Chapter Four
A Technical Practice, an Aesthetic

The New Wave's Aesthetic

The New Wave is based on a different manner of producing films, as we saw in the previous chapter, that privileges small budgets so as to safeguard the creative freedom of the auteur director. However, it also overturned many conventions that governed the technical practices for filmmaking in that era, from conception right up to its editing and final mix. The New Wave thereby brought a new generation of technicians, creative collaborators, camera operators, and writers into a profession that had been very closed and isolated. The New Wave aesthetic is founded on a series of choices made from the script through to the final print. In principle, it assumes, therefore, the following agenda:

1. The auteur director is also the scenarist for the film.
2. The director does not follow a strict, pre-established shooting script, leaving instead much of the filming to improvisation in the conception of sequences, dialogue, and acting.
3. The director privileges shooting in natural locations and avoids building artificial sets in the studio.
4. The director uses a small crew of only a few people.
5. The director opts for "direct sound" recorded during filming rather than relying too much on post-synchronization.

6. The director avoids depending upon overly heavy additional lighting units, and thus selects, along with the cinematographer, a very fast film stock that requires less light.
7. The director employs non-professionals as actors.
8. If the director has access to professionals, newer actors will be chosen and directed in a freer manner than conventional productions allow.

All of these choices provide for a greater sense of flexibility in the direction and endeavor to streamline as much as possible the heavy constraints typical of the commercial, industrialized cinema model. They are aimed at erasing the borders between professional and amateur cinema, and those between fiction, and documentary, or investigative films.

Films that take these strategies to their logical conclusions are very rare, but they provide the underpinnings for the creative cinematic process wrought by the New Wave. The initial model is embodied in the films of Jean Rouch, beginning in particular with *Me, a Black Man*. It would be Rouch who was the most faithful to this approach throughout the 1960s, with films like *The Human Pyramid* (1958) and *Lion Hunt* (1965). It culminated with his medium-length project, *The Punishment*, which attracted few people in its initial exhibition, but had a strong influence upon the films of Eric Rohmer during the 1970s and '80s. But these ideals are also at the heart of one of the strongest works of 1960s French cinema: *Gare du Nord*, the short film directed by Rouch for the collective manifesto *Paris vu par . . .* (*Six in Paris*) in 1964.

This erasure of the boundary between fiction and documentary is one of the aesthetic poles of the New Wave, influencing Rohmer, Jacques Rivette, Jacques Rozier, Jean Eustache, and Godard in some instances, and, to a certain extent during the post-New Wave period, Maurice Pialat, Philippe Garrel, and Jacques Doillon.

The other pole is dominated more by narrative. It includes auteurs with a much more novelistic conception of creation, such as Claude Chabrol, François Truffaut, Agnès Varda, Jacques Demy, Pierre Kast, and Jacques Doniol-Valcroze. To varying degrees, each of these auteur directors displays more classical cinematic practice, based on a script and pre-established dialogue, and employing post-synchronization. If they belong equally to the

New Wave movement, it is due to their low budgets, their autobiographical inspiration, and their themes tied to contemporary society and embedded in the current climate: the myth of youth, new morality, the autobiographical dimension of cinema, loose narrative, and use of digressions, among other traits.

Such was not the case for directors as important as Alain Resnais or Jean-Pierre Melville, who became associated with the New Wave during at least one stage of their career. Resnais is without a doubt a great modern filmmaker, and just as important as Jean-Luc Godard in the history of filmic forms. But his conception of a script and decoupage, his continual reliance on auteur scriptwriters, such as Marguerite Duras, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Jorge Semrun, and Jacques Sternberg, his use of studios, his direction of actors, and his notion of the soundtrack based on post-synchronization, all distance him from the New Wave aesthetic, in contrast to Jacques Rozier's *Adieu Philippine*, which burst on the scene with such intensity in 1963.

As for Jean-Pierre Melville, even if his *Silence of the Sea* foreshadowed and inspired the mode of production adopted by Chabrol and Truffaut, and even if he was able to influence the Godard of *Breathless* and the Truffaut of *Shoot the Piano Player* with his small-budget, detective film *Bob le flambeur*, which retained a very personal style, he rapidly adopted a much more classical narrative style with *Le Doulos* and *L'Aîné des Ferchaux* (*Magnet of Doom*, 1963). With these latter films and the rest of his career, Melville followed the model of American cinema in the 1930s and '40s, while trying to go beyond those conventions with an "oriental" abstraction, often labeled "mannerist," and far from the New Wave aesthetic practiced by Jean Rouch, or the Godard of *My Life to Live* and *Pierrot le fou*.

The Auteur Director

Must the director serve as his own scriptwriter? What is the actual role of improvisation in the New Wave cinema?

One of the dogmas of the *politique des auteurs*, set as a base requirement by Alexandre Astruc in 1948, was that "the scriptwriter directs his own

scripts; or rather, that the scriptwriter ceases to exist, for in this kind of filmmaking the distinction between author and director loses all meaning."[1] This thesis remains today Astruc's most popularized point. It has become a dominant idea, structuring to a certain degree the means of access to the profession and shaping the conception of first films. Hence, the cyclical return to polemics and the dialectical affirmation, in reaction, of the importance of the scriptwriter.

But what really was the role of the scriptwriter during the New Wave? Did scriptwriters all disappear to make way for the auteur director? A close review of the subjects from New Wave films reveals that instances of the filmmaker directing scripts he or she had written were far from the norm. Very rapidly, the young auteurs regularly collaborated with new scriptwriters, and those writers only rarely went on to become new directors. We need only examine several of the key early films as reference points.

Le Beau Serge is the only film that corresponds precisely to the label "script written by the director," since Claude Chabrol wrote the film, basing it to a large extent upon his own life, especially his childhood spent in the town of Sardent during the Occupation. However, beginning with *The Cousins*, Chabrol collaborated closely with his friend Paul Gégauff, who was initially credited with the dialogue for this film, but who went on to become Chabrol's steady scriptwriter for the next decade. For *À double tour* (*Leda*, 1959), it was Gégauff who adapted Stanley Ellin's detective novel, *The Key to Nicholas Street*, for the screen. With *Les Bonnes Femmes* (*The Good Girls*, 1960), Gégauff's role was dominant in the conception of the film, its characters, and the dialogue, and the scenario was signed "Paul Gégauff, from an idea by Claude Chabrol." Though the script for *L'Oeil du malin* was written by Chabrol, that for *Ophélia* was again by Gégauff, and for *Landru* Chabrol adapted a script by Françoise Sagan.

The 400 Blows is obviously a very autobiographical film. Nonetheless, François Truffaut sought out a professional scriptwriter working in television, Marcel Moussy, for a collaboration. Moussy ended up helping to structure the script and contributed to editing the dialogue, much as Pierre Bost had done with Autant-Lara. *Shoot the Piano Player* was an adaptation of a novel by American writer David Goodis, which Truffaut then reworked with the help of Marcel Moussy. For *Jules and Jim*, Truffaut

adapted Henri-Pierre Roché's novel with the help of Jean Gruault. He would again collaborate with Gruault on *Wild Child*, *Deux Anglaises sur le continent* (*Two English Girls*, 1971), and *La Chambre verte* (*The Green Room*, 1978).

Throughout his career, with 21 feature films, Truffaut collaborated very regularly with a core of four or five scriptwriters, with each of whom he made two or three movies: Jean-Louis Richard worked on *La Peau douce* (*The Soft Skin*, 1964), *Fahrenheit 451* (1966), *La Mariée était en noir* (*The Bride Wore Black*, 1967); Claude de Givray and Bernard Revon helped write *Baisers volés* (*Stolen Kisses*, 1968) and *Domicile conjugal* (*Bed and Board*, 1970); and Suzanne Schiffman worked on *La Nuit américaine* (*Day for Night*, 1973), *L'Argent de poche* (*Small Change*, 1976), *Le Dernier métro* (*The Last Metro*, 1980), *La Femme d'à côté* (*The Woman Next Door*, 1981), and *Vivement Dimanche* (*Confidentially Yours*, 1983).[2]

Breathless began from a short script written by Truffaut in 1956 and signed over to Godard for the small amount of $2,000, in June 1959. Previously, Truffaut had considered shooting it himself with Jean-Claude Brialy or Gérard Blain in the role of Poiccard, then he offered it to Edouard Molinaro who was to have made it as his first feature, instead of *Dos au mur* (*Back to the Wall*, 1958).[3] However, for his second feature, *Le Petit soldat*, Godard wrote the script himself.

For his third feature, *A Woman is a Woman*, Godard wrote the script based on an idea from Geneviève Cluny (which he subsequently published under his name in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, number 98, in August 1959). This story had already been filmed by Philippe de Broca under the title *Les Jeux de l'amour* (*Games of Love*, 1959), starring Jean-Pierre Cassel, Geneviève Cluny, and Jean-Louis Maury. However, Godard made it his own, reworking the script from the ground up, as he filmed *A Woman is a Woman* in a very personal manner. Similarly, very little remains of the play by Benjamin Joppolo in Godard's *Les Carabiniers*, though the titles list Jean Gruault and even Roberto Rossellini as aiding in the adaptation. And for *Pierrot le fou* and *Band of Outsiders*, almost nothing remains of the source detective novels. They were only used to reassure the co-producers during the early stages of the productions.

Thus, it is Godard who pushes furthest this idea of a director becoming auteur of his own narrative material, since, with him, the classical notion of a script gradually loses any meaning, especially by the point of *Made in USA* (1966) and *Symphony for the Devil/ One Plus One* (1968). Godard explicitly acknowledges the economic constraints of the script-as-merchandise during his highly ironic prologue to *Tout va bien*, in 1972, when a character explains, "To make a film you need stars and a story."

The original script for Eric Rohmer's *The Sign of Leo* was certainly written by Rohmer, but Paul Gégauff was in on the original idea and helped with the dialogue. The script for *Paris Belongs to Us*, directed by Jacques Rivette, was co-written with Jean Gruault. By contrast, Jacques Demy alone wrote the script and dialogue for *Lola*, as he did with virtually all his other movies, just as his wife Agnès Varda did for *Cléo from 5 to 7*. But, to return to one of the pillars of 1950s *Cahiers* critics, Pierre Kast's 1957 production of *Girl in his Pocket* was based on a script by France Roche, who had herself adopted the idea from a science fiction novel by Waldemar Kaempfert. For *Le Bel Âge*, a collection of three connected short stories, Kast adapted a novella by Alberto Moravia, *An Old Imbecile*, for the first episode, and co-wrote the other two tales with Jacques Doniol-Valcroze. The latter wrote and directed his own scripts for *A Game for Six Lovers* and *Coeur battant* (*The French Game*, 1961).

It thus becomes clear that the configuration hoped for by Astruc and Truffaut in their programmatic articles was far from dominant. Nonetheless, the adaptations were characterized by a much more clearly defined and active role played by the director in working out the script during the preproduction phase than had been the norm earlier for directors such as Marcel Carné, Claude Autant-Lara, and Yves Allégret. Taken together, New Wave scripts were more personal and often more autobiographical than those from the "tradition of quality." However, it was really in the *mise-en-scène*, the relation to the characters, and the serious or ironic private film references that this subjectivity was inscribed. Narration in New Wave films is rarely impersonal and this was partly what irritated critics who championed classical stories and put off those spectators who were hesitant to accept the highly obvious interventions by

the auteur, except in several specific genres like burlesque or detective film parodies.

The adaptations of novels, short stories, or plays did not disappear during the New Wave, as these statistics demonstrate:

1956	Three years before the New Wave, of the 91 French films produced, 52 had original scripts, 29 were adaptations of novels or short stories, and 10 were theatrical plays.
1959	Of the 105 films, 54 had original scripts, 43 were adaptations of novels or short stories, 6 were from theatrical plays, and 2 were documentaries.
1960	Of the 123 films, 71 had original scripts, 46 were adaptations of novels and short stories, 5 were from theatrical plays, and 1 was an adapted ballet.
1961	Of the 105 films, 61 had original scripts, 38 were adaptations of novels and short stories, 4 were from theatrical plays, and 2 were inspired by comic strips.
1963	Of the 88 films, 36 had original scripts, 45 were adaptations of novels and short stories, 6 were from theatrical plays, and 1 was a remake.

The percentage of original scripts increased slightly from 1959 to 1961, but the increases were hardly significant.

Directors, producers, and writers thus continued to adapt novels, but less and less were they the sort of novels by Emile Zola and Stendhal that had typified 1950s French production. By the early 1960s, those sorts of adaptation were gradually becoming the subject-matter for television projects. There was a shift from the dominant naturalist model offered by René Clément's *Gervaise* or Yves Allégret's movies toward a model more influenced by Balzac, though it was greatly transformed by Rivette, whose *Out One*, for instance, was inspired by Balzac's *Story of 13* and *The Belle Noiseuse* by *The Unknown Masterpiece*. Truffaut and Chabrol also cite Balzac in *The 400 Blows* and *The Cousins*. The naturalist model privileged costume dramas, social class conflicts, and a strong "typage" of characters, bordering on stereotyping. The Balzacian model dealt more often with a critical

description of contemporary society, underlining the contradictions that determined conflicts that were as much psychological as social.

In a certain sense, the New Wave is more a generational changing of the guard among scriptwriters than an exclusive promotion of auteur directors. The exhaustive filmographies of Paul Gégauff and Jean Gruault reveal the importance of these two auteurs in the movement's production. For example, after having worked with one of the great "masters" for New Wave filmmakers, Roberto Rossellini, Gruault collaborated on scripts with Godard (*Les Carabiniers*), Rivette (*Paris Belongs to Us*, *The Nun*), Truffaut (*Jules and Jim*, *Two English Girls*, *The Wild Child*, *The Green Room*), Alain Resnais (*My American Uncle*, *Life is a Novel*, and *L'Amour à mort*). Gruault offers a strong, well-documented, and quite personal account of his collaboration with Rossellini, Truffaut, Rivette, and Resnais in his book *Ce que dit l'autre* (*What the Other One Said*).[4]

The Plan-of-Action Script

In fact, it is necessary to oppose two conceptions of the script, as they have been defined by Francis Vanoye in his *Scénarios modèles, modèles de scénario*: the "program-script" (*scénario-programme*) organizes the story events into a fixed structure, ready to be filmed; the "plan-of-action script" (*scénario-dispositif*) is more open to the uncertainties of production, to chance encounters, and ideas that suddenly come to the auteur in the here and now of filming. Clearly, the plan-of-action script is the New Wave's ideal, which Godard would expand upon greatly as his career advanced.

But, although the program-script dominates "classical" cinema, it is far from absent from some New Wave films, since it governs productions by Agnès Varda, Alain Resnais, and Jacques Demy. The films of Truffaut and Chabrol oscillate from one pole to the other, though the program-script clearly dominates their output.

The plan-of-action script is an ideal that the New Wave often attempts to achieve, but it reigns supreme in the aesthetic approach of Jean Rouch and Jacques Rozier. Rouch's experiments, even those that seem less convincing in regards to their outcome, never cease to haunt the creative imag-

ination of Godard, Rivette, and Rohmer. At the opening of *The Human Pyramid*, Rouch, seated in the grass, explains to the young students that he had gathered together that they will write the "script" at the same time as he directs it. In *Punishment*, the director "unleashes" a young actress whom he asks to play the role of a high school girl who is shut out of school one morning by her teacher and now heads off to Luxembourg Gardens where she encounters three young men hanging out there. While Godard wrote the dialogue for his characters in *All the Boys are Called Patrick* in a very personal manner, Rouch, by contrast, lets his actors improvise their lines completely. This approach is also followed by Jacques Rozier, though to a slightly lesser extent in *Adieu Philippine* than in *Du côté d'Orouet* (*Near Orouet*, 1973). Later, this manner will be adopted by Rivette for his *Céline et Julie vont en bateau* (*Céline and Julie Go Boating*, 1974) and even more radically by Rohmer in his *Le Rayon vert* (*Summer*, 1986).

It is precisely this narrative strategy that Rivette encouraged during an interview after directing *L'Amour fou*, which was a sort of manifesto for the plan-of-action script:

> Time was, in a so-called classical tradition of cinema, when the preparation of a film meant first of all finding a good story, developing it, scripting it and writing dialogue; with that done, you found actors who suited the characters and then you shot it. This is something I've done twice, with *Paris Belongs to Us*, and *The Nun*. . . . What I have tried since – after many others, following the precedents of Rouch, Godard, and so on – is to attempt to find, alone or in company (I always set out from the desire to make a film with particular actors), a generating principle which will then, as though on its own (I stress the "as though"), develop in an autonomous manner and engender a filmic product from which, afterwards, a film destined eventually for screening to audiences can be cut, or rather "produced."[5]

The dramaturgy of films directed by Rivette in *Out One* and *Céline and Julie Go Boating* springs directly from these principles, just as will his later films, from *Pont du Nord* (1981) through *Haut, bas, fragile* (*Up, Down, Fragile*, 1995).

It is within these limits of improvised fiction that the most pronounced specificity of the New Wave's creative approach is diametrically apposed to

the program-script. It opens onto what, in 1960, was called "*cinéma vérité*," in regard to Rouch and Morin's *Chronicle of a Summer*. However, that film's approach proved less significant, since it defined itself within the realm of the film-inquiry rather than being a fiction film like *The Punishment*, which provided a veritable aesthetic matrix for films by Rivette and Rohmer in the 1970s and '80s.

Techniques of Adaptation, the Relation to Writing

Although they denounced a certain conception of adaptation in vogue during the 1950s, that which transformed novels by Stendhal and André Gide into ancestors of the television series, the New Wave directors did not renounce the inspiration that came from the literary sources about which they were impassioned; on the contrary. But their practice of adaptation was radically different. Most of their films did not try to hide from their literary sources and did not try to substitute visual "equivalences" for scenes considered anti-cinematic.

Two films helped show them the way: *The Silence of the Sea*, filmed by Melville who remained very faithful to the text by novelist Vercors, since the original story is also told in voice-over by the narrator (the young woman's uncle, played by Jean-Marie Robain); and *The Crimson Curtain*, adapted by Astruc from a novella by Barbey d'Aurevilly. In both these cases, though for different reasons, one of the protagonists, and both times it is a young woman, refuses to speak, and the director presents the speech from a masculine narrator who recounts the story in voice-over. Astruc, referring to his adaptation, mentioned "filming the grandeur of nature in the text," and clarified it by saying that he intended to remain scrupulously faithful to Barbey's text. Adapting *One Life*, by Maupassant, Astruc combined fragments of voice-over commentary with the voice of the heroine Jeanne (Maria Schell) to help describe her encounter with the man she will marry.

Truffaut remained faithful to the same strategy when he adapted the Maurice Pons short story for *The Mischief Makers*. Throughout this luminous short film, the external narrator's voice (from actor Michel François)

recalls the exploits of the "brats" in a very elegant and literary manner, since it is the exact same text as the writer's. The film's richness resides precisely in the relation established between the nostalgic text, read *a posteriori*, and the events that we are shown in the image, accompanied occasionally by spontaneous shards of dialogue from the characters in their real southern French, Gard, dialect. Several years later, when adapting Henri-Pierre Roché, Truffaut constructed the soundtrack for *Jules and Jim* to include large segments of voice-over commentary spoken by Michel Subor (the actor from *Le Petit Soldat*) alternating with Georges Delerue's music. This verbal enunciation of the text that engulfs the filmic track is even more prominent in *Two English Girls*. In the end, it is a way for the director to offer a homage to the author he or she adapts, respecting each word of the text.

This verbal dimension will be one of the constants in the New Wave, with the director precisely citing the very text of the author being adapted. For example, there are fragments of Moravia's novel ("I often thought that Camille would leave me . . .") at the center of Godard's adaptation for *Contempt*, and he leaves an even larger space for the interior monologues when the script is original and not adapted, as in Bruno Forestier in *Le Petit Soldat*. Similarly, Rohmer's narrators in *The Girl at the Monceau Bakery* ("Paris, the Monceau intersection . . .") and *The Collector*, as well as Jean Eustache's *Le Père Noël a les yeux bleus* (*Santa Claus has Blue Eyes*, 1966), all feature commentary. At the origins of this trend there is the voice of Jean Rouch commenting on *Les Maîtres fous* (*The Crazy Masters*, 1955), or his actor Oumaraou Ganda pretending to be Edward G. Robinson in Rouch's *Me, a Black Man*.

The New Wave advanced the notion of a *mise-en-scène* of the voice. Three decades after the coming of sound, it allowed directors to exploit all the possibilities in the soundtrack, and especially speech. It offered a cinema that was not ashamed to speak, helping dismiss the out-of-date myth, imposed by theorists in the 1920s, that located the primacy of the cinema in the image. The New Wave did not hesitate to integrate songs and popular music of the time into the film, as René Clair had done in *Sous les toits de Paris* (*Under the Roofs of Paris*, 1930) and *Quatorze Juillet* (*Bastille Day*, 1933). Songs by Charles Aznavour appear in *A Woman is a Woman* and the

characters dance to his "Madison" in *Band of Outsiders*, Jean Ferrat is heard in *My Life to Live*, and Boby Lapointe performs his famous "Raspberry" number in *Shoot the Piano Player*, while Serge Rezvani, a.k.a. Bassiak, sings "Le Tourbillon" with Jeanne Moreau in *Jules and Jim*.

For his part, Alain Resnais was one of the major documentary filmmakers of the 1950s, and he was a great proponent of voice-over commentary, especially in *Night and Fog*, whose text was written by Jean Cayrol and spoken by Michel Bouquet to accompany those horrible images from the archives that remain etched in our memories. Resnais would also construct the opening sequences of his first two feature films with recitative voices: Emmanuelle Riva, playing the French nurse from Nevers, speaks over the images of victims of the atomic blast in Hiroshima, while the handsome lover, played by Giorgia Albertazzi, speaks in his Italian accent as his gaze surveys the ceilings and long corridors of the hotel at Marienbad. This aesthetic direction leads to the Duras films of the 1970s, such as *La Femme de Gange* (*Woman of Ganges*, 1974) and *India Song* (1975) where her films employ voices-off from female, though anonymous, narrators.

Exiting the Studios and the Rediscovery of Location Shooting

One decisive New Wave action was to move away from studio-bound cinema. The New Wave thereby inscribed itself into a Rossellini-inspired gesture, following in the tradition of *Rome Open City* (1945), *Paisan* (1946), and *Voyage in Italy* (1953). Rossellini had presented a radically different face of Italy by showing Rome's popular neighborhoods, the landscapes of the highways, and the museums of Naples.

In *La Pointe courte*, Agnès Varda had taken the step of describing, alternately, the romantic relations of a young married couple, speaking in a very lofty, literary language, and the daily lives of fishermen, shot in the actual locations where they worked and lived. One often finds in New Wave works this *mise-en-scène* of the fiction set within real places, or, as cinematic vocabulary typically labels it, natural settings. Yet these locations are hardly chosen at random. They are places that the auteurs strode through in their

youth. Their inscription contributes mightily to the autobiographical dimension of these movies.

In Louis Malle's *Elevator to the Gallows*, we can see a classical French detective film of the 1950s shot in studio sets: the interior of the elevator where the lead character is trapped and the interiors of the buildings. However, this portion of the film alternates with pre-New Wave segments that present an original description of Paris at night, its streets, telephone booths, etc., as we follow the meanderings of the woman, Florence, as she silently searches for her trapped lover, often to the wonderful, non-diegetic musical accompaniment of the Miles Davis soundtrack. Malle's model was influenced by the earlier work of Jean-Pierre Melville, who in turn built on Malle's innovations when filming Manhattan at night, where he described the same sort of action (two reporters search for a witness). Obviously, Melville traveled to New York to film on location in natural settings. The result was *Deux hommes dans Manhattan* (*Two Men in Manhattan*, 1959).

While shooting *Le Beau Serge*, Claude Chabrol and his crew stayed in the village where he spent his adolescence during four years of the Occupation, the village where he discovered the cinema, young girls, and alcoholism: "The village topography was a determining factor. I wanted the spectators to follow the actors in all their comings and goings so they would come to recognize places, alleys, and houses. To do so I exposed many miles worth of film."[6]

While, in *The Cousins*, Chabrol did go into the studio to construct the large apartment, supposedly set in the expensive Paris suburb of Neuilly, lent by Paul's (Jean-Claude Brialy) rich, ever absent anthropologist uncle and regularly used by Paul for his parties, he also filmed a great deal of the action on location in Paris. He shot in the streets, showed the Champs-Elysées being criss-crossed by Paul in his convertible, the bookstores of the Latin Quarter, the Place Edmond-Rostand, and other hangouts of the young right-wing set that held echoes of Chabrol's early days as a student. The aesthetic success of Chabrol's *The Good Girls* also depends in large part on the authenticity of the vast electric appliance store where the four young sales women are bored to death, as well as such locations as the streets at night, the Pacra concert hall, the zoo, and the swimming pool.

All the action in *The 400 Blows* is situated in the neighborhood where Truffaut spent his childhood: the 18th arrondissement and Place Clichy. In *The Soft Skin*, Truffaut even went so far as to shoot in his own apartment on rue Conseiller-Collignon to present the conjugal relations between the professor (played by Jean Desailly) and his wife (Nelly Benedetti).

Breathless serves as a veritable geographic portrait of 1959 Paris with its small tourist hotel, cafés, grand avenues like the Champs-Elysées shot near the *Cahiers du Cinéma* offices, the movie houses, hidden passageways, La Pergola brasserie in Saint-Germain-des-Prés, and the photography studio on rue Campagne-Première.

If *Le Petit Soldat* and *A Woman is a Woman* appear as such personal films, it is because the former describes Bruno Forestier in Geneva, situated in the area around Léman Lake, all places of Godard's childhood. For *A Woman is a Woman*, Godard's musical comedy in intense color, he shot his own wife, Anna Karina, in their apartment on rue du faubourg Saint-Denis. The film is a beautiful cinemascope documentary on the grand boulevards, the Saint-Denis arch, and the cafés and popular cabarets of the neighborhood. Even as abstract a fable as *Les Carabiniers*, situated in an imaginary country somewhere in the land of Ubu, gains its force from its inscription within the wasteland of Rungis and the no man's land of the area outside Paris.

The very title for Rivette's first feature, *Paris Belongs to Us*, signals its role in the same New Wave program. Rivette provides us with a survey of Paris that is quite singular, returning to the paths taken by Louis Feuillade, who filmed Paris as if it were a desert in his 1915 *Vampires*, and René Clair of *Paris qui dort* (*The Crazy Ray*, or *Paris Asleep*, 1924). We get to see the roof of the Sarah Bernhardt Theater, the rue des Cannettes, the Place Sorbonne, the Arts Bridge, a modest hotel where the American journalist fleeing McCarthyism stays, the cheaper *chambres de bonne* where the young provincial woman lives, the numerous staircases and attics of the buildings that reinforce the labyrinthian aspect of the story. Rivette's Paris is an obscure maze, where intricate conspiracies are hatched by the vague Organization, a lucid premonition of the French Organization of the Secret Army (OAS). All the characters feel threatened. The atmosphere evoked by the film recalls the American witch hunts or the Budapest revolution

recently crushed by Soviet tanks, but the film also presents a fairly remarkable description of the intellectual climate of the end of the Fourth Republic, with its political and military plots concerning the Algerian War. The character of the idealist and paranoid young theatrical director (who is indeed killed by the story's end) struggles to stage his version of *Pericles* while some secret police operate in the shadows, just like in a Fritz Lang detective movie where everything is watched over by Mabuse.

With his first feature, *The Sign of Leo*, Eric Rohmer pushes even further this descriptive tendency that owes so much to documentary practice and which we find so often in New Wave films. Actually, the main character of *The Sign of Leo* is not the failed American painter and sometime bohemian played by Jess Hahn and his heavy silhouette; rather, it is the capital city in the month of August, made up of the quais along the Seine, the small Latin Quarter hotels, the métro and streets in the suburbs. Despite the commercial failure of this film, Rohmer continued to radicalize his approach as he undertook his first Moral Tales. *The Girl at the Monceau Bakery* describes in detail the neighborhood from which the bakery and the film take their name, and the film's exposition is a maniacal presentation of the urban topography where the narrator will wander. The narrator does not spare us the name of a single street, intersection, or alleyway. The subject is precisely there since it involves the path to the bakery, which is also clearly a moral journey.

A few years later, the site is an isolated villa in Ramatuelle on the Mediterranean, which shelters an art dealer on his monastic vacation. He has decided to devote himself to internal meditation, far from feminine temptation, until the inopportune meeting with a very intriguing female *Collector*.

But the film that explicitly inscribes the primacy of place is, to a certain extent, the second cinematic manifesto of the New Wave, produced by Barbet Schroeder as the movement's first phase (the period 1959–63) was ending. It was *Six in Paris*, with episodes shot by Jean Douchet, Jean Rouch, Jean-Daniel Pollet, Jean-Luc Godard, Eric Rohmer, and Claude Chabrol, all in 16 mm and released in 1965. Each of the six short films that make up *Six in Paris* emphasizes the topography of a place, with a story that derives from the structure of each featured neighborhood. The episode that remains

Rohmer offers precise time and location in *The Girl at the Monceau Bakery* (Rohmer, 1962).
Produced by Barbet Schroeder

most faithful to that program is Eric Rohmer's *Place de l'Etoile* whose tale is based in part on the non-coordination of the traffic lights that circle the Arc de Triomphe and thus govern the trajectory of the pedestrians having to cross all those streets.

Techniques of Filming

The choice of subject-matter and its integration into a natural location generated a whole series of consequences that were purely technical. New Wave films brought forth smaller production crews, often using fewer positions than those imposed by the technician unions. Hence, the strong resistance from the traditional guilds, especially the set designers and studio personnel. These tensions also motivated a discourse that was increasingly critical of the absence of professionalism, the notorious incompetence of the young directors, and the supposedly rushed, slapdash nature of their works. This discourse was unleashed in particular against Godard's earliest films, which did not hesitate to provoke spectators and critics alike. In the opening scene of *My Life to Live*, for instance, he frames an entire conversation involving a couple seated at a bar from their back.

> The New Wave is a school of critics who dare each other actually to try their hand at filmmaking. It is filmmaking to see if one is capable of filmmaking. . . . The films they have produced themselves are amateurish: films in which incompetence, if not the rule, is adopted as a feature of style. In comparison with everyday, technically over-slick productions, these slapdash films momentarily took the public by surprise – they saw in them, and rightly so, a certain quality of freshness. Once incompetence has been overcome (probably reluctantly) and replaced by virtuosity, people pretty quickly noticed in someone like Chabrol an irrevocable decline in sincerity. Once a New Wave director learns his profession properly, his breeziness misfires and becomes grotesque. Godard, at the present stage of his career [in 1962], is no longer creating cinema; moreover, he is trying very hard not to look too much as though he is.[7]

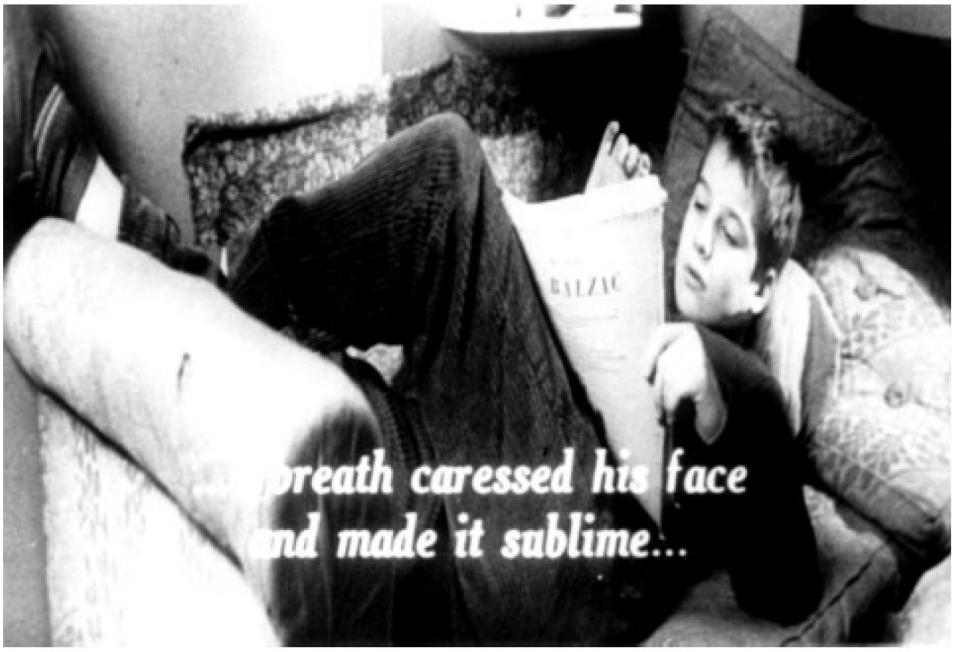
Some of the new auteurs moved in the same direction under the pretext of minimizing technique. For instance, Chabrol delighted in recalling how

he had no experience from the moment he began filming *Le Beau Serge*: "Rabier [the camera operator] invited me to look through the camera's viewfinder. I got my eye in place . . . but saw nothing. Kindly, Rabier explained that I was trying to look into a bolt. . . . We fell three days behind during the first week of filming. I made every mistake possible."[8] Furthermore, Chabrol continually claimed that one could learn film technique in half a day: "Everything you need to know to direct any movie can be learned in four hours. Courses at IDHEC [the French film production school] should last only half a day."[9]

This lack of initial schooling has since been exaggerated. The most important point is that most of these directors never took conventional career paths, working their way up as assistants. Yet even this claim needs qualification. Truffaut did shoot in 16 mm, filming *A Visit*, before launching into *The Mischief Makers*. Godard, Rivette, and Rohmer had all shot films in that substandard format since the early 1950s. Godard directed a short commercial assignment, *Operation Cement*, and had collaborated on productions with Pierre Schoendoerffer, all while editing tourist films for the *Knowledge of the World* series. Jacques Rozier graduated from IDHEC, which Louis Malle also attended. Jacques Demy graduated from the Louis-Lumière School and was an assistant to animator Paul Grimault and documentarist Georges Rouquier. Agnès Varda was a professional photographer when she entered into her adventure of making *La Pointe Courte*. We could cite many more examples of similar apprenticeships.

Nevertheless, this legend reinforced the romantic myth of New Wave creation. It pleased the press, which could valorize the lack of an apprenticeship if they liked the films, or, in the opposite situation, they could cite it to help denounce these directors as imposters. But these young directors were all supported and assisted by their cinematographers, or chief camera operators. Two names in particular deserve our attention: Henri Decae and Raoul Coutard, technicians who were more open-minded than their colleagues.

Henri Decae began as a photo-journalist, then worked as a sound engineer and sound editor. He had just begun making a few short films himself when he agreed to light Jean-Pierre Melville's *Silence of the Sea*, for which he also ended up editing and mixing the sound. He collaborated again with



Decae's interior shooting for *The 400 Blows* (Truffaut, 1959; it is an anamorphic frame of Jean-Pierre Léaud as Antoine Doinel).
Produced by Les Films du Carosse

Melville on *The Strange Ones*, but it was his distinctive camera work for *Bob le Flambeur* that caught the attention of the young critics. Louis Malle shot his first two features with Decae, then Chabrol hired him for his first three features: "For my director of photography I thought of Henri Decae since I had admired *Bob le Flambeur*. It was hard for him to find work at that point. There was something of a boycott against him because he helped on a film about the Korean War."[10]

Truffaut also hired Decae for *The 400 Blows*. His collaboration with Malle and Chabrol had now given him a very professional status, so he was the highest-paid person on this first feature by Truffaut's Films du Carrosse: "With his sharply contrasted black and white, his liking for natural lighting, and his great working speed, Decae was an ideal collaborator for Truffaut, who probably needed to feel confident on the technical level," explain Truffaut's biographers.[11] All this led Decae to work with the

"grand professional" René Clément, beginning with *Plein soleil* (*Purple Noon*, 1960). Henri Decae was thus a cinematographer who was willing from the start to adapt to the most precarious and audacious conditions of production; and it was he who liberated the camera from its fixed tripod. He made the New Wave possible, backing up Melville, Malle, Chabrol, and Truffaut.

Raoul Coutard joined the French expeditionary force of the Far East in May 1945, serving five and a half years in Vietnam. Afterward, he was a war correspondent and photographer for *Paris-Match* and *Life*, as well as the magazine *Indochine Sud-Est-Asiatique*. It was in southeast Asia that he met Pierre Schoendoerffer, who hired him as camera operator for his adaptations of Pierre Loti's work, produced by Georges de Beauregard. He was thus experienced in techniques of news gathering and reporting, and forged a great mastery of hand-held camerawork while being happy to film in natural light when there was nothing else. It was de Beauregard who assigned him to Godard for *Breathless* and, to a certain extent, their meeting was providential. Coutard adapted quickly to that director's very unusual filming conditions, which increased the technical handicaps, such as filming two actors in a tiny hotel room with a minimum of light or following them along the Champs-Elysées with the camera hidden in a postal pushcart. "Godard told me to imagine I was a reporter following these people. So, I had to be light, mobile, and ready to hide when we shot in the street."[12] Raoul Coutard would go on to make a total of ten films with Godard, including *Weekend* and *Prénom Carmen* (*First Name Carmen*, 1984). He would also shoot four features by Truffaut: *Shoot the Piano Player*, *Jules and Jim*, *The Soft Skin*, and *The Bride Wore Black*. And it was Coutard who overexposed the luminous images for *Lola*, just as Jacques Demy requested.

One can argue that with the ten films he lit for Godard during the 1960s, Raoul Coutard completely revolutionized the plastic values of French cinema, changing both its lighting style and visual aesthetic. This new image was also the product of an evolution in techniques. Faster and more sensitive film stocks existed for photo journalists but not for motion picture camera operators. Thus, it had been, to use a photographic equivalent, the "Harcourt" style that dominated the visual aesthetic of French films in the 1950s.

Coutard's revolutionary "new image" for Belmondo driving in *Breathless* (Godard, 1960).
Produced by Les Films de Georges de Beauregard

In order to adapt to the aesthetic demands established by Godard, Raoul Coutard employed a new film stock, Ilford HPS, previously reserved exclusively for still photography. He used a Cameflex camera, whose perforations were closest to the Leica camera, so as to expose the 50-foot rolls, which he spliced together for his motion picture camera. At Godard's request, Coutard intervened in the development process as well, pushing the exposed stock to double its sensitivity.[13] The goals of these "brainstorms" were to be able to shoot more quickly and not have to hinder the characters' movement, all in order to capture them in their environment more successfully.

Each new film by Godard and Coutard was an original visual experience. With *Les Carabiniers*, Godard wanted to recapture a certain contrast that characterized silent cinema, so he played with different film stocks, the actors' make-up, and the processing of the archival footage that he inserted

in the montages. Film reviewers had trouble understanding this approach and violently attacked the movie under the pretext of its botched and off-hand technique. Cut to the quick, Godard responded to these very cruel comments by citing all the precise techniques employed in order to prove his nearly maniacal perfectionism, right down to respecting the exact sound of the machine guns:

> *Jean Rochereau* (of *La Croix*): There are only carelessly filmed shots, edited any old way, and laden with bad matches.
> *Jean-Luc Godard*: We shot for four weeks during a harsh winter that encouraged us to be rigorous, and from script to mixing, everything happened under its spell. The soundtrack, in particular, thanks to engineers Hortion and Maumont, was given special attention. Each gun, each explosion was recorded separately, then remixed, even though it would have been easy to buy them from Zanuck. Each airplane possesses its own distinct engine noise, and we never put the roaring of a Heinkel for the rapid-fire bursts of a Spitfire. Much less the bursts of a Berreta when you saw a Thomson machine gun. The editing took longer than for *Breathless*, and the mixing resembled that of Resnais or Bresson. The music was recorded at the very serious Schola Cantorum. As for the mismatches, there is one that is superb, moving, Eisensteinian, in the scene where one of the shots could have been taken right out of *Potemkin*. We see an establishing shot of a non-commissioned officer in the royal army removing the cap from a young partisan woman, as blonde as the wheat of her Soviet farm. In the next shot, in close-up, we see the same gesture. And so? What is a match if not the passage from one shot to another? This shift could be made without a clash – and it is the match that is pretty much perfected over 40 years by American cinema and editors who, in detective films and comedies, and from comedies into westerns, installed and refined the principle of an accurate match on action, in the same position, so as not to break the melodic unity of the scene. In brief, a purely manual match, a process of *écriture* or discourse. But one can also shift from one shot to the next, not for a discursive reason, but for a dramatic reason, and that is the Eisenstein match, which opposes one form to another and inextricably links them by the same process. The shift from long shot to close-up becomes then that of minor to major in music, for instance, or vice versa. In brief, the match is a sort of rhyme, it is not worth starting the battle of Hernani over staircases that must be hidden. One simply needs to know when, where, and how.[14]

Godard reveals his aesthetic decisions with sufficient clarity that it is not necessary for us to summarize any further. The reference to Eisenstein, who was fundamental to the visual aesthetic of *Les Carabiniers*, highlights the rediscovery of montage that was under way by the New Wave auteurs, and especially Godard, Resnais, Rivette, and Rozier.

Montage/Editing

Editing is the technical practice most obvious to critics and specators. It "leaps out" at us. With *Hiroshima mon amour*, Resnais bases his narrative on the discontinuity of shots, the progressive emergence of memory that appears via the brief images, and then their serial arrangement. He alternates images of the present in Hiroshima with those of the past in Nevers, France. The final portion of the film is a veritable modern musical score structured on the music of Giovanni Fusco during which the voice of Emmanuelle Riva, the traveling shots of the streets at night in the Japanese city, and the pans of the misty, grey walls of Nevers are more and more inextricably mixed. Jean-Luc Godard would prove to be one of the first to retain this lesson. With *Breathless* he destroys the rules of classical composition, and privileges syncopated editing in the action sequences (such as the car chase early in the movie), as well as during the dialogue scenes (as when Michel Poiccard comments on Patricia's neck during a car ride, edited with jumpcuts). But, heading in a completely different direction, he occasionally opts for shot sequences, either straight-on (Michel and Patricia's conversation on the Champs-Elysées) or circular (the final discussion in the apartment on rue Campagne-Première). As we have suggested, he never hesitates to extend a sequence to three or four times its traditional duration, as is the case in the central part of the film, which features a long conversation between Michel and Patricia in her room. This extension shows no concern for the conventional constraints founded on continuity editing. Those rules had become absurd. Godard breaks them with elation and thus invents modern montage by rediscovering the poetic inventions of the great montage editors of 1920s Soviet cinema.

Jumpcuts in *Breathless* (Godard, 1960; two sequential frames).
Produced by Les Films de Georges de Beauregard

But he never confines himself to a narrow rhetoric. With *Le Petit Soldat*, his innovation passes to long flash pans, rapidly reframing from one "shot" to the next, a process that, at the time, made conventional cinema technicians bristle because they belonged exclusively to the amateur cinema. In *My Life to Live*, he explores the resources available to the long take, whether mobile (Nana in her record store), or static (the scene of her writing a letter in her schoolgirl's notebook), or as lateral tracking shots (the opening discussion in the bar).

Godard is certainly the most innovative New Wave director, exploring all the possible avenues for cinematic expression. But Jacques Rivette and Jacques Rozier, each in their own manner, also base their styles on the powers of montage and discontinuity editing. Both of them recorded a great number of shots with synchronized sound and it is the editing process that organizes this abundant material, which a prior script could neither describe nor anticipate. This approach assumes a great confidence on the part of the producer, since it is often experimental and can prove expensive, especially in terms of the amount of film exposed. It also results often in works that are longer than the average screen time, going beyond the norms of commercial exhibition. The leading example of this tendency is Rivette's *L'Amour fou* (1968). It is a brilliant reworking of the structure from *Paris Belongs to Us*, on a related topic. It is based on an alternation between long takes, some in 35 mm (the developing relationships between the director, his wife, and the partners) and others in 16 mm (a television crew records the phases of the theatrical staging of *Andromache*, directed by Sebastian, played by J. P. Kalfon). Rivette pushed this experiment even further with the 12 hours and 40 minutes of *Out One* in 1971, which he reduced to a "short" version of 4 hours and 15 minutes. It was again Jean Rouch who had opened this route with his ethnographic films, such as the series *Siguis* in which he shot ceremonies of aging among the Dogons on the cliffs of Bandiagara in Mali over an eight-year period, from 1966 through 1973. Without these long films, Jean Eustache never would have tried to release *La Maman et le putain* (*The Mother and the Whore*, 1973) which ran to 3 hours and 40 minutes, composed of relatively few shots, of long duration.

But the New Wave also made innovations in the area of sound.

Synchronized Sound

This aesthetic debate revolves essentially around the question of post-synchronization. One of the directors most admired by the new auteurs was Jean Renoir. Yet he had very personal views regarding sound recording and dialogue. From 1930 on, Renoir was an unconditional partisan of "direct sound," or sound recorded during the filming process. This practice was particularly difficult to accomplish in those days of optical sound recording, which was a heavy, constrictive process that greatly limited the options available for mixing. But Renoir, intractable on this point, preferred to sacrifice the precision of sound quality for its authenticity. Since his *On purge bébé* (*Baby Gets a Laxative*, 1931) and especially *La Chienne* (*The Bitch*, 1931), he recorded the sound for his films with the "direct" method. However, he was one of very few directors to do so, though Marcel Pagnol followed the same procedure.

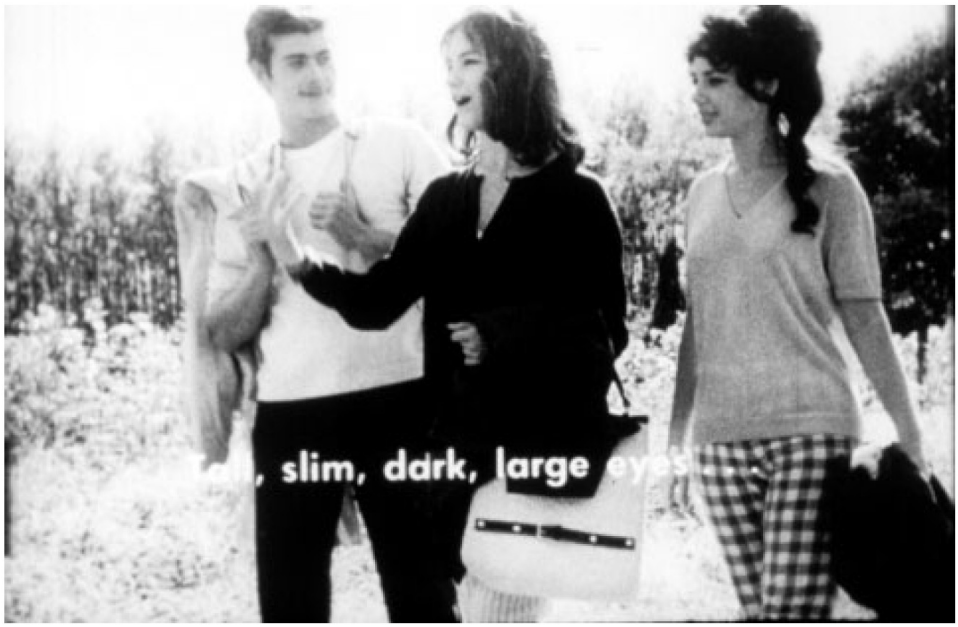
During the 1950s, despite the widespread use of magnetic sound recording, which offered many new possibilities, the practice of post-synchronization reigned supreme as the standard technique. Furthermore, by the end of that decade, direct sound still posed cumbersome and difficult conditions for recording dialogue (to say nothing of the need for more retakes), all of which ran counter to the needs set by the small budgets of the New Wave. Which helps explain why the first films by Chabrol, Truffaut, Godard, Rivette, and Rohmer were post-synchronized. Some of these, such as *Breathless*, were even shot like completely silent movies without any wild "guide tracks," to record the dialogue spoken on the set as a guide for use later in duping.

Aside from Renoir, one other director became a reference point, especially to Jean-Luc Godard, who was a particularly fervent admirer. It was, once again, Jean Rouch. He had shot short ethnographic films in 16 mm since the late 1940s, which he usually post-synchronized because of his lack of adequate technical equipment. But in 1958 he began his production of *Me, a Black Man*, a semi-improvised fiction film performed by African actors; Rouch then asked these actors to dupe quite freely over their own

performances. This duping was even recorded in a radio studio.[15] Godard was enthralled by the freedom of the interior monologues by the central protagonist as well as by the emotional effectiveness of the post-synchronization of these very random comments. He would be inspired by Rouch's approach, first in post-synchronizing *Charlotte and Her Jules*, where he had the audacity to dupe in Jean-Paul Belmondo's dialogue himself, and then in *Breathless*, where the same liberty and offhandedness are obvious. With *Le Petit Soldat* and *A Woman is a Woman*, Godard continued his experiments with post-synchronization. For the former, he launched a sort of personal diary in interior voice; in total contrast, for the latter, the colorful cinemascope comedy, he multiplied the musical and vocal refrains, helped by a particularly creative musical score by Michel Legrand.

But during this period, technological innovations caught up with creative experimentation. The synchronization of image and sound became simpler thanks to new tape recorders, such as the Nagra. These technical advances were being exploited by television and documentary cinema. It was again Rouch who pointed the way by directing *Chronicle of a Summer*, along with sociologist Edgar Morin; this feature-length inquiry became the manifesto of "*cinéma vérité*." Shot in 35 mm with a lightweight camera, the film was quite obviously recorded with direct sound. As soon as he could, Godard transposed this direct sound approach, beginning with *My Life to Live* which became in some aspects an "investigative film" aimed at the life of a Parisian prostitute. Following this film, he directed all his features with direct sound and this strategy became inseparable from his approach to "sound directing."

This search for authenticity and freer movements for the actors found its most successful realization in the first feature by Jacques Rozier, who was the most direct disciple of Jean Renoir's cinema. In *Adieu Philippine*, the New Wave found the naturalist masterpiece that the young critics at *Cahiers du Cinéma* had dreamed about. And yet, the film had to be post-synchronized by Rozier even though he had employed direct sound to record everything at the time of the filming. The sound obtained, recorded under makeshift conditions with a portable tape recorder, was not sufficiently audible, to say nothing of being in sync. Because the dialogue was largely improvised by the three young, non-professional actors, Rozier had



Three lead actors chat spontaneously in *Adieu Philippine* (Rozier, 1962).
Produced by Rome Paris Films, Unitec-Alpha, and Euro International Films

to transcribe completely the recorded material and then undertake a very long post-synchronization, as well as the very difficult editing job, all of which was further complicated by the vast amounts of film exposed and audiotape recorded during production.[16]

Thus, some of the major films in the history of cinematic form came about under particularly difficult conditions. Such was the case with *Adieu Philippine*, which was distributed three years after its production began. Filming began on August 7, 1960, but was not finished until January 1962. It premiered on September 25, 1963 at the famous La Pagode cinema in Paris, but only received a very mediocre box office return. Nonetheless, Rozier's film had a considerable influence on the aesthetic evolution of French cinema. This commercial failure derailed Rozier's subsequent career as a motion picture director. He did not direct another feature until 1970, when he shot *Near Orouet*, but this time he filmed in 16 mm with perfectly synchronized sound.