Jonathan Rosenbaum’s counter-declaration, advanced in the title of a recent book, *Goodbye Cinema, Long Live Cinephilia!* (2010). *Haute tension* is a movie that, in putting the New Wave to death — an execution as radical in its implications, if not in its manifestations, as Godard’s *fin de cinéma* — re-invents New Waves.

Thus, whatever their differences, both begin at the same “zero.” The cinema has been put under the guillotine. Luc Moulet is operating under the command of Les États Généraux,¹⁵⁷ Aja from within New Media culture (and the Sontag article). Both are genre

¹⁵⁵ Brenez, Nicole, “Movie Mutations: Letters from (and to) Some Children of 1960,” in *Movie Mutations: The Changing Face of World Cinephilia*, ed. Jonathan Rosenbaum and Adrian Martin, London: BFI, 2003.

¹⁵⁶ Ross, Kristen, *May ’68 and its Afterlives*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2002, pg. 25.

¹⁵⁷ See Harvey, Sylvia, *May ’68 and Film Culture*, London: BFI, 1980. Originally published in *Cahiers du cinéma* (August 1968, no. 23), *Les États Généraux* were republished in English in *Screen* (1972): 13 (4): 58-89, along with extensive context and

films: one is a horror movie, and the other a Western. I take it for granted that genre transformation (including the transformation implied by a re-setting, a spaghetti Western, a Korean horror film, etc.) signals a new, historically and culturally specific staging of old questions. The Western in the Vietnam period — whether French, American, Spanish, Brazilian, or Italian — re-cast the “frontier myth” in light of American Imperialism in Southeast Asia.¹⁵⁸ With *Haute tension*, Aja registers the traumatic effects of the very *emergence* of a commercial horror genre in a cultural context designed to support authored, French films. And, in both cases, a woman is at stake — as in, Joan of Arc at the stake.

The status of “genre” in these cinematic post-mortems signifies a return of the repressed. The Nouvelle Vague repressed “genre” twice: first, in its authorship politics (e.g., Hawks stood outside of genre), and then in its disavowal of its own generic conventions (chief among them, couplehood: see Chapter Three of this manuscript, in which it is Amos Poe who demonstrates a New Wave convention as rigid as a western’s, and see also Colin Crisp on the more general disavowal of genre in French cinema¹⁵⁹).

At the same time, “horror” and “western” here stand in the place of another, presumed Ur-narrative — the heroic myth of the Nouvelle Vague. My thesis is that the “death of the cinema” is the central *event* of that myth. Even as it was emerging, the Nouvelle Vague was involved in a complex series of deaths and rebirths, which operated on many different registers of meaning. For example, as I showed in Chapter One, Jacques Rivette’s sublation of Fritz Lang signified the rise of the New Cinema out of the death of the classical Hollywood cinema. There were distinct Christological resonances here. Rivette’s article cast the forthcoming New Wave in the image of the New Testament. The Cinema of Authors would be the Law made flesh — the Cinema

notes by Simon Hartog. Signed by Rivette, Jean-Pierre Mocky, Louis Malle, Alain Resnais, Jean-Louis Comolli, and others (self-described as a “working party”), The Estates General of the French Cinema begins, “The French cinema today is produced in slavery conditions engendered by the capitalist system, itself protected by a number of state-controlled bodies. Any liberation of the cinema, any creation of new structures has to begin with the destruction of the old structures...”

¹⁵⁸ See Slotkin, Richard, “Cross-Over Point: The My-Lai Massacre, The Wild Bunch, and the Demoralization of America, 1969-1972” in *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998. For a brilliant, Gramscian reading of the “spaghetti western” as an outcropping of Italian modernist filmmaking, see Landry, Marcia, “‘Which Way is America?’: Americanism and the Italian Western,” *boundary 2*, 23:1 (Spring 1996), 35-59. In fact, Landry’s article calls for precisely the sort of “disarticulations” and “reevaluations” that I’m attempting here, in the name of the Mid-Atlantic: “In an examination of the culture of Americanism, it is necessary to understand a ‘third meaning,’ not merely as signifying either the geographical United States or Europe but as a trope for a phenomenon that has existed since the turn of the century and that has undergone various transformations as it circulates on both sides of the Atlantic...Even the sense of Americanism in North America must be disarticulated and reevaluated” (pp. 40-41).

¹⁵⁹ See Crisp, Colin, *Genre, Myth, and Convention in the French Cinema, 1929-1939*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002.

personified. It inevitably went to its Gethsemane in 1968; and then again in 1975 with Pasolini's death; and then again in 1977 with Nick Ray's death; and in Truffaut's, Fassbinder's, Hitchcock's deaths... until *Cinema Journal* puts it to death in 2010, with the accusation — “Who Killed Bridget Bardot?” — and the answer: Godard, Truffaut, *la politique des auteurs*. Contemporary scholars on both sides of the Atlantic must resurrect the French New Wave in the image of the international superstar and fifties French commodity culture.¹⁶⁰

There is always a reason why the cinema must die; it must be *on behalf* of someone or something. The cinema, as it has been, cannot support the appearance of the one who must appear to deliver the news that the cinema is dead (and sometimes to avenge another death, like “Bardot's”). In the two films under discussion, this specter takes the form of a quasi-embodiment: “Woman” in *A Girl is a Gun*, “New France” (here conceptualized as both the racialized Other, the French Arab or African, and as the anonymous, stateless subject of “internet culture” — i.e. the horror fan) in *Haute tension*. But ultimately, there *is* no cinema here, dead or otherwise, without the criticism and scholarship that gives it discursive life. Hence, another set of deaths and rebirths traverses this discussion. What is put to death in France is resurrected in America and vice versa; and the cinema that dies in “theory” (post 68 critics were often blatantly sadistic in their relationship to images) is reborn there, too, as a theoretical cinema.

I. 1971: A Girl is a Gun

Luc Moullet shot *A Girl is a Gun: une aventure de billy le kid* (1971) in the deserts and mountains of the Southern Alps. He was born and raised there and has made most of his films in its forbidding precincts. In Moullet's early films, the alien rock formations called *les roubines* are the primary focus of attention. His human characters careen, like crumpled-up newspapers, across volcanic, prehistoric surfaces. Moullet's *mise-en-scène* is “rocks,” says Dennis Lim of the *Village Voice*,¹⁶¹ evoking the older, more exalted definition of *mise-en-scène*. “Rocks” is Moullet's idea of the World; it is also his idea of the Cinema. His default composition is an extreme long shot, often taken from an opposing cliff, as his actors clamber up and down a mountainside, engaged in some hyperbolic, futile struggle. He typically casts Parisian actors, tiny neurotic people who look especially out of place negotiating this perilous environment. The result is close to farce without being farce. There's something analytical, even entomological about

¹⁶⁰ The quote which served as epigraph to the Introduction of this dissertation: “Now that the New Wave is by some accounts 'officially' fifty, perhaps, like a wise middle-aged person, it can be sober and mature enough to admit its excesses and exaggerations, its *partis pris*, and, finally, come to terms with who 'it' murdered to get ahead.” Schwartz, Vanessa, “Who Killed Brigitte Bardot?: Perspectives on the New Wave at Fifty.” *Cinema Journal* (volume 49: no. 4: 2010).

¹⁶¹ Lim, Dennis, cited in “À la recherche de Luc Moullet: 25 Propositions,” in Rosenbaum, Jonathan, *Goodbye Cinema, Hello Cinephilia!*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010, pp. 31-43.

Luc Moullet's films: "like Courteline rewritten by Brecht," as Godard put it; like a cross between "Buñuel and Jacques Tati," said Jean-Marie Straub.¹⁶²

Yet these postulates seem too *formal* to account for the strangeness of Moullet's works, which are far more shambolic than anything made by Tati or Courteline and far less self-conscious than Brecht or Buñuel. Indeed, watching *A Girl is a Gun*, one has the impression, given the difficulties of the landscape in which it was made, that the rules of the standard cinematic language have been utterly reshaped and even *deformed* by the vicissitudes of making a low-budget film at high altitudes and in the desert, with water supplies running as low as film stock.

Moullet, like Godard, Rivette, and Truffaut before him, began his filmmaking career as a critic for *Cahiers du cinéma* in the late 1950s, when he was still in his teens. Although very little of his criticism has appeared in English, he is best "known" (or at least most often encountered) as the author of the Fritz Lang monograph that Brigitte Bardot is reading in *Le mépris*. It is a measure of his astonishing success as a critic that Moullet achieved, at such an early age, what must have been the not-so-secret aim of every gangly, pale-faced cinéophile of the era: to watch Brigitte Bardot reading your book in the bathtub in a film by Jean-Luc Godard. His most influential piece of criticism was a review of Samuel Fuller's Western, *Run of the Arrow* (1959); in this review, Moullet contributed a shibboleth of "First Wave" cinéphilia, the proposition that a tracking shot could be a "moral question." Moullet meant that Fuller, like all great American directors, had absolutely nothing to say — only something to do.¹⁶³ Fuller expressed nothing in his blustery, political scripts; his morality, rather, was reflected in his camera movements.

¹⁶² Quoted on the DVD box-set, *The Luc Moullet Collection*, from *blaq out and Facets Video* (2007)

¹⁶³ On *Run of the Arrow* (Fuller 1957): "Morality is a question of tracking shots. These few characteristics derive nothing from the way they are expressed nor from the quality of that expression, which may often under cut them. It would be just as ridiculous to take such a rich film simply as a pro-Indian declaration as it would be to take Delmer Daves for a courageous anti-racist director because there is a clause in each of his contracts which stipulates that there will be love affairs between people of different races." Moullet, Luc, "Sam Fuller: in Marlowe's Footsteps," trans. Norman King, in *Cahiers du Cinéma, The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave*, ed. Jim Hillier, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985. In passing, it should be noted that the tracking shot in question ends in the firing of the last bullet in the American Civil War, therefore having some allegorical significance in relationship to the improbable genesis of a "French" western. "Let there be no doubt about it," André Bazin wrote about Westerns in 1953. "This naïve greatness is recognized in westerns by simple men of every clime — together with the children — despite differences in languages, landscape, customs, and dress... The Civil War is part of nineteenth century history, the western has turned it into the Trojan War of the most modern of epics. The migration to the West is our Odyssey." Bazin, André, *What is Cinema?* v. 2, trans. Hugh Gray, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971, pp. 147-148.

This idea was quickly picked up by Godard and Rivette and recast as auteurist doxa: “Alain Resnais has made tracking shots a moral question.”¹⁶⁴

To understand the distance we have traveled from those days of *la politique des auteurs*, just imagine Godard at the podium of the Great Hall during the forced closure of the 1968 Cannes Film Festival. Veins popping in his forehead, banging his fist, he’s castigating the assembly for being more interested in *tracking shots* than in the plight of the French worker. In the newsreels taken of this event, Truffaut stands a little to the side and behind Godard’s shoulder, looking slightly embarrassed... although, for now, he stands “in solidarity” with his comrade.¹⁶⁵

We tend to forget the blunt force trauma of the cinema’s *actual* death. For all intents and purposes, the cinema died (i.e., became an implacable reality, an ineluctable scientific fact for cineastes to deal with or try in vain to explain away) with the notorious end-title of *Weekend*. There, the announcement — End of Story, End of Cinema — served local and polemical ends. It was a murder: a political assassination and a hate crime and maybe a mercy killing, perhaps even a revolutionary act. To appropriate a phrase from Godard’s *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, made thirty years later and a constant companion of our current “death of the cinema” arguments: *Weekend* put the cinema “under the guillotine of significance.” Henceforward it would skitter around headless, like the decapitated chicken Godard has shown us a few scenes before, flapping its wings in the death throes of the ultimate dissociation.

What did Godard believe himself to be putting to death when he put the cinema to death? There are, of course, the standard critical explanations, vouchsafed by the Maoist films that Godard himself made in the aftermath of May 1968 and ratified by theorists of the age. And yet, perhaps we should be wary of ascribing these later theorizations of “counter-cinema” to Godard’s motivations at the time he composed (or simply threw in, as a kind of grim joke) that notorious end-title for *Weekend*. It must be remembered that the sacking of Langlois and *les événements de mai* were still to come and that those occurrences were the true context for the Maoist films. *Weekend* came at the end of a furious burst of creative energy (a dozen shorts and thirteen feature films, each more remarkable than the last, a frenzy of cinematic invention comparable only to D.W. Griffith’s invention of narrative cinema in the 1910s) that left Godard, if not the cinema as a whole, exhausted (end of story, end of cinema).

In fact, with Kaja Silverman and Harun Farocki, I’d argue that the end-title of *Weekend* refers first and above all to the film that we have just witnessed.¹⁶⁶ The end of

¹⁶⁴ Domarchi, Jean; Doniol-Valcroze, Jacques; Godard, Jean-Luc; Kast, Pierre; Rivette, Jacques; and Rohmer, Eric, “Hiroshima, notre amour,” in Hiller (1985), trans. Liz Heron. “Rohmer: I can understand how one could like and admire Hiroshima and at the same time find it quite jarring in places. Doniol-Valcroze: Morally or aesthetically? Godard: It’s the same thing. Tracking shots are a question of morality” (pg.62).

¹⁶⁵ This newsreel footage can be seen on Criterion’s *Stolen Kisses* (Truffaut 1968) DVD (2003), in a special feature entitled, *Cannes 1968*.

¹⁶⁶ At the end of their chapter on *Weekend* (“Anal Capitalism”), Silverman writes, “...wherever commodification reigns supreme, whether in the bourgeois culture of Paris or the counterculture at the end of *Weekend*, the phallus will give way to the anus. This is not the utopian sexual liberation hailed by Hocquenghem thirty years ago, but the

the cinema is what *Weekend* was about (or is). If so, then the “Cinema” whose neck was under Godard’s axe was *not quite* the cinema that shilled for the debauched, wretched consumer society or the overdetermined “classical Hollywood cinema” of the later apparatus theorists; at least, in so far as it was *those* cinemas he was putting to death, Godard saw them differently than he would a few years later, after May was crushed. The discourses supporting his counter-cinema were dialectical in the extreme. Reading Peter Wollen’s famous article on counter cinema now, over forty years later, it is possible to believe that the Hollywood cinema was invented to suppress the emergence of its radical anti-thesis, and that the counter-cinema existed to delineate the formal and narrative procedures of classic Hollywood.¹⁶⁷

But *Weekend* is about the *horror* of the dialectic, and specifically the dialectic when brought to bear on sexual difference, the male-female binary that grounds Western metaphysics. For Hélène Cixous, the dialectic was a hellish vision of “couplehood” that assimilates every Two to a One in a chronic “battle to the death.”¹⁶⁸ As the engine of Western history, the battle of the sexes proceeds, inexorably, to the total annihilation of *everything*. Immediately before the end-title in *Weekend*, Godard shows the prim Mirielle Darc in close-up, eating some meat. She is told that it partly consists of her dead husband; without blinking she asks for a second helping. In *Weekend*, the bourgeois “eat” the poor; radical hippies eat the bourgeois; wives eat their husbands; children eat their parents. The world eats the cinema; the cinema eats the world. End of story, end of cinema. QED.

A Girl is a Gun is one of many post-1968 *films* (we can’t call them cinema or “works”¹⁶⁹) lying in the deep dark shadow of this proclamation, and it is completely in key with the *Weekend* Silverman and Farocki describe — the one that demonstrates that an apocalypse can be generated out of the cinema’s failure to realize a *true* heterosexuality. Indeed, the first part of Moullet’s title — *A Girl is a Gun* — refers to the Godardian cliché, pronounced in the cocky early days of *la Nouvelle Vague*: “All you

catastrophic end of all singularity. What we might call ‘anal capitalism’ decess the commensurability of ‘male’ and ‘female,’ but only by consigning both, along with *Weekend* itself, to the cosmic scrap heap.” Silverman, Kaja, and Farocki, Harun, *Speaking About Godard*, New York: New York University Press, 1998, pg. 111.

¹⁶⁷ Wollen, Peter, “Godard and Counter-Cinema: *Vent d’est*,” *Narrative Apparatus Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, ed. Phil Rosen, New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, 198-209.

¹⁶⁸ Cixous writes: “Through dual, hierarchal oppositions. Superior/Inferior. Myths, legends, books. Philosophical systems. Everywhere (where) ordering intervenes, where a law organizes what is thinkable by oppositions (dual, irreconcilable; or sublatale, dialectical). And all these pairs of oppositions are *couples*. Does that mean something? Is the fact that Logocentrism subjects thought — all concepts, codes, and values — to a binary system, related to ‘the’ couple, man/woman?” And, further on: “...the movement whereby each opposition is set up to make sense is the movement through which the couple is destroyed. A universal battlefield. Each time, a war is let loose. Death is always at work.” “Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays,” in Cixous, Hélène, and Clément, Catherine, *The Newly Born Woman (La jeune née)*, trans. Betsy Wing, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991, pg. 64.

¹⁶⁹ Such categories would seem to be proscribed by *Les États Généraux*.

need to make a film is a girl and a gun.”¹⁷⁰ Again, the inexorable logic of the dialectic, endlessly assimilating the “other” into a terrible, snowballing unity. After 1968, you only needed a *girl* to make a film, because if you had a girl you already had a gun (a “tool to buy your freedom,” etc.). At the same time, as the film’s theme song tells us repeatedly, a gun is not a girl and a girl is not a gun, so you really have neither girl nor gun; thus you have no film. Fin de conte, fin de cinéma.

From Moullet’s perspective, *Weekend* must have looked like a Western. Indeed, Godard’s film could be construed as a meta-cinematic recasting of a 19th century American captivity narrative, with the bourgeois weekenders as pioneers, and their cars, piled up in endless traffic jams, a modern-day wagon train. There is nowhere for them to go — no frontier for them to colonize — but they continue to carve a bloody swath of “civilization” into the landscape. And in this alternative mythological framework, the forest-dwelling radicals are obviously the predatory “savages,” the Indians (i.e., the Vietcong). Thus, for Moullet, Godard had furnished *la fin de cinéma* with a *mise-en-scène* (the Western) and a protagonist (the “heterosexual couple”).

In *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, in fact, Godard deploys the ending of *Duel in the Sun* (1946) in place of *Weekend* to signify “la fin de cinéma.” Recall that King Vidor’s and David O. Selznick’s histrionic Western/melodrama concludes with Jennifer Jones and Gregory Peck blasting each other apart with guns on a cliff, before bleeding to death in each other’s arms (“Oh Lewt!” she wails, seeing the bloody hole she’s made in his stomach as she claws toward him on mangled hands. “Y’always told me you could shoot,” he says, admiringly. “I never believed you!”). This is the *landscape* (mountains and rocks, suggestive of some primeval “origine du monde”¹⁷¹) as well as the *situation* of *A Girl is a Gun*, which plays as an extended riff on the self-same scene from *Duel in the Sun*.

As Moullet’s film opens, *Billy le kid* — rather improbably assayed by Jean-Pierre Léaud (he plays several characters in *Weekend*, including Saint Juste) — has just murdered a wagon-load of people and absconded with their gold. One of the passengers survives his bullet wound and runs off, with Léaud in maniacal pursuit, clownishly kicking up dust and firing bullets into the air, like a silent comedian (Léaud was apparently strung out on amphetamines during the shoot). He eventually tracks him down to a cabin, where — while Moullet inserts a five-second piece of black leader — he kills

¹⁷⁰ Hard to find an exact attribution for this quote, one of the most popular of Godard’s maxims (I used to have a T-Shirt that bore this quotation). I seem to recall it came up in an interview about *Bande à part* (1964) but cannot find it.

¹⁷¹ Beyond the Western movie valence, deserts have a broad significance in sixties art and political cinema. Pasolini may be the key figure here. See Viano, Maurizio, *A Certain Realism: Making Use of Pasolini’s Film Theory and Practice*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, pg. 131. Viano argues that the desert in Pasolini’s work is the site of a “return to zero” which is complexly involved with Christianity (Jesus’s revelations in the wilderness) and psychoanalysis (“the solitude of the self having submitted to desire”). In Gerard Courant’s *The Man of the Badlands (L’homme des Roubines 2001)*, a documentary about Moullet, the auteur expounds at some length on the fact that the rocks of his Alps pre-date American rocks by thousands of years, thereby giving Europeans a geological pre-entitlement to the Western genre.

him off for good. A few scenes later, he encounters the “girl,” buried in sand and begging to be rescued. He kidnaps her instead, with the intention of bartering her life for his own when the posse (which seems to consist of three guys and one horse — which Moullet rented for one day, because a Western needs a horse) finally catches up with him.

What ensues are the courtship rites of two toddlers in the anal-sadistic stage — or, rather, “love” according to the violently repressed, heteronormative model of the Hollywood cinema, where sex is murder. For the first half of the movie, he abuses her, mentally and physically, and she grows to love him; for the second half, set in a truly lunar landscape located somewhere in the deep netherworlds of Moullet’s beloved Alps, she tortures him to the brink of death while he moons over her. She reveals to Billy that she was the wife of the man Billy had shot in the first scenes of the film; she had manipulated Billy into falling passionately in love with her so that she could then kill *herself*, thereby making him as hopeless and bereft as she was, after Billy murdered *her* one and only true love. But in order for her plan to work, she can’t commit suicide; she has to stay alive to prevent Billy from killing himself in despair over her, or being put out of his misery by the posse hot on his trail... in either case eluding the lifetime curse that she intends to place on him by not reciprocating his passion for her, which she has so carefully and believably cultivated in him.

Moullet hereby traverses and re-traverses the fantasy underpinning *Duel in the Sun* and the ideological nightmare-scape of *Weekend*. He puts both films under psychoanalysis. If the problem in both of those movies was that the couple could not happen without its members annihilating one another, here the problem is that couplehood can’t *stop* happening. Neither party gets to live or die or, in fact, uncouple. After the Girl shoots Billy’s young Cherokee bride with an arrow, in an effort to prevent his last-ditch attempt to suture his melancholy, wounded heart, he triumphantly cries out to the mountains, in pidgin Cherokee, “You’re jealous!” And for the next several tableaux we see the Girl in various mountainous contexts, first wearing (or almost wearing) Cherokee clothes and then the stiff black garb of a widowed spinster, crying out repeatedly “I’m *not* jealous!” Soon she meets Pat Garrett, *Billy le kid*’s legendary pursuer. He is the spitting image of her dead first husband, and the vicious circle seems to be broken. Soon the Girl is re-married and living in Pat Garrett’s homestead. She is now, finally, The Woman, presumably having “put behind her” the spellbinding erotic tortures of her wilderness sojourn with *Billy le kid*. Moullet, fascinatingly, portrays the boredom and frustration of domestic life just as Chantal Akerman will do several years later, in *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975): she stands at the kitchen counter with her jaw clenched, rigidly peeling potatoes.

There are a couple of allegories here, one contemporary with the experience of the strikers after the defeats of May, slinking or being forcibly pushed back into the “social”; and one coming more directly from French filmmakers’ practical experience of Godard’s terrifying injunction that the cinema as they had known and loved it must *die*. On the first level of allegory, *A Girl is a Gun*’s insistence on working through and deconstructing “couplehood” mirrors the psychic drama of *les manifestants*, returning miserably to the forms and structures of “reality” that they had so gloriously overthrown two or three

weeks before.¹⁷² Moullet, Léaud, and the leading actress, Marie-Christine Questerbert — who chose to be credited pseudonymously as “Rachel Kesterber” for the film — all participated in the events, in one way or another, and were familiar with the hangovers of June and the problems of “re-adjustment.”

A Girl is a Gun's second allegory stages the absolute necessity for, and the real impossibility of, extricating oneself from an imaginary relationship to the Hollywood cinema. That cinema is represented by the brutal but also *painfully* sincere and ardent *Billy le kid*. Not *Billy The Kid* but, rather, the more diminutive Billy who belonged exclusively to the juvenile desires of French cinéphiles. This antic figure had “watched over the cradles” of the New Wavers, as Serge Daney or Jean-Louis Shefer might put it. As grown-ups, yes, we can see *Billy le kid* now as he always was in *fact*, producing and reproducing “Vietnams” all over the globe. He’s a puny, ridiculous sadist. Nonetheless, for Luc Moullet, another ciné-fils, *la fin de cinéma* must have felt like more than a parricide. It was a matricide too, because, inexplicably, the cinema only *came alive* for him in conjugation with this terrible character.

These two allegories oddly dovetail in an incident that happens both within the diegetic world of *A Girl is a Gun* and which happened simultaneously on the set of the movie while this very scene was being made. In other words, it is an event that transpires and which transpired “in the splice,” the interval formed between two of Moullet’s deliberately jarring, ill-matched shots.¹⁷³ In the penultimate scene of *A Girl is a Gun*, the Woman (like the second Mrs. De Winter, she remains unnamed in the film) is lying in her marriage bed with Pat Garrett. She’s restless and frustrated. Garrett is her correct “love object” (a perfect replica of the man she had before Billy came along and shot him) but she feels nothing for him. A spectral wind continually pushes the door ajar. She keeps getting up to shut it and it keeps opening again, *creeeaaak*. Finally, in a trance, she stumbles outside. She staggers somnambulantly from the porch, across the yard, and to the edge of a cliff. Like Catherine in *Wuthering Heights* or Lucy in *Dracula*, she has been summoned to this perilous ridge by a voice from beyond the grave, the voice of her own lover-tormentor, Billy le kid.

As Moullet planned the sequence, when the actress Rachel Kesterber reached the precipice, there would be a cut and the following shot would scroll rapidly down the jagged mountainside to reveal her broken body at the bottom of a gully, artfully daubed with red paint and smudged with charcoal bruises, her tongue lolling parodically from her mouth. As was his custom, Moullet was directing Kesterber’s walk from the house to the ledge from a great distance away and from another cliff, far above her head. In the spirit of her performance as a sleepwalker, Kesterber kept her eyes shut. She trusted her director to let her know when she was safely “out of frame” and could step back from the

¹⁷² See Ross, especially pp. 124-126, on the “...wrenching emotional aftermath of the repression of revolution, the lived experience of political possibilities shutting down, the dismantling or dimming of utopian conceptions of change...”

¹⁷³ I take these anecdotes from Shafto, Shelly, “Questerbert on Moullet: An Interview with Marie-Christine Questerbert,” *sensesofcinema.com* (Issue 56: October 2010). Shafto is an important and underrecognized “archaeologist” of this period, Shafto has also written a terrific (and untranslated into English) book about the Zanzibar group, which included Philippe Garrel.

ledge. He did not and she plummeted more than 130 feet down the side of the mountain into some garbage, nearly slashing open her femoral artery on some broken bottles and bleeding to death at the bottom of the gully.¹⁷⁴

In one of his last interviews, Serge Daney reflected:

The New Wave (in France in particular, but also throughout the New Waves of the world) was stuck doing something completely different [than previous cinematic movements, such as neorealism]: a man and a woman, the war of the sexes, and the eventual resolution of this war. Between 1960 and 1980 all artistic and creative energy is invested there. The cinema of ideals, the masculine cinema (only men had ideals), had to be exchanged for a cinema that would allow women to appear.¹⁷⁵

For a brief moment, seemingly preserved in Moullet's finished film, there are two women in one body, both hovering on the verge of an imminent change of perspective (the next shot) and a terrible fall (off the cliff); one has been brought there by her lover, Billy le kid, and the other by her director, Luc Moullet.

But, in fact, there is a third woman along with these: women keep appearing here in this jump cut. There is also Marie-Christine Questerbert, former student of Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes, and Jean Rouch, who took the name Kesterber in order to differentiate her acting career from her career as a critic and director. When she reached this verge, she had made one film (I believe), a "critical" documentary called "Buy Me, Sell Me," about American Mormons in France, who were selling detergents door-to-door.

In the finished version of the film, she finds her demon immediately. A few scenes previously the Woman had delivered "Le kid" over to some Cherokee Indians to be scalped. His head is now wrapped in bloody bandages; he's lost an eye; and he walks with a crutch (before handing him over to the Indians, she shot him twice in the leg). He limps past her, at first oblivious. Then recognizing his true love with a jolt, he drops his crutches and collapses on top of her. Another unseemly cut and the film ends with Kesterber and Léaud crouching side-by-side on the floor of some dark hovel, full of bullet holes and broken bones. Each is totally insane and absorbed in his or her physical torments — but they're alive, "together." They begin to make out and Moullet cuts to black — THE END.

On the other side of *A Girl is a Gun*'s "faux raccord," the terrified Moullet, who thought he had killed her, brought his severely damaged actress to a hospital in a nearby village where, miraculously, she recovered from her injuries. Within a month, she was back on the set, completing the film. One year after *that*, Marie-Christine Questerbert went back to the Southern Alps to direct her *own* Western, with Moullet playing the part of the villain and, for a script, Valeria Solanas's SCUM manifesto. From a recent Anthology Film Archives program of her work, another back of the beyond of "cinema":

¹⁷⁴ Shafto, interview with Questerbert.

¹⁷⁵ Daney, Serge, *Postcards from the Cinema*, trans. Paul Grant, Oxford and New York: Berg, 2007, pp. 92-93.

THE ENDLESS RIDE / L'INTERMINABLE CHEVAUCHÉE

**1972, 10 minutes, 35mm, color. In French with projected English subtitles.
With Luc Moullet, Michel Delahaye, Noel Simsolo and Nina.**

Train-robbing outlaws are run out of the west by a cabbage-hurling, Valerie Solanas-citing, possibly Maoist gang of marauding women ready to take over the world. To date, as far as we know, the only French feminist Western; here's hoping for more.

Thus, Questerbert returned to the site of her mortification to make another *film*, if not another Cinema — the last film that could justifiably call for a regime change was *Weekend*. And perhaps she intended her retaliatory, Maoist inflected, Solanas-scripted, French feminist western to be the tombstone on the grave of a Cinema, which, by 1971, had been so covered over by Godardian, Pasolinian, and Antonionian *odes* that it was asphyxiated, choking on its own heroism.

Yet, the plangent irony of the Archive blurb (“here’s hoping for more”) underscores what seems to me a real and painful improbability: there could never be another French feminist Western, and the one that *does* exist, *The Endless Ride*, can only be re-accessed as “camp” (at best, a scholarly attempt to reconstruct the historical conditions for such a bizarre set of statements). Thus, if *la fin de cinéma* promised an epiphanic appearance of “Woman,” it delivered instead a fascinating but irretrievable obscurity... a counter-counter cinema, a parody of counter cinemas.

The problem of agency plays out on both sides of the screen, as “figure” and as “act.” The figural woman, *Billy le kid*’s lover, carries on some kind of angelic struggle within the images, embracing her torment in the name of “desire” (indeed: the hovel they wind up in is reminiscent of the prospector’s quarters, at the beginning of *L’Age D’Or* [1930], another film in which the murderous side of Eros is postulated as a revolutionary force). The “actual” woman, detached from Moullet’s representational schema through an on-set disaster, commandeers the apparatus and drags *Moullet* out to *les roubines* to be assaulted by cabbage-hurling Maoist femmes.

How, then, should we understand the event as a whole? The question is posed in an interval, frequented by feminist scholars of the Questerbert generation, and often framed in Mid-Atlantic terms, as a schism between French and American Imaginaries. French (European) feminism centers on an absence, specifically the foreclosed “feminine” in language, and goes about creating *une écriture féminine* in the gaps, the bleeding wounds, of the Oedipal subject, who is always-already a boy. American feminism takes to the streets to demand equality with men — it draws up charters; it pays dues; it generates icons; it publishes bestselling books.¹⁷⁶ From the standpoint of the

¹⁷⁶ These are stereotypes, obviously, but no less “real” for being so. The nationalization of the philosophical/activist binary is a running theme of the 1987 anthology, *Men in Feminism* (ed. Alice Jardine and Paul Smith; New York: Routledge). For an historical chronicle of the relationship between *écriture féminine* and the Mouvement des femmes, see Toril Moi’s “Introduction” to *French Feminist Thought: A Reader*, Cambridge: Blackwell, 1987. It should also be noted that Richard Cuisel bases his award-winning

French feminist, the American's struggle is a struggle for adequation with men, while hers is to delineate an essential feminism, one which will find — in the margins of a text that is all about women, but in which there is and can be no Woman — radical alterity, *un manque d'être*. For the American feminist, her Gallic sister is cerebral, withdrawn, dis-engaged, i.e. *theoretical*: and yet she reads Julia Kristeva as a feminist, instead of the linguist, philosopher, narratologist, or psychoanalyst Kristeva claimed to believe herself to be.¹⁷⁷ From the perspective of the French feminist, on the other hand, the American sister operates within Patriarchal modes and risks participating in their annihilation of the “feminine” altogether. Yet, it is arguable that there has never been a real *Mouvement des femmes*... at least, not on the same scale (or with the same political effectiveness) as there was a Women's Movement in the U.S.

In Film Studies of the early-to-mid seventies, this parallax (of politics, of views, of theories) was further complicated by the odd palimpsest of a still-living Auteurism (even in its paradoxical phase, the “death of the author” — Mulvey's “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” is arguably the most influential treatment of Hitchcock and Sternberg for contemporary scholars), an emergent Culture Studies, and “gaze” theory (a compound of Lacanian psychoanalysis and Althusserian Marxism, re-written in feminist terms). Claire Johnston's famous “Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema” is exemplary here.¹⁷⁸ Johnston takes a concept which developed out of a close reading of Godard's militant films (counter-cinema), and uses it as the basis for an argument about biographical women directors. In traditional “counter-cinema” discourse, political effects were formal ones. For Peter Wollen, Godard's *Vent d'est* systematically broke with the realist codes of Hollywood and Art Cinemas (for closure read “lack of closure”; for “transitivity” read “intransigence”; for “identification” read “alienation”; etc.). A counter-cinema in the Godardian (or Mulveyian) mode represented a concerted, terroristic assault on the way that we see and hear and identify in the cinema. For the militant filmmaker, in other words, there was a subject in dispute, but it was neither a man nor a woman. Rather, it was a grammatical “I” or a geometric point in space (the subject of perspectival vision).

“Women's Cinema as Counter Cinema” thus occupies a bizarrely “symptomatic” film-theoretical terrain. In place of an oppositional cinema theorized on formal grounds,

chronicle of *la rencontre franco-américaine* on the function of the “stereotype” in organizing French and American exchange in the Cold War period: if my depiction is too schematic, it is partly the “schematism” of the cliché that I'm trying to capture here. Richard Kuisel writes: “French perceptions of America have been and continue to be highly patterned. There is a certain repetition associated with stereotypes even if the same images are evaluated in contradictory ways” (*Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); from the otherside of the Atlantic, Vanessa R. Schwartz's *It's So French!: Hollywood, Paris, and the Making of Cosmopolitan Film Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007) also shows the crucial role of the stereotype in French-American exchange.

¹⁷⁷ See Kristeva, Julia, “Why the United States?”, trans. Seán Hand, *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi, New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, pp. 272-291.

¹⁷⁸ Johnston, Claire, “Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema,” *Sexual Strategems: The World of Women in Film*, ed. Patricia Erens, New York: Horizon Press, 1979, pp. 133-143.

Johnston proposes a counter-cinema which subsists in the recovery of the careers of female directors (Ida Lupino, etc.) who worked within the Hollywood institution and its grammars, but who — against all odds — smuggled in a “feminist” (or at least “feminine”) perspective on traditional themes. This is a classic film authorship argument: “Hawks” also spoke through the various genres in which he worked. However, Johnston’s Auteur is no longer a function of great works: she does *not* advocate we see Lupino’s films because they are great (although some of them may be). “Greatness,” in fact, is what she kills off in the name of the Author. In its place, she puts Women’s Cinema — a new genre, given blatant political perimeters as a “counter-cinema” that becomes one through an act of scholarly recuperation: the study (hence: the salvation, the anamnesia)¹⁷⁹ of the careers of the women who made it.

Metaphorically then, Claire Johnston’s article is on the ledge — the place where one story (the story that’s happening *in* the film) becomes another, i.e. the history of the *making* of that story.

II. 2003: A Girl is a Chainsaw

Alexandre Aja’s 2003 thriller, *Haute tension*, ends with a bizarre and upsetting plot twist. As in Moullet’s film, from thirty years earlier, the twist is enacted through, and on, the brutalized body of a woman (thankfully, in this case, only in special effects). At stake, though, is not the salvation of an image of “Woman” from the rocks of genre, Patriarchy, theory, or boyish fantasy (however one wishes to conceptualize Moullet’s beloved *les roubines* as *grounds*), but a wholesale, even absurd, overthrow of “gender.” For Aja, *le cinéma de papa* is Godard and Truffaut and the hypostasized “event” of Mai 68, with its neurotic prohibitions: its Eustaches and Garrels and Godards and Moullets trudging into the wilderness, like Oedipus Rex after plucking out his eyes. *Haute tension*’s twist flaunts its own Oedipal relation to the New Wave father, killing him off in the figure of the “heterosexual couple.”

Simultaneously, Aja’s twist undermines the national Eros underlying Godard’s insistence on “copulation,” often (in Godard’s sixties work) symbolized as a *tricolore*, a blue-white-red that was also a Red White and Blue, a becoming-France-becoming-America. The destruction of the classic New Wave imagos (the couple; the American Friend; the New Cinema) is the grounds for the appearance of a “new subject,” the *horror fan*. This obscure entity operates in a transnational, gender-less, and consumerist framework of torrents, blogs, and contrabandage.

Until its last act, when it snaps, *Haute tension* mostly keeps the promise of its title. Like its unacknowledged ‘source,’ the Dean R. Koontz novel *Intensity*,¹⁸⁰ the movie

¹⁷⁹ “Anamnesia,” unforgetting, is treated in the conclusion to the present work.

¹⁸⁰ On his website, Koontz wrote: “In the past, I have been aggressive about plagiarism and have succeeded in every action he has taken against every plagiarist. In this case, a win appeared inevitable, but I decided to ignore the offense because he found the film so puerile, so disgusting, and so intellectually bankrupt that he didn’t want the association with it that would inevitably come if he pursued an action against the filmmaker. Maybe the lesson is that if you’re going to steal from my work, you better make your version as disgusting and misanthropic, as full of loathing for humanity, as you can; then you might get away with it!” <http://www.deankoontz.com/movies-qa/>

hinges on a pursuit: a young woman (played in the film by Cécile de France) valiantly tries to rescue her friend (played by Maïwenn) from the clutches of a demonic serial killer. It's a three-character drama — or rather a two-character drama, as Maïwenn spends most of the film bound and gagged in the back of a panel truck. The action is confined to a single night, from dusk to dawn, over the course of which predator and prey switch places. The heart of both film and novel is a *Duel*-like car chase on a dark country road; the panel truck that Cécile is grimly racing after periodically drops from sight, only to shockingly loom up in her rearview mirror.

Aja has deepened the psychic register of Koontz's novel by insisting that the relationship between the two women goes beyond "sisterhood." The Cécile de France character *lusts* for her tormented *copine*; hence, the "intensity" of her rescue mission carries an erotic surcharge. *Haute tension* also introduces a vague socio-political subtext that is not present in the book: the captured girl, object of desire for both fiend and friend, is Romanian, while the murderer is identified with retrograde, unredeemable *Frenchness*. He's played by Philippe Nahon, the star of Gaspar Noé's infamous *Seul contre tous*. In Noé's film, the actor embodies the 'fetid' heart of the French nation, festering with incestuous and homicidal (and homicidally incestuous) impulses.

Then comes the flabbergasting climax: in the final act, the entire set-up is revealed to have been a hoax. In fact, the hunter and the hunted — Cécile de France and Philippe Nahon — are one and the same person.

The cavern that opens here — between the "reasonable" and the "verisimilar" — is even more extreme than the final twist of Fritz Lang's *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*.¹⁸¹ The "unsuspecting spectator" is asked to rationalize what is totally irrational. She re-screens the preceding film in her mind, trying to re-perspectivize from the standpoint of an ending that does not merely critique but *lacks* judgment: So it was the French girl who butchered the Romanian girl's entire family in the first act and absconded with Maïwenn as her trophy? *She* whom we first saw parked in a cornfield at dusk, copulating with a severed head? *She* who murdered the gas station attendant and stalked *herself* around the aisles of a convenience store for several grueling minutes? *She* was driving both the hulking panel truck and the trim yellow sports car in pursuit?

A three character film that's really a two character film becomes a one character film; and *Haute tension* finishes in a double homage to the twin peaks of American psycho killer cinema. Maïwenn, fleeing from her persecutor, who now wields a snarling chainsaw, runs out into the road and flags down a passing motorist, à la *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Hooper 1974). After turning the unlucky driver into raspberry *coulis*, the Butcher puts down his/her/its saw and begins to kiss and caress the grue-spattered, traumatized Maïwenn, who responds by thrusting a jagged piece of glass into her/his/its chest. Cut to black. There is a brief epilogue. Cécile sits on the edge of a bed in a psychiatric ward, rocking slowly back and forth, as she/he/it ruminates in a voice over, "I won't let anyone come between us anymore." And is the voice referring to herself and Maïwenn? Or is it talking about the killer, with whom Cécile is now irrevocably fused, like Norman Bates and Mother in the final moments of Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960)?

Commentators have predictably condemned *Haute tension*'s twist ending for equating non-normative sexuality with serial killing. *Haute tension* might offer a

¹⁸¹ See Chapter One of this manuscript ("Beyond the Zero").

particularly repellent example of this formula, but its sexual politics are obviously following the *Psycho* and *Repulsion* (Polanski 1966) blueprint. Horror fans have more reasonably complained about *High Tension*'s "coup de théâtre" on the grounds that it makes no sense. The third act needlessly transforms a genuinely intense and scary horror movie experience into an unsolvable and pointless puzzle.

Indeed, Aja and his co-scriptwriter and art director, Gregory Levasseur, claim that Luc Besson — the movie's producer and arguably the "guru" of the New Wave in French horror — suggested that they add the twist at the last minute, during filming.¹⁸² Besson was probably making a commercial calculation. *Haute tension* would debut the New French horror movie in a thriller climate where audience expectations had been shaped by the likes of *The 6th Sense* and *Fight Club* — a climate in which an absurd twist ending was *obligatoire*. When you re-watch *Haute tension*, you find some evidence that Aja and Levasseur retro-fitted the movie with the "red herrings" and "psychological clues" that superficially justify the film's conclusion. Yet it remains a non-sequitur in another way. Even for 21st century movie audiences, for whom the "shocking" *rebondissement* should be a cliché by now, the climax of *Haute tension* has managed to be notorious.

I do not intend to defend the twist on social or aesthetic grounds. Rather, I would like to argue for its cultural importance. *Haute tension* is *The 400 Blows* of the New French Horror. In economic terms, at least, it is the *sine qua non* of a horror "movement" in France (not least of all because its worldwide success rewarded all of its key personnel with lucrative Hollywood contracts). Subsequent to *Haute tension*'s release in 2003, a slew of grisly francophone horror films have appeared, many of them now recognized by aficionados as masterpieces of the genre, including *A l'intérieur* (*Inside*: Alexandre Bustillo & Julien Maury, 2007), *Frontière(s)* (*Frontiers*: Xavier Gens, 2005), *Ils* (*They*: David Moreau & Xavier Palud, 2006), and *Martyrs* (Pascal Laugier, 2008). In my view, these films are all superior to *Haute tension*, yet they are influenced by Aja's film in numerous ways. Thus, insofar as a New Wave in French horror begins with *Haute tension*, it begins in this absurd twist — the one that asks us to believe that Philippe Nahon and Cécile de France are the same person.

In fact, I argue, the New French Horror *itself* materializes as the "bad twist" at the end of a story that began in the Nouvelle Vague period. The watchword of that story was "authorial politics." Since the 1960s, the French cinema has presented itself to the world's contemplation as a Cinema of Authors; Gilles Deleuze once claimed that the Nouvelle Vague reinvented the French cinema as a *martyrology*.¹⁸³ The directors associated with the New French horror are almost all in their mid- to late-30s; they grew up watching Tobe Hooper, John Carpenter, and Wes Craven movies on videocassette during the Mitterrand years. Now they are forcing the French cinema to do what it supposedly can't, won't, and shouldn't do: produce a genre cinema according to the models of America, Japan, and Italy, for international consumption. Authorial politics are certainly not relinquished here. The filmmaker who wants to revision *Texas Chainsaw* for

¹⁸² *Haute Horror — Making of "High Tension"* (2003), a special feature on the Lion's Gate DVD, *High Tension*.

¹⁸³ Deleuze, Gilles, "Preface to the French Edition," *Cinema 1: The Time Image*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986: "The history of cinema is a long martyrology."

France inevitably clashes with the state censors (the custodians of French identity, insofar as they determine the legitimacy of cultural expressions). The fight with the censor is the crucible in which an authorial politics is forged around the question of a French *horror* cinema (it also accounts for the ever-escalating violence of these films). Pascal Laugier, one of the most celebrated of these filmmakers, constantly refers to his struggles in terms of “free expression” and the right to “authorial vision.”¹⁸⁴

However, the classic *politique des auteurs* was intrinsically anti-genre — it was about making the French cinema into a site of independent and *original* expression. Even if there has always been some dissimulation on the part of French cinéastes regarding *genre*, there has never been a French horror cinema *per se* — a handful of classics by Franju, Cocteau, and Clouzot notwithstanding. Aja and his cohort are deliberately pushing authorial politics to the limit where it topples over into genre cinema *tout court*. The New French horror film is a singularity: a small cluster of tightly focused “free expressions” that together manage to simulate a genre — but one that is “libre, honnête et dur.” It’s an authored cinema that’s really a genre; and it’s a genre cinema that’s really an authored cinema.

A distinction is necessary, therefore, between the New French Horror and what James Quandt, writing in *Art Forum* in 2004, called the “New French Extremity.”¹⁸⁵ The New French Extremity consists of experimental art films that trade in scenes of nauseating cruelty and hardcore sex (*Baise-moi, A ma soeur!, Irreversible, Trouble Every Day, La vie nouvelle*). The phenomenon is symptomatic, in Quandt’s admittedly controversial view, of the European art film’s 21st-century retreat from genuine political or artistic engagement, into harrowing images of defilement, penetration, and auto-cannibalism. But these are not horror films, exactly; if asked to explain or justify his work, Philippe Grandrieux is likelier to mention Marcus Aurelius than Dario Argento. The New French Extremity is vilified or defended on fairly straightforward auteurist grounds; and its “shock tactics” are vouchsafed by an elite critical discourse that situates

¹⁸⁴ French censors gave *Martyrs* an 18+, which was tantamount to banning the film altogether. Few theaters in France will screen a film with this classification. Laugier responded: “I knew that we were living in very hard times, in terms of censorship and that France was returning to the old times when *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Dawn of the Dead* were kind of forbidden, but I couldn't have anticipated it. I really thought that the film would get a normal rating for extreme violence, like a 16, forbidden to under 16s. But finally we understood that it was a way for the classification commission to simply erase the film, to kill it commercially, you know? It was an indirect way of censoring the film, because in my country, if you censor a film directly, it won't be accepted, if you ask a director to cut out some sequences, it won't be accepted by anybody. So they found a new system, which is to say, let's make it an 18+. If the film is an 18+, it's considered a porn film so you won't find any theatre to release it and it won't be in the big stores on DVD.” (interviewer unknown)

<http://www.viewlondon.co.uk/cinemas/pascal-laugier-interview-feature-2771.html>

¹⁸⁵ Quandt, James, “Flesh & Blood: Sex and Violence in Recent French Cinema,” *ArtForum* (February 2004).

them in relationship to French theory.¹⁸⁶

The New French Horror, on the other hand, situates itself as a neat stack of résumé portfolios on Harvey Weinstein's desk. This is almost literally the case: nearly all of the French horror specialists have followed Alexandre Aja's lead and gone "Hollywood." Their films have been bought by the Weinstein Brothers or Lions Gate, and are mostly scheduled for English-language remakes (Laugier reports that Weinstein watched the first ten minutes of *Martyrs* on his laptop in an airplane, vomited, and immediately commissioned an English-language version); the directors themselves are busily "rebooting" fetishized products from the American seventies and eighties horror film library. Aja's own reward for the global success of *Haute tension* was a remake of Wes Craven's *The Hills Have Eyes* (2006), which virtually qualifies as a French film — apart from the actors, its entire creative team emigrated from *Haute tension*.¹⁸⁷ In a revealing development, the owner of the *Hellraiser* franchise recently hired the directors of *A l'intérieur* to refurbish the Clive Barker classic for contemporary audiences; he mysteriously fired them a couple months later, only to hire Pascal Laugier for the job. Just as peremptorily, he then fired Laugier (who is now making the English-language *Details* for Paramount-Vintage¹⁸⁸).

Truffaut's *politique des auteurs* agitated for the reinvention of the European cinema. This is still the aim of the New French Extremist, even if the object has grown perverse in her case. *Haute tension* has opened a wormhole, through which all of the most celebrated figures of the French horror "movement" are now siphoning off into the intergalactic commercial cinema, perhaps never to be heard from again.

Nevertheless, we should not lose sight of the fact that there *is* an authorial politics going on here, no matter how base, venal, or simply *vide* we find the impulses that might be driving it (or the fact that it may have no place to go). The ill-fated French-American remake of *Hellraiser* probably testifies to a stubbornness, a refusal to compromise — an "irredentist spirit," shared by the horror filmmaker and his Nouvelle Vague ancestors. Pascal Laugier or the directors of *Inside* would undoubtedly take their *Hellraiser*

¹⁸⁶ See, for instance, Beugnet, Martine, *Cinema and Sensation: French Film and the Art of Transgression*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2007, an impassioned and convincing riposte to Quandt's article, in which she argues that these films reflect a different *sort* of politics, rather than a retreat from engagement. In making this defense, she mobilizes alternative political frameworks derived from Bataille, Deleuze, and Nietzsche. My point here is that this high-level discourse belongs to a different regime than the one occupied by French horror; and, in fact, the French horror specialist refuses this discourse — in the process, I'm arguing, re-discovering as if by accident the "incendiary gesture" of Truffaut and *la politique des auteurs*.

¹⁸⁷ The same is true of *Piranha 3D* (Aja), an unlikely box-office and *critical* success from the summer of 2010.

¹⁸⁸ Another cancelled project! *Details* was announced in 2010, when I first wrote these words. As it turns out, Laugier's one Hollywood film to date is *The Tall Man* (2012), starring Jessica Biel. It premiered at South by Southwest but never got an official release in the U.S., becoming a "Video on Demand."

commission very, very seriously.¹⁸⁹ This is one of the reasons why, I argue, the emergence of French horror constitutes a twist ending to the French cinema's great "family plot," *la politique des auteurs*. The twist in *Haute tension* forces us, against our better judgment, to accept that the lithe, beautiful girl and the slobbering fat killer are two halves of one person. The very *existence* of the New French horror film forces us to an equally gut-wrenching conclusion: world cinema has reached such an extremity — such a point of *high intensity* — that only one film now stands between Claire Denis and Rob Zombie: *Haute tension*.

Whether or not we believe this to be true, the French horror film is absolutely *narrating* this dire conjuncture. Indeed, I propose that all of French horror's generic markers — from its beleaguered embryos, to its banlieue riots, to its persecuted sisterhoods — are "red herrings." Putatively serving to establish the *Frenchness* of French horror, they actually represent the belligerent category of French horror itself, its status as the "absurd" climax to the story of the Nouvelle Vague. Fans of these films have noted, for instance, the *difference* in the way French horror auteurs deploy quotations, which transcends the sort of winking "homage" that you get from the Tarantino ensemble. Like Godard and Truffaut, the French horror *auteur* uses citations intertextually, in order to generate a sort of historical argument or rich aesthetic context for the film.

Take, for example, the twist in *High Tension*. As I have mentioned, this twist occurs by way of a double reference to *Psycho* and *Texas Chainsaw*. There is a semiotic *tour de force* underpinning this climax; if it doesn't make the plot turn any less preposterous, at least it transfers the preposterousness to another level of *histoire*. Note Aja's presentation of his leading actress, Cécile de France. Her cropped hair and muscular body are meant to evoke Jeanne D'Arc; there is even an important scene at a gas station, where she ceremoniously takes up arms against the "usurper" (the killer who has stolen her *love object*). If this seems farfetched, consider that the New French Horror proliferates with Joans of Arc. For example, in a late scene from Xavier Gens' *Frontière(s)*, the heroine's long black hair is ritualistically chopped off, as a prelude to

¹⁸⁹ Pascal Laugier explains the assaultively brutal *Martyrs* in a language that evokes Truffaut in its emphasis on faith and innocence, its disgust with the "faux moderne": "The problem is that we have lost something [of] our faith, [our] primitive innocence. Everything in the world has become so self conscious, and it goes with politics, ideology, you know? The loss of illusions. Now, to be cool, is to be cynical. You can't be surprised because you're [a] cool guy. And everybody is always the same, you know it's the 'cool attitude' and cynicism that kills everything because it's the opposite of the faith we need to be told some stories, you know? We have lost the faith in narrators, to the people who [told us] what the world is, to make us believe in other worlds, to [tell us] stories. Now it's the opposite - it's the post-modern world we are living in, and we are very aware of everything. And I hate that. As... I hate that as a director. And I hate that as a member of the audience. Any time I feel like the director wants to be clever, wants to tell me very precisely that he is more intelligent than the film he is doing, you know by pretending being funny, being... I hate that. For me, it's a betrayal. I want to be like a child and I need some primitive feelings facing a work of art."

<http://www.aintitcool.com/node/39602>

her going into battle against an Occupying Army (in her case, a family of inbred, mutant, cannibalistic Nazis, held over from the Vichy period). Laugier's *Martyrs* is *sui generis*: *Martyrs* is about a coven of French conservatives who abduct and torture young girls, with the explicit intention of producing on their faces the "matryred" look of Joan at the Stake.

Recall that Luc Besson produced *Haute tension* and ordered the twist ending; a few years before, he directed a "Joan of Arc" movie, *The Messenger*, with Milla Jovovich. Here he was following modern French cinema tradition: Besson had his Joan of Arc; now Besson has his too. As Jacques Rivette deviously pointed out, there is only one small 'r' between Besson and Besson¹⁹⁰; and Rivette, too, made a Joan of Arc movie, *Jeanne la pucelle*, which is seven hours long. In *Haute tension*, Cécile de France personifies the Joan who figures so centrally in modern French cinema. She is the Joan who belongs to the Nouvelle Vague — its call to glory, its heroism, its abjection, and its martyrdom.

From this perspective, it is impossible to miss that Cécile (surname *France*) also resembles Jean Seberg in Godard's *A bout de souffle*. Godard cast Seberg after admiring the American actress in Otto Preminger's *Bonjour Tristesse* — and in Preminger's *Saint Joan*. Hence, Aja's Joan of Arc carries with her a Nouvelle Vague-era eroticism, centering on the Hollywood cinema and its actresses. This was the heroic phase of the French New Wave: Godard was "rescuing" Seberg from these bogus French films and putting her in a real one.¹⁹¹

Like *Saint Joan*, Cécile is compelled by a *voice*; in her case, it's the voice of the rotten soul of contemporary France, Philippe Nahon. Nahon is almost exclusively identified with one role, but it's a powerfully symbolic one, almost as iconic an image of New France as Joan of Arc is of Old France: he plays the Butcher in *Seul contre tous*, the signal film of the New French Extremity. Nahon personifies the necrophiliac, racist, filicidal part of French national identity: he's Le Pen, or the insanely frustrated working class guy who thinks Le Pen has all the right ideas. Like *Jeanne la pucelle*, he believes he's been called to defend True France against its usurpers — the Arab and African

¹⁹⁰ Bonnaud, Frédéric, "The Captive Lover: An Interview with Jacques Rivette," trans. Kent Jones, *sensesofcinema.com* (Issue 16: September 2001).

¹⁹¹ As early as 1953, Michelangelo Antonioni recognized and satirized the preponderance of "Joans" in modern European Cinema. In *La Dame sans camélia*, a wealthy businessman (Gino Cervi) falls in love with a starlet (Lucia Bose) when he happens to see her on a film set, enacting a passionate love scene for a racy melodrama. He marries her, in the expectation that she will give up her acting career to be a traditional wife, but she becomes withdrawn and depressed. He offers a compromise: he'll allow her to act in a film, so long as it is the story of Joan of Arc. The result, which he finances, is a disaster. Thus, Antonioni's film prophesies the eros particular to the New Cinema: an ardent cinéophile discovers a beautiful woman (Anna Karina, Jean Seberg, Brigitte Bardot, Catherine Deneuve, etc.) *in flagrante delicto* amid the debauched images of the commodity culture (sex films, soap commercials, magazine ads, trashy American films); "rescues" her from this circulation of images, which he pretends to have nothing to do with; then facilitates her return to images, but chastened, literally flaunting her *chastity*.

emigrants, the American idolaters, the Jews, etc. At the end of *Seul contre tous*, desperate for some kind of release from his *own* poisonous internal monologue, he molests and murders his mentally ill, teenaged daughter.

The fusion of these two personas — *la pucelle* and *le boucher* — thus carries a powerful symbolic current, vis-à-vis the “invention” of a horror film out of the rubble of contemporary France. So long as there has been *une politique des auteurs*, the French cinema has been riven by an impossible psychic bind. The need to get *beyond* the French cinema has been implanted in the heart of the culture since *Les 400 Coups* and *A bout de souffle*; but this need comes into conflict with the exigency that the French cinema must stay French in order to move beyond France. This exigency is both commercial — a factor in the global film economy — and a matter of auteurist pride, a refusal to be assimilated by the Hollywood apparatus. Joan and The Butcher are symbols of this bind; both are martyrs to the French cinema “complex.”

So what role does American genre cinema play in this twist ending? Is Joan of Arc now being martyred on the set of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*? Or is *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* being forced to recite the story of French nationhood? What does it mean to collapse *Breathless* together with *Seul contre tous* and call the fusion “Mrs. Bates”? And — once again - whose story begins in the twist at the end of *Haute tension*?

If, as I have argued, the Cinema of Authors historically presented itself for the *world’s* contemplation, the New French horror is arrayed for eyes that are simultaneously far more distant and perilously “close” — the “horror fan.” One might imagine this “fan” hunched over his laptop trying to find an unexpurgated copy of *Martyrs* or *A Serbian Film* (Srđan Spasojević 2010), scoring eBay copies that claim to come from San Diego but ship from Hong Kong, filling a 3TB hard-drive with torrented movies as one might pour water from a carafe, contributing to furious online-forum debates about the ethics of animal abuse in *Cannibal Holocaust* (Deodato 1978 — another film that, weirdly, owes something to *Weekend* and its paradoxical legacies), and compiling, with theological fastidiousness, an ordered canon of the 10 Most Disturbing (as opposed to “horrifying”) Films of All Time (*Salò* [Pasolini 1975], then *Last House on the Left* [Craven 1972] ... no, *Ilsa: She Wolf of the S.S.* [Edmonds 1975] must come second).

The fan builds her or his collection as diligently as Walter Benjamin unpacked his library. Yet, while each volume on Benjamin’s shelf emblemized a set of precise memories of purchase, which put the book collector at a perverse distance from the normal “consumer” of books,¹⁹² the “horror fan” is only *sort of* the site of a resistance... Only, perhaps, as Aja, Laugier, and the other manifestants of a French cinema imagine her or him (or me), as an alternative to the French subject. His collection (so easily got — and anything can be gotten, if you’re willing to pay for it, or can find a pirate site) signifies less a group of precious acquisitions, each signifying a memory, a *site*, than it does the absorption of “difference” into differential calculus (French horror; Japanese horror; Korean horror; Spanish horror; most Disturbing Films; most graphic beheadings; worst twist endings...).

¹⁹² Benjamin, Walter, “Unpacking My Library: A Talk About Book Collecting,” trans. Harry Zohn, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, New York: Schocken Books, 1968.

III. End of Story

Gender, genre, *theory*, history — the death of cinema. François Cusset's book, *French Theory in America*, begins with an odd, satiric paragraph. I quote this long passage in full, because it is necessary to experience Cusset's perlaboration of a fantasy, his "putting in scene" of the American imaginary that gave rise to Derrida, Lacan, Baudrillard, and the other Big Names in French Theory of the 1970s and 1980s. Who is satirized? The Americans who imagine French theorists like this, or the French who imagines Americans imagining French Theorists like this?

Quelques noms de penseurs français ont acquis aux États-Unis, dans les trois dernières décennies du XXe siècle, une aura qui n'était réservée jusqu'alors qu'au héros de la mythologie américaine, ou aux vedettes du *show business*. On pourrait même jouer à rabattre le monde intellectuel américain sur l'univers du Western hollywoodien: ces penseurs français, souvent marginalisés dans l'Hexagone, y tiendraient sûrement les premiers rôles. Jacques Derrida y pourrait être Clint Eastwood, pour ses rôles de pionier solitaire son autorité incontestée et sa tignasse de conquérant. Jean Baudrillard y passerait presque pour Gregory Peck, mélange de bonhomie et d'un sombre détachement, plus leur aptitude à chacun à n'être jamais où on les attend. Jacques Lacan y camperait un Robert Mitchum irascible, au titre de leur common penchant pour le trait meurtrier et l'ironie indécidable. Gilles Deleuze et Félix Guattari, plutôt que les Westerns spaghetti de Terence Hill et Bud Spencer, évoqueraient le duo hirsute, éreinté mais sublime, de Paul Newman et Robert Redford dans *Butch Cassidy*. Et pourquoi Michel Foucault n'y deviendrait-il pas un Steve McQueen imprévisible, pour sa connaissance de la prison, son rire inquiétant et son indépendance de franc-tireur, figurant au sommet d'un tel générique la coqueluche du public? Sans oublier Jean-François Lyotard en Jack Palance, pour leur âme burinée, Louis Althusser en James Stewart, pour la silhouette mélancolique, et, du côté des femmes, Julia Kristeva en Meryl Streep, mère courage ou sœur d'exil, et Hélène Cixous en Faye Dunaway, féminité libre de tout modèle. Western improbable, où les décors deviendraient personnages, où la ruse des Indiens les ferait victorieux, et où jamais n'arriverait la suante cavalerie.¹⁹³

Like *A Girl is a Gun*, Cusset begins in the mode of an imaginary Western. He, too, ends in an epiphanic appearance: two women, four women, Woman: Cixous, Streep, Kristeva, Dunaway. But *whose* imaginary Western is this?¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ François Cusset, *French Theory*, Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 2003, pp. 11-12; although this book has been translated into English (trans. Jeff Fort: Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2008), I use the French to dramatize the activity of Cusset's Frenchness in the production of a particular fantasy, imputed to an American fantasy about the French.

¹⁹⁴ This might also be the case with Moullet's film, in which the careening figures of Billy and the girl seem, at times, the projections of an unconscious. Especially when watching the film in its English dubbed version (which Moullet prefers), one feels that the characters are remote-controlled...from an enigmatic elsewhere, by a dreaming

With his fantasmatic casting session, Cusset argues that the American scholar subsumed these Gallic figures into a discourse about the (American) self. Lacan, Baudrillard, Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari, were not only speaking “American” truths — these French philosophers were more American than America. In the “mind” of humanities scholars, they were actors in the primary American psychic drama, a Hollywood Western: “an improbable Western, in which the sets would become characters, the Indians’ cunning would lead them to victory, and we would wait in vain for the glistening cavalry to burst into the scene.”¹⁹⁵

Sets become characters, indeed: in fact, *idea* becomes “set” and is transmuted into image, then rationalized as “character.” Derrida shares with Eastwood the “imposing mane of a conqueror” — here there is a direct family resemblance. The “disheveled duo” of Deleuze and Guattari approximates, I guess, the dishevelment of Redford and Newman in *Butch Cassidy* — but this analogy is clothes deep (it is no easier to conceptualize *Anti-Oedipus* with “Raindrops Keep Fallin’ On My Head” than it is to understand why the French anti-psychologues *shouldn’t* be in a Terence Hill movie). Michel Foucault, on the other hand, is Steve McQueen, on the basis of a shared knowledge of “prisons,” a choice that reflects the American academy’s preference for *Discipline and Punish*. Presumably Foucault plays the character (in this French fantasy of an American fantasy of French philosophers) that McQueen plays in *The Great Escape* (1963). If these characterizations make a kind of humorous sense, in relation to a stereotypical idea about American thought and experience, the final two examples fall out — like Rachel Kesterber falls out — of the genre.

What makes this an “improbable” Western is not, as Cusset claims, the fact that it (French Theory in America) reverses the terms of the classic Western, making the Indians the good guys and cancelling the cavalry call. In fact, that is precisely what the “anti-Western” of the period in question did.¹⁹⁶ Rather, what makes Cusset’s Western improbable is the casting of Cixous and Kristeva. All of the other French theorists play recognizable Western heroes in a speculative fantasy of American “re-invention” — Mitchum, Peck, McQueen, Eastwood, Palance, Stewart, and Redford/Newman are archetypes of the genre. Meryl Streep and Faye Dunaway do not belong among them.

Julia Kristeva is “Mother Courage” or “sister in exile”: whether or not one can conceive of these types as characters in a Western (and it is unlikely that we would describe them as such, if we could), Meryl Streep’s Mother Courage is Karen Silkwood (*Silkwood* 1983), the martyred whistleblower (or perhaps the mother courage who leaves her husband and son to find herself, in *Kramer vs. Kramer* [1979]); her “sister in exile” is

someone or something. The surreal landscape may stand in for another, unrepresentable scene - an “originary” site.

¹⁹⁵ Jeff Fort’s translation of the last lines of the Cusset citation.

¹⁹⁶ (*Little Big Man, The Wild Bunch, Buffalo Bill and the Indians, Soldier Blue...*).

Moreover, an anti-Western remains a Western: it still has essential American business to do. It straps on its counter-ideology like Gary Cooper holsters up in *High Noon*, in order to fight against the failures in the dominant ideology, some corruption of the “ideal,” mythic America by progressive (the railroad) or reactionary (witch-hunting, Red fighting) forces. From this point of view, there is no truly classic Western that is not “improbable” *vis-à-vis* the cliché: John Ford spent his entire career making anti-Westerns.

probably the tragic Sophie in *Sophie's Choice* (1982), a Polish survivor of Auschwitz, living in New York after the War (Kristeva was a Bulgarian exile in France). Nor does Faye Dunaway, free woman *de tout modèle*, seem right for Cixous — or for Westerns, unless *Bonnie & Clyde* (1967) counts as a Western. Here I have the nauseating feeling that Cusset is thinking of Cixous's figurations of The Newly Born Woman (the hysteric, the witch, the woman in the attic) in the ghastly image of *Mommie Dearest* (1981), a scandalous, campy portrait of Joan Crawford as child-abuser. Why not, instead, cast Hélène Cixous as Joan Crawford herself, in Nicholas Ray's *Johnny Guitar* (1953)? In which case, perhaps, Kristeva could be Barbara Stanwyck in *The Furies* (Mann 1948) or *Forty Guns* (Fuller 1958). And perhaps Luce Irigaray (whom Cusset doesn't cast) might be Julie Christie, smoking her opium pipe at the end of *MacCabe and Mrs. Miller* (Altman 1971), while Warren Beatty (Jacques Lacan) staggers to his death in a snow drift.

This is no failure of imagination (or cinéphilia) on Cusset's part, but a real oversight.¹⁹⁷ If Kristeva and Cixous, the representatives of *l'écriture féminine*, appear last in this sequence of theorists, and if are swept (in our fantasy of Cusset's fantasy) into a different genre (an historically specific one, I think: the pre-backlash Women's Picture of the 1970s¹⁹⁸), then it is because Cusset means to portray feminist thought as an outcropping or effect of these other discourses: Derrida begat Cixous, Lacan begat Kristeva. Just so, "Vietnam," "Civil Rights," and "Free Speech" begat Second Wave Feminism, when an archetypal woman noticed that her role in these liberatory movements was restricted to getting coffee for, and having sex with, her activist boyfriend.¹⁹⁹

Both myths depend, I think, on a fantasy of succession - the re-appropriation of masculine knowledge by feminist activists and thinkers, perhaps the strategic mobilization of its hypocrisies. Yet such a representation might be an injustice to the real "event" of feminist thought, which here retains a trace of its revolutionary force only at the rhetorical level, as a contortion in Cusset's metaphor. When Cixous and Kristeva appear at the end of Cusset's paragraph, we are no longer in a classic Western, but in a late-seventies Women's Picture. It takes a wrenching labor of imagination to think the

¹⁹⁷ In *Reading Capital*, Althusser and Balibar propose that the classic economists could not see what was visible to Marx: the labor theory of value. Their "oversight" is manifest in a logical account of the commodity form that, for us (as for Marx), reads as illogical.

¹⁹⁸ "Pre-backlash" refers to Susan Faludi's important argument about the plight of the Women's Movement under Reaganism. In her chapter on Hollywood films, she discusses several movies, such as *Baby Boom* and *Working Girl*, in which an independent woman is returned to the clutches of a re-assuring, traditionally organized, domesticity, in the form of a "real man" — an actual cowboy, Sam Shepard, in *Baby Boom*. If *Alice Doesn't Live Here* (1975) also ends this way, it does so more ambiguously: Ellen Burstyn loses nothing of "herself" in marrying *her* cowboy, Kris Kristofferson — it is understood that each character will have to negotiate some sort of peace with the other's form of independence: he'll have to learn that she is not going to play the Grace Kelly part in his *High Noon*, while she'll have to learn that his "solitude," the solitude of the man on his horse, does not exclude relationality.

¹⁹⁹ *La mouvement des femmes* was also conceived in this revelation, during Mai 68.

two together, or to imagine a lineage from John Ford to *Sophie's Choice*. Moreover, while (for me anyway) the male characters are well cast, and the Western analogy apt (given Derrida's concentration on classical Western texts, Plato, Rousseau, etc.), the Women's Picture is inadequate *mise-en-scène* for Kristeva and Cixous. Perhaps Kristeva might be better placed in a horror film, as Barbara Creed's book implies. Cixous, on the other hand... it would be absurd to attempt to slot her into an American genre template, even in the effort to establish the fantasmatic grounds for a "Hélène Cixous" particular to the American Imaginary.

IV. End of Cinema

Now I return to the two films which constitute the core of this chapter, *A Girl is a Gun* and *Haute tension*. Both, I argue, stage the death of the cinema in genre terms, perhaps *as* genre. In each case, the standard genre logic is reversed — indeed, *precisely* reversed. While the Western is traditionally understood as being about "race," Luc Moullet's film is about (or ends up being about) "woman."²⁰⁰ On the other side, a generation of female scholars and feminist scholarship has established that the horror film (at least post-*Psycho*) is about gender²⁰¹ — and yet, *Haute tension* is about *race*, the transpiration of a New (heterogeneous, polyglot, multi-ethnic, multi-generational) France out of the death of the Old France and its icons, including the icons of the sixties New Wave. Roberto Rossellini is swapped out for Dario Argento and Tobe Hooper takes over from Howard Hawks; in place of Godard's heterosexual couple, the repugnant fusion of

²⁰⁰ Richard Slotkin argues that the Western develops out of the fundamental American myth, "regeneration through violence": the European settler, new to the New World, confronts the savagery of the Other. In order to secure the boundaries of the white settlement, he "becomes" Indian. He learns how to live in the woods and how to fight with knives and hatchets. Then he returns to his settlement, a spiritual "half-breed," to found an *American* civilization. The cycle resumes. Because the law of this new (non-European, non-savage) civilization is predicated on a descent into savagery, it is understood that the maintenance of the law will require the continual off-scouring of the savage — which is the Self. See Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973, especially Chapter One ("Myth and Literature in a New World").

²⁰¹ I think it's safe to assume that almost everybody working at the high end of the spectrum on horror films — and the French horror filmmakers are very high end indeed — has read or at least encountered Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), possibly through Quentin Tarantino, who often praises Clover's book in interviews. Indeed, Men, Women, and Chainsaws signaled — and might have instigated — the slasher film's entry into full-blown "modernity." Thereafter, no "Final Girl" could be a Final Girl without knowing in advance that her sexual abstinence, tomboy features, and academic intelligence had marked her as the one who would survive her butchered cohort to do battle with her sexually "invert" antagonist (see *Scream*, for example, in which characters continuously refer to the "rules" of slasher films, while living through their own "slasher" — the rules in question cite Clover's folkloric readings of the genre).

Cécile de France and Phillippe Nahon in a *no-body*.²⁰²

In the classic Western, “woman” served mostly as a function of diegetic closure. She is the house that Gary Cooper or John Wayne or Alan Ladd finds or returns to (or finds he can’t return to) at the end of the film. When “woman” takes center stage in a Western, a hystericization of the genre takes place.²⁰³ In fact, the racial — as opposed to gender — underpinnings of Hollywood Westerns were even *more* apparent in the Vietnam-era Westerns, when filmmakers like Sam Peckinpah reworked the genre as furious essays on American Imperialist atrocity. There are no women at all in *The Wild Bunch* (1969), not even Grace Kellys — just temperance society old maids, lewd Mexican whores, and Pike’s (William Holden) memory-fantasy of the Virgin Mary. In the film’s absolute identification with *American* savagery — its almost Derridean inhabitation of a classic Western discourse (in Peckinpah’s case, the classic Western film), which it progressively undoes from inside, like a virus disseminating through the mythic bloodstream²⁰⁴ — there is an attempt to envision an Other who is not the

²⁰² “Horror” is much harder to define as a genre (the word describes an affect, not a constellation of tropes). In fact, one of its traditional axes, Urban-Rural, operates much like the Civilization-Wilderness binary does in Westerns (the Final Girl instantiates the cycle of “regeneration through violence”). The slaughter of a prairie family by Indians, the inciting moment of so many Westerns — *The Searchers*, *The Outlaw Josey Wales* (Eastwood 1973), *Once Upon a Time in the West* (Leone 1968) — is echoed by the gory slaughter of Maïwenn’s family, in *Haute tension*, which sets Cecile de France (John Wayne, Joan of Arc) on her/his/its path to retributive violence. Thus, the principle difference between *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *The Searchers* is that the first is more obviously about gender — a woman squirming on a meathook — while the other is more obviously about “race” (and yet, when John Wayne swoops up Natalie Wood in his arms...).

²⁰³ See, for example, *Duel in the Sun* (and Laura Mulvey’s argument about that film); see also the Nouvelle Vague’s well-beloved *Rancho Notorious* (Lang 1953), *Johnny Guitar* (Ray 1954), and *Forty Guns* (Fuller 1947). In the last, Barbara Stanwyck plays the Patriarchal figure — the Victor Mature or Arthur Kennedy character, the Law as *charismatic* authority. Early in the film, she is visited by the gun-slinging stranger, Barry Sullivan, while eating dinner. They flirt for a while in a medium-shot, which leads us to believe that they are the only people in the room. Then with a sly smile, locking eyes with Sullivan, Stanwyck says, “Will you gentlemen please excuse us?” Fuller cuts to an extreme long shot of the cavernous dining room. The eponymous Forty Guns, uniformly dressed in handkerchiefs, blue jeans, spurs, and holsters, rise from the table in unison and stamp outside with a sound like herding cattle.

²⁰⁴ A not entirely specious comparison. Note that François Cusset identifies Derrida as the “Clint Eastwood” of Film Theory in America, probably a reference to the way in which Derrida deviously turns “both ends against the middle,” in his infamous battle with John Searle (published in *Limited, Inc.*). If “language” can be imagined as a Western settlement in a Sergio Leone film, Derrida might be also conceived as the Man With No Name (in *Fistful of Dollars*), deftly working within the binary systems that keep it (language, the town) locked in a static, futile struggle between equally bad possibilities.

whooping murderous savage of *Stagecoach* (Ford 1939), or the sanctified victim of an Indian Holocaust (*Cheyenne Autumn* 1964), or still yet the mirror of our own primal brutality and isolation (*The Searchers* 1956). This invisible, theoretical “Other” perspective is a mirage generated in Peckinpah’s apocalyptic conflagration of traditional Western modes of self-identification.²⁰⁵ But the salvage of an ethnic or racial Other happens in place of, instead of, an attempt to conceive an image of Woman in the flames. In fact, it could be argued that the pre-condition for the “Indian” apparition, in the self-cannibalization of *The Wild Bunch*, is the disavowal of the *other* Other perspective — the indigene of the indigenous person.

A Girl is a Gun, however, is only about “Vietnam” in so far as it inevitably recasts the inaugural New Wave gesture, the Hollywood polemic, in the image of colonial exchange. For the First Wave, a fantasy about America might be conceived in relationship to Baudelaire’s turn to Poe, or Diderot’s turn to Richardson, or even Malraux’s turn to Faulkner — singular literary events that shirked (or thought they were shirking) territory and nationhood altogether (Baudelaire abominates America as much as he does France — it is “Poe” whom he celebrates). In 1971, such a fantasy had to justify itself in relation to America taking France’s place in the colonialization of Vietnam. Even Baudelaire, in his identification of Poe with the savage substrate of America, the Indian as “dandy,” could in retrospect be charged with bad faith. However, the “Indians” in Moullet’s film do not substitute for the Vietnamese, as the Mexicans do in American Westerns of the period. They are, in fact, minor actors on the fringes of a psycho-sexual struggle, which ends in the confrontation with the *other* Other, the girl who is neither gun nor girl.

Similarly, *Haute tension*, as the forerunner of a New French Horror picture, turns the normal gender “play” of the modern horror film inside out, and outside in. It produces a fat, wheezing, racist butcher, smock dripping with gore, where there seemed to be a fair-skinned, lithe French girl in tight blue jeans; the film switches out grue-spattered masculinity for svelte femininity, a wiry lesbian with a chainsaw. As I’ve suggested, “race” is at issue in *Haute tension* — Maïwenn’s family are recent Romanian immigrants. Yet, the films made possible by *Haute tension*’s abominable twist amplify its racial stakes. The French horror filmmaker seemingly perceives a disavowal of race in Godard’s (the First Wave’s) central project, the recovery of an image of “woman.” These films accuse the New Wave of covering over the “immigrant” (African, Arab, Pakistani...) with a sexual fantasy, or a fantasy about sexuality.

Bustillo’s and Maury’s sinister *A l’intérieur* is apodictic here. The most terrifying and disgusting of all French horror films, *Inside* is also the most politically pointed. Mostly taking place in a single location, a two-story house somewhere on the outskirts of

By the end of the book, Searle’s discourse, in the mirror of Derrida’s, turns against itself, and writing is “liberated” from both authorial intent and the speech act.

²⁰⁵ *The Wild Bunch* brings to a climax of Richard Slotkin’s three volume, four thousand page, meticulously argued thesis about the frontier myth and American culture. In a virtuostic close-analysis of the film’s concluding massacre, overwhelming and inscrutable in its fine details for the casual viewer, Slotkin shows just how thoroughly Peckinpah understood the mythological supports of the classical Western and how systematically, even sadistically, he demolished them in this shattering finale.

Paris, the film is about a very pregnant widow (due any minute — and it's Christmas Eve!) who is besieged by a maniacal older woman (Beatrice Dalle) hell-bent on ripping out the fetus in retribution for a car accident, some years before, in which her own embryo died. Although Paradis manages to contact the police, there is a problem. The police are distracted by an uprising in *les banlieues*, which they must suppress before they can deal with other calls. We never see the riot, only ominous pink flames in the distance, on rare instances when we get an exterior shot of the house. It is the unrepresentable "struggle," on the other side of the hill, in place of which we get an appalling image of *Woman*, two women, two mothers, attacking each other with long scissors, until the French household (re: France) brims with blood.

The violence directed at the womb — at the embryo — signifies a self-consuming struggle for the future, the all-French future. Béatrice Dalle gets her prize: in the film's final shot, she is visualized on the staircase, soaked in viscera, nursing the baby she has just "delivered" from the carcass of its mother, which lies (literally turned inside out, a quivering pile of ribs and internal organs) nearby. However, if this emblem of *la fin de cinéma* is just as ferocious as the aftermath of the massacre in *The Wild Bunch*, or Mirielle Darc eating her husband in *Weekend*, or even the Third Circle of Hell in Pasolini's *Salò*, its re-plotment in the "naissance" of French horror genre gives it a different, more ironic aspect. The demonic nativity scene on the steps is still a nativity: something, someone is born here, there is still life...

* * *

As the heroic white masculine cinema of Mid-Atlantic auteurism plays out its perpetual deaths, it gives birth to a still born that is at once the mute otherness of gender and race *and* the empty, de-politicized "differential calculus" of new media, Internet fandom, and global capitalism (what Daney calls the "diarrhea" of present-day image culture). Yet, there *is* something to see beyond what we are supposed to see (but never really see) in these films and film theories, as the after-image of a *fin de cinéma*. Here I turn to Alain Badiou.²⁰⁶ In the introduction to his book about St. Paul, Badiou makes an important argument about the intricate relationship between equalitism and neoliberalist economics. After the complete collapse of the communal alternative, he argues, every subject counts, so long as that subject is "countable" — a French, a homosexual, a gun-owner, a black, an Arab, a woman (who increasingly doesn't count), etc. It is this "countable" subject that the death of the cinema traditionally wants to bring into view: a woman (*Girl is a Gun*) or a "racialized French Other" (*Haute tension*).

Against the corporatized "multiplicities" of late Capitalism (in which every subject is brought under the Law of the general equivalent, in order to circulate as legal currency), Badiou postulates the radical singularity of St. Paul. In this figure, he discovers a "universality" that is grounded in the solitude of the subject, in her/his irrational faith in the Resurrection. From this standpoint, the death of the cinema might be re-conceived as an "event" in the Badiouian sense, as the improbable glimpse of some Real as it cycles into another myth. In the preceding analysis, I have been trying to give expression to such aporias — the real impossibility of thinking Cecile de France as Philip

²⁰⁶ Badiou, Alain, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003, pp. 6-9.

Nahon, Hélène Cixous as Faye Dunaway, or even Rachel Kesterber as Marie-Christiane Questerbert. In each case, there is a "real" trying to disengage from a fable and, in a kind of mythopoetic mitosis, becoming another fable.

Indeed, I argue that what is called the "death of cinema," no matter how conceived (in the militancy of a counter-cinema; in the technological nexus; in the waning of a Godardian "affect") in fact signifies the event of the "embryonic image." I will take up this concept, central to my theory of the Mid-Atlantic, in the conclusion.

CONCLUSION

The Embryonic Image

Pour l'enfant, amoureux de cartes et d'estampes,
 L'univers est égal à son vaste appétit.
 Ah! Que le monde est grand à la clarté des lampes!
 Aux yeux du souvenir que le monde est petit.
 — Baudelaire, "Le voyage"

I conclude with an image, made in the mid-90s, but arguably belonging to the mid-50s. The image comes from the first part of the second chapter of Jean Luc Godard's momentous video essay, *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (2A: "Seul le cinéma"). The image is literally *dense*: it has thickness and texture, like an oil painting. Like so many others in *Histoire(s)*, Godard composed it by juxtaposing two sets of moving pictures, one in black and white and the other in color, with video dissolve tools. The first scene is an *objet trouvé* from the cinematic archive — a fragment from Charles Laughton's *Night of the Hunter* (1955). The second is a video portrait of a woman alone in her house, reading Les fleurs du mal aloud.

Godard punctuates *Histoire(s)* with ceremonious black-outs. Deep blacks (seconds of black leader) wash over bloated masses of text and image in waves, making them appear to float. Objects (paintings, films, photos, text) rise to the surface of the screen before being carried down again into this sonorous abyss, often to re-emerge somewhere else a long time later, even in later episodes of *Histoire(s)*. To carry forward the Herman Melville metaphor from the introduction, perhaps *Histoire(s)* takes place in the wreck of the Pequod, after its apocalyptic encounter with the white whale. In Godard's vast, oceanic churning of texts and images and sounds, each has been grounds for myriad other figures, figures for other grounds.

Then, at the climax of the chapter, the two scenes find each other. They grapple, tangling for passionate seconds, until they disengage or are pulled apart by the black sea of Godard's *entre-image*. Each scene drops from the clutches of its counterpart and returns to its separate channel in *Histoire(s)*'s whirlpool of signification to find new couplings, new combinations, any one of which might be as definitive as this one was, in its own way.

But in those moments when these two *particular* scenes hurl together, the Mid-Atlantic is visible in all of its phases.²⁰⁷ Here is the Oceanographer's Mid-Atlantic, a geological fissure that buckles the West and has the power to dissolve entire continents; Herman Melville's Mid-Atlantic, a "blending cadence of waves and thoughts"; and even André Malraux's Mid-Atlantic, the site of an authorship politics that promised to redeem European Civilization in the aftermath of World War 2. Into all of this, Godard stirs the expectant mood that suffused the best works of the early Nouvelle Vague. Everything in this image bristles with new life, anxious to be whatever it is becoming.

²⁰⁷ See the Introduction, where I elaborate these four "Master Tropes" of the Mid-Atlantic.

First, Godard gives us a close-up of the face of a woman (Julie Delpy), in color and on video, as she looks up from the book she is reading, Charles Baudelaire's *Les fleurs du mal*. Elsewhere in the episode, we have seen her moving around her modern home. She does the laundry, takes a bath, and parts the shade to look out the window. Even as she performs these routines (and in a very stilted way), Godard imbues his actress with mythic qualities. She is poised somewhere between the women in a Marguerite Duras film from the 1970s — one who inhabits and is “inhabited by” the *house*, as Deleuze puts it²⁰⁸ — and a much more antique figure, from D.W. Griffith or Herman Melville, the archetypal woman who waits for her husband or son to return from his long voyage at sea. More immediately, she recalls Marie, alone in her room near the end of Godard's own *Je vous salue, Marie!* (1984), his “modernization” of the myth of the Immaculate Conception. The figure of the *waiting woman* is partly evoked by the poem she is reading; while she is doing household tasks, she soliloquizes Baudelaire's “Le Voyage,” the last and most disquieting of his “Flowers of Evil.” This poem concerns a group of doomed travelers, their hearts full of “rancor and disgust,” who are fleeing “their country's shame” and “Circe's tyranny.” Their desire is to “yield it all to the rhythm of the waves/ our infinite self awash on the finite sea.”²⁰⁹

Then Godard brings in a fragment of Charles Laughton's film. Depending on how you see it, he situates this fragment beneath, within, or over the close-up of Delpy's face. He makes a *surimpression* of a close-up, in color, on video, with a series of shots taken from a longer distance, on black and white film. The grain of the film pulses within the pellucid electronic image, creating an ultrasound effect; this effect is reinforced by the way he will frequently pause the motion, as if tracking a heartbeat.

The Night of the Hunter also depicts a flight from what Baudelaire, in “Le Voyage,” calls the “horror of life at home.” John and Pearl are running from their stepfather (Robert Mitchum), a psychotic ex-con masquerading as a preacher. He has just murdered their mother. Now he intends to force John and Pearl to divulge the location of some money their father squirreled away before he died. The orphans clamber down the riverbank into a waiting skiff. They push out to the middle of the river with their stepfather in hot pursuit. Hip-deep in water, Mitchum curses the children as they float away from his grasp. There follows one of the most Cocteau-like sequences in modern American films. The scene of John and Pearl cruising downstream suggests Cocteau's dream of cinema, to reawaken “*le monde perdu*” of early childhood; and because this is an enchanted river, the *mise-en-scène* of their nighttime passage carries Orphic reverberations. Ultimately, the children's boat will drift to shore on a property owned by a Mother Hubbard character, played by Lillian Gish, the iconic star of many Griffith silents. She gives them shelter and ultimately destroys the preacher. Even in 1955, the casting of Gish in the role was meant to signify that John and Pearl find sanctuary in the bosom of The Cinema Itself, which has the power to annihilate false fathers.

Godard, however, does not let the children arrive there. He freezes the image, below, within, and around the close-up of Julie Delpy's face, until the two scenes engulf

²⁰⁸ Deleuze, Gilles, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989, pg. 257.

²⁰⁹ Baudelaire, Charles, *Les Fleurs du mal*, trans. Robert Howard, Boston: Godine, 1983, pg.152.

one another. Delpy's chin streams into a haunted river; the prow of the boat pulls into her upper lip; the bridge of her nose projects a rickety wooden fence; beach trees cluster around her ears; and her blue eyes and rose-colored skin deliquesce into the damp gray of the night sky. The effect of this juxtaposition is to absorb Baudelaire's poem into the *monde perdu* of *The Night of the Hunter*.

The "embryonic image" thereby created hearkens to yet *another* nautical passage: the dangerous crossing of Godard himself, along with the other "children of the Cinémathèque Française," into the embrace of the American Cinema. This "crossing" happened in the mid-1950s, around the same time that *The Night of the Hunter* came out in Paris. Truffaut's "Une certaine tendance du cinéma français" was published in 1954 and is generally regarded as the founding document of *la politique des auteurs*. Like Laughton's film, "Une certaine tendance" symbolizes an escape from "false" and filial fathers — *le cinéma de papa*.

However, the image from *Histoire(s) du cinéma* goes a step further, into the unfathomable depths of the Mid-Atlantic. It is customary to think of Godard and Truffaut as caught between *deux pères*, "Yves Allegret" and "Alfred Hitchcock." But *The Night of the Hunter* is not the only scene here that allegorizes *le voyage* undertaken by Godard and Truffaut in the 1950s. The solitary woman also represents the origins of the Nouvelle Vague. She is the cinema in its gestation period, its time of *waiting*. There are two *mothers* in this image: the implied one, Lillian Gish, and the face of the Baudelaire reader, which floats above and seemingly exerts a tidal influence on the children's progress, pulling them into Baudelaire. Godard's "embryonic" image therefore portrays the *co-naissance*, literally, the co-birth, of the French and American cinemas of the 1950s.²¹⁰ This image is precisely located in what Godard calls "the middle of the century and the middle of the Cinema." *The Night of the Hunter* is the American film in its *innocence* — before Godard, before the French New Wave. It is about to be reborn as a Cinema of Authors.

* * *

In fact, I make no claim for the special status of the combination I have just described, in relation to *Histoire(s) du cinéma* as a whole. Each time Godard brings two or three or four things together through the miracle of *surimpression*, it is a singular event. I do not agree with those critics who feel that Godard's work is fundamentally argumentative;²¹¹ nor do I think one should emphasize the theoretical calculus that

²¹⁰ Perhaps because Klee's famous painting of a nursing mother and child is also in the mix in "Seul le cinéma," the combination of images also invites us to think of lactation: the seepage of white in the top right hand corner, which merges Delpy's cheek with the Laughton's pallid evening sky, suggests a splash of milk...One image is stretched over the breast of the other.

²¹¹ Richard Brody, for example, claims that the complexity of the work is on the surface: in fact, he asserts, the work makes a fairly straightforward argument, if one looks past the overt complexities of the representation. It is hard to believe in the argument's "straightforwardness," even through Brody's characteristically accessible rendering of it. One must be a true Godardian to accept the terms of the thesis as described: that the Cinema "failed" when it "turned its back on" the Jewish Holocaust. More centrally, with

underlies the method of conjugation (a montage theory) over the complexities of the conjugations themselves. If it is overwhelming to imagine a reading of *Histoire(s)* that takes account of the radical singularity of each of its compositions, then *to be overwhelmed* is part of the point. Godard's project with *Histoire(s)* is to multiply possible meanings, possible combinations, possible ways of combining, possible ways of thinking combination. At the same time, the struggle to "see the invisible,"²¹² to excavate or create a meaning in the convergence, is as important for us as it was for him: such is the radical democratic thesis of *Histoire(s)*, and it is partially borne out by the wealth of critical exegeses on the work.²¹³ It is unusual these days for any film, video, or even piece of literature to be so difficult or for its difficulty to be so well-met.

If this image is not the most important in *Histoire(s)*, it is because there can be no "most important." None has any special claim to being the key image of the work. Each establishes its own contexts, its own special reasons for being. For *me*, the author of the present dissertation, the image in question is easily the most important in *Histoire(s)*. And

Michael Witt and Sonja Bertucci, I would like to propose that the project's long gestation — Godard spent over twenty years elaborating that fantastic surface — muddies any coherent sense of a particular discursive "origin" for the project. While a 1984 debate with Claude Lanzmann and Marguerite Duras might play a part here, as Brody contends, many other key events shaped particular episodes, particular arrangements of text and image. For the episode in question ("Seul le cinéma"), the key event was almost certainly the death of Serge Daney, who appears here in person, and whose favorite films, from *Moonfleet* (Lang 1955) to *Psycho* to *Night of the Hunter*, form its *repertoire imaginaire*. Brody, Richard, *Everything is Cinema: The Working Life of Jean-Luc Godard*, New York: Metropolitan Books, 2008, pg. 512. See also, Witt, Michael, "Archaeology of *Histoire(s) du cinéma*," in Godard, Jean-Luc, *Introduction to a True History of Cinema and Television*, trans. Timothy Barnard, Montreal: Caboose, 2014; and Bertucci, Sonja, "Le même et l'autre: Proust et Godard au miroir de l'intermédialité," doctoral thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 2012.

²¹² From *Hélas pour moi* (Godard 1992); quoted as the epigraph to David Sterritt's *The Films of Jean-Luc Godard: Seeing The Invisible*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

²¹³ In one of the most important readings of the work, Jacques Rancière takes Godard to task for suggesting that we remember the *image* of the glass of milk from *Suspicion* (Hitchcock 1944) but not the narrative context in which that image serves. Rancière justifiably points out that the image only *operates* in relationship to the plot: the image is memorable because Hitchcock has lead us to believe that the milk might be poisoned. In my view, it is not necessary to decide whether the glass of milk stands "for itself" or condenses a narrative. The modality of *Histoire(s)* is experimental in the extreme. Godard does not intend for us to prioritize his spoken narration (which is often quotation anyway) over what we see, hear, experience at any given moment in the work. Each citation or pronouncement, moreover, is arguably an attempt at a hypothesis, a thesis, broken off in mid-sentence in an attempt to poeticize the thesis (to make the thesis poetry, in this case, an expression of the ineffable). Rancière, Jacques, *The Future of the Image*, trans. Gregory Elliot, London: Verso, 2007, pp. 33-68.

if I end with a close reading of it — some might say, “too close”²¹⁴ — it is because the project I am now bringing to conclusion began with it.

The concept of the Mid-Atlantic was born at the Pacific Film Archive in 2006, during a showing of *Histoire(s) du cinéma*. Amid all of the sounds and images of this magnificent work, some of which throb with obvious world-historical significance (such as the oft-studied “Elizabeth Taylor at Auschwitz”²¹⁵), this is the one that stayed with me. It gave me a desire to write — a desire which is always related to the enigma of “self” (pace Roland Barthes). Because this “self” is obviously at issue throughout this manuscript, not only in the choice of objects but in the style of demonstration, it is important that “I” become a subject, if only briefly (perhaps just for a few paragraphs). It should be understood that I do not intend for this “I” to bear the burden of the thesis, nor to excuse its inadequacies as a plan of research. Instead, I’d like to use this autobiographical detour as a way of bringing into better focus the transferential side of my thesis.

The person who saw this image in 2006, and who went home to conceive the “Mid-Atlantic” as the subject of his doctoral thesis, undoubtedly felt as if it bore witness to his own family romance. Here (in the image or in my reading of it) are multiple figures of embarkation, of leaving “home,” each of which cycles back to a maternal imago that is at once frustrating (or frustrated) and solacing (or solaced). In the process, it invokes a myriad of solitudes which add up to neither “loneliness” or “independence.” There is no “New” which is not always-already an “Old”; no “Old” which is not met as if for the first time. When I saw the image, I encountered, for the first time, *my* Godard in Godard.

My Godard developed in the 15 years leading up to this projection of *Histoire(s) du cinéma* at the PFA. No matter what else I was doing or not doing during the first 10 years of that period, it was *not* going to school. Both of my parents were English professors. At some point, it seemed necessary to reject their example in order to explore an alternative “New.” While working in retail jobs and racking up credit card debt, I began studying Godard, whose films I had encountered through Tom Gunning’s History of Cinema class at SUNY Purchase, in 1989-1990. Studying Godard outside the academy was an improbable exercise. This was a time (pre-internet) and a place (Muncie, Indiana) when and where it was very difficult even to see Godard films. Finding them, therefore, was a key component of “my” Godard, it being assumed that the difficulty I associated with the name began with the difficulty of access.²¹⁶

²¹⁴ Miller, D.A., “Hitchcock’s Hidden Pictures,” *Critical Inquiry*, Autumn 2010, pp. 106-130.

²¹⁵ Wright, Alan, “Elizabeth Taylor at Auschwitz: JLG and the Real Object of Montage,” in *The Cinema Alone: Essays on the Work of Jean-Luc Godard, 1985-2000*, ed. Michael Temple and James S. Williams, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2000.

²¹⁶ This difficulty has not gone away. Even his sixties cinema is by no means “complete” on DVD (not even in Japan, which has become for the digital age what France might have been for modern painting). Case in point: *Puissance de la parole* (1988) is a very important *Histoire(s)* precursor, despite its unlikely beginnings as an ad for France Telecom. I’ve very much wanted to use it here but have only been able to see fragments on YouTube. There is one sequence in which a man and a woman are having an argument over the telephone (their dialogue, I believe, comes from James M. Cain’s *The*

During this period of *not* going to school, my perspective on Godard's work was Joycean and transferential.²¹⁷ What drew me to his films was their referentiality and the implicit suggestion of a code. In order to understand *Je vous salue, Marie!*²¹⁸ one must first see all the other Godards; in order to understand Godard one must understand Hitchcock; in order to understand Hitchcock one must understand Lang; etc. Godard signified a plunge into an endless string of readings and viewings and listenings, each connected to the last by a frail umbilicus — several months digging into Paul Eluard because one of his books is glimpsed in *Alphaville* (1965); two years spent in a torpor, trying to figure out *how it could be* that the hidden pages of all the book covers glimpsed in *Made in U.S.A.* had meaning in relation to the objective content on-screen.

In my mind, this problem had the force of the famous shot at the beginning of *Blue Velvet*, in which the camera plunges into a bright green suburban lawn to reveal the bugs, furiously knitting together “reality.” It could not be, but it was: Godard was somehow bringing into play not just the title of the book that Karina reads in the opening shot of *Made in U.S.A.*, (*Adieu la vie, adieu l'amour*) but images and episodes tucked deeply into its pages. Since the dialogue she speaks, with her fingers closed in the Horace McCoy novel (“Happiness... for instance...”), is from Samuel Beckett (“Enough”), there must be a nucleus, a point of fusion, where McCoy and Beckett converge. Therefore, two years on Beckett and American crime novels of the thirties.

If this sounds like a strange way of dropping out of college, it was and it wasn't. This kind of happily paranoid reading is certainly not “academic,” at least in the modern sense. Here precedence becomes absolute precession: *this* came before *that*, before which came *that* — a series of *befores* translated into a reading and watching and listening, which itself stretches endlessly into the future. But the image in question, from

Postman Always Rings Twice). It's a bad connection; there's a problem in the line. Godard cuts to images of the Ocean, seemingly taken from *within* the crushing waves. It seems to me that this cutaway “remembers,” on some level, that the Mid-Atlantic ridge was discovered by scientists sounding the sea-bottom for a trans-continental telegraph cable.

²¹⁷ Many years ago, my mother told me a story about her father, John Calnan, Massachusetts-born but an inveterate Irishman. He was young when he died — my current age, I think (43) — by misadventure. My mom recalls him once taking she and her sister on his knee and pointing to *Ulysses*, open on his lap. “We come from there,” he said. He probably meant “Ireland” (in fact, Richard Ellmann, with whom my Mother briefly studied at Northwestern, mentions a Calanan who belonged to Joyce's youthful circle in Dublin). Yet my mother believed (at least I like to think my mother believed) that he was referring to the book itself: her family came from *Ulysses*.

²¹⁸ Thanks to its denunciation by the Pope, *Je vous salue, Marie!* was one of the first Godards to appear on VHS in the United States. In my local video store — the much-mourned Big Star Video, which could not survive the arrival of Blockbuster Video — it could be found in a section called “exotica,” along with an English-dubbed *Salò*, Lucio Fulci's horror films, *Ilsa: She Wolf of the SS* (which apparently plays some part in Godard's cinematic archaeology — Serge Daney writes in his last essay of Godard's collection of concentration camp porn), and soft-core direct-to-videos like *The Pamela Principle* (1991).

Histoire(s) du cinéma, did not activate a desire to decrypt. Rather, it landed on me (in 2006) with the shock of a *mémoire involontaire*: My father wrote *his* dissertation on William Faulkner, during the first years of my life (Haynes, Michael A., “The Unity of the Collected Stories of William Faulkner,” Ball State University, 1976). Once I asked him: “Why Faulkner? Why did you choose to write about Faulkner?” In the course of answering, he promulgated something about how the French, specifically André Malraux and Jean-Paul Sartre, had recognized in Faulkner something that Americans (before Malcolm Cowley) had not.

In some ways, perhaps, this dissertation has been an attempt to answer the questions at the psychic root of my own father’s dissertation (which was not about Faulkner’s French reception, but could not have been written without it), questions which my father himself could not answer: *What* did they recognize? Why the French? Some minutes before *The Night of the Hunter* slides into Julie Delpy’s visage, Serge Daney asks Jean-Luc Godard the same questions: why the French? Why is it that (in Godard’s view) the cinema became “historical” when the Nouvelle Vague and Godard in particular entered into its stories?

Just as my father did, Godard responds by reference to a genealogy: “Diderot, Baudelaire, Malraux — je mets tout de suite après Truffaut. Il y a une ligne directe là-dedans. Baudelaire parlant de Edgar Poe est pareil que Malraux parlant de Faulkner est pareil que Truffaut parlant d’Edgar Ulmer ou de Hawks.” Like the image, this quotation stands “alone” (a very important word in this chapter of *Histoire(s)*, “*Seul le cinéma*” — often re-arranged in Godard’s busy titling scheme to spell “*Le cinéma seul*”). He takes for granted that there is this lineage of French writers who wrote about art and at some point turned to the study of Anglo-American writers (Samuel Richardson in Diderot’s case).²¹⁹ Critical work has been done on these three or four seconds of video: like everything else

²¹⁹ Godard twice underlines and mocks his pomposity during this “interview.” First, he puts himself in a deep shadow in the left foreground; then he uses various filters and echoes on his voice. As with everything else here the reference is complex in the extreme. Unctuous notes from Bernard Herrmann’s score for *Psycho* play under the scene, occasionally drowning out the speech in late-Godard fashion. I think he means to put the interview under the sign of the Hitchcock-Truffaut summit, with Daney cast in the Truffaut part. But the reference goes further and deeper. Throughout *Histoire(s)*, Godard characterizes the Cinema Itself in Bazinian terms and describes Hitchcock as “L’Absolu.” Thus, in casting himself as “Hitchcock” to Daney’s “Truffaut,” he is also suggesting that “L’Absolu” is under psychoanalysis: and that the root of the analysand’s problem is a “mummy complex” (as Bazin claims of art, in his classic article about photography). As preposterous as it sounds, Godard — in casting himself as Hitchcock — is also playing Norman Bates, who had his own “mummy/Mommy” complex. If so, it should be noted that it is not the first time Godard has indirectly cast himself as “Mother” while referring to *Psycho*. He also does so in *Made in U.S.A.*: at one point Anna Karina discovers the corpse of her former lover (Godard in life — Richard Poltizer in the film) wrapped in bandages (mummified) on a dentist’s chair, in a set of images which evoke Vera Miles’s discovery of “Mother” in the fruit cellar at the end of Hitchcock’s movie. Later on in *Made in U.S.A.*, Godard’s own voice plays on a tape recorder in the character of Poltizer — just as “Mother” is finally revealed to be nothing more than a Voice, in *Psycho*.

in *Histoire(s)*, these lines *have* been studied. For the most part, scholars have emphasized the French side of the *ligne-directe* and the art historical works of the writers Godard mentions. Diderot's *Salons*, Baudelaire's *Salons* (and other art writings), Malraux's *Les voix du silence* — each represents a distinctly *French* history of writing about images.²²⁰ Occasionally, a scholar will append another name or two, to bring this art-historical side into better focus.²²¹ But what Godard presents us with, I contend, is a real *politique des auteurs*, perhaps the *essence* of auteurism chez Godard: there can be no other names but these, until Godard himself admits Daney, after the beloved critic died of AIDS, in 1992.

I make this claim for lots of reasons, all related to the discovery (subdued, if one only admits the French art historical side) of the parallel “Edgars” in Godard's poetic phrasing: *Edgar* Poe and *Edgar* Ulmer. Edgar Poe is a major figure. The name “Poe” includes many writers and artists of his time and beyond, and not just European and American ones. When the name comes into contact with Baudelaire's, it goes truly viral: there is hardly any modern art *anywhere* that does not owe something to this connection. Similarly, Richardson and Faulkner can feasibly stand for literary “epochs”; and Howard Hawks, too, is entitled to definitional status *vis-à-vis* a French turn toward American qua American culture in the 1950s (they were the Hitchcocko-Hawksians after all). But Edgar Ulmer? Best known — maybe *only* known — as the director of the grungy *Detour* (1945), one of the most vicious of all classic film noirs and one of the few with genuine Poverty Row bonafides, Ulmer would seem to be a very slight figure amid these Big names.

However, it is not “Ulmer” at stake here in Godard's *politique*, but the “Truffaut” who recognized his own portrait in Ulmer's obscure 1954 western, *The Naked Dawn*:

Talking about *The Naked Dawn* is equivalent to drawing the portrait of its author, because we see him behind every image and feel we know him intimately when the lights go on. Wise and indulgent, playful and serene, vital and clear, in short a good man like the ones I've compared him to.²²²

This is an extraordinary passage. In fact, it may be the most extraordinary critical statement I have ever read. In some ways, obviously, Truffaut goes *beyond* confirming the most basic critique of auteurism as a vulgar knowledge of film. Not only is *The Naked Dawn* the fulfillment of an authorial intention, it *personifies* its author. But it would be a pity to leave it at that: Truffaut here demonstrates, as he does in his introduction and conclusion to the Hitchbook (see Chapter Two), an essential personhood, a good will rarely encountered *anywhere* in discourse, let alone in criticism.

²²⁰ One which evolves out of a sense of cultural exceptionalism best emblemized by Malraux — ONLY the French can write about these paintings.

²²¹ The editors of *The Cinema Alone*, for example, append Élie Faure and André Bazin. Williams, James, and Temple, Michael, “Introduction to the Mysteries of Cinema, 1985-2000,” in that text (cited above).

²²² Truffaut, François, *Films in my Life*, trans. Leonard Mayhew, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978, pg. 156.

Derrida might call it a “politics of friendship.”²²³ If the relationship instantiated is at the level of imago (Truffaut distills a “portrait of an author” from the film), the essential decision he makes is to regard this figure as a “good man.” “I *know* Edgar Ulmer,” he seems to be saying, “and Edgar Ulmer is good.” Godard, in turn, acknowledges Truffaut’s essential goodness: I knew François (he did, of course, *know* him — but by the time of *Histoire(s)* Godard is on a first name basis with all of the Gods of Western Art), and François was kind.²²⁴

But there is something else going on here, in Godard’s inclusion of Truffaut’s Ulmer alongside Baudelaire’s Poe, Malraux’s Faulkner, Diderot’s Richardson, and Truffaut’s (better-known) Hawks. Godard means to draw attention to the process of becoming an author, which he equates with a recognition of how one’s “petit h” (little history) fits with the “Grand H” (Big Histories) of Literature and Cinema. Early in the same review, Truffaut announces that he has become friendly with the author Henri-Pierre Roché. Seeing *The Naked Dawn*, in which there is a love triangle, Truffaut notes that it might be possible to make a film of Roché’s *Jules et Jim*. Eight years later he made it, and it is widely regarded as his masterpiece.

Reading these lines of Truffaut’s, one feels a tremor. A “sympathetic vibration”²²⁵ travels through the other names in Godard’s list and personalizes them. Sheared from their world-historical significance, they are revealed as the budding authors they once were. Each sought within the work of another (an Anglo-American writer) his own portrait, an “authorial mirror” developing like a photograph in the other’s text. P.N. Furbank reports that Diderot, reading Richardson’s *Clarissa*, identified so strongly with the victimized heroine that he would nightly declaim the villainy of her persecutors *as if they were real people*.²²⁶ Out of this personal tumult came not only the essay, “Eloge de Richardson,” in which he put his own philosophical work under the sign of “identification” (against the dominant, maxim-based philosophy of La Rouchefoucauld),

²²³ Derrida, Jacques, *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins, London: Verso, 2006.

²²⁴ Recall the Godard quote that begins *Two in the Wave*, discussed in the Introduction to this dissertation: “After François died, Anne-Marie Miéville told me, ‘Now that he’s dead, *nobody will protect you*...since he was the only one of the Nouvelle Vague who was accepted and tried, in a way, to join the ‘establishment.’”

²²⁵ Aumont, Jacques, *Amnésies: Fictions du cinéma après Jean-Luc Godard*, Paris: P.O.L., 1999, pg. 1.

²²⁶ Furbank writes: “...Diderot made the acquaintance of Richardson’s novels and became an impassioned champion of them. He decided that Richardson was a moral genius, superior to Montaigne or La Rouchefoucauld because he showed ethics in action; he was even in danger, he wrote to a friend, of making a liking for Richardson a condition of his own friendship. But what amazed and impressed him even more was Richardson’s hypnotic illusionism, which put the reader into the situation of a child at its first stage of play, crying ‘Don’t trust him! He means to deceive you!’ One day, in a friend’s presence he was reading the famous deathbed scene in *Clarissa* and, unable to bear any more, he got to his feet and, to his friend’s alarm, uttered the most piteous outcries against Clarissa’s unfeeling family.” “Introduction” to Diderot, Denis, *Memoirs of a Nun* (trans. Francis Birrell), New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992, ix.

but also the philosophical novel *La religieuse*. Similarly, Baudelaire's discovery of Poe's writings involved the shock of a "recognition": "...en 1846 ou 1847 j'eus connaissance de quelque fragments d'Edgar Poe; j'éprouvai une commotion singulière; ..." ²²⁷ He spent the rest of his life painstakingly translating Poe's tales, as if riddling out the mysterious apparition of "self" he had first glimpsed in that "remarkable commotion."²²⁸ Lastly, Malraux's "Faulkner" has Malraux-ian features, even if Faulkner plays a lesser part in the Malraux biography than Poe plays in Baudelaire's. In his brief but definitive "Preface to *Sanctuary*," the future First Minister of Culture and *metteur-en-scène* of the Nouvelle Vague lays out the grand tragic themes of *La condition humaine* and spells out his important definition of the modern author: as the one who arranges for himself the themes that will crush him.²²⁹

Godard's ligne-directe, in other words, strings together a series of embryonic author events. If each becoming-author happened "first" on the French side, in a trans-Atlantic (or, in Diderot-Richardson's case, cross-channel) turn, the advent of the Anglo-American author is also implicated. Only abstractly, in the form of a linear historical accounting, does Poe "precede" Baudelaire. In his "worldly" form — as a definitive author of the 19th century and early 20th century — he comes after Baudelaire's translations. The same must be said of William Faulkner.

In choosing Faulkner for the subject of his dissertation, my father believed (this is how he put it, when I asked him long ago) that Faulkner would *always* be of interest to scholars of American literature. *Always*: Faulkner was, you know... *important*. It was the French — Malraux, Sartre — who vouchsafed his importance, and (it follows) gave my father the courage to write his dissertation.

* * *

Throughout the process of writing about the Mid-Atlantic, I have often been asked (and have often asked myself), "Who is my reader?" In other words, to whom

²²⁷ Baudelaire, Charles, *Lettres 1841-1866*, Paris: Société du Mercure de France, 1907, pg. 176.

²²⁸ While *Les fleurs du mal* is undoubtedly Baudelaire's key work, Michel Butor (in his strange and wonderful book, *Histoires Extraordinaires: An Essay on a Dream of Baudelaire's*) notes that it is really *Histoires Extraordinaires* (1856) that marks the birth of Baudelaire as a published author. Butor also reveals, in his brilliant dream analysis, how significant that publication was for Baudelaire — in other words, it was not just a commercial necessity, but a real "event" in Baudelaire's self-recognition. The dream in question involves Baudelaire ceremoniously delivering a galley copy of *Histoires* to his mother, who lives in a house full of over-sexed demons, like the *mise-en-scène* of a Mario Bava movie.

²²⁹ Malraux, André, "A Preface for Faulkner's *Sanctuary*," trans. unknown, *Yale French Studies*, 1953, No. 10, 92-94. In his 1966 hate letter, "Letter to the Minister of Kultur," an expression of contempt on the occasion of the banning of Rivette's *La religieuse* (1966), Godard makes a point of addressing *Malraux*. It was not Malraux, in fact, who was responsible for the ban, but Yvon Bourges, the Minister of Information: nonetheless, *I* (Godard) know *you*, Malraux, and it is you — who knows *Diderot* — who is to blame here. See *Cahiers du cinéma* 177, April 1966.

(within the “discourse”) is this discourse about the Mid-Atlantic addressed? And, more disturbingly, who is the *we* on behalf of whom you presume to speak in the introduction? This is a question, whether posed from outside or within, that leaves the author feeling very alone. Begging the reader’s indulgence, I have no good answers to these questions. This writing will not, does not, cannot admit its author to a community of like-minded scholars, for whom the Truffaut in Hitchcock, the Edgar in Amos Poe, the Kesterbert in Questerbert, or the extrication of a “French” Lang from a French Lang, are urgent matters. This subject position was vacated a long time ago, and it was also never “mine,” in the strict sense of the word, since it is more a transit-point than an abode.

However, the Mid-Atlantic is *neither* transit-point nor abode. Here I stress the intransigence of that “Mid-,” with its cartographical pretensions. It is a site that cannot be a site, an “abstract” singularity. Nor does the place-name designate traffic between nations, a nodal point for cultural exchange. If that were the case, it would be “trans-Atlantic.” Indeed, my guiding hypothesis has been that the texts and films with which I am concerned here, in their specificities, merely *leaned on* the histories of nations. Jean Laplanche defines human sexuality as such a *leaning* (anaclisis) — an aim propped on a function.²³⁰ In nursing at the breast, the baby is nourished; however, it is not nourishment, but the stimulation of the labile zone around the mouth and nipple, that constitutes the “origin” of sexuality in the child. Just so, the texts and films of the New Wave, unquestionably dependent on national image economies (and economies of nationalist images), nonetheless constitute a set of singular and definitionally perverse relationships in and among themselves. The Mid-Atlantic does not exist; it *insists*, in the interweaving of subjectivities, in the knitting together of texts and authors in a fantasmatic genealogy.²³¹

In *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, Godard eschews “culture” in both of its academic modalities: he neither propagates the bourgeois ideal of culture as the aggregate of the best that has been thought and done in the world, nor does he valorize the neoliberalist idea of culture in the absolute relativity of ethnic and sexual difference. In fact, I think the “culture” at stake here is the biologist’s: “the artificial propagation and growing of micro-organisms, or of plant and animal cells, tissues, etc., in liquid or solid nutrient media in vitro” (OED). This is the only definition of “culture” which does not depend on soil, on

²³⁰ Laplanche writes: “Now the crucial point is that simultaneous with the feeding function’s achievement of satisfaction in nourishment, a sexual process begins to appear. Parallel with feeding there is a stimulation of lips and tongue by the nipple and the flow of warm milk. This stimulation is initially modeled on the function, so that between the two, it is at first barely possible to disinguish a difference...Thus the ‘propping’ consists initially in that support which emergent sexuality finds in a function linked to the preservation of life.” *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman, Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976, pg. 17.

²³¹ This is why I have had little recourse to a meta-language, a remedial theory, here. The Mid-Atlantic, as “Master Trope,” as “fantasmatic genealogy” or “embryonic image,” can only be traced in the fold, in the joining or overlapping of texts. The didactic has to give way to close readings and their imaginary surplus, the accidental discovery that may prove to be a “definitive by chance.” In the pursuit of these discoveries, the critic and scholar knits himself into this “fantasmatic genealogy.”

the cultivation of a particular territory, to achieve its consistency. Indeed, what is at stake in the *surimpression* is an experimental subject, and if the test-tube is implied, so is the uterus.

In the image with which I began this chapter, the making of embryonic images is turned into obstetrics — an historical obstetrics. This is so, not only because the image evokes such a complex symbology of “motherhood,” but because of the specific kind of conceptual *labor* the image requires of us, and which it presumably required of its maker. Lyotard identifies this labor as “anamnesis” — unforgetting — and characterizes it (with full cognizance of the gynecological resonance) as the “labor to hold open a passage.” The *passage* in question — the infolding of Julie Delpy’s portrait with the scene from *Night of the Hunter* — is temporal. The word “anamnesis” originates in Plato’s philosophy of education.²³² Plato put forward the notion that the educator’s task was not to give the student *new* knowledge, but to assist the student in excavating the memory of a *complete* knowledge that he had at birth, but forgot along the way. As in Freud, anamnesis implies that the future of the subject proceeds toward the recovery of an image of its past.

This past image, however, can only ever *be* an image: the recreation of a past in the mirror of the present, with futural implications. In juxtaposing *Night of the Hunter* with Julie Delpy’s face, therefore, Godard implies not the definitive recognition of a past that *was*, but a possible representation of the future of the “past” in the eyes of a subject not yet born. And, most centrally, Godard puts the strongest emphasis on the *travail*, the labor, of bringing that “future anterior” to term: “Seeing the invisible is exhausting,” he remarks.

This has strong implications for the historian, particularly the historian of the New Wave. If the Mid-Atlantic is unlocatable in space, it is equally dislodged in time. In the preceding chapters, I have tried to register that temporal dislocation in a series of author events in which prolepsis is the dominant figure: in writing about Fritz Lang, Jacques Rivette created a Langian discourse. In so doing, he assimilated an historical “Lang” as the past tense of the New Wave still to come. Oddly, this “still to come” is experienced by the contemporary reader in the *passé simple* — the future of the past. Similarly, the monumentality of Truffaut’s Hitchcock book (what it has come to mean for scholars, film lovers, filmmakers all over the world) is experienced *personally*, through the recovery of the two selves at risk in the text of the interview, each of whom relinquishes his “mastery” to the other.

If Eurocentrism is implied in choosing to study such events in the cross-hatching of France and America, I have desired to show how the particularity of the events themselves undermine the territorial imperatives retroactively superimposed on them. The Mid-Atlantic insists that “nationhood” take the perilous route of the embryonic image, to be rediscovered as (seen to have been) an effect of such “singular commotions” as those I’ve talked about here.

In other words, these films and texts do not and cannot project nationhood (a Godard film in no way belongs to France; nor is the Frenchness of Godard, as spoken by Amos Poe or even Martin Scorsese, merely imitative — it is a proper extension of a “Godard” whose real importance might be in his extensions). Rather, they form the

²³² Plato developed these ideas in the dialogues, *Meno* and *Phaedo*.

grounds for a reconceptualization of nationhood, now seen in the image of furtive, subversive exchanges, transpiring in the gaps of Big History. In these gaps, Amos Poe might figure as largely as Andre Malraux for determining the Americanness or the Frenchness of this or that position. And even the most rigorous historian, French or American, plumbing the national archive for box-office receipts, cinema ads, and newspaper reviews, and refusing the French New Wave and its illusions, will be seen to have been knitting herself into these fantasmatic genealogies.

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