

during which it brought to the fore notions of the cinema as a vehicle for ideological engagement and as a language in its own right. Alexandre Astruc's 1948 'Naissance d'une nouvelle avant-garde' ('Birth of a new avant-garde') inaugurated a mode of writing on the cinema which the journals *Positif* and *Cahiers du cinéma* were to continue into the 1950s.

It is in a sense provocative to bracket those names together for, in their earlier days at least, the two journals cordially detested each other. *Positif* was sympathetic to Surrealism and to the French Communist Party, while among the major influences on *Cahiers* was the existentialist Catholicism of André Bazin. Half a century on, both journals still exist and thrive, albeit with much ideological passion spent. If *Cahiers* remains to non-French audiences at least much the better known, this is because so many of those who wrote for it went on to direct films in their own right. Chabrol, Godard, Rivette, Rohmer, Truffaut – the patron saints of the New Wave – all began as *Cahiers* critics in what remains the most striking mass migration from writing-about to writing-in film history has to offer. Their interest in low-budget American cinema led them to pursue with zeal the *politique des auteurs* – a pantheonisation of figures such as Howard Hawks and Samuel Fuller, whose individuality in making 'their' films in the teeth of studio-imposed constraints was lauded in a sometimes extravagant manner. *Positif's* favourite sons, such as Otto Preminger and Raoul Walsh, have lasted somewhat less well by comparison.

The *Cahiers/Positif* antithesis is important for a number of reasons. It exemplifies a tendency in French cultural life – illustrated at very much the same time by the work of such 'new novelists' as Alain Robbe-Grillet and Nathalie Sarraute – for critical and theoretical reflection to stimulate and feed through into artistic production. It illustrates the importance of political loyalties, or their absence, already marked in the cinema of the Popular Front era, in informing aesthetic and cultural debate. Finally, it stages the love/hate relationship with the United States that has been so crucial a factor in French artistic and cultural as well as political and economic life throughout the post-war years. For reasons we shall now explore, 1959 was the year in which all these trends converged to inaugurate what was rapidly recognised as a new era for the French cinema.

1959–1968: THE NEW WAVE

The New Wave never formally constituted itself as a movement (the term was coined by the journalist Françoise Giroud), so that 'membership' of it is to a large extent a matter of opinion. The five 'core' directors – Claude Chabrol, François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Éric Rohmer and Jacques Rivette – had met at the Paris *Cinémathèque* in the late 1940s or early 1950s and had graduated to film-

making by way of the influential journal *Cahiers du cinéma*. The major intellectual and personal influence on them was the critic André Bazin, a passionate advocate of 'realism, mise-en-scène, and deep focus (which he saw in opposition to montage)' (Monaco, 1976: 6), and of the *politique des auteurs*. European art-house directors, such as Renoir or Rossellini, had traditionally been treated as the 'authors' of their films, in much the same way as Balzac or Baudelaire were of the literary texts they signed. The American low-budget cinema, on the other hand, tended to be thought of as a commercial and studio-based product, to which Godard pays homage in his dedication of *A bout de souffle* (1959) to Monogram Pictures. *Cahiers'* innovation was to treat film-makers such as Hawks or Fuller as the authors of their films in much the same way as their more 'respectable' European counterparts.

The New Wave directors, like their Hollywood predecessors, worked individually and creatively within often severe budgetary constraints and the conventions of studio genre. Their films were frequently self-referential (Godard making a brief Hitchcock-like appearance in his own *A bout de souffle*, Truffaut's *Les 400 Coups* (1959) containing an obvious visual quotation from Vigo's *Zéro de conduite*), as though to assert the value of film as a form of artistic expression on a par with the novel or the theatre. Allusions to art cinema and Hollywood action film sat side by side in a manner that, nowadays, with the erosion of the barrier between 'high' and 'popular' culture, seems unremarkable, but was extremely innovative at the time. The literary adaptation and the costly studio set-up were anathema to these film-makers, whose use of hand-held cameras and location filming gave their work a constant charge of the unexpected. They were also greatly helped by the introduction, in 1960, of the *avance sur recettes*, a system of government loans, granted on the basis of a working script, to enable films to be produced. One in five French films benefits from this funding, though only one in ten of these has been sufficiently successful at the box office to pay off the loan in full (Hayward, 1993: 46). The system thus effectively works as a source of subsidy, another reason for the often-remarked thriving independent and experimental sector (known as *art et essai*) of the French industry.

Chronologically, the first New Wave film was Chabrol's *Le Beau Serge* of 1959, followed in the same year by his *Les Cousins*. The influence of Hitchcock is marked in the exchange of roles between the central characters (in both films played by Gérard Blain and Jean-Claude Brialy), the latter of whom represents Parisian would-be sophistication against the provincial benightedness of the other. Chabrol has had a wildly uneven career, often filming neither wisely nor too well, but at his best he is the master denouncer of the hypocrisy and pretensions of the bourgeoisie. Misanthropy and misogyny are other components of his work and both are

plain in *Les Bonnes Femmes* (1960), about the varying fortunes and ambitions of four young women who work in an electrical shop, an emblem of the modernisation of French society. *Les Biches* (1966) features a bisexual love triangle in Saint-Tropez, probably the first major French film to deal overtly with lesbianism, albeit in a manner that changes in sexual politics have caused to appear dubious.

The year 1959 – *annus mirabilis* of post-war cinema – also saw the feature debuts of Truffaut and Godard. The former's *Les 400 Coups* remains among the cinema's most touching evocations of a less-than-happy childhood, modelled in many ways on Truffaut's own. Film here is the medium at once for autobiographical essay and for formal audacity, as in the celebrated final shot in which the young Antoine Doinel/Jean-Pierre Léaud runs away from reform school and is frozen by the camera, half-fearful and half-exhilarated, as he catches his first glimpse of the sea. Truffaut wisely left Doinel to fend for himself for the best part of a decade, during which he broadened his experimental use of the medium with the bitter-sweet gangster parody *Tirez sur le pianiste* (1960), starring Charles Aznavour, and the prolonged triangular love story between a Frenchman, a German and the capricious Catherine/Jeanne Moreau, *Jules et Jim* (1962). This earned an unprecedented standing innovation at the Cannes festival, from which Truffaut had a few years before been banned, and the all-but-jealous homage of Renoir. The homoerotic intensity of the relationship between Jules and Jim, mediated it would be possible to argue through their shared passion for Catherine, now gives the film a strikingly modern feel. The theme of tragic or impossible love, and its close linkage with death, recurs in more conventional format with *La Peau douce* (1964), generally regarded as Truffaut's most Chabrolesque work.

A bout de souffle remains probably the best-loved of New Wave films, its innovative use of jump-cuts, location filming of a non-touristic Paris and *mise-en-scène* of the love/hate relationship between French and American culture remaining as fresh now as when it was released. The fecundity of Godard's experiments with sound-image relationships and filmic genre is a constant in his work throughout the decade, which spanned the musical (*Une femme est une femme*, 1961), science fiction (*Alphaville*, 1965) and the sociological treatise (*Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle*, 1966). *Le Mépris* (1963) gives Brigitte Bardot her major serious dramatic role, and stages an eloquent enactment of the contradictory pressures on the film-maker to make money and produce significant art. Much of Godard's work during this decade displays an unnerving prescience. *Bande à part* (1964) alludes to the genocidal conflict in Rwanda 30 years before it came to widespread attention. *Masculin féminin* (1966) pre-echoes the debates about gender and sex roles that were to achieve such importance in succeeding decades. The cultural and institutional

upheaval of May 1968 has a very good claim to being the most unexpected major event in post-war European history; yet Godard's two 1967 films, *La Chinoise* and *Weekend*, are extraordinary straws in the wind, the former foreshadowing the leftist agitation at the University of Nanterre that was to spark the events off, the latter a Surrealist, cartoon-like dramatisation of the consumerism so characteristic of French society in the 1960s and of the 1968 reaction against it.

The political strain in Godard's work becomes evident as early as *Pierrot le fou* (1965), which features Jean-Paul Belmondo from *A bout de souffle* in a doomed love affair with Godard's then wife Anna Karina, his inspiration for much of this period. *Pierrot le fou* suggests much of what was to follow in Godard's subsequent work, with its strikingly poetic use of colour, its use of mockingly didactic, quasi-Brechtian tableaux and its references to the Vietnam War.

Rohmer's work remains, certainly in French and probably in world cinema, unique in that he has never lost money on a film in a 40-year career. His low-budget approach, reliance on highly crafted dialogue and fondness for ironic philosophising make a 'Rohmer film' instantly recognisable, and in these respects he can, even by those not uniformly enthusiastic about his work, be seen as the supreme *auteur*. *Le Signe du lion* (1959) is his most savage work, about an over-trusting bohemian's destitute summer in Paris. His work for the remainder of this period took the form of short films, often made for television, a further illustration of the economic awareness that informs his work.

Rivette's love for lengthy, intricate narratives was apparent from his first feature, *Paris nous appartient* (1961), and has caused him to have a rather chequered career. *La Religieuse* (1966), his only other feature of the period, was briefly banned by the censor for its supposedly scandalous evocation of convent life, and authorised to be exported only under the distancing title of *Suzanne Simonin, la religieuse de Diderot*, much as Godard's 1964 *La Femme mariée* had to be retitled *Une femme mariée* before it got past the censor.

Other film-makers closely associated with the New Wave, though not with *Cahiers du cinéma*, were Alain Resnais, Agnès Varda and Jacques Demy. Resnais, the great cineast of memory, remains unique in his exclusive use of pre-written scripts, the basis for the most extensive formal experimentation with montage among contemporary film-makers. Novelists Marguerite Duras and Alain Robbe-Grillet, both themselves to go on to direct films, scripted respectively *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959) and *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* (1961). *Hiroshima* intertwines the horrors of the nuclear bomb and its central female character's love affairs with a German during

the war and a Japanese afterwards, broaching at once political and ethnic taboos. Nowadays, with a more widespread awareness that 'the personal is political', its 'dime-store novel' plot (as the central character, played by Emmanuelle Riva, herself describes it) appears less audacious than it did at the time, when its sympathetic evocation of a love affair with the enemy was moving into largely uncharted territory. The film, as important a first feature as *A bout de souffle*, makes vivid, often startling use of subjective visual flashbacks, cutting back and forth between the Hiroshima of 1958 and the French provincial town of Nevers under the Occupation.

L'Année dernière à Marienbad (see Figure 1.2) is a virtuoso essay in the 'eternal present' of the filmic image. It is impossible to tell whether its love story, with Delphine Seyrig as the object of two men's desire, is past, present, future, fantasy, or all or none of these. In this respect the film is analogous to the experiments of the 'new novelists' – including Robbe-Grillet – with subjective, fragmented or even contradictory narration. A strikingly, even flamboyantly, modern work, it is also an evocation of and homage to the golden age of black and white film-making; there is scarcely another film it would be so difficult to imagine in colour. *Muriel* (1963), also starring Delphine Seyrig, ran into censorship difficulties because of its references to torture in the Algerian war, much as Godard's *Le Petit Soldat* had done three years earlier. Censorship of film was rife in the Gaullist era – the downside perhaps of the state's interest in the medium. Officially instituted for the first time during the Occupation, it continued in force thereafter, to such an extent that during the eight years of the Algerian War (1954–1962) 'not a single film on the Algerian question was granted a visa' (Hayward, 1993: 40). Not until Giscard d'Estaing became president in 1974 did it all but disappear.

The *succès de scandale* enjoyed by Louis Malle's second feature, *Les Amants* (1958), is there to remind us that sexual censorship was scarcely less to be reckoned with (though less specific to France) in this period than its political counterpart. *Les Amants* stars Jeanne Moreau as a bored bourgeois trophy wife who leaves her family and lover behind after a night of love with a young student she met on the road. The aforementioned *succès de scandale* pertained to the film's (inevitably) discreet depiction – or evocation – of cunnilingus, but more profoundly shocking than this might be the wife's seeming abandonment of not only her husband, but her young daughter. Malle's role as starmaker was reinforced by *Vie privée* of 1962, with its barely disguised references to the real life of its star, Brigitte Bardot.

Varda is beyond doubt French cinema's leading woman director. The number of films directed by women in France has increased exponentially over the past decade in particular, but until the post-war period a woman director was a rarity,

and Varda for a very long time was – certainly so far as non-French audiences were concerned – seemingly the only one of her kind. *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1962) tells in real time the story of a singer who suspects she may have cancer. Hope and encouragement are given to her by a young conscript soldier she meets in the Parc Montsouris while waiting for the result of hospital tests – a scene given particular poignancy by the fact that he is at the end of a period of leave from Algeria. The counterposing of a life under threat from within and one under threat from without figures the interplay of the personal and the political we have already seen at work in *Hiroshima mon amour*, as well as suggesting how film-makers found ways of incorporating references to the Algerian War into their work without falling foul of the censor. Varda's other work in this period was in the short or documentary format, apart from the ironic love triangle *Le Bonheur* of 1965.

Demy (Varda's husband) made two major films during this period, *Lola* (1961) and *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg* (1964). Set in western French seaports (Nantes and Cherbourg respectively), they refer, in a perhaps deceptively lighthearted way, to the twofold processes of modernisation and decolonisation under way in the France of the time (see Ross, 1995, for a masterly analysis of these). *Lola's* eponymous heroine, played by Anouk Aimée, oscillates between a French and an American lover before her first love returns (driving a vast American car) to reclaim her at the end. *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg*, for all the frothiness of its entirely sung dialogue (to music by Michel Legrand), actually offers a serious treatment of the effects of modernisation along with those of the Algerian War. Catherine Deneuve, in her first major role, becomes pregnant by the man she loves the night before he leaves for Algeria; on his return he finds her married off to a wealthy local jeweller, in part because her mother does not believe that a garage mechanic would be an acceptable match for her. The irony of this, in the increasingly motorised French society of the time, becomes manifest in the film's final sequence, where we see Michel as the proud owner of a large and gleaming garage.

Bresson, Tati and Melville, all of whom had come to the fore in the war years, produced arguably their finest work during this period. Bresson's *Pickpocket* (1959) and *Au hasard Balthazar* (1966) refine his elliptical precision still further; editing here becomes a spiritual quest. *Pickpocket's* anguished Dostoevskyan hero is never 'analysed' (a term anathema to Bresson) in any detail. His compulsive thieving is observed in tight phenomenological detail, and only in the film's final sequence, where in prison he is visited by Jeanne for whom he realises the depth of his love, does it dawn on him (and the audience) that it has represented his way to redemption. *Au hasard Balthazar* realises the *tour de force* of making the tribulations of a

donkey (its central 'character') into a spiritual odyssey – Bresson's rejection of the very idea of the actor carried to its furthest extent – while also offering a surprisingly barbed view of modernised France through the presence of the villainous *blouson noir* Gérard. Tati's only feature of the period, *Playtime* (1967), is a prodigiously choreographed near-silent comedy, which lost a vast amount of money and all but ended his career. Nowadays, it appears not only as his finest work, extraordinarily intricate in its complexity of visual organisation, but also as a striking prefiguration of the postmodern era in which everywhere looks like everywhere else. The film follows a group of tourists as they journey round a concrete and glass Paris whose iconic landmarks, such as the Eiffel Tower, are visible only in travel agency posters. Melville's masterpiece *Le Samouraï* (1967) carries his stylisation of the gangster movie to iconographic lengths, in a pared-down narrative with minimal dialogue sustained largely by the androgynous performance, by turns violent and vulnerable, of Alain Delon.

By the end of our period the New Wave as any kind of unified movement or entity had ceased to exist (some would situate its demise as early as 1963). The film-makers associated with it were pursuing widely divergent paths – from the increasingly politicised experimentation of Godard to the more commercial work of Truffaut or Chabrol – all with significant success. Part at least of the reason for this had to do with the actors and actresses their work brought to the fore. *Le Mépris* notwithstanding, Brigitte Bardot is not normally associated with the New Wave (her most celebrated role remains Roger Vadim's *Et Dieu créa la femme*, 1956), but the sexual openness and freedom with which she was for long synonymous struck a chord with the New Wave generation, echoes of which can be traced in Jean Seberg/Patricia in *A bout de souffle* and the early roles of Catherine Deneuve. Jeanne Moreau has tended to evoke a more sophisticated, upmarket sex appeal, exemplified not only by her roles in *Les Amants* and *Jules et Jim* but also by her periodic forays into independent and avant-garde cinema, such as Peter Brook's Duras adaptation *Moderato cantabile* (1960).

The key icons of masculinity during this period were Delon and Belmondo. The former's 'demonic presence beneath the disguise of an angel' (Passek, 1987: 113) was not to be deployed by a New Wave film-maker until 1990 and Godard's *Nouvelle vague*, but his work for Melville, René Clément (*Plein soleil*, 1959) and the Italian directors Visconti and Antonioni made him an international art-house superstar. Belmondo's craggy vulnerability made him the ideal interpreter for the two key Godard roles already referred to. He was to oscillate throughout his career between overtly commercial roles (in which his credibility was vastly enhanced by the fact that he insisted on doing all his own stunts) and appearances for

'respectable' directors including – as well as Godard – Chabrol, Resnais and Truffaut.

In 1968, French cinema, like the society in which it was rooted and which it represented, appeared to be quietly prosperous and securely grounded. Yet a crisis that occurred in February of that year suggested that this impression might not altogether conform to reality. The Paris *Cinémathèque*, co-founded in 1936 by Georges Franju and Henri Langlois, had during the 30 or more years of its existence become one of the world's leading film archives, where as we have seen the New Wave directors and many others received much of their cinematic education. Langlois's energy and commitment were immensely important in its success, despite his often anarchic curatorial methods. It was these latter that led, in February 1968, to his dismissal by the Culture Minister, André Malraux, in an attempt at increasing already pronounced governmental control over the world of culture, which sparked off a massive wave of protest. The *Cinémathèque* was effectively closed down by demonstrations until Langlois's reinstatement at the end of April. The 'Langlois affair' now appears as an obvious precursor of the 'events' that were to shake France to the core the following month – events that, as we shall see, were to have a major cultural and political impact in which the cinema would have its part to play.

1968–1981: THE NEW WAVE (POSTSCRIPT), REALISM AND COMEDY

The May 1968 events – a student protest leading to a general strike on a massive scale and briefly seeming to menace the whole institutional structure of French society – appear in retrospect as the moment when culture assumed a major importance in the political arena. The Langlois affair, as we have seen, was a pre-figuration of this, and the 'Estates-General of the Cinema', set up during the events by the film technicians' union, discussed various possibilities for the restructuring of the cinema industry in the revolutionary perspective dominant at the time.

For all this involvement, however, May 1968's effect on film-making was in the end slight. More significant for the industry, though not necessarily for film as an art form, was Giscard's abolition of censorship, spearheaded by his Culture Minister, Michel Guy. This led to a burgeoning of pornographic films, which were more heavily taxed than other films and thus cross-subsidised the 'legitimate' industry. They to some extent helped to stem a decline in cinema attendance which nevertheless, as everywhere else, proved to be inexorable, owing above all to the pervasiveness of television. Even so, the French industry was to prove, as it has done ever since, the envy of many others in its ability, thanks to state intervention, to keep

its head above water, instanced during this period by the continuing success of the major directors from earlier years and the coming to the fore of new film-makers.

The major impact of May 1968 on film-making practice is undoubtedly to be found in the work of Godard. We have seen that *La Chinoise* and *Weekend*, made the year before the events, were a striking prefiguration of them. Godard became heavily involved in far-Left politics, working with Maoist groups and plunging himself into the making of *ciné-tracts* – revolutionary propagandist collages – before disowning his earlier work, ‘claiming that it functioned only at the level of theoretical experiment rather than of social and political struggle’ (Williams in Hughes and Reader, 1998: 273–4). His work in the rest of this period was marked by a politically inflected investigation of the image/sound relationship, across a variety of genres – from political shorts, via a subversive return to the ‘commercial’ cinema with 1972’s *Tout va bien* (starring Yves Montand and Jane Fonda), to experimentation with video in *Numéro deux* (1975), which returns to the theme of gender relationships he had adumbrated as early as *Masculin-féminin* in 1966.

Godard also worked for television, unsurprisingly encountering problems with its state-dominated apparatus, before returning to his country of citizenship, Switzerland, in the late 1970s. *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* (1979) was his most ‘mainstream’ film for some considerable time, situating its political involvement at the level of interpersonal and particularly gender relations rather than of the class struggle. In its diversity of institutional contexts, its engagement with video and television, its passage through a vehemently committed Marxism to a more diffuse and labile view of what constituted the political, Godard’s work of this period serves as a remarkable crystallisation of the wider cultural and ideological evolution of the France of these years. That evolution, we shall see, was to culminate in the election of a Socialist president – François Mitterrand – in 1981 and the dwindling of May’s revolutionary optimism into diverse movements for other forms, notably ethnic- and gender-based, of social change.

Among New Wave figures, Truffaut rejoined Doinel/Léaud for three autobiographical features: *Baisers volés* (1968), *Domicile conjugal* (1970) and *L’Amour en fuite* (1979). He won an Oscar for *La Nuit américaine* (1973), a comedy about the making of a film, and enjoyed his major commercial success with the Occupation-set theatre drama, *Le Dernier Métro* (1980), giving starring roles to Catherine Deneuve and the mountainously extravagant Gérard Depardieu. There was a tendency, in this period characterised by arduous political commitment and formal experimentation, to dismiss his films as lightweight, especially in the light of *Cahiers du cinéma*’s Marxist position of the 1970s (see the section on ‘ideology and suture’ in Chapter 2

of this volume). Yet the exploration – ambiguously complicit or critical – of ‘Donjuanism’ and gender relations in *L’Homme qui aimait les femmes* (1977), and the death-haunted central character of *La Chambre verte* (1978), played by Truffaut himself, in different ways give the lie to this view. *La Chambre verte* appears particularly poignant in the light of Truffaut’s tragically early death from a brain tumour in 1984.

Chabrol went at the provincial bourgeoisie with a will in *Le Boucher* (1970) and *Les Noces rouges* (1973), among more ephemeral ventures. *Le Boucher* shows the influence of Hitchcock in its metaphysical echoes, notably the possible transference of guilt for the village butcher’s murders on to the school teacher H  l  ne (played by Chabrol’s then wife St  phane Audran), who has rejected, or at least refused to confront her love for, him. The previous year’s *Que la b  te meure!* likewise suggests a disturbing transference, here between the father seeking to avenge his son’s death and the monstrous hit-and-run driver – played by Jean Yanne in a prefiguration of his title role in *Le Boucher* – responsible for it. Rivette enjoyed the biggest success of his career with the screwball-influenced *C  line et Julie vont en bateau* (1974), while making almost certainly the longest French feature film ever, *Out One* of the same year, which ran for 12 hours and 40 minutes and was understandably only ever screened once in the full-length version.

Rohmer’s *Ma nuit chez Maud* (1969), one of his ‘Six Moral Tales’ series, is probably his defining work, in its use of intellectualised irony (here rooted in a reading of the seventeenth-century philosopher Pascal) and investment in talk as alternative rather than preliminary to sex. *Le Genou de Claire* (1970) and *L’Amour l’apr  s-midi* (1972), part of the same series, likewise deal with temptations to infidelity or sexual transgression that are resolved through language rather than action. At a time when Lacanian psychoanalysis, with its stress on the inextricable interplay of language and desire, was carrying all before it in French intellectual life, it is perhaps not fanciful to suggest that Rohmer’s films, for all their evocation of the early Enlightenment world of Marivaux’s comedies, were more in tune with their own period than might at first appear. Resnais enjoyed less success in this period than previously, though *Mon oncle d’Am  rique* (1980) is a masterly *mise-en-sc  ne* of the technocratic modernisation of France in the 1970s. The social transformations of the Giscard years, fuelled by growing Americanisation and issuing in measures ranging from the abolition of censorship to the 1975 legalisation of abortion, have tended to be somewhat overshadowed by the earlier hegemony of Gaullism and the (largely unrealised) hopes invested in the Socialist victory of 1981. Yet they were considerable, and Resnais’s chronicle of the changing and intertwined fortunes of his three main characters traces them in fascinating detail.

Bresson used colour for the first time in the Dostoevsky adaptation *Une femme douce* (1969), though many find his colour work less starkly challenging than the black and white films. In *Lancelot du lac* (1974), he constructs a bleak and pitiless Middle Ages from which any sense of faith or purpose has been evacuated, and the same is true for his evocation of suicidal contemporary youth in *Le Diable, probablement* (1977). The redemptive possibilities of *Journal d'un curé de campagne* or *Pickpocket* seem definitively banished from an increasingly pessimistic body of work.

All in all, then, the New Wave's reputation for innovation did not long survive its first half-dozen or so years. Its swansong – by one not even considered a New Wave director – has to be Jean Eustache's *La Maman et la putain* (1973), three and a half hours of sexual and philosophical agonising, which take apart the aesthetic, emotional and political hopes of the 1959–1968 generation (see Figure 1.3). The film stars Jean-Pierre Léaud in probably his greatest role, as a posturing (pseudo?)-intellectual dandy caught between the 'mother' and the 'whore' of the title – respectively, Bernadette Lafont (an early muse of Chabrol's) as the fashion shop owner with whom he lives and Françoise Lebrun as the unhappily promiscuous nurse with whom he begins an affair. The disillusionment that followed the extravagant hopes aroused by the events of May 1968 is matched and paralleled by the film's drawing out of New Wave stylistic trademarks – black and white location filming, dialogues that sound improvised (though they were not), the use of iconic actors – to something like a point of no return.

The 'New Wave generation' had been reared on first the myth of, then (in 1968) the reaction against, Gaullism – a cycle that only really came to an end in 1974 with the death of de Gaulle's *dauphin* and successor, Georges Pompidou. That also enabled the calling into question of the myth of omnipresent and heroic resistance to the Occupation on which Gaullism had been founded. Marcel Ophüls's documentary *Le Chagrin et la pitié* (1971) suggested the first stirrings of this. Commissioned by the state broadcasting system (the ORTF), it was not shown on television for more than a decade, its revelations of the extent of collaboration in Clermont-Ferrand, which could have been virtually any other French city, proving far too uncomfortable. The can of worms opened by the film was still alive and writhing in the 1990s, as illustrated by the 1994 revelations about President Mitterrand's collaborationist past and the imprisonment of former Giscard minister Maurice Papon for his part in the deportation of Paris Jews.

Where the documentary film had led the way, the feature was soon to follow. Louis Malle's *Lacombe Lucien* (1973) gave the first (moderately) sympathetic portrayal of a collaborator, in the person of its central character who joins the Milice only when

rejected by the Resistance and helps to save the life of the Jewish girl with whom he falls in love (see Figure 1.4). The debate aroused by these and other films of the time centred less on their artistic qualities than on the legitimacy of calling the myth of the Resistance – hence, for many, the hard-won social and institutional stability of post-war France – into question. This was at the same time a debate around two divergent views of history – one the classic ‘classroom’ kind grounded in great names and dates, the other more popular, anecdotal and concerned with the study of attitudes and phenomena rather than landmark events. The second view, promoted first by the journal *Annales* in the post-war period, then by the immensely influential philosopher and historian of ideas Michel Foucault, became extremely influential in the aftermath of 1968, with its stress on the need to give excluded or marginalised voices a hearing. René Clément’s 1966 *Paris brûle-t-il?*, whose main characters are major historical figures from the Occupation of Paris, can stand as an example of the heroic view of *les années noires* as battle between good and evil, which subsequent texts and debates, historical and cinematic, were relentlessly to undercut. Cinema was to have a greater impact on French society and (in the wider sense) politics through its role in these debates than through the politically fuelled formal innovations advocated by *Cahiers du cinéma* in the 1970s.

In part because of 1968’s limited direct influence on film-making practice, but more significantly in response to the challenge of television and the increasing multinationalisation of the industry, the film-makers who began to build careers for themselves in the 1970s tended towards more conservative models and techniques than their predecessors. Bertrand Tavernier’s low-key social realism, as in the Lyon-set *L’Horloger de Saint-Paul* (1974) and *Une semaine de vacances* (1980), is a good example of the resurgence of a kind of film-making the New Wave had fondly imagined dead and buried. That Tavernier’s major scriptwriter is Jean Aurenche – he of the Aurenche and Bost reviled by Truffaut and others as epitomising the *cinéma de papa* – shows how tenacious such cinema was to prove, reaching its financial if not always artistic apotheosis in the ‘heritage movies’ of the 1980s and 1990s.

Maurice Pialat began to make his reputation with the terse realism of early works such as *L’Enfance nue* (1969) and *La Gueule ouverte* (1974), which established him as a venomously anarchistic dissector of the nuclear family and its discontents. Pialat’s reputation as all but impossible to work with has never ceased to dog his relationships with producers and actors alike, at the same time as whetting audiences’ appetites to see films whose on- and off-screen tensions are reputedly almost indistinguishable. *Loulou* (1980) was among the first films to bring Isabelle Huppert, arguably the key female star of that decade, to prominence, as well as giving a major role to Gérard Depardieu, who plays the layabout of the title, with Isabelle

Huppert as the middle-class girl who abandons everything for a turbulent sexual relationship with him.

Depardieu had become known a few years earlier for his work with Bertrand Blier. Blier's mixture of misogyny and carnivalesque parody was to make him, along with Tavernier and Pialat, the key director to emerge in the 1970s. In this he was greatly helped by the team of actors who worked with him, many of them coming from the world of *café-théâtre*. *Les Valseuses* (1974) is a road movie, but breaks with one key convention of that genre in that its central characters (played by Depardieu and Patrick Dewaere) are in no sense concerned with self-discovery through travel. Their sole concern is sexual and material self-indulgence, in which they are helped by major actresses from different generations – Jeanne Moreau and Miou-Miou. Blier had in 1978 won the Best Foreign Film Oscar for *Préparez vos mouchoirs*, again starring Depardieu and Dewaere.

The entirely male focus of this chapter – at least so far as directors are concerned – will not have escaped the reader, the more so since Blier's sexual politics have been the target of frequent, and sometimes well-justified, criticism. It was not until the 1980s and 1990s that women directors were to become an everyday phenomenon in the French cinema, but significant figures began to make their mark in the previous decade. Coline Serreau's love triangle comedy *Pourquoi pas?* (1977), and Diane Kurys's autobiographical *Diabolo menthe* (1977) were early works by filmmakers who were to go on to lasting prominence.

The films discussed here were not, of course, the French productions actually watched by most French people during the period under discussion. That distinction went to Just Jaeckin's *Emmanuelle* (1974), most notorious of the soft-porn features that followed the disappearance of censorship, and Gérard Oury's *Les Aventures du Rabbi Jacob* (1973). Oury had enjoyed even greater success in 1966 with *La Grande Vadrouille*, like *Les Aventures du Rabbi Jacob* starring two of France's best-loved screen comedians of the time, Bourvil and Louis de Funès. Both, like the more internationally known Dewaere and Depardieu later on, came from the world of the stage and the music hall – evidence that for all the specificity of film as art form so vaunted by the New Wave, the French cinema remained profoundly dependent on other types of popular performance art, not always of a kind that travel well.

Despite the steady decline in cinema attendance over this period, the French industry continued to fare better than its main competitors, thanks to co-production deals, with television and other European countries, and the constant – some would

say protectionist – vigilance of successive governments. The 'Mitterrand years', as we shall now see, were to develop and extend that vigilance, even if it was often to be a question of running fast to stay in the same place.

1981–2001: HERITAGE, THE LOOK, WOMEN, BEURS, BANLIEUE, LE JEUNE CINÉMA

There were major changes in the production and distribution of films during the late 1970s and early 1980s, which had a significant impact on the cinema. Some of these changes were common to other developed countries in Europe. Amongst these, there was the rise of TV co-productions, in particular with the encrypted channel Canal+, which unlike its counterpart in the UK, Channel 4, was almost exclusively devoted to films; other major channels such as TF1 and FR3 became associated with film production, alongside Canal+. The effect on films was that an increasing number of them were conceived from the outset for screening on the small rather than the big screen, leading to what was called a 'televisualisation' of the cinema.

A second major change, which occurred in other countries as well, was the rise of the multiplex. This had started as early as the beginning of the 1970s, supported by state funding. However, in the mid-1980s, Pathé and Gaumont, the main distributors in France, came to an agreement that led to the expansion of such complexes. A greater number of film theatres meant that distributors were less likely to take risks, and would screen the same film throughout the country with a vast advertising campaign, leading to ever more expensive films. This at least had the merit of concentrating resources in the national products, which were then, arguably, in a better position to vie with Hollywood films.

The third major change was the shift by French audiences away from the national product to the increasingly globalised and even more heavily marketed Hollywood product. In 1986/87, for the first time in the history of the French cinema, there were more French audiences watching Hollywood films than French films. Unsurprisingly, this led to the gradual waning of the more popular French genres such as the police thriller and the comedy. In their place came new genres in the 1980s, which, with the exception of mainstream heritage films, one could call the 'cinemas of the marginal', suggesting that French cinema, much like the French press, was diversifying in an attempt to find niche audiences, at the very same time as it was being absorbed, one might argue, by the curious phenomenon of the Hollywood remake. Remakes are of course a frequent phenomenon in the history of the French cinema. However, whereas there are some 20 Hollywood remakes in the period 1930–1950, dropping even more in the next 30 years when there were