

**‘A movement that was never a movement’: The *nouvelle vague*
and the construction of a New Wave**

by Christian Hayes

The *nouvelle vague* is now seen as one of the key moments of film history. The movement emerged in 1959 with films such as *Le Beau Serge* (Claude Chabrol, 1959) and *Les Quatres Cents Coup* (François Truffaut, 1959), and was greatly defined by *A Bout de Souffle* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1960). Although it is possible to include the Left Bank filmmakers such as Alain Resnais, Chris Marker and Agnès Varda, under the term *nouvelle vague*, I will be focusing on those filmmakers who first made their name as critics for *Cahiers du Cinéma*. The movement is primarily remembered for these *Cahiers* filmmakers, all of whom went on to have long careers: Jean-Luc Godard, François Truffaut, Claude Chabrol, Eric Rohmer and Jacques Rivette, most of whom are still working today. Since the *nouvelle vague* is regarded as such a monumental moment in film history, I want to investigate the reality of its emergence. In this essay I will think about how the *nouvelle vague* was constructed, looking at how box office, manifestos, festivals and terminology function in the construction of movements. With reference to the British film publication *Sight and Sound* I will also explore the reaction of the British critical press to the *nouvelle vague*, questioning both how far the critic/filmmakers who led the *nouvelle vague* affected the approach to American cinema in Britain and also how far ‘moments’ in film history are constructed or maintained by the press.

International Success

An article published by *Sight and Sound* in Winter 1959/60 by Penelope Houston and Duncan Crow, 'Into the Sixties', attempted to forecast what the cinema of that future decade would bring. They wrote:

Sooner or later, each decade of the cinema's history acquires a personality, an image... there are always films and personalities which seem obstinately to belong to some other time, or to stand aside from time altogether. But at least we have a map with the contour lines plotted in; and this is the way histories of cinema usually get written.¹

The authors here are aware that histories of cinema often map decades with broad strokes, that icons will eventually take over facts. The authors stated that 'the inevitable nostalgia for the 1950's will creep in', just as it would for the 1960s, and a moment synonymous with the 1960s, the moment that arguably fired it off, was the *nouvelle vague*.² Etched into the cinematic memory of this decade would be such symbols as a young Jean-Pierre Léaud running to a beach, or Jean Seberg selling *The Herald Tribune* along the Champs-Élysées. How certain images journey from being only one inside of a single film to representing a moment of time, or how a single film comes to represent many, is the result of a complex network of different factors. One of the overriding contributors to a film's future reputation, I believe, stems directly from its success at the time of release. Truffaut recalls how he went over budget on *Les Quatres-Cents Coups*,

¹Penelope Houston & Duncan Crow, 'Into the Sixties', *Sight and Sound*, Winter 1959/60, p.4.

² Ibid.

from £20,000 to £25,000, believing that he was moving into dangerous territory.³ *Les Quatres-Cents Coups* presents itself as a small, almost low-key film with a very individual style. Never once does it appear as a box office hit, but Truffaut stated, ‘the film more than paid for itself, what with the Cannes Film Festival and sales abroad. In the USA alone, it was bought for £35,000.’⁴ Many of the early *nouvelle vague* films profited financially, but only in relative terms. As Truffaut wrote in 1957, ‘A film costing 300 million francs must please every possible audience in every country. A film costing 60 million can make a profit in France alone or by touching certain groups in different countries.’⁵ The *nouvelle vague* films were successful by keeping budgets low and appealing specifically to a limited demographic. The grant of 35 million francs awarded to Chabrol by a French government eager to relight its film industry ensured that Chabrol made two films, *Le Beau Serge* and *Les Cousins* (1959), for the price of one, the two films then playing simultaneously on the Champs-Élysées.⁶ A combination of savvy economic planning and a decline in cinema attendance in France led to the financial success of these small, young films.⁷ Even more importantly, as is evident by *Les Quatres-Cents Coups* being bought for £35,000 in the U.S.A. and by Truffaut’s plan for

³ François Truffaut, ‘Interview with François Truffaut’, *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 138, 1962 in Peter Graham (ed.), *The New Wave* (London: Secker & Warburg/BFI, 1968), p.9.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ François Truffaut, *Arts*, 15 May 1957; in T. Jefferson Kline, ‘The French New Wave’ in Elizabeth Ezra (ed.), *European Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p.163.

⁶ George Sadoul, ‘Notes on a New Generation’, *Sight and Sound*, Summer and Autumn 1959, p.115.

⁷ Kline, ‘The French New Wave’, p.164.

films to be seen by ‘certain groups in different countries’, is that these films travelled and were financially successful internationally. They became box-office hits on the international art-house circuit. This financial success meant that the films were seen, that they were exposed around the world and placed into the consciousness of the global filmgoing community. It is ultimately ironic that the endurance of these individual, rebellious films stemmed from a success that was partly financial, the ultimate antithesis of the artist’s ideology.

Ideology

There is no single document that acts as a manifesto for the French New Wave. There is, however, a collection of articles that reinforce a certain ideology. Of course there is the publication *Cahiers du Cinéma* itself, a forum in which the future directors would dictate an uncompromising view of what cinema should and should not be. Of immense influence was critic André Bazin, and in particular his championing of the *politique des auteurs*, which *Cahiers* and its critics placed at the forefront of their ideology. Critic Peter Graham suggests that an earlier article by Alexandre Astruc, ‘The birth of a new avant-garde: La caméra-stylo’ (*Écran Français* 144, 1948), acts as a precursor to the *politique des auteurs* and the *nouvelle vague*.⁸ Astruc outlines his belief that the cinema should be a means of expression in its own right, rather than as an extension of literature. The camera should not illustrate what the pen has written, but be the pen itself. He writes that, ‘Direction is no longer a means of illustrating or presenting a scene, but a true act of

⁸ Graham (ed.), *The New Wave*, p.15.

writing. The film-maker/author writes with his camera as a writer writes with his pen.’⁹ Here we see a formulation of the idea of director as author, but more specifically of the author as indistinguishable from the film itself. Astruc claims he was compelled to write after noticing a new kind of cinema emerging in, specifically, Renoir’s *La Règle du Jeu* (1939), Bresson’s *Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne* (1945) and the films of Orson Welles, claiming that these films prove that film is more than capable of presenting the complex psychological and metaphysical overtones that distinguishes literature, but using its own inherent language.¹⁰ Astruc writes, ‘to evolve a philosophy of life, how can one possibly distinguish between the man who conceives the work and the man who writes it?’¹¹ In this way the director and the film one and the same thing: Welles is *Citizen Kane*, Godard is *A Bout de Souffle*, Truffaut is *Les Quatres-Cents Coups*. This total acceptance of a director and their films was taken up by *Cahiers* to the point where entire filmographies were held in high regard due to the ‘acceptance’ of their directors. This provoked Truffaut to write, ‘I will never like a film by Delannoy. I will always like a film by Renoir.’¹² Richard Roud claimed that this hardline stance did run into problems. Robert Aldrich was accepted into the pantheon on the basis of *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955) only, placing him alongside the likes of Hawks, Ray, Preminger, Mann, Hitchcock and Ford. Aldrich’s other

⁹ Alexandre Astruc, ‘The birth of a new avant-garde: La caméra-stylo’ in Graham (ed.), *The New Wave*, p.22.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.17, p.20.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.22.

¹² François Truffaut, ‘French cinema is collapsing beneath the weight of false legends’, 1959.

films were instantly praised by *Cahiers*, but Truffaut later conceded that he found Aldrich's later films disappointing.¹³

Astruc's article, with its comparisons between film and literature, conveys the struggle that film was facing at the time, a struggle that is referenced throughout film criticism right up to the 1960s. Critics such as Astruc and Bazin were fighting for film to be regarded as an art-form comparative to literature. For this reason, film was often compared to literature. Literary adaptations were one way in which the film's producers could raise the apparent worthiness of a film so that it would be immediately taken seriously. This was the kind of trick that, as we shall see, British publication *Sight and Sound* fell for.

Festivals

The collecting together of these new French films as a movement was already in motion before the films were released in cinemas. A report from Cannes 1959 (by George Sadoul, which we shall see later), where both *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* (Resnais, 1959) and *Les Quatres-Cents Coups* played to critical acclaim, was printed in the same issue as an article on the new French cinema.¹⁴ These films therefore travelled and made an impact through festivals, where distribution deals would have been struck and international reviews written. Success was not entirely due to the films' release in cinemas; by that time much interest had been stirred and collective names, such as *nouvelle vague*, had been debated. The new French films were therefore already being

¹³ Richard Roud, 'The French Line', *Sight and Sound*, Autumn 1960, p.169.

¹⁴ 'Cannes', *Sight and Sound*, Summer and Autumn 1959, p.138.

viewed as a movement before the release of its early films such as *Les Cousins* and *Les Quatres-Cents Coups*. By the time of the London Film Festival of 1959, the *nouvelle vague* was recognised as a movement so much so that an award was given to Truffaut, who was present, for the new French cinema as a whole; all this before *Les Quatres-Cents Coups* had reached British cinemas.¹⁵ There was likely to have been a direct link between the reception of the *nouvelle vague* in *Sight and Sound* and the award presented to Truffaut at the Film festival, due to the link between *Sight and Sound*, the British Film Institute and the National Film Theatre. The relationship between film festivals and international publications were therefore integral to the dissemination of these films and to the formation of a new wave.

The *nouvelle vague* in *Sight and Sound*

Early reference to there being a new movement appeared in George Sadoul's 'Notes on a New Generation' in the Summer/Autumn 1959 of *Sight and Sound*, published in the same issue as the report from Cannes 1959, therefore before the films had been released.

Sadoul discusses different French filmmakers who have already begun to make an impact. He writes about, amongst others, Marcel Camus, Jean Rouch, Georges Franju, Alain Resnais and lastly a section on Chabrol and Truffaut as a pair. These filmmakers had clearly made an impact upon Sadoul and he praises *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* as being 'one of the most distinctively original works given us by the cinema in many years'.¹⁶ He comments how Chabrol and Truffaut wrote for *Cahiers* and championed the *auteur*

¹⁵ Duncan Crow, 'London Festival', *Sight and Sound*, Winter 1959/60, p.9.

¹⁶ Sadoul, 'Notes on a New Generation', p.115.

theory, and that their new films embody this ideology. He writes, ‘now they have both been able to make their first films “on their own account”—rather like those novelists and poets who bring out their work at their own expense when they can’t persuade editors to accept it.’¹⁷ Sadoul is referring to the grant that allowed Chabrol to make *Le Beau Serge*, which Sadoul describes as containing, ‘the directness and honesty one might expect from a first novel’.¹⁸ This reference to the filmmakers as novelists will recur in the assessment of the *nouvelle vague*, reinforcing the way in which these films appear *auteured*, as though they were made wholly by their director alone. With *Les Quatres-Cents Coups* Sadoul suggests that, ‘the screen is simply a window opened on life, and the artist looks first for the true and the natural.’¹⁹ Therefore what was immediately striking for Sadoul in both films was their directness and ultimately their ability to present the viewer with an honest view of the world. This directness and honesty are, of course, constructions in themselves. Even though the *nouvelle vague* films made their artificial aspects explicit with its sound montage, jump cuts and the breaking the forth wall (all of which *A Bout de Souffle* takes to the extreme), they still manage to maintain a heightened sense of reality. Therefore on the one hand these filmmakers expose the workings of the medium onscreen and on the other they project a directness to the viewer. This seems as though it would be a contradiction, but it may be for the very reason that the films are exposing their mechanics and not attempting to deceive the viewer that they come across as ultimately more honest.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.116.

At the end of the article, Sadoul discusses ‘A New Movement’, and already here we have a more focused sense of a wave emerging. He suggests that there are at least twenty directors with films arriving in 1958-9, amounting to a new wave of films in France. He already questions what to name this new movement. He writes:

If we group these newcomers under some general heading like “the 1960 generation” or “the young Paris school,” we are really falling back—as with that expression *nouvelle vague* so dear to the press—on establishing the fact of a new movement without attempting to explain its cause or look into its spirit.²⁰

And of course, the press did fall back on that expression so dear to them, an expression perhaps therefore not at first exclusive to cinema. As is often the case with the grouping together of films, they are sometimes forced to fit under a general heading, and often the fit is uncomfortable. Indeed, the longer such words as *neorealism* or *nouvelle vague* are dwelt upon, the harder they become to define. This often leads to a series of stylistic checkpoints, such as handheld cameras, jump cuts or breaks in cinematic illusion, and at that point each factor becomes debatable as the pool of films grows and becomes more diverse. Indeed, Sadoul pointed out that, ‘the most striking thing [about the *nouvelle vague*] remains the differences of tone and temperament among these directors.’²¹ Yet however much such terminology is debated, the critic cannot help but resign to using them nonetheless. Sadoul did compare the movement to neorealism, questioning whether the *nouvelle vague* is in fact a ‘sequel to neo-realism’.²² An interesting way to suggest a connection between both movements is the individual and varied styles, just as Sadoul

²⁰ Ibid., p.117.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

pointed out. The *nouvelle vague* films and filmmakers are unified, conversely, by diversity. More appropriately, then, would be to suggest that the films are unified by a general spirit of freedom that allowed such films to be made and which is evident in the films themselves.

The article 'Into the Sixties' by Penelope Houston and Duncan Crow, however, wrote, 'the *nouvelle vague* is not a movement; it has no policy, no leaders, no theorists, as the neorealists had the invaluable Cesare Zavattini to define their idealism'.²³ There were clearly those who would not succumb to the frenzy surrounding the new French cinema, yet its comparison to neorealism was counterproductive since by comparing a non-movement to a well-established movement it inadvertently served to further affirm the status of the *nouvelle vague* as a movement. While it is clear that the *nouvelle vague* was never organised, there were, as we have seen, clearly those theorists such as Astruc and Bazin, who fuelled the leaders of the movement, and whose films did indeed lead the movement on: Truffaut, Chabrol and Godard. Houston and Crow predicted that,

The talents, once launched, no longer need the label; the talents which should never have been launched won't be kept afloat by it... This is a cautionary tale from a movement that never was a movement... The *nouvelle vague* will soon go out of the headlines.²⁴

These authors were already forecasting a decline and there had not yet been any mention of Godard. His *A Bout de Souffle* had yet to be seen.

²³ Houston & Crow, 'Into the Sixties', p.4.

²⁴ Ibid., p.5.

An article on *A Bout de Souffle* was published in the Spring 1960 issue of *Sight and Sound*. Louis Marcorelles wrote that *A Bout de Souffle* is,

a genuine *film d'auteur*—more so than either *Les Quatre Cents Coups* or *Hiroshima mon Amour*, to which the screenwriters made a powerful contribution. Godard is a lone wolf; he expresses himself with the absolute independence of a novelist, yet with a discipline and style, in the literary sense, which make his film perhaps the most perfectly realised screen novel produced to date.²⁵

The author is interestingly using a literature analogy, the idea of *A Bout de Souffle* as a ‘perfectly realised screen novel’, to represent a film that would be better described as purely cinematic, a film that reasserts the unique qualities of cinema in an intensely visual way. Again literature is being used as a reference point to assert the validity of cinema as a means of expression, suggesting that cinema can equal literature in not only narrative terms but can also convey a series of complex alternate meanings, thoughts and emotions, much in the same way as a novel can. But Marcorelles is also suggesting that in *A Bout de Souffle*, the *nouvelle vague* had found its purest example of its *auteur* philosophy, and in that sense Godard is as purely an author of his film as a novelist is to a novel. Yet there are also further connections between *A Bout de Souffle* and literature that could be made. Godard was an admirer of poverty row B-movie filmmaking and of Samuel Fuller’s immediate ‘tabloid’ style, even dedicating the film to Monogram Pictures. The image of newspapers recurs in *A Bout de Souffle* as Michel (Jean-Paul Belmondo) is constantly seen checking the headlines for an update on his own story, often glancing at the paper before discarding it into the street. Yet the immediate style of the film, with its shorthand-like jump-cuts and montage of dialogue, mirrors the way in

²⁵ Louis Marcorelles, ‘Views of the New Wave’, *Sight and Sound*, Spring 1960, p.84.

which newspapers are pieced together and the way in which newspapers are read, attention being grabbed by the most appealing headlines. In fact the jump cuts of *A Bout de Souffle* represent the visual equivalent of the turning of the page, as though it is a story being thumbed through. The killing of the policeman at the beginning of the film plays out like a story half-read before moving on, a reader having gained only the most essential information. Yet *A Bout de Souffle* is an intensely cinematic film in both its sound and visuals. Critic Michel Marie wrote that,

Godard, filming after Chabrol, Truffaut and Resnais, wanted to make *A bout de souffle* the standard-bearer of a new aesthetics, that of the French New Wave of 1959. His film was to explore a hitherto unknown continent in the aesthetics of cinema, smash the boundaries of the conventionally ‘filmable’ and start again from scratch.²⁶

There was in fact probably no way for Godard to have known the kind of resounding effects his film would have. He more likely made the best film he could at the time, but based upon stories of last-minute writing and cavalier editing, Godard was never precious about his film. It was possible that this freed him to take risks, but also the success of the wave so far and the new filmmaking spirit would have also led to an environment in which risks could be taken, and Godard took them, ultimately redefining film grammar and pioneering a new way of seeing.

Marcorelles very interestingly articulated the problems that this brave new style may have faced, namely the British prejudice and its effect on the reception of the film.

He wrote,

²⁶ Michel Marie, “‘It Really Makes You Sick!’” Jean-Luc Godard’s *A bout de souffle* (1959) in Susan Hayward & Ginette Vincendeau (eds.), *French Film: texts and contexts, Second Edition* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.162.

Many spectators, especially English ones, may not take his film very seriously when they see how much it owes to American techniques, to comedies and gangster movies... The serious filmgoer in London or Oxford, New York or Boston, may well be shocked by the ingrained vulgarity of the themes and by the characters Godard has chosen to portray.²⁷

On very first glance *A Bout de Souffle* could be seen as a kind of desecration of cinema, of disrespecting all the cinema that came before it. Yet for all its playfulness it in fact reinvigorated cinema. *Sight and Sound* highlights a stance that fundamentally split opinion along British and French lines, which could be seen more clearly in each country's reaction to American cinema.

It is this contrast that Richard Roud explores in his *Sight and Sound* article 'The French Line', questioning the *nouvelle vague* filmmakers' choice of films and their apparent disregard of content. He wrote,

Chabrol has stated categorically that the important or "big" subject is worth no more than the unimportant one. He even goes on to say that the smaller the subject is, the more it can be treated greatly. In other words, whereas in England a film with a good (i.e. noble, humanistic, socially aware, humanitarian) subject has already won half the battle, in France the more noble a film's subject the more suspiciously it is regarded. The greatest link between all schools of French film criticism is an insistence on the supremacy of form over content.²⁸

In this article Roud contrasted the French and British reception of 'low' and 'high' art, explaining that the French took to heart American writers such as Hemingway, Dos Passos, Faulkner and Hammet. In Faulkner's *Sanctuary*, for example, Malraux saw, 'the

²⁷ Marcorelles, 'Views of the New Wave', pp.84-5.

²⁸ Roud, 'The French Line', p.167.

incursion of Greek tragedy into detective story.²⁹ On the one hand the French had an ability to find complex form inside of potboilers and B-movies, but they rarely seem to admit that they simply *enjoyed* the low-down sordidness of these works, stemming from a fascination with Americana. If this American fascination was not the case, then why would the American hat-and-coat iconography of Bogart and other numerous gangsters and detectives, and not just the ‘form’ of the films, feature so prominently in *A Bout de Souffle* and *Le Mépris*, for example? It took Richard Roud to question the British stance that films without noble subjects cannot be worth appreciation.

Taking a look at a *Sight and Sound* review of a Hitchcock film released at the same time as the emergence of the *nouvelle vague* (*North by Northwest* (1959) was reviewed literally on the same double page as *Les Cousins*) we see such prejudice clearly. In Penelope Huston’s review of *Vertigo* (1958) in Spring 1959, she wrote,

in a story of this kind, a sleight-of-hand affair built on deception and misdirection, mystification counts for everything; to introduce questions of motivation, to suggest that the people involved in this murder game are real, is to risk cracking a plot structure of egg-shell thinness.³⁰

Roud, looking at the ten-best lists in *Cahiers*, found universally accepted titles such as *Ivan the Terrible* (Eisenstein, 1944), *Les Quatres-Cents Coup* and *Wild Strawberries* (Bergman, 1957), but was very surprised to find titles such as *Rio Bravo* (Hawks, 1959), *Run of the Arrow* (Fuller, 1957), *Wind Across the Everglades* (Ray, 1958) and *Vertigo*. He writes, ‘One’s first reaction might be to conclude that these men must be very foolish’³¹

²⁹ Ibid., p.168.

³⁰ Penelope, Houston, ‘Vertigo’, *Sight and Sound*, Spring 1959, p.319.

³¹ Roud, ‘The French Line’, p.167.

but concludes that, based on the evidence of their films, it is hard to accept Resnais, Truffaut, Chabrol and Godard as fools. He writes, ‘On closer consideration one can see that it is really only as to American films that their standards differ.’³² There is a clear preference towards European cinema in *Sight and Sound*, *nouvelle vague* included, and although the major American directors do get reported on, there is less willingness to accept them as readily.

We can see this clearly in the Top Ten list of 1962. The only American films included are the established silent classic *Greed* (von Stroheim, 1923) and *Citizen Kane*, which topped the poll for the first time.³³ *Citizen Kane* was acceptable since it is an anti-establishment Hollywood film, seen as *auteur*ed in the same vein as Truffaut’s and Godard’s films. In 1959 Penelope Houston believed that with *Vertigo* Hitchcock was ‘repeating himself in slow motion’ yet in the 2002 Top Ten poll, it came in second place.³⁴ It is not the ‘fault’ of *Sight and Sound* that *Vertigo* was not seen as a possible successor to *Citizen Kane*, but it does present an interesting perspective on how American cinema was viewed in Britain at the time. I would argue that the *auteur* philosophies presented by *Cahiers du Cinéma* and by the internationally exported and viewed *nouvelle vague* served to shift general opinion of classical Hollywood cinema. The entering of *Citizen Kane* into the list is representative of a wider reassessment of American film that was taking place.

³² Ibid.

³³ ‘Top/Ten’, *Sight and Sound*, Winter 1961/2, p.10.

³⁴ ‘Critics’ Top Ten Films’, *Sight and Sound*, September 2002, p.24.

This French influence can be seen in a new British publication that began in 1962. *Movie* arrived as a reaction to *Sight and Sound* but also in response to the methodologies of *Cahiers du Cinéma* and renewed interest in American film sparked by these critics and the *nouvelle vague*. Its pilot issue opened with a bold manifesto, a veiled attack on *Sight and Sound*, but also on *Cahiers du Cinéma*. It read:

MOVIE aims to help remedy the unhealthy lack of reasoned disagreement about films in Britain. It will embody an approach to the cinema which is not represented by any existing magazine, and although the opinions expressed in it are those of the individual authors, in general they will be shared by the rest of the contributors...

We do not want to force our ideas on other people, or to persuade everyone to like Otto Preminger and Leo McCarey rather than Visconti and Kurosawa. There is no point in replacing one cult with another. Instead we would like films to be the subject of enthusiastic argument in which our approach would only be one of many...

For us, enthusiasm is the first essential of good criticism.³⁵

This emphasis on enthusiasm is what sets *Movie* apart from *Sight and Sound*, which maintained a fixed tone of judgement that, as we have seen, often drifted into prejudice. On the one hand *Movie* set out to be like *Cahiers du Cinéma* and to maintain a unified position on which films were accepted (in the first issue a *Cahiers*-like list of accepted British and American directors was printed, only Hitchcock and Hawks accepted as ‘Great’, the highest category),³⁶ and on the other hand it vowed to not ‘force’ their opinions onto people, unlike the autonomous beliefs of *Cahiers*. *Movie* however aligned itself firmly with *Cahiers du Cinéma*, and therefore in opposition to *Sight and Sound*, in two major ways. Firstly it took a refreshing approach to American cinema, publishing

³⁵ *Movie*, No.1, June 1962, p.0 [inside front cover]

³⁶ ‘The talent histogram’, *Movie*, No.1., 1962, pp.8-9.

major articles and retrospectives on American directors such as Otto Preminger, Sam Fuller and Nicholas Ray. It also published articles by the *Cahiers* director/critics themselves, such as ‘Big Subjects, Little Subjects’ by Claude Chabrol and a piece on Preminger’s *One Man Mutiny* by Eric Rohmer.³⁷ There are quite a few articles on the *nouvelle vague* films themselves, with pieces on *Paris Nous Appartient* (1961), *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1961), *Vivre Sa Vie* (1962), *Le Beau Serge* and *Une Femme est une Femme* (1961).³⁸ Some of these were translated from French and it was very possible that some of them had originally been printed in *Cahiers du Cinéma*. With *Movie*, then, there is a shift towards the appreciation of classical American cinema, the cinema of gangsters and crime and poverty row that went unrewarded by the prejudice both reported in and maintained by *Sight and Sound*, *Movie* clearly being influenced by the *Cahiers du Cinéma* model.

This Francophile enthusiasm for the *nouvelle vague* is greatly contrasted by an article in *Sight and Sound* that in Winter 1964/5 declared its downfall. Gilles Jacob’s ‘Nouvelle Vague or Jeune Cinema?’ opens with a salacious report of how Truffaut, so recently the new young hope of European cinema, was ‘shot down in flames by a barrage from all sides, and there was a feeling around that some old scores had been

³⁷ Chabrol, Claude, ‘Big Subjects, Little Subjects’, *Movie*, No.1, June 1962, pp.12-13; Rohmer, Eric, ‘One Man Mutiny’, *Movie*, No.2, September 1962, p.20.

³⁸ Paul Mayersberg, ‘Paris Nous Appartient’, *Movie*, No.2, September 1962, p.34; Mark Shivas, ‘Cléo de 5 à 7 and Agnès Varda’, *Movie*, No.3, October 1962, pp.32-5; Jean-André Fieschi, ‘Vivre Sa Vie’, *Movie*, No.3, October 1962, p.30; Boys, Barry, ‘Le Beau Serge’, *Movie*, No.6, January 1963, pp.30-1; Mark Shivas, ‘une femme est une femme’, *Movie*, No.7, February 1963, pp.26-7.

settled.³⁹ Jacob almost gleefully makes out that the *nouvelle vague* filmmakers had in fact been a flash in the pan, claiming that it was a period in which *anyone* could have made a film, as long as they were young. ‘An era is unquestionably over’, Jacobs emphatically states.⁴⁰ He almost gives himself away when he went into the current state of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, stating how it, ‘used to be a bastion. Now it is ruffled by agitation, undergoes metamorphosis, and quits its handsome Champs Elysées address’, exposing some rivalry with the highly influential publication.⁴¹ As though it were an empire, Jacobs states, ‘The collapse of the Nouvelle Vague has begun, and this will be the determining factor of the next few months. In so far as the “Nouvelle Vague” was a matter of extreme confusion anyway, the collapse is a good thing.’⁴² There is a definite sense that Jacobs was never satisfied with the *nouvelle vague*, that he himself was in ‘extreme confusion’ over the attention paid to it. He perhaps overstated his case when he claimed that over 170 new directors were involved in the movement; this is the highest estimate of directors I have found.⁴³ He claimed that many did not deserve this accolade, believing that many directors were seen as part of the *nouvelle vague* since they made their films during the 1958-1963 period. The tone of Jacob’s article suggests that he had been predicting the end of the wave for years, that he had been waiting for years for the ‘movement that was never a movement’ to end. Perhaps some saw the movement as a

³⁹ Gilles Jacob, ‘Nouvelle Vague or Jeune Cinema?’, *Sight and Sound*, Winter 1964/5, p. 4.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.5.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

fraud, as a series of young filmmakers who had stumbled upon fame and success by pure chance and whom would one day be exposed as fraudsters. Jacob feels this moment had arrived when Truffaut was 'shot down' for his new film, *La Peau Douce* (1964).

Although the beginnings of movements are often clearly christened by key films (*Le Beau Serge*, *Les Quatres-Cents Coup*), their ends are usually much harder to pinpoint.

The *nouvelle vague* filmmakers made individual, diverse films from the very beginning, and this only became more apparent as their careers continued.

Naturally all movements come to an end, but just as the press can construct a movement before it has begun, they can also announce its demise before it has truly disappeared. The debate of whether the *nouvelle vague* was a movement or not, and whether it would strive or fail, continued throughout the entire period of the *nouvelle vague*. A complex series of factors contributed to the labelling of these films as a major new movement. Certainly the dissemination of these films through international festivals and their subsequent success in public cinemas played major parts in the longevity of its labelling as a movement, but it is the publicity given to the *nouvelle vague* by publications that created and maintained a unity and invested a weight in these films. *Sight and Sound* was only one of many international film publications that would have fuelled the debate as to whether the *nouvelle vague* was truly a movement or not, but this very debate only served to seal the reputation of the *nouvelle vague* as a key 'moment' of 1960s cinema.

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