

9

Sex, Gender and Auteurism: The French New Wave and Hollywood

Diana Holmes

The French New Wave was a short-lived movement, its peak years normally dated as 1958–1962, but it had a lasting and dramatic influence not only on subsequent French film but on cinemas across the world. It is a well-known fact that the young directors who formed the *Nouvelle Vague* drew energy and inspiration from a passionate enthusiasm for those Hollywood films that poured across the Atlantic from 1945, when the ending of the Second World War re-opened European frontiers and cultures to US imports. In both the United States and France, the post-war period from 1945 to (at least) the early 1960s was characterised by a strong social conservatism – ideological emphasis on home and family, fear of difference in all its forms – while at the same time the post-war baby boom and the imperatives of an increasingly consumer-based economy combined to foster a new youth culture that would form the enabling context for the New Wave itself, and to offer women new and emancipatory opportunities in education and, potentially, employment. Both US and French societies remained strongly and traditionally gendered (albeit according to historically different conceptions of precisely what gender meant), but rapid social change was also opening up new ways of experiencing male and female identity, later to be articulated in second-wave feminism. Cinema was central to the production of both youth and gender identities: the cinema-going public was – in both societies – predominantly young, and the stories and dreams absorbed in darkened auditoria shaped the spectators' sense of what it was to be young, and to be male or female, in the affluent democracies of the Cold-War West. In this chapter, I want to ask how the young critics of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, the crucible from which New Wave cinema would emerge, responded to Hollywood's representations of gender, and how far these shaped their own portrayals of masculinity, femininity

and relations between the sexes. In turn, films of the French New Wave made their way across the Atlantic to a mixed, sometimes enthusiastic, reception: in both directions, reception abroad differed from that in the home culture. To what extent did US and French representations of gendered identity in the 1950s differ or coincide, conflict with or reinforce each other?

Gender in the 1950s

In both the United States and France, perhaps the most familiar popular image of the 1950s is that of a neatly housed nuclear family ruled by a working father, managed by a housewife mother, with (probably two) safe, obedient children and a modern consumer lifestyle. This has some basis in truth. Strongly marked gender roles were central to social organisation and national self-image in both societies. In the United States, educational opportunities for women were good, but the post-war backlash ousted two million women from their wartime jobs and returned them (in most cases reluctantly) to the home,¹ and a powerful consensus on the importance of marriage, home-making and a strong birth rate also dramatically decreased the numbers of women in higher education (Friedan 1963: 14). Cold War politics meant a defensive spirit of nationalism and an aggressive suspicion of anything that smacked of left-wing or oppositional values – most apparent in the witch hunts practised by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC, founded 1937) during the early 1950s, when the influence of McCarthy was at its height. In the cinema, the industry's self-regulation body, the Production Code Administration (established 1934) responded to pressure from HUAC, and from powerful right-wing pressure groups such as the Legion of Decency, by firmly censoring the representation of sexual or violent scenes and upholding the sanctity of home and family.

Within a general tableau of comfortable conservatism, hindsight nonetheless allows us to pick out the threads of resistance that would crystallise into open opposition in the following decade. Betty Friedan, writing in 1963, traced the signs of dissatisfaction among young American housewives of the 1950s in the massive use of tranquillisers, the plethora of press articles exhorting women to enjoy and make the most of their domestic lot, in the testimonies of the many women with whom she corresponded (Friedan 1963). Through the writers, artists and musicians of the 'Beat' movement, an alternative voice could sometimes be heard even in mainstream America, and rock'n'roll provided young men and women with a sensual, enjoyably rebellious music of their

own. Cinema depended for its survival on mass appeal, to an audience that was predominantly young as well as more than 50 per cent female (Izod 1988: 146). Despite the many layers of self-imposed and official censorship in place, a new 'teen' cinema made its first appearance with the rapid rise to stardom of angry, sexy young actors Marlon Brando (*The Wild One* [László Benedek 1953], *On the Waterfront* [Elia Kazan 1954]) and James Dean (*East of Eden* [Elia Kazan] and *Rebel Without a Cause* [Nicholas Ray], both 1955). The masculine ideal embodied in older stars like Gregory Peck or James Stewart was a traditional one: successful masculinity was, as Peter Kramer puts it, 'mature, active, efficient, graceful and stoic' (Kramer 2000: 64). Brando and Dean slouched onto the screen with a sulky, unbiddable grace that seduced spectators of both sexes, and suggested that to be authentically young required self-definition against one's elders, not imitation of their models.

In French society too, the end of the war meant a reassertion of firm gender divisions. Although French women finally gained the right to vote under the new Fourth Republic as well as benefiting from the expansion of secondary and higher education, the combination of a practical need to reconstruct the nation, and a desire to reaffirm a French virility humiliated by defeat and Occupation led to strongly pro-natalist policies, so that women found themselves returned to the home and exhorted to be good wives and mothers. The influx of new consumer goods and accompanying advertising also tended to situate women firmly in the home, indeed in the kitchen, while male identity was associated more with the outside world of work in the growing economy and 'virile' products such as cars. France was also engaged in wars against her colonial subjects, in Indo-China (1946–1954) and Algeria (1954–1962), which encouraged a traditionally patriarchal, military image of the nation.

Here too, though, there were signs of alternative and dissenting visions of self and society. Women writers, from Simone de Beauvoir (*The Second Sex* 1949) to best-selling novelists Christiane Rochefort and Françoise Sagan, articulated the conflicts between women's theoretical equality and their real relegation to second-class status. There was a pervasive sense of a new generation contesting the values of its elders, to the extent that de Gaulle as incoming President of the new Fifth Republic set up a special commission to deal with the 'problem' of young people (de Baecque 1998: 49). The press was full of articles on contemporary youth, of which perhaps the most influential was the 1957 survey conducted for and published in *L'Express*. It was there that Françoise Giroud first coined the phrase 'nouvelle vague' to designate the new and *different* generation

of young people revealed by the survey. Giroud found that responses revealed major differences between the sexes: while male respondents remained loyal to a very traditional concept of gender, young women were intensely aware of living in an age of female emancipation, and of the contradictions between the opportunities this offered and the real constraints of marriage and motherhood (Giroud 1958).² As in the United States, cinema attendance was an important element of youth culture,³ and in France as elsewhere in Europe the medium prospered throughout the 1950s, beginning its decline only around 1958. Films played an important role in the construction of gender identity, especially for the young.

***Cahiers du Cinéma*: Gender and film theory**

The term 'New Wave', then, first referred to a whole generation, before it was narrowed down to designate a new and polemically oppositional form of cinema, made by young men who were (for the most part) in their twenties. The vision of cinema that would inform New Wave films was largely elaborated in the pages of the journal *Cahiers du Cinéma* in the 1950s by a uniquely male group of *cinéphiles* (film enthusiasts), most of whom would go on to become film directors. The *Cahiers* critics⁴ were ambivalent about their status as representatives of a generation: on the one hand they were willing to praise a film for its capacity to 'breathe the air of our times' (Godard on Roger Vadim's *No Sun in Venice* [*Sait-on jamais?* 1957])⁵ or to be 'typical of our generation' (Truffaut on Vadim's *And God Created Woman* [*Dieu créa la femme* 1956]);⁶ on the other, their way of viewing and evaluating films resolutely privileged form over content and thus refused to make social relevance a criterion of quality. Their polemical attacks on the 'cinéma de papa' ('Dad's cinema') that still dominated French screens excoriated, in particular, the tendency of directors such as Claude Autant-Lara and Yves Allegret to privilege themes that were deemed to be topical and relevant to a wide audience. If cinema was to be an authentic 'seventh art', each film must be the expression of an artist/director's personal vision, and this would be expressed not so much through theme and narrative as through aesthetic form. Political or social commitment, or the role of spokesman for a generation, were incompatible with creative freedom.

As feminist film historian Geneviève Sellier has argued, New Wave film theory is unconsciously but unmistakably gendered masculine.⁷ The film director is imagined as a solitary hero, in Oedipal revolt against his filmic fathers, scornful of the latter's appeal for a mass market which

is represented, implicitly, as feminine. Rohmer, for example, writing in praise of Hollywood film and against the French cinema of the day, finds that the latter, with its 'perpetual drivel about love crossed by some religious or social conformism', reduces the potentially 'profound and courageous' theme of conflict between the individual and the social to the level of 'trashy women's magazines'. The Hollywood Western, on the other hand – a genre that (with few exceptions) foregrounds male stories – elevates the same theme to the level of the universal (Rohmer 1985: 91). As Sellier points out, resistance to the vulgarisation of art by commercial forces in France traditionally adopts the strategy of feminising – and hence demeaning – what is popular, and conversely defining authentic, demanding, innovative art as inherently masculine (as in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*). The 'auteur' imagined and lauded by the ambitious young *Cahiers* critics was no mere skilled director working as part of a team, but a heroic figure whose singular vision found innovative formal expression regardless of the constraints of the film industry and the market: the unity of his style and 'voice' transcended any differences of genre, technique and even quality that might occur between individual films, since these could be attributed to mere 'external factors' such as funding (Truffaut, quoted in Sellier 2005: 24). To make films as the representative of a collectivity (generation, social or political grouping), or to attempt to please a wide (and to a significant extent female) public were both incompatible with this image of the creator driven by inner inspiration.

It was thus a very provocative move to assign the status of 'auteur' to precisely those directors who worked within the entertainment industry of Hollywood. But having learnt their passion for cinema in a post-war France inundated with the best of a decade of US films – for the Occupation had, of course, meant the temporary loss of all American imports – the young *cinéphiles* were anxious to proclaim their inheritance and use it as a stick to beat their legitimate 'fathers', the preceding generation of French film-makers. Thus selected Hollywood directors were argued to have transcended the context of production, that is, the commercially driven studio system, through the expressive quality of their *mise-en-scène*, which could transform the popular genres of Western or thriller into works at once highly personal and expressive of a universal mythology. Not without self-contradiction, *Cahiers* argued that directors working within the wholly market-led context of Hollywood studios were among the finest creators of films as uniquely personal works of art, and that it was the singularity of their vision that produced Hollywood's

apparently limitless power to capture imaginations across continents and cultures.

Cahiers' interpretation of Hollywood's mythologies was of course selective and partial, and on the whole what they favoured were films that viewed the world from a very male perspective. Howard Hawks Westerns, Hitchcock thrillers, Sam Fuller Westerns and war films, Robert Aldrich's stylish films noirs and Nicholas Ray's stories of troubled, fragile, violent men were among the favourites. Douglas Sirk, whose melodramas were tremendously popular with female spectators, was also viewed positively, but only once his films were purged of their content and social relevance to reveal the original aesthetics of an *auteur*. Praising Sirk's technique in *Imitation of Life* (1959), Luc Moullet nonetheless rejects the film's themes of 'racial questions and relations between mother and child' as 'a poor subject', and dismisses Sirk's 'sentimentality so dear to Yankee women' as likely to fail with a French public *other* than those in 'the suburbs [...] and the backward, prudish populations of Brittany and Alsace' (Moullet 1960: 57). In French, Moullet's terminology makes it clear that these despised spectators are female.⁸ Most of the *Cahiers* critics simply assumed that the spectator to and for whom they wrote was male (and needless to say heterosexual), so that a 1955 article on eroticism in cinema and theatre focuses solely on female nudity and extols the capacity of film to deliver 'dream women who are also present in the flesh, and who can belong to each of us without belonging to all' (Amengual 1955: 59). One of Truffaut's definitions of cinema, cheerfully cited and endorsed by Claude de Givray in a salacious 1957 piece on Brigitte Bardot, was 'the art of making pretty women do pretty things' (de Givray 1957: 43).

The taken-for-granted sexism of a group of young men in the 1950s may seem scarcely worth commenting on, since the primacy of male subjectivity was so much part of the prevailing doxa, but it is apparent even in the pages of *Cahiers* itself that an alternative way of viewing gender was available. In December 1955, a rare female voice, that of Annette Raynaud, reviews the work of an equally rare woman director, Agnès Varda,⁹ and employs the terminology of Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (published 1949) to describe the heroine as a 'femme-sujet' (female subject) rare in contemporary film (Raynaud 1955: 46). Pierre Kast, one of the few committed left-wing critics to write for *Cahiers*, consistently pays attention to the way that women are depicted in film and attacks stereotyping in Hollywood films in similarly Beauvoirian terminology: 'a certain concept of woman as object, a sort of throw-away soap made by men for men, is proposed and imposed', 'the sexual perspective is

always that of a man. Sensuality means that a man takes his pleasure, or gives it, – a woman is never allowed to take hers without being punished for her “sin”’ (Kast 1955: 40). However such awareness that male and universal were not, in fact, synonymous, and that film could have social consequences was the exception rather than the rule in *Cahiers*. On the whole, the perspective on film was consistently and unquestioningly androcentric.

This made for some interesting blindspots in the future New Wave’s readings of Hollywood films. The extremely conservative sexual politics of some directors – for example Howard Hawks – were simply ignored as beneath proper critical attention (Sellier 2005: 23–24), while the interestingly complex portrayal of women in some Hollywood films, which for good commercial reasons also addressed a female public, generally went unnoticed. A large proportion of cinema-goers were women, and thus market imperatives encouraged some inclusion of female issues and even perspectives. The contradictions in women’s situation in the 1950s, tugged between a theoretical emancipation and a powerful ideology of motherhood and domesticity, found a degree of expression in many Hollywood films of the period. Thus, for example, the many *Cahiers* readings of Hitchcock’s *Rear Window* (1954) – one of the group’s ‘films-fétiches’ or key texts – focus on the self-referentiality produced by the hero’s position as *spectator* of life in his neighbourhood, on the film’s formal structures and ‘universal’ themes of ‘solitude and the lack of love’ (Chabrol 1955: 42),¹⁰ but pay scant attention to the role played by Grace Kelly and the extent to which it is she, the ultra-feminine would-be wife, who in fact solves the mystery through a different, less cerebral and more empathetic form of spectatorship,¹¹ and a physical daring that belies her fashion-plate exterior.

Nicholas Ray as *auteur*

Hitchcock (born 1899) was already in his fifties, and had been making films since the 1920s, when the future New Wave directors (born between 1920 [Rohmer] and 1932 [Truffaut]) unanimously re-defined him as an *auteur*. The group were equally agreed on the importance of a younger director Nicholas Ray (born 1911) whose career began post-war and who thus felt much closer to their own generation. Godard described one of his films as ‘not cinema, more than cinema’ (Godard 1985: 18). Rohmer called him ‘the greatest director of the new generation of American film-makers [...] an *auteur*, a great *auteur*’ (Rohmer 1956: 33); Truffaut ‘an *auteur* in our sense of the word’ (Truffaut 1955a: 39),

and 'certainly one of the greatest American film makers of the younger generation' (Truffaut 1955b). Rivette described him as 'the most secret, the greatest, the most spontaneously poetic' of American directors (Rivette 1955: 20).

Ray was a commercially successful director who worked in Hollywood continuously throughout the late 1940s and the 1950s. Critically, he was less well received at home than in France: those very qualities of introspection and 'poetic' experimentation with colour, lighting and framing that made him an 'auteur' for *Cahiers* were often seen in the United States as pretentious, and as a failure to understand the functioning of genre. Thus *Johnny Guitar* (1954), praised by the *Cahiers* critics for its 'dream-like, magical' take on the Western genre (Truffaut 1985: 107) and for its dramatisation of Ray's recurring themes of 'twilight, [...] the solitude of living creatures, the difficulty of human relationships' (Rivette 1985a: 96), seemed to *Variety* 'so involved with character nuances and neuroses [...] that "Johnny Guitar" never has enough chance to rear up in the saddle and ride at an acceptable outdoor pace' (*Variety* 1954). The *New York Times* found it a 'flat walk-through of Western clichés' and especially disliked its portrayal of gender: Joan Crawford as the heroine, Vienna, was 'as sexless as the lions on the public library steps and as sharp and romantically forbidding as a package of unwrapped razor blades', and Sterling Hayden in the title role 'galumph(ed) around morosely' rather than acting like a proper Western hero (*New York Times* 1954). *Cahiers* were surely right to see in the film not a failure to observe the genre's narrative conventions, but rather an original, complex and visually compelling reworking of them. The story pits its hero and heroine, representatives of a progressive, anti-violent form of modernity, against a static, inward-looking small-town culture, making the hated symbol of the encroaching modern world Vienna's huge, magnificently solitary saloon, with its piano, its well-ordered gaming tables and its 'feminine' comfort. Vienna welcomes the railway that is blasting its way through the hills to civilise this violent frontier society, and plans to make the saloon the first step in the construction of a whole new town, but the locals fear and hate her. Johnny Guitar loves her, and takes her side. The battle is fought out in vivid colours and images: Vienna's white dress against the indigo night sky when the mob trap and attempt to hang her, the scarlet and yellow flames that destroy her saloon, the white waterfall and blue sky against which the couple are framed, embracing, at the happy ending.

The critics of the future New Wave also recognised and liked Sterling Hayden's representation of a fragile, wounded, but nonetheless heroic

masculinity. They read the narrative – as they read all of Ray's narratives – as the hero's story: 'the story of a violent man who wants to stop being violent, and his relationship with a woman who has more moral strength than himself' (Truffaut 1985: 29). And *Johnny Guitar* does offer an interestingly non-standard version of the Western hero, within the gender conservatism of the 1950s. Though he is the principal narrative agent, in the sense that it is his arrival in town that opens the film and triggers all subsequent action, he comes in search of the woman, Vienna, whom he has loved and lost, and without whom he can no longer live. Once he has appeared, his story is driven by hers: if he is to win her, he must accept her refusal to run away from her enemies, side with her against the brutality of the locals, and fight on her side, on her terms. At first witty and laconic in true hero style, Johnny soon reveals that he is less in control of his emotions than Vienna, begging her to 'Lie to me – tell me you've been waiting for me. That you'd have died if I hadn't come back. That you love me.' Vienna agrees to lie, and chooses her moment to reveal that the lies are, in fact, the truth. The *New York Times* critic's objection to Hayden's 'morose galumphing' is an objection to the hero's paralysing intensity of feeling, which contradicts the view of virility as active, initiating, capable of the sublimation of emotion in heroic action. Resolutely androcentric in their worldview, the *Cahiers* critics were nonetheless drawn to portrayals of masculinity as flawed, uncertain, in thrall to powerful women, struggling for self-definition rather than confidently natural.

The striking omission in *Cahiers* discussion of *Johnny Guitar* is the film's unusual depiction of women. First, this Western goes against generic norms by making the central conflict, with its culmination in a shoot-out, a battle between two female characters: Vienna, played by Joan Crawford, and Emma Small, played by Mercedes McCambridge. Vienna represents the film's positive values: progress, the refusal of violence and love; Emma, motivated by sexual jealousy and fear of change, represents prejudice, immobilism and hatred. True to the melodramatic binaries of the genre, good and evil are clearly incarnated and a fight to the death announced early in the plot:

Emma: I'm going to kill you.

Vienna: I know – unless I kill you first.

Rather than the familiar idealisation/demonisation of women as a sex, here a narrative struggle between two sets of human values is simply enacted between two female characters. Moreover, Vienna is a highly

unusual heroine in terms of 1950's gender norms. Crawford (born 1904) was very close to fifty when the film was shot. Truffaut notes with fascination her strong, chiselled features, finding her to be 'unreal, the ghost of her former self. [...] a face of steel [...] becoming more virile with age' (Truffaut 1955b), but his review pursues no further Crawford (Vienna)'s interesting fusion of gender identities. The narrative agency that traditionally belongs to cowboy heroes is hers throughout, as we have seen. Her active function in the film is emphasised in the opening scenes by her slim, mobile body dressed in 'masculine' black trousers and shirt, her strong face framed by short black hair: she is a much more dynamic, controlling figure than the big, loose-limbed Johnny with his softer contours and neutral-coloured clothing. She first appears at the top of the saloon stairs, her authority and poise signified by a series of up-shots that frame her as she surveys and dominates the scene. Vienna represents a cluster of heroic virtues that are normally those of a male hero: autonomy (she loves Johnny, but has built herself a very successful life without him), a pioneering spirit, integrity, physical and moral courage. But at the same time, the masculinity of Vienna's dress is always inflected by, for example, the small brightly coloured neckties she wears, and her big dark eyes, pale skin and scarlet lips are intensely feminine. Her sexual allure is confirmed by Johnny's passionate love for her, and by the desire she provokes in the film's second handsome cowboy Dancin' Kid (Scott Brady), whose preference for Vienna is the cause of Emma's jealousy. In her attempt to protect Turkey, the youngest and weakest of the Kid's gang of outlaws, Vienna also shows maternal tenderness. It is the fact that Vienna is very much a woman that disturbs Emma's lynch-mob of local farmers and makes them reluctant to use violence: hiding Turkey, Vienna receives them in a long white dress, seated at her piano, and her effective performance of femininity almost succeeds in throwing them off the scent. Crawford certainly manifests what Laura Mulvey famously termed 'to-be-looked-at-ness', but it is far from that sexually objectified allure that conventionally holds the spectator's gaze: she fascinates through her very visible combination of extreme femininity and 'masculine' power.

Johnny Guitar demonstrates the *Cahiers* critics' pre-determined reading of all films as male stories, even where this is a reductive interpretation, and their refusal, in the name of auteurism, to acknowledge a film's social or political relevance. The reactionary herd-like violence of the farmers and their fear of change surely resonated with McCarthyism for contemporary American spectators, and the film's strikingly unusual representation of relations between the sexes raises questions about

1950's orthodoxy on gender roles, but these are simply passed over. Similarly, in reviews of what is perhaps Ray's most celebrated film, *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), *Cahiers* remains indifferent to the depiction of inter-generational conflict, although for American critics this is essentially what makes the film interesting. For *Variety* the film is a 'melodrama of unhappy youth' (*Variety* 1955), for the *New York Times* 'a violent, brutal and disturbing picture of modern teenagers' (*New York Times* 1955). For Truffaut, it is – like all Ray's films – a story about the hero's 'moral solitude' (Truffaut 1956b); for Rohmer too the teenage hero (James Dean) and heroine (Natalie Wood) belong more to the 'common genealogy' of all Ray's characters than to a specific era. Rivette's 1953 comment on Ray's cinema summed up the *Cahiers* position: 'the world hardly interferes at all, or if it does, it is only to harm (the hero). Salvation is a private affair' (Rivette 1985b: 105).

But in this film, surely, salvation is far from a private or an ahistorical affair. The main protagonists are three teenage victims of parental inadequacy or neglect, who struggle to develop viable identities and codes for living despite the impoverishment of the models offered by most adults. Set in contemporary America, the film makes it clear that gender is central to identity, and suggests that gender roles have become confused and distorted. Jim Stark (the James Dean character) longs for his father to provide him with an example of masculine strength and integrity, but Mr Stark's gentle, compliant, domesticated mode of fathering totally fails to meet his needs. Jim wants to know how to be a man in a world where his peers define masculinity in terms of violence and dangerous games of rivalry, but the film makes it clear he will find no answers from a father-figure clad in an apron, literally on his knees before his wife as he picks up the tray of breakfast he dropped on his way to her bedroom. Judy's father is embarrassed and unconfident faced with her adolescent sexuality, and retreats into what she interprets as a withdrawal of love. Plato (Sal Mineo) has no father at all, and adopts Jim as a surrogate paternal model. In each case the mother is equally if not principally at fault: castratingly bossy and overbearing in the case of Jim's mother, insensitive in that of Judy's, and simply absent in that of Plato.

Contrary to the consistency attributed to *auteurs* by New Wave theory, Ray presents a very different and much more conservative moral vision here than in *Johnny Guitar*: salvation seems to depend on the teenagers rejecting their parents' inadequacies to return to a fairly classical distribution of gender roles. The bodies and body language of the three young protagonists initially suggest a break away from traditional identities:

Dean's sulky, awkward glamour with its undertones of emotional need, Wood's initially cool, hard demeanour and rebelliousness, Plato's openly expressed intensity of feeling for his (male) friend. But the solution the film proposes is a reinstatement of the classically ordered family. Playing out a surrogate family drama in the deserted house to which they flee, pursued both by gangs of their peers and by the police, Jim takes on the role of 'husband' to Judy (who defines satisfactory masculinity for him as 'standing up for what you feel or think, not running away, but also being able to be gentle and sweet') and protective 'father' to Plato; Judy accepts Jim's leadership and 'mothers' Plato; Plato is almost saved by Jim's intervention, though here adult stupidity triumphs and he is shot down by a police bullet. Teenage rebellion reinstates the sense of integrity the adults have lost, and makes this inseparable from a clear and differentiated sense of gender.

Not only does *Rebel Without a Cause* convey a sense of generations radically divided by culture – the music, fashions, fast cars and *angst* of the teenagers are totally foreign and incomprehensible to their parents – but also the film (a huge box-office success in the United States and Europe), without proposing any new answers, dramatises anxious questions about gender roles. What did it mean to be a man in an affluent, civilian post-war world? If women in their idealised roles as domestic goddesses became embittered and emasculating, how should their daughters define femininity? The New Wave critics again responded to the appealing representation of the hero as fragile and solitary, but showed little interest in the film's social significance, or in its representation of the feminine.

Hollywood models and the first New Wave films

If American films, even in the repressively conservative context of the early 1950s, often carry undertones of contestation and of a woman's point of view, this is surely because the appeal to a youth and a female market are central commercial imperatives. In France, defence of the national film industry against both American competition and television led in 1948 to a system of State subsidy. From 1956 this was further developed into support for a specifically French *art* cinema, through the 'advance on profits' that supported the making of films approved on artistic grounds (Sellier 1999: 218). The early films of the New Wave were among the first to benefit from this system, and thus their theoretical indifference to the mass-market was translated into reality: State subsidy freed them, to a considerable extent, from the need to appeal to a

popular audience. Truffaut (*The 400 Blows* [*Les 400 Coups*] 1959; *Shoot the Pianist* [*Tirez sur le pianiste*] 1960), Godard (*Breathless* [*A Bout de souffle*] 1960) and Chabrol (*Handsome Serge* [*Le Beau Serge*] 1958; *The Cousins* [*Les Cousins*] 1959) were, of course, delighted to find that their films did resonate with a wide youth audience and thus made them famous and, to an extent, rich, but they enjoyed an important degree of freedom from commercial pressure in their apprenticeships as film-makers.

Their aim was of course not to reproduce Hollywood cinema, but to make very French, very personal films that alluded, affectionately and respectfully, to the Hollywood cinema that had inspired them, as well as to the French *auteurs* they were willing to claim as their heritage. However, the favourite Hollywood films of the critics-turned-directors, or at least their readings of them, undoubtedly informed their own creative work in a number of ways. The wholly male perspective on the world, the image of masculinity as fragile, solitary and in search of love, the denial of female subjectivity combined with an anxious sense that women may somehow be the stronger sex, are all equally present in *Cahiers* readings of Hollywood and in early New Wave films. Despite the New Wave's romantic wish to free creativity from social determinants, these similarities are in part shared responses to similar social contexts. But they also demonstrate the inevitable and creative intertextuality of film: the films the New Wave had seen and discussed formed part of the texture of their own cinematic vision. In terms of gender, New Wave films show the influence of Hollywood models – though both the extreme cinematic self-awareness that characterises the New Wave, and the difference between French and US attitudes to sexuality meant that these films, with their international impact, would also represent a new take on gender and sexuality that would in turn influence subsequent US film. The relationship was indeed one of dialogue.

The differences between individual New Wave directors and films are, of course, as important as their similarities, but certain common patterns do make for a family resemblance. Early New Wave films tell the story of a brittle, uncertain male hero, seeking a mode of survival and self-realisation in a world he fails to understand. Physically, with the partial exception of the muscular, handsome Jean-Paul Belmondo, the male stars of the New Wave were more James Dean than James Stewart: often small (Charles Aznavour in *Pianist*), with irregular if appealing features (Belmondo, Gérard Blain in *The Cousins*) and an air of self-absorption, vulnerability and uncertainty rather than the dependable strength of the traditional hero (all of them). As with Ray's heroes, their outsider status is often confirmed by a narrative move that places them on the wrong side

of the law (*The 400 Blows*, *Breathless*, *Pianist*). Father figures, potential models of how to be a man, tend – as in Ray’s films – to reveal a disappointing lack of strength or moral authority (the father in *The 400 Blows*, Lars Schmeel in *Pianist*). This representation of masculinity as dislocated from traditional models, in search of itself, is interesting in an era of strongly marked gender, and the unexpected box-office success of the films suggests a degree of audience recognition. In the New Wave films, the idea that masculinity is constructed rather than inborn is emphasised by the films’ self-reflexive nature: the Belmondo character in *Breathless* models himself on Humphrey Bogart, Truffaut’s Charlie/Edouard (Aznavour) in *Pianist* imagines properly masculine courtship moves but fails to enact them.

To these heroes adrift in an alien world, women appear at once desirable and alarming. The women’s perspective is rarely given or evoked: women are seen from the outside as contradictory and mysterious or, in Beauvoirian terminology, ‘other’. From the seductive, heartless mother in *The 400 Blows* to the finally duplicitous Patricia in *Breathless*, from the unfaithful Florence in *The Cousins* to the women who love and yet destroy Charlie in *Pianist*, New Wave films represent women as intensely desirable but dangerous to men. There are none of the *Johnny Guitar*-style reversals of narrative role, nor even *Rear Window* implications of an alternative, feminine way of viewing – aspects of Hollywood that failed to interest the New Wave directors in their days as *Cahiers* critics. Desire for a woman, or women, is central to all the early New Wave narratives, but desire on the whole proves fatal to the male hero (*Pianist*, *Breathless*, *Handsome Serge*, *The Cousins*) and its female object is punished if not by death (*Pianist*) then by being finally identified with the film’s negative values (*Breathless*, *Handsome Serge*, *The Cousins*). In Chabrol’s first films, androcentrism borders on misogyny: Marie and Yvonne in *Handsome Serge* and Florence in *The Cousins* are the passive and unresisting objects of the male protagonists’ dehumanising idealisation (Charles in *The Cousins*) or their sadistic sexism (Serge in *Handsome Serge*, Paul in *The Cousins*), and the films provide no basis for a counter-perspective.

And yet, in the dialogue with Hollywood that saw the New Wave, in turn, open up new possibilities for American cinema in the 1960s, the representation of sexual relations between men and women would play a crucial role. First, both the New Wave’s limited budgets and their determination to innovate meant that instead of established female stars they introduced new, young actresses to the screen, and in their search for a new, intimate realism filmed them with a close attention that attenuated the uniquely male focus of their stories. The strong, characterful

faces and acting styles of Jean Seberg (*Breathless*), Marie Dubois (*Pianist*), then Jeanne Moreau (Truffaut's *Jules et Jim* 1962) and Anna Karina (Godard's *It's My Life/Vivre sa vie* 1962) bring to the portrayal of women an implication of complex subjectivity that the film's narratives decline to explore. From the point of view of a female spectator, whatever the final narrative fate of the women these actresses play, the on-screen representation of desiring, demanding and credibly modern women was potentially enabling. New Wave directors themselves, to varying extents, developed the exploration of female subjectivity in their subsequent careers,¹² and French New Wave cinema was an acknowledged influence in the American cinema of the 1960s with its uncertain heroes and insubordinate heroines (for example Faye Dunaway in *Bonnie and Clyde* [Arthur Penn 1967], Jane Fonda in *Klute* [Alan J. Pakula 1971]).

Secondly, French culture is, historically, less puritanical than American, and the United States was at its most repressively censorious in the early 1950s. It is symptomatic that Roger Vadim's 1956 *And God Created Woman*, with its famous opening nude scene of Bardot, caused only minor scandal in France, but thoroughly shocked the United States and had to be heavily cut before being licensed for public showing. Reviews of the film focused, despite the heavy censorship, on the 'spectacular display' and the camera's 'brazen ogling' of Bardot's body (*New York Times* 1957). Similarly, *Breathless*, in France, was initially received as an interesting ethnological study of contemporary boy-girl relationships (Sellier 2005: 51), but not as particularly erotic, whereas the *New York Times* saw it as 'a pile-up of gross indecencies' and 'concerned mainly with eroticism' (*New York Times* 1961). In a relatively liberal climate, then, and aiming at a close, realistic depiction of relationships, the New Wave directors demonstrated the possibility of filming sex differently, and opened up the erotic as a domain that could be explored and imagined in a candid and guilt-free way, potentially by women as well as men. The famous long sequence in the bedroom in *Breathless* may, as Sellier argues, privilege Michel (Belmondo)'s desire (Sellier 1999: 222–223), but with its use of 'real time' it also portrays an interplay of conversation and silence, conflict and tenderness, play and passion between the couple that has some of the complexity and awkwardness of lived experience. The pleasure and intimacy of sex, for both partners, are also well and closely rendered in Truffaut's *Shoot the Pianist*, in both comic mode (the scene between Charlie and Clarisse) and lyrically tender mode (the overlapping fades of the sequence where Charlie and Lena spend their first night together). A more explicit, less codified way of filming sex could of course – and did – lead to greater objectification

of the female body, but the New Wave's greater sexual realism also made it more possible, in the 1960s and after, to explore on screen how sex felt, and what it meant for both sexes.

Conclusion

Cahiers criticism was a discourse that assumed its era's male-for-universal perspective on the world, and read Hollywood films accordingly. But the liking of the future New Wave directors for films that featured a flawed, vulnerable, self-questioning model of masculinity foregrounded one of the most interesting aspects of 1950's Hollywood, and later carried this into their own, very different films. Their blindness to the often interesting ways that women were depicted in mass-market Hollywood films, whether misogynist or proto-feminist, translated into an unconscious androcentrism and 'othering' of women in their own films. But the New Wave's concern to produce an original, poetic and fine-textured realism, combined with the relatively liberal French attitude to the erotic, produced some innovative representations of sexual relations that were potentially enabling for women as well as men. These, in turn, would feed into future Hollywood cinema, and indeed into world cinema as a whole.

Notes

1. Eighty per cent of women surveyed in 1944 would have chosen to keep their jobs (French 1978: xvii).
2. See also Geneviève Sellier, *La Nouvelle Vague. Un cinéma au masculin singulier* (Sellier 2005: 12).
3. In 1955, 43 per cent of cinema-goers in Paris were between the ages of 15 and 24. The same age-group accounted for only 17 per cent of library book borrowing (de Baecque 1998: 71).
4. Clearly, there were differences of approach between the individuals writing for *Cahiers*, as becomes apparent below. But it is no misrepresentation of the journal to write of a collective *Cahiers* discourse of auteurism, admiration for Hollywood, and rejection of 'sociological' cinema.
5. From *Cahiers du Cinéma* (Truffaut 1957).
6. From *Arts* (Truffaut 1956a). Truffaut's regular reviews for *Arts* expressed the same philosophy of film as his work for *Cahiers du Cinéma*.
7. Sellier's concern with the sexual politics of film makes her more or less a lone voice in film studies within France. A series of articles on the gender politics of the New Wave in the 1990s and early 2000s culminated in her book *La Nouvelle Vague. Un cinéma au masculin singulier* (see Sellier 2005: fn. 7).
8. The adjective I have translated as 'prudish' is 'Marie-Chantalisesantes'.

9. The review is of *La Pointe Courte*.
10. The film was also reviewed by Truffaut, Godard, Rohmer and Rivette.
11. See Modleski (2005) for interesting readings of the sexual politics of Hitchcock's cinema, including the idea that different (and gendered) modes of spectatorship are represented on-screen.
12. I am thinking particularly of Godard and Truffaut, for example the former's *Tout va bien* (1972) and the latter's *Adèle H* (1975).

Bibliography

- Amengual, Barthélemy 1955, 'Des conditions de l'érotisme au théâtre et au cinéma', *Cahiers du Cinéma* 46, April.
- Chabrol, Claude 1955, 'Les Choses sérieuses', *Cahiers* 46, April.
- de Baecque, Antoine 1998, *La Nouvelle Vague: portrait d'une jeunesse*, Flammarion, Paris.
- de Givray, Claude 1957, 'Nouveau traité de Bardot . . . suivi du petit A.B.B.Cédaire', *Cahiers du Cinéma* 71, May.
- French, Brandon 1978, *On the Verge of Revolt: Women in American Films of the Fifties*, Frederick Unger, New York.
- Friedan, Betty 1963, *The Feminine Mystique*, Penguin, Harmondsworth.
- Giroud, Françoise 1958, *La Nouvelle Vague, portraits de la jeunesse*, Gallimard, Paris.
- Godard, Jean-Luc 1957, *Cahiers du Cinéma* 71, May.
- 1985, *Cahiers du Cinéma* 79, January 1958, in Jim Hillier, *Cahiers du Cinéma Vol. I, The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, p. 18.
- Izod, John 1988, *Hollywood and the Box Office*, Columbia University Press, New York.
- Kast, Pierre 1955, 'Thousand and Three', *Cahiers* 54, Christmas.
- Kramer, Peter 2000, 'Post-classical Hollywood', in John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson (eds), *American Cinema and Hollywood: Critical Approaches*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 63–83.
- Modleski, Tania 2005 (first published 1988), *The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory*, Routledge, Abingdon and New York.
- Moulet, Luc 1960, *Cahiers du Cinéma* 104, February.
- New York Times* 1954, 28 May.
- New York Times* 1955, 27 October.
- New York Times* 1957, 22 October.
- New York Times* 1961, 8 February.
- Raynaud, Annette 1955, Review of *La Pointe Courte*, *Cahiers* 53, December 1955.
- Rivette, Jacques 1955, *Cahiers du Cinéma* 54, Christmas.
- 1985a, 'Notes on a Revolution', *Cahiers* 54, Christmas 1955, in Jim Hillier, *Cahiers du Cinéma Vol. I, The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, p. 94.
- 1985b, 'On Imagination', *Cahiers* 27, October 1953, in Jim Hillier, *Cahiers du Cinéma Vol. I, The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, pp. 104–106.
- Rohmer, Eric 1956, *Cahiers du Cinéma* 59, May, p. 33.

- 1985, 'Rediscovering America', *Cahiers* 54, Christmas 1955, in Jim Hillier, *Cahiers du Cinéma Vol. I, The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, p. 88.
- Sellier, Geneviève 1999, 'Images de femmes dans le cinéma de la Nouvelle Vague', *CLIO, Histoire, Femmes et Sociétés*, 10, pp. 216–232.
- 2005, *La Nouvelle Vague. Un cinéma au masculin singulier*, CNRS Editions, Paris.
- Truffaut, François 1955a, *Cahiers du Cinéma* 46, April.
- 1955b, 'Johnny Guitar', *Arts*, 23 February.
- 1956a, *Arts*, 5 December.
- 1956b, 'La Fureur de vivre' (Rebel Without a Cause), *Arts*, 4 April.
- 1957, *Arts*, 15 May.
- 1985, under the pseudonym Robert Lachenay, 'A Wonderful Certainty', *Cahiers* 46, April 1955, in Jim Hillier, *Cahiers du Cinéma Vol. I, The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, p. 107.
- Variety* 1954, 5 May.
- Variety* 1955, 26 October.

Filmography

- And God Created Woman (Et Dieu créa la femme)*, Roger Vadim, France, 1956.
- Bonnie and Clyde*, Arthur Penn, US, 1967.
- Breathless (A Bout de souffle)*, Jean-Luc Godard, France, 1960.
- Cousins, The (Les Cousins)*, Claude Chabrol, France, 1959.
- East of Eden*, Elia Kazan, US, 1955.
- 400 Blows, The (Les 400 Coups)*, François Truffaut, France, 1959.
- Handsome Serge (Le Beau Serge)*, Claude Chabrol, France, 1958.
- Imitation of Life*, Douglas Sirk, US, 1959.
- It's My Life (Vivre sa vie)*, Jean-Luc Godard, France, 1962.
- Johnny Guitar*, Nicholas Ray, US, 1954.
- Klute*, Alan J. Pakula, US, 1971.
- Jules et Jim*, François Truffaut, France, 1962.
- La Pointe Courte*, Agnès Varda, France, 1956.
- No Sun in Venice (Sait-on jamais?)*, Roger Vadim, France, 1957.
- On the Waterfront*, Elia Kazan, US, 1954.
- Rear Window*, Alfred Hitchcock, US, 1954.
- Rebel Without a Cause*, Nicholas Ray, US, 1955.
- Shoot the Pianist (Tirez sur le pianiste)*, François Truffaut, France, 1960.
- Wild One, The*, László Benedek, US, 1953.

10

A Fistful of *Yojimbo*: Appropriation and Dialogue in Japanese Cinema

Rachael Hutchinson

There are many ways to read the relationship between a film and its remake: in terms of fidelity, imitation, plagiarism, appropriation, or other enactments of power. For the most part, such models rely on a binary system to analyse the relationship between two films in isolation from their surroundings. In this chapter I wish to examine such a relationship in terms of a wider model of understanding, based on possibilities of dialogue with a wider film genre. The case study will be the relationship between Akira Kurosawa's film *Yojimbo* (*Yōjimbō* 1961) and Sergio Leone's remake, *A Fistful of Dollars* (*Per un Pugno di Dollari* 1964).¹ The two films themselves are very well known. Akira Kurosawa (1910–1998) made *Yojimbo* because he had always wanted to make a movie in the Western genre after the style of John Ford, whose movies he had seen as a child. Sergio Leone (1929–1989) was electrified by *Yojimbo* and made his own version starring Clint Eastwood, a relative unknown. Both films broke box-office records, inspired sequels and made huge stars of their main actors, Toshirō Mifune and Eastwood. As we shall see later in this chapter, Leone's film has been credited with single-handedly creating a new genre in European cinema, the 'Spaghetti Western'. Taken individually, these films had a massive impact on the Japanese and Italian film industries respectively. Both have been critically examined in terms of this impact, but, surprisingly, they are hardly ever discussed in relation to each other. When they are, critics focus on the fact that although Leone's film was extremely close to Kurosawa's, he failed to credit Kurosawa on the screen titles, giving rise to charges of plagiarism (Galbraith 2001: 311); or, alternately, to analyses that compare the scripts to see how different Leone's film was from the original (Frayling 1998: 148–150). The main approaches to the films so far have thus taken the form of 'fidelity discourse'.