

## STARS AND STARDOM IN FRENCH CINEMA

When people think of film stars, they think of Hollywood. Yet, second only to America, French cinema has produced the most substantial galaxy of stars to achieve world fame in their national films. Top French stars are every bit as glamorous and charismatic as their American counterparts, but they are also different from their rivals and opposites, especially in the freedom they have to control their own images and in the ways they straddle mainstream and auteur cinema.

This fascinating book, written by a leading authority on French cinema, analyses for the first time the French 'star system' and provides brilliant in-depth studies of the major popular stars of the French cinema: Max Linder, Jean Gabin, Brigitte Bardot, Jeanne Moreau and the stars of the New Wave, Louis de Funès, Jean-Paul Belmondo, Alain Delon, Catherine Deneuve, Gérard Depardieu and Juliette Binoche. *Stars and Stardom in French Cinema* analyses these stars' images and performance styles in the context of the French film industry and in relation to French culture and society.

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Front cover illustration: Brigitte Bardot in *En effeuillant la marguerite* / *Misselle Strip-tease* (1956). Courtesy of Les Films Ariane.

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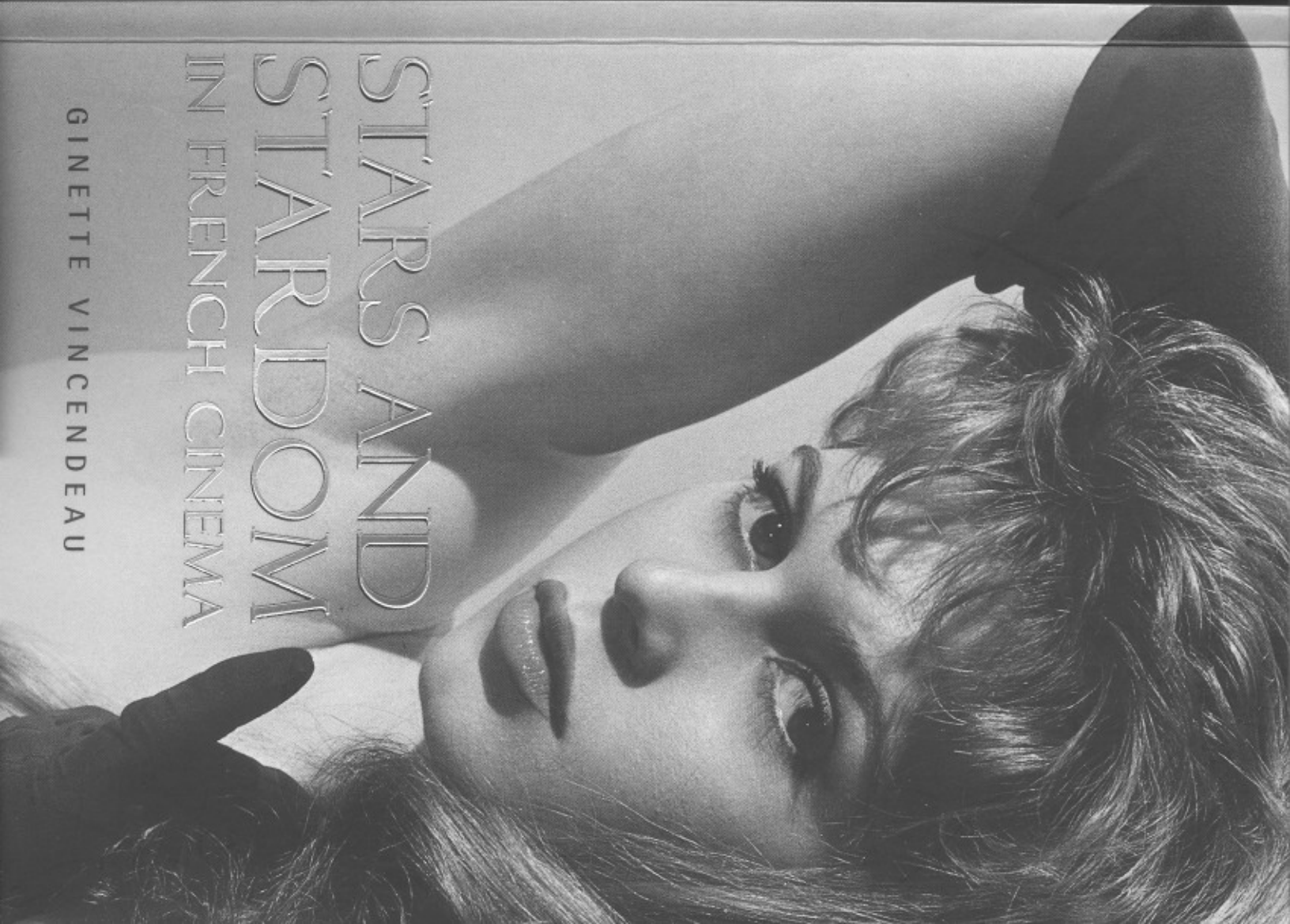
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## CHAPTER 4

## Brigitte Bardot

*The old and the new:  
what Bardot meant to 1950s France*

When the magazine *Esquire* was re-launched in the UK in March 1991, it chose to put Brigitte Bardot on its cover, using the still which had advertised Godard's *Le Mépris* in 1963. That is to say, Bardot in one of her most stereotypical sex-goddess images: long bleached blonde hair, heavy eye make-up, pink lipstick on parted luscious lips echoing the pink towel in which she is wrapped, not hiding much of her breasts. But if in the highly self-reflexive *Le Mépris* Bardot represented 'Bardot' and the phenomenon of stardom, her place on the cover of *Esquire* was, at first, more baffling, since there was nothing on her inside the issue. We are then thrown back to the cover and its caption: 'From the Bomb to Bardot, Greaves to Gazza, JFK to John Major – OUR TIMES, A Picture History of Men: 1946–1991'. So, this magazine for men invoked Bardot as historical symbol of the new in old terms indeed: Woman, as the sub-heading of *Esquire* put it, is 'Man at his best'. What is, after all, only a clever piece of magazine design attracted my attention because it is indicative of the structure of the Bardot 'myth'.

From the release of Roger Vadim's *Et Dieu ... créa la femme* in 1956, Bardot became a media sensation as an icon of rebellious youth, sexiness and of French womanhood, both in and out of France. In that film, she plays Juliette, an orphan who sets the small resort of Saint-Tropez

ablaze. All men desire her, including wealthy playboy Carradine (Curt Jurgens). She herself is in love with Antoine (Christian Marquand), though in the end she marries his brother Michel (Jean-Louis Trintignant). Juliette – a name redolent with romantic love (Shakespeare) and sex (de Sade) – and Bardot were immediately conflated: her beauty, her carefree lifestyle on the beach, her insolence towards her elders and betters. Subsequent films replayed and accommodated this persona. Bardot was voted 'typical woman' of 1961 by the fan magazine *Cinémonde*, an accurate enough assessment, since her dress, hairstyle and demeanour were widely copied, both by other film stars – Mylène Demongeot, Annette Stroyberg, Jane Fonda, Catherine Deneuve, to name the most obvious clones – as well as by ordinary women, and she inspired, among other cartoonists, Jean-Claude Forest, who modelled Barbarella on her. Bardot was famous enough to be known by her initials, B.B. In 1969, she modelled for the bust of Marianne, the representation of the French Republic, the first known woman to fulfil this role (Agulhon and Bonte, 1992). Countless books and magazines have featured Bardot in their pages and on their covers, including coffee-table celebrations and biographies – for instance, Tony Crawley's *Bébé: The Films of Brigitte Bardot* (1975), Peter Haining's *The Legend of Brigitte Bardot* (1982), Glenys Roberts' *Bardot: A Personal Biography* (1984), Sean French's *Bardot* (1994) and Jeffrey Robinson's *Bardot: Two Lives* (1994) – but more surprisingly perhaps, works by feminists. These include Françoise Audé's *Ciné-modèles, cinéma d'elles* (1979), Michèle Sarde's sociological survey, *Regard sur les françaises* (1983), Catherine Rihoit's biography, *Brigitte Bardot: un mythe français* (1986), Mandy Merck's *Perversions* (1994) and Camille Paglia in a Channel 4 television documentary series, *Without Walls*, broadcast in 1994. Most famous of all, though, is Simone de Beauvoir's early essay 'Brigitte Bardot and the Lolita syndrome' (1960), first written in English for the American *Esquire*.

However different their intentions or backgrounds, all writers stress the newness of Bardot, especially her revolutionary, 'free' sexuality. The invention of the Bardot phenomenon was claimed, with characteristic exaggeration, by Roger Vadim, who said, in an introduction to the video of his 1960 film *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (starring Jeanne Moreau): 'We are all beginning to encounter this new species of liberated young girl who

has abandoned the restraint usually imposed on her sex. ... This particular phenomenon I've tried to bring to life through the personality of Brigitte Bardot.' Vadim, a journalist for *Paris Match* and aspiring filmmaker, indeed saw Bardot's potential when she was a teenage model, married her in 1952 and engineered the beginning of her film career. By the time of *Et Dieu ... créa la femme*, she had made sixteen films, was splitting up with Vadim and beginning to attract serious media attention.

Bardot undoubtedly ushered in a new femininity in 1950s France. Her spectacular youthful looks, her insolent wit, her blatant promiscuous lifestyle and her outspokenness were unlike any other star of the time, in France or elsewhere. Yet, at the same time her appeal depended on 'old' values: on traditional myths of femininity and on the display of her body, though a body repackaged for the times: nude, more 'natural', on location, in colour and Cinemascope. Bardot's stardom rested on the combination and reconciliation of these opposed sets of values. My analysis in this chapter concentrates on Bardot's period of high stardom, which was surprisingly short – from the release of *Et Dieu ... créa la femme* in 1956 to *La Vérité* in 1960, her highest grossing film in France<sup>1</sup> – though I will refer to earlier and later films, in particular her two New Wave films, *Vie privée* (1961) and *Le Mépris* (1963). As discussed in Chapter 1, in box-office terms alone, Bardot's ranking is relatively low. Yet, she outstrips all the stars in this book in fame. Both during her film career and since it ended in 1973, Bardot has been extraordinarily visible through press, television shows, documentaries, postcards, books, internet sites, etc. Original posters of her films are among the most expensive, and outside France they are among the few French posters available. Bardot also had an important career as a singer in France, where there is a collector's market for her records,<sup>2</sup> and several CDs of her songs are available. In the late 1950s and through most of the 1960s, as she vividly recounts in her memoirs (Bardot, 1996), she was hounded by paparazzi, on film shoots (the subject of Willy Rozier's 1963 documentary *Paparazzi*) and even as she was giving birth in her apartment. She was mobbed by crowds on every outing, and the object of ceaseless press speculation. Bardot was the first French mass-media star. Since the end of her film career, her involvement in animal rights and her controversial political stance have kept her in the public eye, as

has the publication of her memoirs, *Initiales BB* (1996) and *Le Carré de Pluton* (1999). But even though many of her activities in the 1980s and 1990s, including her marriage to National Front supporter Bernard d'Ormale, have aroused hostility in France and abroad, the cult for the young Bardot shows no sign of halting. To understand the extraordinary appeal of the Bardot 'myth', we must therefore return to the late 1950s when she emerged with such impact on the world cultural scene.

### Youth

Already a model and ballet dancer, Bardot started acting in film at the age of 18, in *Le Trou normand*. In this comedy designed around the comic star Bourvil, Bardot plays the small though not insignificant part of Javotte, a silly but ambitious (and devastatingly pretty) teenager, plotting with her mother to bring her cousin (Bourvil) down in order to steal his legacy. Bardot's role in *Le Trou normand* is prototypical: delightfully garbed in a tartan dress or gingham, she is out of place in the small provincial town; she pouts and is always ready with insolent repartee. If the main joke in the film is that the adult Bourvil has to go back to school, Bardot incarnates real youth. Most of the films in the early part of her career likewise cash in on her youth: she plays daughters or is clearly cast as a younger version of the main heroine: for example, in *Les Grandes manoeuvres*, where she is contrasted to Michèle Morgan. *Et Dieu ... créa la femme* not only represents her as 'young' but also makes her the emblem of the young generation.

In its mode of production principally, *Et Dieu ... créa la femme* was part and precursor of the New Wave. The location shooting, the use of a relatively small crew, the eschewing of studio and established film stars (except for Curt Jurgens, whose presence in the film was essential to the project – see Vadim, 1976), all emphasized modernity and spontaneity. *Et Dieu ... créa la femme* became one of the emblems of modern French cinema. A contemporary review by François Truffaut in *Arts* put it explicitly: 'It is a film typical of our generation ... despite the vast audience that *Et Dieu ... créa la femme* will certainly find, only young spectators will be on Vadim's side, because he shares their vision.'<sup>3</sup> In another issue of *Arts*, Truffaut defended Bardot against a 'cabal' of

'misogynist critics' who said she couldn't act.<sup>4</sup> This rhetoric of the new would soon become a major feature of the cultural, social and political new broom ushered in by General de Gaulle's Fifth Republic in 1958, and of the New Wave. But Vadim's age (twenty-eight) at the time of making *Et Dieu ... créa la femme* is, in retrospect, the strongest common denominator between him and the New Wave directors. For, in aesthetic terms, apart from the real location, *Et Dieu ... créa la femme* is a classic narrative film that mixes comedy and melodrama and has more in common with the mainstream French cinema of the time than with the modernist experiments of Godard or Resnais. Indeed, the Christmas 1956 issue of *Cinéma* described *Et Dieu ... créa la femme* as 'the prototype of sexy comedy'. This point is borne out by Vadim's subsequent career. What made *Et Dieu ... créa la femme* 'young' was Bardot.

Bardot as leading actress made a dramatic contrast to the dominant female stars of the time: Michèle Morgan, Danielle Darrieux, Micheline Presle, Edwige Feuillère and especially Martine Carol, the then French sex goddess, seen in such films as *Caroline chérie* (Richard Pottier, 1950) and *Nana* (Christian-Jaque, 1954).<sup>5</sup> These women, on the whole, had long film careers and/or stage experience. Bardot, by contrast, trained as a dancer and came from modelling, perceived as modern at the time. She had appeared several times on the cover of *Elle*, the magazine for the new 1950s woman. The 1950s did see the emergence of a younger generation of popular actresses, such as Danièle Delorme, Nicole Courcel, Dany Robin, Dany Carrel, Jeanne Moreau, Françoise Arnoul and Pascale Petit, who typically appeared as the daughter figure to an established male star such as Jean Gabin (see Chapter 3). By the time Bardot played with Gabin in *En cas de malheur*, she was the only one to rival him in stature, and conversely he was the only male star with a presence to rival hers – her fame was such that major male stars were unwilling to appear with her, a phenomenon paralleled in her private life (Bardot, 1996). Although the 1950s saw an increase in female film stars, Bardot became a rare instance in French cinema of a young female star who was bankable and on her name alone a series of films was made.

Apart from her looks, what distinguished Bardot from other actresses was her performance. Her style was blatantly non-actressy, giving the impression of spontaneity and 'naturalness'. Many of those performance

signs will be examined later: her walk, postures, her facial expressions. Here, I shall mention one aspect which defined her most against Feuillère, Carol, Arnoul, etc. – her voice and intonation. Whether trained on stage or not, French actresses of the period relied on a careful and modulated elocution designed to showcase dialogue. By contrast, Bardot's monotone delivery and 'babyish' intonation enraged her detractors and was the main reason for the accusations that she couldn't act.

But association with a new cinematic trend and a different type of performance are not enough to explain the extent of Bardot's success. Her emerging persona coincided with the rise of youth consumer power and the social and cultural changes this brought about. This is the case, most visibly, in terms of fashion. The prevailing model of desirable femininity purveyed by the fashion of the time was middle-aged and bourgeois – discreet, untouchable, chic. French fashion of the 1950s was constricting and conformist: tailored jackets pinched at the waist, bosom-emphasizing but concealing tops (implying rigid bras and girdles), full skirts, stiletto heels, epitomized by Christian Dior's New Look ensembles of 1947. A strong theme was that of the coordinated ensemble, the 'total look', in which underwear, clothes, perfume, and accessories matched perfectly. Each occasion and time of the day had its own outfit: afternoon ensembles, cocktail dresses, evening gowns. Such styles can be seen in the mainstream French cinema of the 1950s. Quite a number of films were explicitly about the fashion world: *Mademoiselle de Paris* (Walter Kapps, 1955); *Le Couturier de ces dames* (Jean Boyer, 1956); *Mannequins de Paris* (André Hunnebellé, 1956); *Nathalie* (Christian-Jaque, 1957) and *Nathalie, agent secret* (Henri Decoin, 1959), both starring Martine Carol. Bardot herself starred as a model in Pierre Gaspard-Huit's *La Mariée est trop belle* in 1956, in a narrative which combines her own youth with youth fashion: like Audrey Hepburn in *Funny Face* (1956), Bardot is picked by a women's magazine editor (Micheline Presle) to become the fashion face of youth. In other genres, too, actresses displayed the work of famous couturiers, whose names were prominent on the credits. In the thriller *Bonnes à tuer* (Henri Decoin, 1954), the hero's (Michel Auclair) reunion of his ex-mistresses (including Danielle Darrieux) is the narrative excuse for a fabulous display of Balmain evening gowns, while *Adorables créatures* (Christian-Jaque, 1952, couture

by Jacques Heim and Balmain), a three-episode comedy starring, respectively, Danielle Darrieux, Martine Carol and Edwige Feuillère, begins with Darrieux returning (appropriately) from a shopping trip and then carefully removing her coordinated accessories – gloves, hat, jacket – before climbing into bed with her lover (Daniel Gélin).

A key feature of the Bardot persona in *Et Dieu ... créa la femme* was her challenge to this tradition, turning her into a figurehead of youth rebellion against prevailing middle-aged fashion.<sup>6</sup> In *Et Dieu ... créa la femme*, *En cas de malheur* and *La Vérité*, Bardot plays a girl of modest origins who wears cheap clothes. To one of Curt Jurgens's rich friends who stares at her dress on his yacht in *Et Dieu ... créa la femme*, she retorts, 'I bought it at the market'. In contrast to the elaborate outfits of other leading female actresses, her clothes are few or skimpy, likewise her underwear (no girdle, sometimes no bra). Though her clothes emphasize her figure, they connote freedom, because they are made of soft cotton rather than the rigid tweeds, satins and silks of couture. Bardot adopted and helped popularize designers such as Real, who specialized in soft fabrics in pastel colours, and neo-hippy designer Jean Bouquin. In her films, her clothes are casual, often crumpled, the buttons undone, and she eschews accessories: little jewellery, often no shoes, usually no handbag, hat or gloves. Her hairstyle is also significant, its length and look of wild abundance contrasting with the neat and shorter *coiffures* of other contemporary stars. Her image is of carefree spontaneity. Catherine Rihoit (1986) shows how Bardot came from a fashion-conscious household (her mother and her mother's friends wore couture), and she herself was a model. Her style was just as planned as others, but the modest cost and easy availability of its basic ingredients meant that it could be widely copied. Her following by young women was, in this respect, similar to that of Madonna in the 1980s.

Like Madonna, too, Bardot wore clothes from different contexts – such as sailors' jerseys and overalls – and diverted their original meaning. The grey dress she wears in *Et Dieu ... créa la femme* is a work overall, but she makes it sexy by rolling up the sleeves and undoing some of the buttons. Throughout her films she is seen dressed in sheets, men's shirts, pyjama tops, etc. She put a mac over an evening dress at a Cannes festival soirée (Rihoit, 1986, p. 123) and married her second husband, Jacques Charrier, in 1959 in a pink-and-white gingham dress,

one of her most imitated outfits. Bardot, as well as ostentatiously chewing gum (see the beginning of *En cas de malheur*), also wore jeans, the emblem of modern American youth popularized by James Dean and Marilyn Monroe, and other clothes connoting bohemian beat fashion and designed to highlight the contrast with the older generation, which is the main theme of two of her most important dramatic films: *En cas de malheur* and *La Vérité*. In *En cas de malheur*, Yvette (Bardot) is a young criminal rescued by a rich older solicitor (Gabin), who falls in love with her, leaves his wife and sets up home with her. At the end, she is killed by her jealous young lover. In *La Vérité*, Dominique (Bardot) is accused of killing her lover Gilbert (Sami Frey), and the film takes place in court where she is accused, defended and judged by middle-aged people, with flashbacks showing us the circumstances of her life leading to the murder. In both films she sports youth fashion which contrast with the formal suits and elegant or dowdy dresses of the older generation. In *La Vérité*, she hangs out in the cafés and hotels of the Latin Quarter, clad in tight black trousers and sweater, flat shoes and a duffle-coat, as well as her signature scarf over her hair. In *En cas de malheur* she wears the 'waif's uniform' of shiny black mac, and Gabin buys her a ski outfit (a sign of modernity in 1950s France), contrasting with the elegant town dresses of Edwige Feuillère, who plays Gabin's wife. Bardot's slim silhouette was lithe, tomboyish, compared to the ripeness of her erotic rivals Carol and Monroe, and thus well suited to youth clothes like jeans, tight sweaters and ski pants. Her second film, *Manina, la fille sans voiles* (which means roughly the 'unveiled girl'), was marketed in English as *The Girl in the Bikini*, which clearly displayed her body.

Bardot's championing of new fashion coincided with important changes in the clothing industry. The 1950s saw the decline in the hold of couture over the fashion business, and the beginning of a real democratization, which the industry was quick to seize on for its own purposes. Pierre Cardin, first expelled from the fashion chamber of commerce for his introduction of *prêt-à-porter*, soon became one of its stars for precisely that reason. The fashion industry was also waking up to the power of the young consumer. Women's magazines launched special columns for young women (Delbourg-Delphis, 1981, pp. 205–6). The emphasis on fashion in Bardot's films, new and iconoclastic as it appeared, was also part of the export effort of the French fashion

business, just as the more traditional films were. Fashion was linked to the cinema in the influence it exerted over the audience and fashion historian Marylène Delbourg-Delphis has argued that since the 1930s the cinema had become the main arbiter of public taste (1981, pp. 161–70). Thus the cover of the April 1959 issue of *Marie-France* shows Bardot and Jacques Charrier under the heading 'style jeune' ('young style'). Cinema was also linked to fashion in a more strictly commercial sense, by the Franco-American Blum-Byrnes treaty of 1946–48 which traded French luxury goods, such as wine, fashion and perfumes, against entry to the French market for American films. This was necessary at a time when French fashion was fast losing its world hegemony. Bardot was thus bankable in France and eminently exportable, because she combined both French and youth fashion, at a time when the latter was becoming more international. I will come back to Bardot's clothes later, in terms of their erotic function.

Bardot's films also associate her with another emblem of youth: jazz and pop music. The appeal of *Et Dieu ... créa la femme* may be ascribed in part to its careful mixing of foreign sounds with French ones: as Vadim said, the film 'was somewhat traditional musically, but we did insert jazz and African rhythms into it'.<sup>7</sup> The rise of rock 'n' roll and pop music in the 1950s and their association with youth have been well documented (see, for instance, Dick Hebdige's 'Towards a cartography of taste 1935–1962' in Hebdige, 1988). Bardot's rebellious stance against the older generation is anchored in music: for example, listening to the juke-box or teaching her girlfriend the mambo rather than staying at home, dancing wildly to the music of a jazz band in defiance of her husband in *Et Dieu ... créa la femme*, annoying Gabin in *En cas de malheur* as a boyfriend plays the jazz trumpet. *La Vérité* contrasts Bardot with her sister Annie (Marie-José Nat), a classical violin player, and Annie's and her boyfriend Gilbert, a student conductor. At one point, Annie, outraged at Bardot's lounging in bed while she, Annie, is doing the shopping, violently wrenches a cha-cha record off the gramophone. Later on, Bardot looks utterly bored and asks for the popular film fan magazine *Cinémonde* while Gilbert is trying to get her interested in Bach.

Classical music in *La Vérité* meets with the approval of the older generation, against whose hostility Bardot is always pitted in the narratives of her films: foster parents (*Et Dieu ... créa la femme*) and



Plate 9 *La Mariée est trop belle* (Pierre Gaspard-Huit, 1956): Brigitte Bardot and Louis Jourdan.

authority figures of all kinds such as magistrates (*La Vérité, En cas de malheur*). This is not particularly remarkable, since French films often put young actresses in actual or symbolic daughter positions. But Bardot's films accentuate this feature. First of all, the staidness and hostility of the older generation is exaggerated; second, the most overt confrontations always take place between her and older women. Her films all contain scenes where an older, straightlaced woman expresses shock, hostility or disapproval: Gabin's secretary in *En cas de malheur*, her mother in *La Vérité*, etc. (see also Plate 9). Older men, on the other hand, like Gabin in *En cas de malheur*, desire her as well as express paternal feelings (see Chapter 3). The opening of *Et Dieu ... créa la femme* condenses this configuration: the middle-aged playboy Carradine visits Juliette, and his gift to her of a toy sports car merges the two sides of his feelings for her. Soon Juliette's foster mother shouts at her for displaying herself in the nude (to which Juliette replies with insolence), while her foster father – in

a wheelchair – is caught peeping at her through a small window. Thus, her youth connotes, in the context of 1950s France, both the ‘new’ – rebellion – and the ‘old’ – lustful spectacle.

### Sexuality

It seems a truism to say that Bardot is a sex goddess, but the contradictions contained in the expression are worth exploring, not least those of a star who embodies sexuality in a superlative manner, but depends on censorship and repression for her appeal. Giuseppe Tornatore’s *Cinema Paradiso* (1988) graphically makes this point and shows the implication of the sex goddess at its crudest: a row of young men masturbate in the cinema as they watch the opening of *Et Dieu ... créa la femme*. Yet, Bardot lost her appeal in the permissive age. This shows how much of a transitional figure she was, the image of permissiveness and a slap in the face of bourgeois morality, but also a classic object of male desire. The concept of the sex goddess equates women with sex, but, as a male concept, represses women’s own sexuality.<sup>8</sup> Bardot, however, was new and different in this respect. In and out of the films, she was not only an object of desire but also possessed an active sexuality of her own. A contemporary review of *Et Dieu ... créa la femme* put it thus: ‘She doesn’t follow the desire of her heart, but the impulse of her body.’ *Et Dieu ... créa la femme* was a *succès de scandale*, and some scenes were cut for release in the French provinces, in America and Great Britain. This meant, as Truffaut predicted, good box-office. Here again, the Bardot persona – as embodied in *Et Dieu ... créa la femme* – contains several contradictory aspects.

On the international film scene, the mid- to late 1950s saw both the break-up of the Hollywood studio system and, concurrently, the rise of European art cinema: the films of Fellini, Antonioni, Resnais, Bergman, etc. As part of its drive to compete with Hollywood, European art cinema proposed a new kind of social and psychological realism which included a bid for explicit sexuality, made possible because of less stringent censorship codes. The different censorship laws and the more realistic genres of European films of the 1950s combined to produce a more ‘natural’ type of sexuality than Hollywood, best epitomized by

Gina Lollobrigida, Sophia Loren and Silvana Mangano in Italian cinema. Women in peasant dresses, with bare feet paddling in rice fields, contrasted with the high glamour of Monroe and Lana Turner. Bardot was closer to the Italian model, and *Et Dieu ... créa la femme* frequently features scenes of bathing, sea and beaches. European eroticism was bankable. Vadim said:

Of course, some of [*Et Dieu ... créa la femme*’s] success came from its sexual frankness, and that’s why so many of the first New Wave films, like Malle’s *Les Amants* and Godard’s *A Bout de souffle*, are equally casual about nudity. It’s what distributors, especially American ones, were asking for.<sup>9</sup>

The strategy worked for Bardot and, according to Marjorie Rosen, [*Et Dieu ... créa la femme*] grossed \$4m in its initial run [in the USA], and many considered Bardot’s “sex kitten” the best thing to come out of France since foie gras’ (Rosen, 1973, p. 297).

The 1950s offered contradictory ideas of feminine beauty. On the one hand, the fashion for bloneness, started in the 1930s, continued in the likes of stars such as Monroe – a fashion which, as Richard Dyer (1979b) has shown, combines the values of childhood, sex and a celebration of the white race. Stars like Monroe, Diana Dors, Jayne Mansfield and Anita Ekberg exhibited blonde hair and exaggerated female curves, especially breasts, features distinctly modified by Bardot. In addition, the ‘dumb blonde’, whose archetype was Monroe, combined sexual spectacle with comedy, again a Bardot feature: for instance, in *Une Parisienne* and *Babette s’en va-t-en guerre*. Bardot, who started her career as a brunette, bleached her hair for *Et Dieu ... créa la femme* and remained a blonde from then on. At the same time, the 1950s and early 1960s saw the rising appeal of young adolescent-type stars, through the success of the Lolita figure, as seen in *Baby Doll* (1956) and *Lolita* (1962) on the one hand, and that of the gamine, epitomized by Leslie Caron (*Gigi*, 1958) and Audrey Hepburn (*Funny Face*) on the other. Bardot, dubbed the sex kitten, fitted in with the gamines, and the fact that her initials were pronounced *bé-bé*, ‘baby’ in French, fed this feature of her persona: in *En cas de malheur*, Gabin buys her clothes, blows her nose twice and spoonfeeds her.

In Bardot, the mature sexual woman and the gamine merged: a cross between Monroe and Hepburn, as it were, between the sexual know-how of the sex goddess and the charm of the adolescent. The potential

'threat' of her spirited sexuality is thus undercut by the innocence and impertinence of her childishness. In the French context, it is as if Martine Carol had been crossed with Zazie, the pert heroine of Raymond Queneau's contemporary *Zazie dans le métro* (1959). The twin values of the sex goddess and the gamine are also enshrined in Bardot's looks and performance. As Edgar Morin noted, her hairstyle mixed the long, tumbling locks, traditionally connoting sexuality, with the girlish fringe (Morin, 1972, p. 29). Her films play with these contrasts: her hair is up and then down, and while the fringe renders the mane innocent, her girlish pony-tails and plaits are 'sexed-up' with a womanly beehive. The same could be said of Bardot's facial features, in particular her mouth, which combines a sensual fullness with the girlish sulking pout. This again defuses the potential 'castrating threat' of a grown woman's sensuality, with the suggestion of petulant dissatisfaction, an invitation to the male viewer to satisfy or tame her. Finally, her body, which as de Beauvoir observed combines tomboy slenderness around the hips with full breasts, continues the same theme.

How does this split persona function in the films? The Bardot characters are the ultimate objects of male desire: Vadim famously called her 'the impossible dream of married men' (quoted in Rihoit, 1986, p. 113), yet the stories appear to revolve around her own desire, though this is invariably reduced to the sexual. She initiates sex, an aspect praised by de Beauvoir, for whom Bardot's innovation resided in the fact that she is 'as much a hunter as she is a prey' (de Beauvoir, 1960, p. 30). In de Beauvoir's terms, Bardot's expression of female sexuality was progressive, a welcome change from what she saw as the passivity of the *femme fatale*. But within the context of 1950s France, matters are more complex. There is, first of all, a tension between the Bardot character as subject (agent) of the narrative, initiating action and expressing her own desire without guilt, and as object, both of male desire and of the camera. All her films involve moments of pure spectacle that stop the flow of the narrative. She is typically frozen in postures which allow the spectator to admire her body and face. In *Mio figlio Nerone* (a 1956 *peplum* comedy about Nero), where she is marginal to the main action, Bardot is often decoratively positioned on the side of the frame, while the stars, Alberto Sordi and Gloria Swanson, occupy centre stage. Simone de Beauvoir noticed the episodic nature of her

films, a remark we can recast in terms of the fact that in Bardot's films the need to provide a series of spectacles takes precedence over the narrative. Clothes play an important part in this process. *Et Dieu ... créa la femme*, despite the differences of her clothes from traditional *haute couture* discussed above, still functions as a fashion display. This is emphasized by her walk (that of a model and a dancer) and, paradoxically, the absence of accessories: the fact that she has no handbag, and often walks barefoot and barehanded, highlights the fact that her walking is primarily designed to display herself and her clothes. Kaja Silverman has discussed how, since the late eighteenth century, dress display has shifted from men and women to women only, and from a class to an erotic role, fashion contributing to the construction of woman as spectacle and 'the cinema [giving] complex expression to the male fascination with female dress' (Silverman in Modleski, 1986, p. 142). In *Mio figlio Nerone*, *En effeuillant la marguerite*, *La Mariée est trop belle*, *Et Dieu ... créa la femme*, *En cas de malheur* and *La Vérité*, Bardot is constantly dressing, undressing, unbuttoning, emphasizing both her clothes and her body, the camera shifting the eroticization of her body: neck and bosom, waist, hips and legs (this point is reprised ironically by Godard in *Le Mépris*, as the film's opening sees Bardot systematically naming parts of her body to Michel Piccoli: 'Do you like my thighs? Do you think my bottom is beautiful?' and so on).

Bardot's display does not, however, amount to making her into a passive spectacle. Other spectacular moments emphasize a strong sense of movement. This is typically expressed through dancing, which recurs in many of her films, most famously in the final mambo sequence in *Et Dieu ... créa la femme*. Bardot's dance in films links her film parts with her own training as a ballet dancer and epitomizes her vitality; it is also an expression of her charisma, which arguably 'resists' her objectification, to use Richard Dyer's (1978) concept. In France, Bardot was well known for singing and dancing appearances on television, including a famous New Year's Eve programme in 1961, and song recordings of such hits as 'Harley Davidson'. Bardot's spectacular displays are also expressions of her agency in another, more complicated, way, as exhibitionism and narcissism are explicitly built into her characters. The Bardot characteristic which shocked most at the time was her evident pleasure in her own body, her desire to make love, frequently reiterated in her



films' dialogue: 'I like it', she says after her wedding-'night' in *Et Dieu ... créa la femme*; 'I want it', she tells her boyfriend in *En cas de malheur* when he seems reluctant. She frequently looks at herself in mirrors and caresses her own body.<sup>10</sup> Bardot here, too, is an ambivalent figure, for if there is no doubt that her 'to-be-looked-at-ness' (Mulvey, 1975, p. 11) is predominantly aimed at male spectatorial pleasure, relayed in the films by male onlookers, her own desire and pleasure are not in doubt either. The intense interest Bardot has provoked in women writers, including feminists, confirms that women spectators also take active pleasure in watching her 'spectacle'. Bardot's well-documented promiscuous life was a strong intertext to the expression of her sexual desire on screen, and in this respect Bardot the star is always superimposed on Bardot's characters: Noël Burch and Geneviève Sellier (1996) are right to point out the inconsistency in *Et Dieu ... créa la femme* of the impudent Juliette supposedly being a virgin and discovering sexual pleasure on her wedding night from the shy and awkward Michel. But Bardot's performance, exuding sexual confidence throughout the film is what the spectator reads rather than Juliette's (at best superficial) characterization.

The Bardot paradox takes another form. In *Et Dieu ... créa la femme*, *La Vérité* and *En cas de malheur*, the narrative is sympathetic to her, while the *mise-en-scène* distances and objectifies her, especially through repeated focus on parts of her body; in *La Vérité*, the flashbacks through which her story unfolds to the courtroom are told from her standpoint; we thus share her 'innocence' which the court does not believe. But the camera repeatedly isolates parts of her body, particularly her legs and bottom. At the beginning of *En cas de malheur*, while she and her girlfriend are hurrying away from their robbery, the camera cuts to shots of her legs and high-heeled ankle-strapped shoes, shifting from a level of subjectivity (we share her panic) to one of objectification (we admire her legs).

Given the complex spectatorial address of her films, it is hardly surprising that Bardot's public reception was contradictory. Although she became for a time the biggest female film star in France and a sure box-office draw, and although her looks, clothes and hair were widely admired and imitated, she was not a 'popular' star in the sense of being liked. She was, supposedly, desired by millions (of men), but was also the object of extraordinary hostility. As de Beauvoir put it, 'Brigitte Bardot

was disliked in her own country' (de Beauvoir, 1960, p. 5). She was, for instance, attacked with a fork by a woman, and mobbed in a lift, an episode reproduced in Louis Malle's *Vie privée* (1961). Traditional explanations for such hostility have recourse to the 'newness' of Bardot's sexuality: she was ahead of her times; any opposition to her was reactionary, the sign of puritan attitudes on the part of men, and sexual repression and jealousy on the part of women. Françoise Arnoul is quoted as saying: 'women insulted her, because they were very worried about their husbands' (Murat, 1988, p. 46). Simone de Beauvoir's argument was a libertarian one: Bardot was too free, too disturbing for her repressive times. Undoubtedly, there was some truth in this. Bardot's combination of sexual casualness, insolence and guiltlessness showed up the hypocrisy of social conventions. A good example of this is the immediate consummation of her wedding in *Et Dieu ... créa la femme*, which she initiates while the rest of the family sits down to the wedding meal, and flaunts to them later on when she comes down from the bedroom to get some food, clad in a sheet. But any notion that Bardot proposed, or could be, a model of 'liberated' womanhood is contradicted in two respects: first of all by the actual social context in which her spectators were placed, and second by the narrative resolution of some of her films.

Bardot crystallized values of sexual freedom at a transitional period in France in terms of sexual mores and the legislation regulating sexuality, particularly women's. Her slap in the face to bourgeois morality was defined in male terms and propounded at a time when the very notion of 'liberated sex' could have no reality for French women, unless they were (like Bardot in real life) from a privileged bourgeois background. In the light of the fact that there was no freely available contraception until 1964 and that abortion was illegal until the late 1970s, feminist historians have rightly pointed out French women's 'unhappy sexuality' in the 1950s. Patriarchal power was inscribed in law and the double standard which gave male sexuality a free reign, while containing female sexuality (Laubier, 1990), a deeply oppressive situation analysed by de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1974). Seen against this social and cultural background, women's hostility to Bardot can be recast, not in terms of sexual repression, but of the gap between the proposed image and its lived experience. If women were jealous, it was not of their men but of

an image of largely unattainable freedom. Bardot's free sexuality was available to bohemian-bourgeois milieux in Paris, out of which most film personnel came, but not to women in the provinces, or working-class women anywhere (Laubier, 1990). As Michelle Perrot put it,<sup>11</sup> Bardot represented not so much a new woman as the male desire for that new woman. By caricaturing the forces hostile to her, Bardot's films ensured that her rebellion appeared greater than it was. In *La Vérité*, Bardot's lifestyle – idleness and sexual promiscuity – is linked to Simone de Beauvoir's, as Dominique is accused of having been corrupted by de Beauvoir's 1954 novel *Les Mandarins*. This very pairing of Bardot with de Beauvoir points to the limits of the Bardot persona. If one of the popular myths about de Beauvoir was her sexual promiscuity and her rejection of marriage (and Anne, the heroine of *Les Mandarins*, included autobiographical elements), her most radical aspect as role model was her intellectual status and her advocacy of work as a key to women's independence. In *La Vérité*, as in all her other films, Bardot's rebellion amounts to sexual promiscuity and never ventures into the sphere of the social.

Revealing in this respect is the contradictory narrative fate of Bardot's characters, consonant with the sex goddess generally: she is defined as powerful and fascinating but is punished, like the *femme fatale*. In *Et Dieu ... créa la femme*, *En cas de malheur* and *La Vérité*, accordingly, she expresses her own desire (the hunter rather than the prey), but she rarely gets the man she wants (for instance, she has to settle for his brother in *Et Dieu ... créa la femme*) and she often dies: she is murdered by her young lover in *En cas de malheur* and commits suicide in *La Vérité*. Her two New Wave films, *Vie privée* and *Le Mépris*, also kill her off at the end. Of course, the contradictions in the Bardot persona, as in all sex goddesses, are such that they are not always contained by the narrative ending. For example, in view of her characterization throughout *Et Dieu ... créa la femme*, her going home hand in hand with her husband (who has, just in time, asserted his manhood by slapping her) defies verisimilitude. And exceptions to this rule are found in comedies such as *Une Parisienne* and *Babette s'en va-t-en guerre*. Nevertheless, it is significant that a star who incarnated vibrant sexuality and energy should be so violently punished in most of her key films, especially when this did not correspond to her off-screen image. For although Bardot seriously



Plate 10 *Et Dieu ... créa la femme* (Roger Vadim, 1956): studio still. Photograph by Willy Rizzo.

attempted suicide on two occasions, these were the result of the pressure she was under – especially media harassment – rather than an indication of a deeper vulnerability, like Marilyn Monroe and Martine Carol. Her positive outlook and appetite for life triumphed, as her post-1973 biography shows.

### The natural

What made the gap between the Bardot image and the lived experience of her audience, particularly women, all the more powerful and problematic, was that her image was presented as natural. For a start, her films, with exceptions such as *Helen of Troy*, *Mio figlio Nerone*, *Les Grandes manoeuvres* and *Viva Maria!*, were contemporary. This contrasted with the costume films with which her rivals – Michèle Morgan, Danielle Darrieux, Micheline Presle and Martine Carol – were associated and whose historical distancing allowed a safer audacity. The natural, the third ingredient of the Bardot myth, is inscribed in the codes of the films, in her performance and endlessly reiterated in interviews and profiles: 'She doesn't act, she exists' (Vadim); 'In front of

the camera, I am myself' (Bardot) (both quoted in de Beauvoir, 1960, p. 18); 'What did B.B. bring to the 1950s? The natural, very simply, the natural they needed so much' (Murat, 1988, p. 50). Authenticity as perceived correlation between the performer and the person, is inherent in stardom, and, as Roland Barthes has shown, the work of myth is always to turn culture into nature. But this process is especially reinforced in the case of Bardot, whose naturalness was thematized in her films. Here again, *Et Dieu ... créa la femme* is emblematic: Bardot is portrayed as natural in three ways: through her sexuality, her clothes and her association with images of nature and landscape, reinforced by the knowledge of her off-screen association with the director of the film and the location. Many are those who, like Antoine de Baecque, see the film as 'a kind of document' on Bardot (de Baecque, 1998, p. 20). Yet, a closer examination reveals how this naturalness is constructed through cultural codes which corresponded with social and cultural change, but also traditional cultural conventions regarding women.

Curt Jurgens's racist description of Bardot as 'a blonde negress' (Rihoit, 1986, p. 178) at the time of the making of *Et Dieu ... créa la femme* is revealing in linking Bardot with the primitive, but also in its acknowledgement of the constructed aspect of her image (the bleached hair). This is encapsulated in the mambo scene at the end of the film, when Bardot goes into a frenzy of dancing to the black band's music, propelled by an insistent beat. Bardot is a whirl of bare feet, wild hair, syncopated movements, as if possessed by the music. The *mise-en-scène*, however, reveals this 'natural' body in very controlled ways: her skirt splits open strategically, the camera isolates her crotch, legs and feet. The primitiveness attributed to her is extended to notions of her as a child or an animal (Lolita, the sex kitten), the creature with an irrepressible sexuality, acceptable because it is 'natural', but which ultimately needs to be tamed. This is her narrative fate, as we saw earlier. As de Beauvoir points out in her essay, this is hardly a new notion of womanhood, since it derives from reactionary myths of femininity, 'the eternal feminine'. In order to justify this myth, then, the films go out of their way to show Bardot as relating to animals and children better than to adults. The fact that Bardot really likes animals is not the point, but rather the way this love of animals metonymically signifies a reified femininity.

Bardot's clothes were carefully designed to connote naturalness.

Gingham fabric is no more natural than silk, but has acquired connotations of simplicity through its use as kitchen curtains and table cloths for country restaurants. Bardot's clothes in her films were often rather impractical (e.g. the tight skirt she wears to ride a bicycle in *Et Dieu ... créa la femme*), as too was her rejection of accessories such as shoes and handbags – for instance, driving barefoot in *Une Parisienne*. Similarly, the *mise-en-scène* of her body reveals a high level of constructedness that contradicts the natural image in its use of two central motifs – the striptease and the pin-up – which belong to well-established traditions of visual representation. Bardot as a character does striptease; concealing parts of her body while revealing others: her sexual invitation to her husband Michel, clad in a sheet, in *Et Dieu ... créa la femme*; the raising of her skirt in *En cas de malheur* (to pay for Gabin's services as a solicitor); her dancing naked under the sheets in bed in *La Vérité*. In *En effeuillant la marguerite*, her stage striptease is part of the story. The design of her clothes itself partakes in this aesthetics: drop-shoulder T-shirts, slit skirts, bare midriffs. The camera also takes on that function, concealing and revealing, as in the opening of *Et Dieu ... créa la femme*: Bardot's feet stick out from behind a sheet hung up to dry, her head bobs up above it. Though Bardot's performance is characterized by mobility and energy – she walks, runs and dances – her films also freeze her in positions which reproduce the conventions of pin-up photography. Shots show her in three-quarter profile (face and body), thus displaying the outline of her breasts and behind. An often reproduced still from *Et Dieu ... créa la femme* (Bardot on her bike, propped against a wall, talking to Jean-Louis Trintignant) encapsulates this. The motif of lifted arms framing the face and lifting the breasts at the same time is also familiar from pin-up photographs (as on the cover of this book). When Bardot throws herself 'spontaneously' onto a couch in Curt Jurgens's yacht in *Et Dieu ... créa la femme*, the next shot frames her perfectly in a breast-and-buttocks revealing position in a mirror. Later on, Christian Marquand pulls her roughly on to the sand, and the reverse shot has her perfectly positioned, her parted legs opening up her half-unbuttoned skirt. In all cases, not only is Bardot's body very carefully displayed to the camera's and spectator's gaze, but it also appears in poses which belong to established traditions of displaying and fetishizing the female body.

The location shooting of *Et Dieu ... créa la femme* was a new departure in French cinema and in this prefigured the New Wave. The location itself was an emblem of the 'new natural'. The choice of Saint-Tropez was overdetermined. The eastern part of the Côte d'Azur (Nice, Cannes) had been a fashionable winter resort for the rich for decades, trading on luxury hotels and exoticism with casinos and palm trees. But Saint-Tropez and other resorts between Cannes and Marseilles, with their pretty little fishing harbours and simple Provençal houses, were sought for their folk value. In the context of the post-war rural exodus and the rise in mass tourism, Provence was about to be turned into a heritage playground for well-off Parisians and foreigners. Saint-Tropez itself was already patronized by celebrities such as Françoise Sagan, who had become an overnight celebrity with her novel *Bonjour Tristesse*, published in 1954. Although Vadim describes his, and various friends', lifestyle in Saint-Tropez in the late 1950s as just 'the carefree uproarious abandon of children who refused to grow up despite being successful and almost thirty' (Vadim, 1976, p. 117), such a bohemian lifestyle was available only to an elite. The view of nature expressed by the filming of Saint-Tropez village and beaches in *Et Dieu ... créa la femme* was a middle-class, glamorous one, that of the rich shipowner (Jurgens) and his yacht. Bardot's myth thus combined authentic Provence and playboy-land. She embodied a carefree lifestyle of sunbathing, swimming, making love and playing the guitar, celebrated in her song 'La Madrague' (the name of her house in Saint-Tropez). A lifestyle which had as much to do with social and economic changes in post-war France as with nature. The urban middle classes were feeling the need for 'a return to nature' and Bardot embodied both the desire for the commodified nature of holidays and 'nature' itself through her earthy sexuality and her casual performance.

#### Between generations, between mainstream and the New Wave

I have emphasized the contrast between the old and the new in Bardot – in terms of youth, sexuality and naturalness – not in order to fix her in one camp or the other, but to show that she encompassed both. I want to end by highlighting two other ways in which she was a pivotal figure:



**Plate 11** *Le Mépris* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1963): Brigitte Bardot and Jack Palance. Photograph by Ghislain Dussard and Associated Press.

in her representation of a generation and in her oscillation between mainstream cinema and the New Wave.

There is a scene in *La Vérité* where the judge presiding over the tribunal indicts her for being 'tempted by the easy life, attracted by all that is fake, ostentatious money, the glitter of boutiques'. Accompanied by his voice-over, we see her window-shopping on the Champs-Élysées, then going into a Latin Quarter café, where she picks 'the wrong crowd' and gives in to 'moral abandon', smoking, drinking and playing the juke-box instead of going to training school. This moment encapsulates the film's, and more generally, France's ambivalence towards Bardot. She is young and seductive. An object of desire for all around her, she embodies both the rising young generation of avid consumers of record-players, Vespas, popular music and movies, and a freer sexuality, and those glittering commodities themselves – popular culture being typically characterized as feminine (Huyssen, 1986). But the new culture poses a threat: to the established order, to the older generation, to the family. *La Vérité* caricatures both sides: Bardot and her young friends as well as the cynical magistrates and lawyers (who simply move on to the

next case when they hear she has committed suicide), the duplicitous witnesses and the prurient audience. Such dark cynicism is typical of Clouzot and of the Tradition of Quality, but it also shows starkly that the ambivalence towards Bardot is a larger social ambivalence towards the process of modernization sweeping France. The new lifestyle, promoted by the economic boom, is equally desired and feared. The clash is also one between two Frances: the conservative, Catholic provinces and the modern, libertarian, urban (essentially Parisian) elites, embodied by the likes of de Beauvoir, Sagan and Bardot. As this list of names suggests, women were taking an active role in the new culture, and this is part of Bardot's French specificity. Where the archetypes of American teenage rebel were James Dean and Jack Kerouac, France offered a more feminized version of youth rebellion.

Bardot's pivotal quality also characterizes her relation to French cinema at the turn of the 1960s. She was a star of the mainstream French cinema: her career was based on films by Autant-Lara, Christian-Jaque, Clouzot, Allégret, pillars of the Tradition of Quality, and Vadim, who quickly evolved towards mainstream cinema. That cinema was, in the late 1950s, still addressing a wide, family audience. The titillating, 'scandalous' element in Bardot's performance was addressed to the older generation, as the films make clear, while her new fashions, her humour and insolence, her pleasure in her own body and eroticism addressed the younger generation. Her newness was acceptable despite her scandalous aspect, because of this dual appeal, ten years before feminism. Yet, in other ways, Bardot was too big for her films in a national cinema which had no tradition of accommodating such a powerful female star. The magnitude of her fame was also, as it turned out, a problem for the emergent New Wave.

Despite Truffaut's defence of Bardot in *Et Dieu ... créa la femme*,<sup>12</sup> by the time he, Godard and other New Wave directors made films in 1959, she was, as the biggest mainstream female star, the epitome of the system they opposed as well as out of reach economically (see Chapter 5). The apparently odd casting of Bardot in Malle's *Vie privée* in 1961 and Godard's *Le Mépris* in 1963 is, however, understandable. Both her box-office draw and the novelty of the New Wave were beginning to wane, while American production companies needed to utilize frozen capital in Europe (*Vie privée* was financed by MGM, *Le Mépris* part-

funded by the American Joe Levine) and European art cinema needed international exposure. Both films are more or less explicitly about Bardot as a star. In *Vie privée*, Jill (Bardot) is a ballet dancer who becomes a film star, and is in love with a theatre director (Marcello Mastroianni). She dies, falling from a rooftop in Spoleto during an open-air theatrical performance, blinded by paparazzi. The film was part-based by Malle on events in Bardot's life. *Le Mépris*, based on Alberto Moravia's novel *Il disprezzo*, is about the relationship between a secretary, Camille (Bardot), and a scriptwriter, Paul (Michel Piccoli), during the shooting of a version of *The Odyssey* by Fritz Lang (playing himself) in Capri. Camille has an affair with American producer Prokosh (Jack Palance) and dies in a car crash with him.

*Vie privée* and *Le Mépris* are very different films and there is no space here to analyse them in detail (for a fuller discussion of the two films, see Sellier and Vincendeau, 1998, p. 115–30). Yet, there are interesting parallels which are worth evoking here, as they cast light on Bardot's position in French film culture. Both films are about artistic production and both stage a conflict between elite culture, figured by the directors' alter-egos – Mastroianni in *Vie privée*, Michel Piccoli and Fritz Lang in *Le Mépris* – and popular culture represented by Bardot. In both films, Bardot is the centre of attention, thematically and visually, while the narratives about (male) artistic creation – staging Kleist in *Vie privée*, filming *The Odyssey* in *Le Mépris* – exclude or marginalize her. Although *Le Mépris* shows a higher awareness of the process of image construction, in characteristic Godardian fashion, both films reduce her character to female sexuality and, as such, to the opposite of creativity. As Claude Gautéur put it, *Vie privée* 'is a film made less with, than against Brigitte Bardot' (Gautéur, 1962, p. 23). Both films kill her at the end. Both thus explicitly uphold high culture (which includes the cinema for Godard, but the cinema of Fritz Lang, not that of Prokosh and Bardot) against the popular in its most threatening incarnations: a French popular star, hysterical crowds, paparazzi, an American producer. Bardot's marginalization in the films was uncannily echoed in life: in her memoirs, she tells of how isolated she was during the shooting of both films, especially *Vie privée* (Bardot, 1996, pp. 300 and 328). *Vie privée* and *Le Mépris* try to tame Bardot's power and charisma, while at the same time exhibiting her, just like the New Wave tried to conquer French

mainstream cinema. In neither case did they succeed, although neither Bardot nor French cinema would be the same afterwards.

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In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Bardot offered a contradictory yet real image of female emancipation, at a transitional moment in the histories of both French cinema and French women, between the post-war backlash which produced the 'evil bitch' (Burch and Sellier, 1996) and the sea-changes of the post-1968 period. Bardot's myth as a star both negotiated and concealed the tensions engendered by her 'old and new' femininity. Her unique combination of stunning looks, traditional femininity and iconoclastic power is the subject of her films, and the reason of her unending fascination. This explains why, since Simone de Beauvoir in 1960, she has continued to fascinate and divide feminists, whether they claim her as a role model and force of nature (Audé, 1979; Paglia, *Without Walls*, 1994) or as a more conservative figure (Burch and Sellier, 1996, pp. 274–7). Bardot as a person was (and is) no feminist. Yet her memoirs show her capacity to break taboos still in 1996 (for instance, admitting to having rejected her child) and her lucidity about the difficulties posed by her explosive combination of gender and power, not least in her chaotic love life. In a country where 'unauthorized' biographies are barred by stringent privacy laws (see Chapter 1), Bardot single-handedly broke that taboo, too, in writing about herself in terms which are at times unpalatable (some of her political views) but which also reveal how she survived being a sex goddess. Her memoirs are those of a survivor.

### Biofilmography

*Born Paris*, 28 September 1934. Married Roger Vadim (1952), Jacques Charrier (1959, with whom she had one son, Nicolas, born 1960), Gunther Sachs (1966) and Bernard d'Omale (1992).

### Main acting awards

Etoile de Cristal de l'Académie du Cinéma, Best Actress, *Viva Maria!*, 1966

### Films as actor

- 1952 *Le Trou normand* (Jean Boyer)  
*Les Dents longues* [cameo] (Daniel Gélin)
- 1953 *Manina, la fille sans voiles/The Girl in the Bikini/Lighthouse Keeper's Daughter* (Willy Rozier)
- 1954 *Si Versailles m'était conté/Versailles* (Sacha Guitry)  
*Le Portrait de son père* (André Berthomieu)  
*Un acte d'amour/Act of Love* (Anatole Litvak, France/USA)  
*Tradita* (Mario Bonnard, Italy/France)  
*Le Fils de Caroline Chérie* (Jean Devaivre)
- 1955 *Helen of Troy* (Robert Wise, USA)  
*Futures vedettes/Sweet Sixteen* (Marc Allégret)  
*Doctor at Sea* (Ralph Thomas, UK)  
*Les Grandes manoeuvres/Summer Manoeuvres* (René Clair, France/Italy)
- 1956 *Mio figlio Nerone/Nero's Mistress* (Steno, Italy/France)  
*La Lumière d'en face/The Light across the Street* (Georges Lacombe)  
*Cette sacrée gamine/Mademoiselle Pigalle* (Michel Boisrond)  
*En effeuillant la marguerite/Mam'selle Strip-tease* (Marc Allégret)  
*Et Dieu ... créa la femme/And God Created Woman* (Roger Vadim)  
*La Mariée est trop belle/The Bride Is Too Beautiful* (Pierre Gaspard-Huit)
- 1957 *Une Parisienne/Una Parigiana* (Michel Boisrond, France/Italy)  
*Voulez-vous danser avec moi?/Come Dance with Me* (Michel Boisrond, France/Italy)
- 1958 *En cas de malheur/Love Is My Profession [La ragazza del peccato]* (Claude Autant-Lara, France/Italy)  
*Les Bijoutiers du clair de lune/Heaven Fell That Night* (Roger Vadim, France/Italy)
- 1959 *La Femme et le pantin/A Woman Like Satan* (Julien Duvivier, France/Italy)  
*Babette s'en va-t-en-guerre/Babette Goes to War* (Christian-Jaque)  
*Tentazioni proibite* [doc] (Oswaldo Civirani)
- 1960 *L'Affaire d'une nuit* (Henri Verneuil) [cameo]  
*La Vérité/The Truth* (Henri-Georges Clouzot, France/Italy)
- 1961 *La Bride sur le cou* (Roger Vadim)

- Les Amours célèbres* [ep. 'Agnès Bernauer'] (Michel Boisrond, France/Italy)  
*Vie privée/A Very Private Affair* (Louis Malle, France/Italy)  
 1962 *Le Repos du guerrier/Love on a Pillow* (Roger Vadim, France/Italy)  
 1963 *Le Mépris/Il disprezzo* (Jean-Luc Godard, France/Italy)  
*Paparazzi* [doc] (Jacques Rozier)  
 1964 *Une ravissante idiote/A Ravishing Idiot* (Edouard Molinaro, France/Italy)  
*Marie Soleil* (Antoine Bourseiller) [cameo]  
 1965 *Dear Brigitte* (Henry Koster, USA)  
*Viva Maria!* (Louis Malle, France/Italy)  
 1966 *Masculin-Féminin* (Jean-Luc Godard) [cameo]  
 1967 *A coeur joie/Two Weeks in September* (Serge Bourguignon, France/UK)  
*Histoires extraordinaires* [ep. 'William Wilson'] (Louis Malle, France/Italy)  
 1968 *Shalako* (Edward Dmytryk, UK)  
 1969 *Les Femmes* (Jean Aurel)  
*L'Ours et la poupée* (Michel Deville)  
 1970 *Les Novices/The Novices* (Guy Casaril, France/Italy)  
 1971 *Boulevard du rhum/Winner Takes All* (Robert Enrico)  
*Les Pétoleuses/The Legend of Frenchie King* (Christian-Jaque, France/Italy/Spain/UK)  
 1973 *Don Juan 73 ou si Don Juan était une femme/Don Juan or If Don Juan Were a Woman ...* (Roger Vadim, France/Italy)  
*L'Histoire très bonne et très joyeuse de Colinot Trousse-Chemise/The Edifying and Joyous Story of Colinot, the Skirt Puller-upper* (Nina Companeez)

## Notes

1. See 'Box office de Brigitte Bardot 1958-1961', *Le Film français*, 10 November 1961, p. 5.
2. *Record Collector*, No. 188, April 1995, pp. 44-7.
3. *Arts*, 5 December 1956.
4. *Ibid.*, 12 December 1956.
5. On Martine Carol, see Phillips (1998).
6. Rihoit (1986) provides interesting biographical information on Bardot's

- relationship to her mother and her mother's friends, all wealthy and elegant Parisiennes in couture clothes.
7. Quoted in Marc Mancini, 'So who created Vadim?', *Film Comment*, Vol. 24, No. 2, March/April 1988.
  8. See my entry, 'The sex goddess', in Annette Kuhn and Susannah Radstone (eds), *The Women's Companion to International Film* (London, Virago, 1990).
  9. Quoted in Mancini, 'So who created Vadim?'
  10. On the narcissistic, childish woman, see Sarah Kofman, 'The narcissistic woman: Freud and Girard', in Toril Moi (ed.), *French Feminist Thought, a Reader* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1987).
  11. Michelle Perrot, interviewed on *Arte* documentary on 'Bardot', tx June 1996.
  12. *Arts*, 12 December 1956.