



# Modernism as a Misnomer

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*Gabriel Rockhill*

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## Godard's Archeology of the Image

*Gabriel Rockhill*

Villanova University

“En un mot, pour que toute modernité soit digne de devenir antiquité, il faut que la beauté mystérieuse que la vie humaine y met involontairement en ait été extraite.

C'est à cette tâche que s'applique particulièrement M. G.”

- Charles Baudelaire

### Myths of Cinematic Modernity

The standard historical image of Jean-Luc Godard is that of a resolute iconoclast breaking with the representational norms and codes of classical cinema in the name of liberating film from the deadening weight of its past. His numerous formal innovations—syncopated montage, unconventional framing, unique experiments with dialogue, etc.—along with his abandonment of traditional narrative and character development, his playful pastiche of genres, his debunking of the representational illusions of cinematic realism, his reflexive preoccupation with film itself and the general dissolution of the distinction between high and low art have created a potent new form of cinema that continues to have far-reaching effects. More experimental than Truffaut, more temerarious than Chabrol, but less fastidious than Resnais, less obtuse and prolix than Rivette, Godard is seen as the bumptious *enfant terrible* of the *Cahiers du cinéma* who set the agenda for a new era of modernist filmmaking.

Godard has partially reinforced this interpretation of his work by cultivating an image as the quintessential eccentric. Like Cocteau before him and Warhol contemporaneously, his life is clearly one of his privileged works of art, and the interlacing of life and work is itself a theme that traverses his corpus, foregrounded most explicitly in films like *Contempt* (1963) and *Passion* (1982).<sup>1</sup> His signatory dark glasses and requisite blazer, as

well as his propensity for philosophic vagaries, impromptu citations and polemical contestations, usually in a nimbus of contemplative smoke, helped project a mysterious aura of eccentricity over his work from the very beginning.<sup>2</sup> This social image of the new iconoclast has been fostered as well by his propitious location in film history and the way in which his work has been framed by the narrative of cinematic modernity. As an identifiable and marketable member of the French New Wave, Godard's singular project has generally been understood as a driving force behind the modernist turn in film history, that is to say the supposed break with classical filmic representation and realism in the name of reflexive, intransitive, expressive and experimental modes of filmmaking.<sup>3</sup> If Orson Welles and the Italian neo-realists are usually seen as predecessors in this development, Godard and his innovative compatriots are commonly understood as having made a distinctively French contribution to modernist film by deepening the break with tradition. The emergence of what is called modern cinema is, moreover, founded on an analogy with the supposed appearance of "modernism" in art and literature. In spite of a minor change in chronological scale, a binary, epochal model of history is deployed in both cases, which purports to sum up the totality of aesthetic practices in terms of two distinct conceptual categories: a few centuries of artistic history—structured by the shift from a classical era of representation and realism to the anti-mimeticism of the modern period—are played out in a single century of film.<sup>4</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that Godard's work has become a prototype of cinematic modernity in the same way that Baudelaire and Manet, for instance, are identified with literary and artistic modernism.

This historical logic is, however, faulty in a number of ways. To begin with, it imposes a detrimental filter on the historical record. In the case of film, it excludes or conveniently sets aside the innumerable avant-garde experiments of the 1910s and 1920s, which include, if we limit ourselves to the case of France (leaving aside German Expressionism, the Soviet montage movement and other important developments), a long list of illustrious names: Abel Gance, Marcel L'Herbier, Jean Epstein, René Clair, Germaine Dulac, Fernand Léger, Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray, Luis Buñuel, Jean Vigo, etc. The films made by these directors were usually much more experimental than anything to be found in the mid-century movements commonly identified with cinematic modernism (Italian Neo-Realism, the French New Wave and New German Cinema).<sup>5</sup> Secondly, this logic of history is largely premised on imposing principles of epochal coherence. In the case of the New Wave, this means separating the historical wheat from the chaff in such a way that what remains represents a unified artistic movement with a set of identifiable characteristics.<sup>6</sup> One of the most widespread tendencies in this regard is to sideline most or all of the Left Bank filmmakers (Resnais, Marker, Demy and Varda, among others) and unaligned exceptions like the mercurial Louis Malle (or figures like Rouch, Melville, Astruc or Vadim) in favor of the Right Bank cinephiles united

around the *Cahiers du cinéma* (Godard, Truffaut, Chabrol, Rohmer, Rivette, etc.).<sup>7</sup> Thirdly, this logic of history is commonly based on an internal account of historical development that presupposes that the evolution of the film industry is ultimately driven by artistic impulses, and that all material, institutional, technological, sociological, economic and political changes are secondary to the true “soul” of film history.<sup>8</sup>

In a longer and more detailed discussion of the New Wave, it would be necessary to systematically dismantle this logic of history. For our current concerns, let it suffice to say that the historical frame used to situate Godard’s project tends to determine the hermeneutic constructs that are deployed in interpreting his films as radical breaks with the past. It is the goal of this article to show that this historical and hermeneutic apparatus has cast a long shadow over what is arguably Godard’s most fundamental *modus operandi*. Rather than turning his back on tradition by abolishing classical conventions in the name of the liberating forces of modernist experimentation, Godard’s work, from the very beginning, repeatedly engages with the past and attempts to articulate a novel relationship to it. In fact, in many ways, it is more past-oriented than future-oriented, or rather it assumes that a true step forward is only possible through a unique step backward. And he is by no means alone in such an undertaking. Other supposedly modernist filmmakers of his generation, such as Chris Marker and Alain Resnais, are equally preoccupied with our connection to history, although their approaches differ in significant ways from Godard’s. Furthermore, some of the canonical figures of what is rather hastily called literary modernism, such as Charles Baudelaire and T. S. Eliot, were no less interested, as we will see, in reworking the bonds that tie us to tradition rather than simply jettisoning what has come before. In fact, it is tempting to assert that if the vague and misleading term “modernism” has any coherent meaning, it actually refers to the elaboration of a new relationship to history.<sup>9</sup> However, for the purposes of the present article, I will restrict myself to the claim that modernism, understood as a thoroughgoing breach with tradition, is a misnomer when it is used to refer to Godard and a constellation of artists who are less concerned with innovative liberation from past conventions than with the formulation of new modes of engaging with and relating to the past.<sup>10</sup>

The emergence of the position referred to as the *auteur* policy is a case in point. There have been many failed attempts at defining exactly what was intended by this policy, precisely because it is assumed that it amounts to a series of operative principles or consistent features of filmmaking.<sup>11</sup> However, one of the fundamental goals of the practice labeled the “*auteur* policy” is to socially elevate film to the status of great art by setting select filmmakers on the same footing as canonical artists, writers or thinkers.<sup>12</sup> It is primarily a matter of establishing a cinematic pantheon comparable to the literary and artistic canon so that film can have its own glorious past and

present made up of the heroic figures of the field.<sup>13</sup> Some of these figures might have certain features in common (a distinct *œuvre*, an identifiable personal style, a set of recurrent themes, etc.), but what is most important is that they have *something distinct*—whatever it is, and in spite of the fact that others might share it or not—that elevates them as artistic geniuses. Godard himself has not only made extensive use of various strategies of social valorization, but he has also explicitly recognized the shared objective of situating film in the grand history of the arts: “We won the day in having it acknowledged in principle that a film by Hitchcock, for example, is as important as a book by Aragon. Film *auteurs*, thanks to us, have finally entered the history of art.”<sup>14</sup>

This strategy of the artistic elevation of film by interlacing it with the history of the arts is not unrelated to a second feature of filmmakers identified with the New Wave. In one of Godard’s most illuminating statements, he asserts, regarding his generation of filmmakers: “We were born in the museum.”<sup>15</sup> In an earlier interview, he explained more explicitly what he meant by this: “We were the first directors to know that Griffith exists. Even Carné, Delluc and René Clair, when they made their first films, had no real critical or historical background. Even Renoir had very little.”<sup>16</sup> The important role of the *Cinémathèque*, ciné-clubs and film journals in the formation of the New Wave (particularly the Right Bank) has been well documented. Godard himself has been extremely lucid regarding the impact of this critical and historical training on the practice of filmmaking. To cite one of his most poignant claims, he wrote in an homage to Henri Langlois, the co-founder of the *Cinémathèque française*: “One immediately discerns the type of revolution that can be brought about in the aesthetic of moving pictures by this new vision of their historicity.”<sup>17</sup> He here identifies, very explicitly, the vast changes in the aesthetics of cinema with a new relationship to the history of filmic images. He seems to be referring to the impact of the development of what T.S. Eliot had called, in 1919, the “historical sense,” which “involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence.”<sup>18</sup> We will return to Eliot later.

## Rebel in Search of a Lost Cause: The Case of Breathless

“Voyez comment Eisenstein retourne aux sources de son art, et dites-moi si le destin du cinéma moderne ne se pose pas dans les mêmes termes qu’il se posa aux partisans attardés du romantisme. Oui, *sur des penseurs nouveaux, faisons des vers antiques.*”

- Jean-Luc Godard

In the opening credit sequence of Nicholas Ray’s *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), Jim Stark, played by James Dean, stumbles to the foreground of the wide, Cinemascope image and lays down to play with a miniature toy

monkey. After winding it up and childishly watching it march and clap its cymbals, he paternally makes a bed for it out of assorted litter and puts it to sleep under a blanket of wrinkled paper. This brief moment not only provides immediate insight into Dean's character, but it also foreshadows the entire story to come: young Jim's paternal drive to 'be a man,' induced in part by a pathetically weak father figure, leads him to adopt Plato as a younger sibling/child whom he can protect (like he wishes he was protected). In fact, Plato acts as a direct visual stand-in for Jim's toy, as is clear from the latter's attempt to give Plato his jacket in the police station moments after the opening sequence, a gesture that Plato would finally accept seconds before his death at the end of the film, when Jim would put him to rest—like his cherished toy that had run out of energy—by zipping up his jacket for the cold beyond. Jim's own father surprisingly repeats this gesture by putting his jacket over his son's shoulders in an inaugural act signaling his desire to protect his child from the gratuitous cruelty of the world.

Jean-Luc Godard is a child of a different nature, although it could be argued that his cinematic father was none other than Nicholas Ray.<sup>19</sup> In contrast to Jim Stark's paternal protectiveness of his playthings, he has a destructive impulse, which is ultimately more metaphysical than sadistic. The comparison between the two immediately calls to mind Charles Baudelaire's description of the difference between the children who play with their toys—at least for a time—and the impatient youngsters who want to see the souls of their playthings immediately:

The overriding desire of most children is to get at and *see the soul* of their toys, some at the end of a certain period of use, others *straightaway*. It is on the more or less swift invasion of this desire that depends the length of life of a toy. I do not find it in me to blame this infantile mania; it is a first metaphysical tendency.<sup>20</sup>

Like those children who impulsively demand to see the soul straightaway, Godard wants to dismantle his cherished playthings to find out what makes them tick. It is perhaps for this reason that when he puts a similar toy monkey in his first feature-length film, he has his main character playfully hang it from a cord. Instead of being a childishly paternal rebel who is supposedly "without a cause," Godard is a rebel *in search of a cause*, in pursuit of the invisible source that animates things. His "genius," as Baudelaire claims for genius in general, is a matter of voluntarily rediscovering childhood in all of its simplicity, but childhood bequeathed with a means of expression and analysis. His privileged plaything is itself presciently described by Baudelaire in the same essay, a coincidence that Godard would surely interpret as having its origin in the mysterious but true depths of destiny. For Baudelaire describes one of the technological ancestors to cinema in his reflection on children's toys, one of the originary but lost causes of film: the Phénakistoscope.

The destructive aspect of Godard's filmmaking, his conscious dismantling of various tropes and tendencies, is indeed—in the words of Baudelaire—the sign of a metaphysical disposition. For his destructive strategies are ultimately aimed at discovering the essence of film itself, or the promise of its essence, in order to recompose its forms—or rewrite its history—in such a way that it is more in harmony with its essential promise.<sup>21</sup> It is Godard's *passion* for cinema that drives him to destroy its material manifestations in search of its inner soul and its vital elements so as to remake it as if from the very beginning.<sup>22</sup> If he wants to commence anew, it is by bringing film back to its origin and archeologically rediscovering the very discovery of cinema. He recognizes, of course, that the original moments of film are forever lost to us and that we cannot return to the era of Lumière and Méliès, or the age of Eisenstein and Vertov. However, the promise of film itself at its inception and at each moment of its rebirth, is still alive, and it is *à la recherche* of this lost cause of cinema that Godard purports to discover the true power of film. This is what allows him to perhaps create something new, or rather new ways of actualizing the potential of film's lost cause.<sup>23</sup>

This aspect of Godard's work has not been lost on his most astute interpreters. André S. Labarthe suggested in his noteworthy article on *A Woman Is a Woman* in 1961 that the history of film might be nothing short of the tireless attempt to return to the originary source of moving images, and he recognized that Godard's contribution to "modern cinema" actually amounted to a rediscovery of the pure and primitive state of film.<sup>24</sup> This is not to suggest, of course, that Godard is simply a nostalgic who wants to turn back the clock. He recognizes that this is ultimately impossible and that he is, in the words of Serge Daney, "doomed to the present," "crucified between what he can no longer do and what he cannot yet do."<sup>25</sup> Labarthe already suggested this in the concluding line of his article on *A Woman Is a Woman*: "Godard is Lumière in 1961."<sup>26</sup> Just as the return to the past as it was in itself is recognized as impossible, so is the goal of a revolutionary leap into an absolutely novel future. In one of the rare and most piercing critiques of the image of Godard as an avant-garde iconoclast, Daney firmly asserted: "There is nothing revolutionary about Godard, rather, he is more interested in radical reformism, because reformism concerns the present."<sup>27</sup> The renewal of film is not based on a rupture with the past or present, but rather on a new articulation of the present's relationship to a past that is no longer accessible, but whose promise continues to haunt us (thereby preparing for a possible future). Properly speaking, this *new* articulation is in fact a re-articulation insofar as Godard is renewing certain gestures to be found in what is called "modern" art and literature. In an extremely insightful analysis, Raymond Bellour has returned to Daney's cogent description of "Godard's paradox" and compared it to the way in which Stéphane Mallarmé's "*crise de vers* (crisis of verse)" foregrounded the unique character of the "*grand vers de toujours* (great verse of alltime)," the alexandrine, which

is essential to the idea of literary creation: “Mallarmé thus succeeded in revitalizing literature by taking off from the tradition he overturned, but continued to desire [*Mallarmé renouvelle ainsi la littérature à partir de sa tradition qu’il bouleverse, mais continue à désirer*]. In similar fashion, Godard, the strictly contemporary filmmaker ‘dedicated to the present,’ as Daney says, continually positions himself in relation to cinema’s past.”<sup>28</sup>

We will return shortly to the question of Godard’s relationship to “literary modernism.” For the time being, I would like to focus on a specific and poignant example: Godard’s first feature-length film, *Breathless* (1960). Widely acclaimed as a key contribution to the French New Wave, if not as a turning point in film history or a veritable watershed separating the classical era from modern cinema, I can think of no better example to use in taking on the myth of Godard’s iconoclastic modernism. In so doing, it is important to note straightaway that I will not be making the trenchant claim that there is simply nothing new in Godard’s films. Instead, I will be arguing that what is perceived as new is largely the result of the articulation of a novel relationship to the past. It is helpful, in this regard, to begin by recalling Godard’s own description of the historical context in which he undertook *Breathless* (*A bout de souffle*):

*A bout de souffle* was the sort of film where anything goes: that was what it was all about. Anything people did could be integrated in the film. As a matter of fact, this was my starting-point. I said to myself: we have already had Bresson, we have just had *Hiroshima*, a certain kind of cinema has just drawn to a close, maybe ended, so let’s add the finishing touch, let’s show that anything goes. What I wanted was to take a conventional story and remake, but differently, everything the cinema had done. I also wanted to give the feeling that the techniques of film-making had just been discovered or experienced for the first time. The iris-in showed that one could return to the cinema’s sources; the dissolve appeared, just once, as though it had just been invented. If I used no other processes, this was in reaction against a certain kind of film-making; but it should not be made a rule.<sup>29</sup>

The conventional story of the film was originally inspired by the newsworthy case of Michel Portail, who had killed a motorcycle cop in a stolen Ford Mercury in 1952, after having led a rambunctious life in the film milieu with his American girlfriend. Originally written by François Truffaut, and adapted by Godard, the broad lines of the screenplay are by no means out of the ordinary: a car thief, Michel Poiccard, returns to Paris after shooting a motorcycle cop in order to pick up his American girlfriend, Patricia, and flee to Rome. In Godard’s linear rendering of the story, the characters play an essential role, and he would in fact later claim that the film became in part a character study of Jean-Paul Belmondo. The latter’s persona in *Breathless* is indeed a partial stand-in for Godard’s unbridled



passion (for cinema), his version of Truffaut's Antoine Doinel. Michel Poiccard has had such a fervent love affair with American film noir that he desires to take it *jusqu'au bout* and live it more fully than itself. It is as if he wants to step up on the screen to take the place of the hesitant and benign Bart in *Gun Crazy* (1950) in order to play the role of the man that his *femme fatale*, Annie, is in search of: "I want a guy with spirit and guts, a guy who can laugh at anything, who will do anything, a guy who can kick over the traces and win the world for me."<sup>30</sup> Borrowing the obligatory suit and fedora of film noir as well as the personal ticks and cool self-assurance of Bogart, he steals American cars, chain smokes and doggedly pursues an American girl who will prove to be his very own *femme fatale*. His salty slang, calm but playful effrontery and relative indifference to the *forces de l'ordre* recall his passion for a select group of French films, like Melville's *Bob the Gambler* (1956), just as his *jusqu'au-boutisme* appears to have been inherited from his compatriot Jean Gabin in films like *Port of Shadows* (1938) and *Daybreak* (1939). Indeed, his goal might be Rome, Rossellini's *Open City*, but his destiny is to die in the streets of Paris in an ironic twist of fate at the hands of an American *femme fatale*: Patricia Franchini. His leading lady is less the hybrid result of cinematic cross-fertilization than a purebred reincarnation, for she walks straight out of Otto Preminger's *Bonjour tristesse* (1958) as the capricious young American girl whose unresolved Oedipal complex has kept her attractively indifferent to her French suitors. Cecile, as Jean Seberg was named in Preminger's film, had clearly suffered from pangs of conscience after her father's fiancée, Anne, tragically committed suicide in the South of France. Feeling partially responsible for her death due to her manipulative plans to break off her father's engagement, the role Seberg plays in *Breathless* can easily be seen as Cecile "three years later."<sup>31</sup> Having turned her back in some measure on the frivolous pastimes of her decadent youth while nonetheless still being attracted to ruthless opportunists and fearless womanizers of the likes of her father, she seems to have taken to heart Anne's motherly advice concerning the importance of educating herself and becoming an independent woman. All said and done, whether they are direct reincarnations from film's recent history or hybrids produced out of a complex combination of cinematic traits from the past, Godard's characters in this film are quite literally woven out of the fabric of film history.

Godard did not simply aim at making a new film out of past films. He also wanted to bring cinema back to its originary role. In the words of André S. Labarthe: "At base, the function that Godard recognizes for the cinema is at once simpler and more fundamental. The cinema is essentially documentary."<sup>32</sup> *Breathless* bears the marks of this desire and is partially driven by a pursuit of the reality of contemporary life, as illustrated in part by Godard's decision to shoot outside in real conditions, with characters devoid of the stylized language and actions of the *tradition de qualité*: "When we began making films... Historically, it was done reactively, as a certain

naturalism; it was in reaction to the way in which films and especially dialogues were being made.”<sup>33</sup> This commitment to the documentary style of the early years of cinema, brilliantly resuscitated by Rossellini and others, is perhaps best summed up by Michel’s provocatively insolent quip, addressed directly to the spectator: “If you don’t like the sea, if you don’t like mountains, if you don’t like the city, screw off [*allez vous faire foutre!*]”<sup>34</sup> Godard’s realism is not, however, limited to his dedication to the documentary power of film, as if he were simply trying to apply the theories of André Bazin. He also aims at using the power of cinema to exaggerate certain characteristics of contemporary life in order to make his films, in a certain sense, more real than reality. Annie Goldmann has analyzed this aspect of his early work, arguing that the ironic exaggeration of the themes of solitude, incommunicability and discontinuity give a heightened sense of the overwhelming characteristics of life in contemporary consumer society, dominated as it is by passivity, the withdrawal into private life, the mindless pursuit of wealth, etc.<sup>35</sup> The conversation woven together out of advertizing slogans in *Pierrot le fou* (1965) is one of the best examples of such an intensified realism, but it is also found in *Breathless* when, for instance, Michel and Patricia talk over one another while walking in circles (one after the other) in a staged “discussion” regarding the complications of communication and love. In one of his early essays, Godard praised realism for taking nature as its model in an interesting comparison between 18<sup>th</sup> century art and contemporary film. However, he insists that this does not amount to the arbitrary imitation of nature but is a matter of correcting, *à la Delacroix*, “the reality of that perspective in which the eye takes too much pleasure not to want to falsify it [*la réalité de cette perspective que notre œil se plaît trop de ne point fausser*].”<sup>36</sup> If Godard is attracted to the documentary aspect of film, he is thus also aware of and keenly interested in the unique power of cinema to produce new points of view on what is real. This is directly related to his desire to show the true reality of film itself, as distinct from the realism artificially produced by the cinematic apparatus. His “realism” is thus inflected in the direction of a hyper-realism in which the reality of film as a mode of representation—as well as an industry—becomes one of his privileged objects. True realism, for Godard, is not simply the attempt to perfectly capture the world as it is. It is the effort to mobilize the true power of the cinematic apparatus to reveal *the reality that film itself is an artifice*. “Realism,” Godard claims, “is in any case never exactly the true, and cinematic realism is necessarily a fake [*Le réalisme, de toute façon, n’est jamais exactement le vrai et celui du cinéma est obligatoirement truqué*].”<sup>37</sup> One of the best early examples, other than Michel’s direct address to the spectator in *Breathless*, is Michelangelo’s visit to the *Cinématographe* in *Les carabiniers* (1963). Godard’s meticulous sound montage and ironic display of his character’s childish search for the source of the cinematic image—pushed to the Godardian extreme of passionate destruction—reveal what film *really is*: a controlled atmosphere of sound and light in which images are projected on

a flat screen for passive spectators to create the illusion of a four-dimensional reality.<sup>38</sup> This is a perfect example of the Brechtian element in Godard's realism: "it mustn't be forgotten that film has to, today more than ever, keep as its rule of conduct this idea of Bertolt Brecht: 'realism is not how true things are but how things truly are [*le réalisme, ce n'est pas comment sont les choses vraies, mais comme sont vraiment les choses*].'"<sup>39</sup> There is a final aspect of Godard's work that should be highlighted in any discussion of his penchant for realism: his "realistic" approach to filmmaking, which can be understood in terms of the pragmatic working rule that he has expressed on numerous occasions: "to do what one *wants* starting from what one *can* do [*faire ce qu'on veut à partir de ce qu'on peut*]."<sup>40</sup> Rather than being a purist or an idealist, Godard recognizes that films are made in part out of creative solutions to unavoidable constraints. One of the best examples in *Breathless* is the contractual obligation to reduce his film from its original length of more than two hours to an hour and a half. This gave birth to what was to become its distinctive stylistic feature, syncopated montage, because Godard and his editor decided to excise a number of small portions from select scenes, creating a jarring effect of acceleration, instead of simply cutting entire scenes.<sup>41</sup>

The use of syncopated montage was, moreover, an opportunity for Godard to rediscover and revitalize the work of great Soviet filmmakers of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century such as Eisenstein. What has largely been recognized as one of the film's most "modern" innovations is thus largely the result of a "realistic" solution to contractual obligations that led Godard to reinvent the montage of the 1920s in much the same way that his use of the iris was an explicit reinvention of a technique perfected by D. W. Griffith that had since disappeared (and would be resuscitated by Truffaut as well).<sup>42</sup> It is important to remember, moreover, that the frenetic sequences with "modern" syncopated montage are juxtaposed, throughout the film, with a series of lengthy scenes shot with extreme long takes, sometimes accompanied by meandering tracking shots. Notably inspired by Otto Preminger in films like *Fallen Angel* (1945), Godard is once again rediscovering the power of cinema by capitalizing on an earlier moment in film history. He is very explicit about this in his own writings, and he admits that "Our first films were purely *films de cinéphiles*—the work of film enthusiasts. ... I thought in terms of purely cinematographic attitudes. I filmed certain shots in relationship to others that I knew from Preminger, Cukor, etc."<sup>43</sup> Indeed the overall structure of *Breathless* is based on a juxtaposition between two filmic styles from the past and is in part the story of the unlikely historical encounter between Eisenstein and Preminger, or more generally between Soviet montage and the postwar realism of maestros such as Rossellini, Preminger or Joseph H. Lewis in *Gun Crazy*.<sup>44</sup> In fact, the central historical encounter that is silently staged in *Breathless* is the meeting between the powerful images of the silent era, whose loss has so often been mourned by Godard,<sup>45</sup> and the vital images of the sound era such

as extreme long takes and seemingly endless tracking shots in moments of meandering conversation.<sup>46</sup> This unlikely encounter, this historical *montage* of silent film and talkies in the revival of high points of the cinematic past, is also visually manifest in the juxtaposition of the extended conversation scenes (most notably in Patricia's apartment) and the exaggerated silent grimaces that punctuate the film. It is worth noting, finally, that Godard's revisitation of filmic history is inscribed in a larger attempt to cull from the past the essential elements of cinema. The voiceless grimaces are an interesting case in point, for they quietly index one of the originary features of film, ironically described by Jean-Paul Belmondo in Godard's earlier short film, *Charlotte et son Jules*, which clearly juxtaposes the *furor loquendi* of the talkie (Jean) with the taciturn gestures of the silent age (Charlotte): "What is cinema? A big head making faces [*en train de faire des grimaces*] in a little room. You have to be a dumb bastard to like that! [*Il faut être con pour aimer ça!*]" This exclamation is duly answered by Godard's grimacing lead character in the opening shot of *Breathless* (also played by Belmondo), thereby weaving his films together as historical intertexts: "After all, I'm a dumb bastard... [*Après tout, je suis con...*]."

These are among the more discreet references to film history in *Breathless*. The more explicit ones infuse the entire picture with resuscitated moments of cinema's past and present. There are, to begin with, direct references to films, ranging from posters and photographs (Humphrey Bogart in *The Harder They Fall*, 1956 and Aldrich's *Ten Seconds to Hell*, 1959) to the film Michel and Patricia see (*Westbound*, 1959) or the fragment of the sound track from Preminger's *Whirlpool* (1949) that is overheard as Patricia is trying to shake the police. More subtle references for the initiated include Jean Rouch's *Moi, un noir* (1958), which is indexed by the scene of the car accident staged by none other than Jacques Rivette and Jean Douchet. Michel's use of the pseudonym Laszlo Kovacs is equally discrete in referring to the name of Belmondo's character in Claude Chabrol's *Leda* (1959), and the same is true of the passing mention of Michel's friend "Bob," surely none other than Bob the gambler in Melville's film, or the mention of "Toni from Marseille" that evokes Renoir's *Toni* (1934). There are also numerous references to the world of film, including Michel's ironic refusal to buy the *Cahiers du cinéma* and his claim that he had worked in *Cinecittà*, the casting of director Jean-Pierre Melville for the part of Parvulesco, or Godard's prolonged Hitchcockian cameo in the form of an ironic Good Samaritan who denounces Michel to the police.

Film, according to the promotional strategies of the *auteur* policy, has its natural place in the long and glorious history of the arts. Godard's references to Bogart, Melville and an innumerable series of films, which I only began to enumerate in the previous paragraph, are intertwined with a seemingly endless chain of references to the work of artists of the likes of Picasso, Klee, Renoir, Mozart and Aragon.<sup>47</sup> The music ranges from Martial

Solal's jazz soundtrack to Bach and Mozart. William Faulkner is cited as well as Louis Aragon, Apollinaire's *Alcools* and Maurice Sachs' *Abracadabra*<sup>48</sup>. A reproduction of one of Picasso's engravings from the 1933-35 period is hanging in Patricia's room as well as a poster of Pierre-Auguste Renoir's *Mlle. Irène Cahen d'Anvers* (1880). Not all of these references are used in the same way, and it would be necessary in a more detailed study to consider the various ways in which they are evoked.<sup>49</sup> For our current purposes, I would simply like to underscore the intertwining of film and art history in the last two examples cited. The reference to Picasso's engraving of a child with a mask and its juxtaposition with Jean Seberg's repeated gesture of covering her face with her hands appears to index an artistic precursor to Preminger's Balzac-length study of Seberg's physiognomy in *Bonjour Tristesse*, recycled by Godard in *Breathless* (Michel Marie has counted 58 close-ups of Patricia's face, making up 1/5<sup>th</sup> of the film).<sup>50</sup> It is as if to say that Seberg's sly and youthful cinematic visage knew an earlier instantiation in the art world as the shorthaired child with a mask. This same puerile countenance is further juxtaposed with Renoir's painting of *Irène*, suggesting that the image of this beauty dates back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, if not earlier (perhaps to Joan of Arc, Seberg's first major role).<sup>51</sup> This extension is further supported by an underlying but silent pretext for comparison, which is fully in line with Godard's aesthetic and historical logic (in which "There is no chance, chance is organized"): Pierre-Auguste Renoir was the father of Jean Renoir, the great master of French realism who notably made *The Rules of the Game* (1939), a film centered on the adventurous attempts to win the love of Christine, a blond shorthaired foreigner with a pristine countenance.<sup>52</sup> All said and done, Godard's *Breathless*, far from trying to cut with the past in the name of experimental innovation, is a film that seeks to rediscover the essential power of cinema by returning to its origins and revisiting crucial moments in the history of film and the arts.

## Modernism as a Misnomer

"We dwell with satisfaction upon the poet's difference from his predecessors, especially his immediate predecessors [...]. Whereas if we approach a poet without this prejudice we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously."

- T.S. Eliot

"Classique = Moderne"

- English professor in Godard's *Band of Outsiders*

In his essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," T.S. Eliot deplors the tendency to use the term "tradition" disparagingly as well as the correlative penchant for praising what is most novel and singular in a poet's work. If we are able to overcome this prejudice, he argues, "we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously."<sup>53</sup> Individuality and tradition, instead of being opposites, are intimately intertwined. According to Godard's explicit appropriation of Eliot in *Band of Outsiders* (1964): "All that is new is, by that fact, automatically traditional." Properly understood, tradition for Eliot is not simply the inherited weight of the past that we are doomed to carry forward (or try to jettison in favor of new horizons). It is the result of great labor and the cultivation of "historical sense":

The historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional.<sup>54</sup>

Eliot's description of historical sense is not simply an appeal to a mode of poetic production that is historically informed and oriented, it is also a performative manifestation of the very principle behind such production. For these lines are themselves written as if on a palimpsest in which the past and the present, the timeless and the temporal, are superimposed. The author of *The Waste Land* quietly conjures the words of a dead poet who had formulated a historical theory of the beautiful and poignantly described the contradictory intertwining of the timeless and the temporal in the work of the modern artist, who "makes it his business to extract from fashion whatever element it may contain of poetry within history, to distil the eternal from the transitory."<sup>55</sup>

This is one of the descriptions that Charles Baudelaire provides in the opening paragraph of section IV of his famous essay on "The Painter of Modern Life." According to this depiction, the artist of modernity obeys the same double imperative that Eliot later unearths for the modern poet. On the one hand, Baudelaire claims that the modern artist, unlike the *pur flâneur*, has "an aim more general, something other than the fugitive pleasure of circumstance."<sup>56</sup> In Eliot's language, he becomes a poet with historical sense rather than a dilettante who callowly fetishizes novelty and innovation. On the other hand, the author of *The Flowers of Evil* equally condemns those who become so attached to the past that they forget the present:

Woe to him who studies the antique for anything else but pure art, logic and general method! By steeping himself too thoroughly in it,

he will lose all memory of the present; he will renounce the rights and privileges offered by circumstance—for almost all our originality comes from the seal which Time imprints on our sensations.<sup>57</sup>

Eliot similarly lampoons the deferential attitude of those who would make tradition into a model to be blindly repeated. In yet another apparent paraphrase of Baudelaire's "rational and historical theory of beauty," he writes of the poet: "He must be quite aware of the obvious fact that art never improves, but that the material of art is never quite the same."<sup>58</sup> Modernity, understood according to the dual imperative outlined by Baudelaire and performatively appropriated by Eliot, is not a rejection of the past in the name of the new. It is the recognition of the historicity of art and the attempt to propose a novel configuration of the relationship between the present and the past, the temporal and the atemporal, that avoids enthroning one at the expense of the other. In the case of Baudelaire, this amounts to recognizing that:

Beauty is always and inevitably of a double composition [...] Beauty is made up of an eternal, invariable element, whose quantity it is excessively difficult to determine, and of a relative, circumstantial element, which will be, if you like, whether severally or all at once, the age, its fashions, its morals, its emotions. Without this second element, [...] the first element would be beyond our powers of digestion or appreciation, neither adapted nor suitable to human nature.<sup>59</sup>

This historical theory of the beautiful and the valorization of the unique splendor of circumstance is explicitly opposed to "general beauty, as it is expressed by classical poets and artists."<sup>60</sup> In rejecting the emptiness of abstract beauty and insisting on the historicity of aesthetics, Baudelaire is obviously not suggesting that the modern artist simply abandons the past. On the contrary, the modern artist is distinguished from the classical artist insofar as the former fully embraces the historicity of art and the specificity of both the past and the present.<sup>61</sup> The interest in the splendor of fleeting circumstance is not a preoccupation with the fugitive for its own sake (as is the case with the *pur flâneur*) but rather an interest in what comes to pass in the circumstantial that is older than time itself: the eternal. The modern artist aims at reproducing the contradictory nature of the beautiful by seizing the timeless in the transitory, the poetic in the historical, the immemorial past in the fleeting present.

Toward the end of the opening paragraph of section IV of Baudelaire's essay, there is another definition of modernity that contradicts the first with remarkable precision: "By 'modernity' I mean the ephemeral [*le transitoire*], the fugitive [*le fugitif*], the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal [*l'éternel*] and the immutable."<sup>62</sup> The terminology that he uses is

identical to the vocabulary employed at the beginning of the same paragraph to distinguish the modern artist's attempt to grasp the eternal (*l'éternel*) in the transitory (*le transitoire*) from the *fugitive* (*fugitif*) pleasure of circumstance identified with the *pur flâneur*. Rather than being opposed to the fugitive and transitory nature of contingent circumstances as the search for the immutable, modernity is very precisely identified with it. It is unclear exactly how these two claims relate to one another, and it seems that Eliot himself was keenly aware of this complication insofar as he states that historical sense is *both* "a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal" *and* a sense "of the timeless and of the temporal *together*."<sup>63</sup> In any case, it is clear that Baudelaire is not advocating a conception of modernity as a complete break with the past aimed at wiping the slate clean, as Paul De Man has famously argued.<sup>64</sup> In fact, even the embrace of the fleeting beauty of the present moment is inscribed within a historical continuity since the depiction of the reality of present life produces a historical archive of the quotidian, and the modern painter thereby joins ranks with the historians of the commonplace. Baudelaire's contradictory claims regarding modernity seem indeed to be the conflictual result of the modern painter's opposition to the classical artist as well as to the *pur flâneur*. Unlike the former, who is dominated by the archetypal forms of the past, the modern painter seeks to engage with the present moment in and of itself. As opposed to the *pur flâneur*, however, the modern artist searches for the timeless in the temporal, the poetic in the historical. Depending on the point of reference, Baudelaire fluctuates between two apparently incompatible positions: modernity is identified with the fleeting present in comparison with the ideals of classical art, but it is defined as the search for the eternal in the transitory when related to the point of view of the *pur flâneur*.

Baudelaire appears to contradict himself a second time, at least in part, when he declares that "all good and true draughtsmen draw from the image imprinted on their brains, and not from nature [*et non d'après la nature*]," in spite of the fact that he had written on the previous page that Monsieur G., the quintessential painter of modern life, worked "under the direction of nature [*dirigé par la nature*]."<sup>65</sup> Unlike the earlier painters who modeled their work on the masterpieces of the past, the modern painter begins with the reality of nature, according to Baudelaire, and the fugitive material forms of the times, which represent the spiritual elements from which they derive. The modern painter thus begins from present reality instead of from the institutionalized forms of the past. At the same time, however, Baudelaire describes the importance of starting from the image in one's brain by contrasting this image with the anarchical equality of the real:

An artist with a perfect sense of form but one accustomed to relying above all on his memory and his imagination will find himself at the mercy of a riot of details all clamouring for justice with the fury of a mob in love with absolute equality. All justice is



trampled under foot; all harmony sacrificed and destroyed; many a trifle assumes vast proportions; many a triviality usurps the attention. The more our artist turns an impartial eye on detail, the greater is the state of anarchy.<sup>66</sup>

He seems to be saying that the artist must be directed by the fleeting and circumstantial status of nature, but that it is necessary, at the same time, to search for that which transcends the circumstantial, for a higher order only to be found in the mind. This, it appears, is the contradictory imperative of the modern artist: to be at once inspired by the reality of nature and fleeting circumstance *and* to search for what is timeless within it. This two-sided imperative ultimately has its roots, for Baudelaire, in the contradictory nature of human beings: “The duality of art is a fatal consequence of the duality of man. Consider, if you will, the eternally subsisting portion as the soul of art, and the variable element as its body”<sup>67</sup>

We are not far from Godard’s aesthetic practice. It would be very tempting, in fact, and entirely in line with Godard’s own repudiation of the notion of chance in history—a repudiation according to which the timeless reveals itself in the temporal, destiny in circumstance—to interpret Baudelaire’s description of Monsieur G. in 1860 as a prophetic portrait, exactly a century in advance, of an “imaginary artist” who would reveal himself to be none other than Monsieur Godard in 1960, with the release of *Breathless*.<sup>68</sup> Consider, to begin with, the closing lines of Baudelaire’s text, where he describes Monsieur G. as a historian creating a precious archive of the commonplace and the familiar:

Monsieur G. retains a remarkable excellence which is all his own; he has deliberately fulfilled a function which other artists have scorned and which it needed above all a man of the world to fulfill. He has everywhere sought after the fugitive, fleeting beauty of present-day life, the distinguishing character of that quality which, with the reader’s kind permission, we have called ‘modernity.’<sup>69</sup>

As he had explained earlier, in his description of “The Sketch of Manners,” the capturing of passing beauty requires the type of rapid execution that Godard was so fond of: “in trivial life, in the daily metamorphosis of external things, there is a rapidity of movement which calls for an equal speed of execution from the artist.”<sup>70</sup> In the list of techniques allowing the artist to seize the frenetic movement of modern life (pastels, etching, aquatint, lithography), it is difficult for the contemporary reader not to anticipate a reference to film. And, of course, Godard would later claim that Baudelaire had described the cinema prior to its existence.<sup>71</sup> However, it is essential to recognize that Monsieur G. is not only “under the direction of nature and the tyranny of circumstance.”<sup>72</sup> In fact, his primary task is described as follows: “for any ‘modernity’ to be worthy of one day taking its place as ‘antiquity,’ it is necessary for the mysterious beauty which human

life accidentally puts into it to be distilled from it [*pour que toute modernité soit digne de devenir antiquité, il faut que la beauté mystérieuse que la vie humaine y met involontairement en ait été extraite*]. And it is to this task that Monsieur G. particularly addresses himself.<sup>73</sup> It is extremely pertinent in this regard that in an article defending classical construction or storyboarding (*découpage*), Godard himself appeals directly to Baudelaire's distinction between the temporal and the eternal:

Consider, rather, with Diderot, that morality and perspective are the two qualities essential to the artist, and that Baudelaire is saying the same thing when he says that beauty is composed of an eternal, invariable element whose quantity is extremely difficult to determine, and a relative element which might be, either by turns or all at once, period, fashion, moral, passion.<sup>74</sup>

It is this task of finding the antique and the invariable in the fleeting moments of present reality that I have aimed at bringing to the foreground in Godard's work. Rather than being an iconoclastic modernist intent on breaking with all of the conventions of the past in order to invent an absolutely novel form of cinema, Godard is a filmmaker invested in returning to the originary power of the cinematic apparatus and revisiting the history of film in order to rearticulate its relationship to its own past. As part of a generation that was 'born in the archive' and as a participant in a movement intent on elevating film and its history to the status of great art, Godard recognized that the new historicity of the image would transform cinematic practice, and he placed himself at the forefront of this transformation. In situating his historical orientation in relationship to the work of Baudelaire and Eliot, it was by no means my intention to unduly identify Godard with Constantin Guys (the original Monsieur G.) or, for that matter, Baudelaire's historical theory of the beautiful with Eliot's thesis on tradition and individual talent. A longer study would be able to detail the nuances that distinguish their various positions.<sup>75</sup> However, certain elements in their work form a remarkable constellation that should encourage us to rethink the historical logic operative in the various narratives of modernity and the hermeneutic systems they tend to produce. If these three artists share something, it is not what is commonly called "modernity." It is the contradictory double imperative of embracing the immediacy of the fleeting present while at the same time searching to formulate its relationship to invariable constants that transcend the here and now, like past moments that *do not pass*. It is for this reason, rather than a belief in any form of destinal history or the supposed mystical underpinnings of chance events, that it makes sense to establish parallels between the so-called literary modernism of Baudelaire and Eliot, and what is rather hastily referred to as cinematic modernity in Godard. I will therefore conclude with a final description of Monsieur G. that perfectly sums up the double imperative of the "modern" artist imagined by Baudelaire 100 years prior to the release of *Breathless*:

Thus two elements are to be discerned in Monsieur G.'s execution: the first, an intense effort of memory that evokes and calls back to life—a memory that says to everything, 'Arise, Lazarus'; and second, a fire, an intoxication of the pencil or the brush [or the camera], amounting almost to a frenzy [*dans l'exécution de M. G. se montrent deux choses: l'une, une contention de mémoire résurrectionniste, évocatrice, une mémoire qui dit à chaque chose: 'Lazare, lève-toi!'; l'autre, un feu, une ivresse de crayon, de pinceau, ressemblant presque à une fureur*]. It is the fear of not going fast enough, of letting the phantom escape before the synthesis has been extracted and pinned down; it is that terrible fear which takes possession of all great artists and gives them such a passionate desire to become masters of every means of expression so that the orders of the brain may never be perverted by the hesitations of the hand.<sup>76</sup>

I can think of no better description of Godard's undertaking in his first feature-length film, which attests at one and the same time to a frenzy of execution in a feverish attempt to capture the reality of the present *and* an "intense effort of memory" aimed at resuscitating the lost moments of filmic history and re-actualizing the potential of the past through a bold and forceful declaration, echoing the voices of Eliot and Baudelaire: *Arise Lazarus!*

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<sup>1</sup> In her book *L'élite artiste: Excellence et singularité en régime démocratique*. (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 2005), Nathalie Heinich has provided an interesting account of the historicity of the social imaginary that has produced the persona of the excentric artist in what she calls the "vocational" regime of art (see 279-301).

<sup>2</sup> See Michel Marie's description of the exceptional promotional campaign behind *Breathless* and everything it did for Godard's infamous reputation: *Comprendre Godard: Travelling avant sur A bout de souffle et Le Mépris*. (Paris: Armand Colin, 2006), 139-150.

<sup>3</sup> On the labelling and marketing of the New Wave by the French 5<sup>th</sup> Republic, see Claude Chabrol's keen remarks in *Et pourtant je tourne*. (Paris: Editions Robert Laffont, S.A., 1976), 135.

<sup>4</sup> I have discussed this issue in greater detail in "L'histoire politique des images," in *Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari et le politique*, ed. Manola Antonioli, Pierre-Antoine Chardel and Hervé Regnaud. (Paris: Editions du Sandre, 2006), 197-207.

<sup>5</sup> In the interview "Comment peut-on être moderne?" André S. Labarthe recalls the extent to which the *Cahiers du cinéma* was hostile or indifferent to experimental and underground cinema (*La nouvelle vague*, ed. Antoine de Baecque and Charles Tesson. [Paris, Cahiers du cinéma, 1999], 10). See also Steve Neale, "Art Cinema as Institution," *The European Cinema Reader*, ed. Catherine Fowler. (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 103-20.

<sup>6</sup> In his book, *The Classic French Cinema: 1930-1960* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), Colin Crisp has provided insightful and well-documented arguments in favor of a more nuanced understanding of classic French cinema and against the perception of

the New Wave as a simple break the past. It is worth noting, in passing, that taking such arguments into account does not require the establishment of a “continuist” history in which there is a single thread of continuity uniting all of the French films made over a thirty-year period (or more).

<sup>7</sup> It is interesting to note that the Right Bank directors, at least in their early years, were notoriously apolitical or conservative (particularly when compared to the Left Bank). See, for instance, Robert Benayoun’s invective against them in “The King Is Naked,” in *The New Wave*, ed. Peter Graham. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1968), 157-80.

<sup>8</sup> Rather than simply being the result of artistic impulses or a single material determinant, the “New Wave”—understood as an identifiable constellation of cinematic practices rather than an epoch, a school or a unified movement—is surely the product of a unique conjuncture of determinants, ranging from the actions of various social agents (producers, directors, actors, etc.) to a myriad of economic, social, cultural, political, industrial, technological and demographic factors. On the various material determinants, see Colin Crisp, *The Classic French Cinema*; Steve Neale, “Art Cinema as Institution”; T. Jefferson Kline, “The French New Wave” in *European Cinema*, ed. Elizabeth Ezra. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 157-75; Richard Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave Cinema*. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2002); Michel Marie, *The French New Wave: An Artistic School*, trans. Richard Neupert. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2003); Alan Williams, *Republic of Images: A History of French Filmmaking*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992).

<sup>9</sup> Jacques Rancière has provided one of the most compelling and insightful analyses of the way in which “modern art,” as it is inappropriately called, institutes a new regime for relating to the past. “The aesthetic regime of the arts,” Rancière writes, in referring to the dominant artistic framework of the last two centuries, “is first of all a new regime for relating to the past” (*The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. and ed. Gabriel Rockhill. [London: Continuum Books, 2004], 25).

<sup>10</sup> In a revealing definition of the New Wave, Godard articulated this problematic in terms of the nostalgia for a type of film that was no longer possible: “The Nouvelle Vague, in fact, may be defined in part by this new relationship between fiction and reality, as well as through nostalgic regret for a cinema which no longer exists. When we were at last able to make films, we could no longer make the kind of films which had made us want to make films. The dream of the Nouvelle Vague - which will never come about - is to make *Spartacus* in Hollywood on a ten million dollar budget” (*Godard on Godard*, trans. and ed. Tom Milne. [New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1986], 192).

<sup>11</sup> Those who have attempted to establish a fixed doctrine inevitably run into a list of notable exceptions. For instance, one of the most common principles is that filmmakers write or should write their own films. However, to take but the most notable exception, Resnais never wrote any of his films. Another common principle is based on the identification of literary adaptations as anathema. Yet, there were enough adaptations by New Wave directors to lead Robert Benayoun to the following conclusion: “The Nouvelle Vague eventually undertook many literary adaptations and gave up the criterion of the ‘complete author’” (“The King Is Naked,” 168).

<sup>12</sup> On the issue of the social elevation of film and its historical relationship to similar earlier attempts in the arts, see Nathalie Heinich’s article “Godard, créateur de statut” in *Godard et le métier d’artiste: Actes du Colloque de Cerisy*, eds. Gilles Delavaud, Jean-Pierre Esquenazi and Marie-Françoise Grange. Paris: L’Harmattan, 2001, 305-13.

<sup>13</sup> In her book *Cinéma et société moderne: Le cinéma de 1958 à 1968* (Paris: Editions Anthropos, 1971), Annie Goldmann identifies the true interest of the New Wave with the artistic promotion of film and the new ambition to “make cinema something equivalent to literature or painting”

(16). Of course, the politics of authorship is also a marketing strategy, as Steve Neale reminds the reader in his article “Art Cinema as Institution”: “The name of the author can function as a ‘brand name’” (119).

<sup>14</sup> *Godard on Godard*, 147. Also see *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, ed. Alain Bergala. (Paris: Editions de l’Etoile, Cahiers du cinéma, 1985), 16. This work is subsequently referred to as *JLG par JLG*.

<sup>15</sup> Jean-Luc Godard and Youssef Ishaghpour, *Cinema: The Archeology of Film and the Memory of a Century*, trans. John Howe. (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2005), 70; *Archéologie du cinéma et mémoire du siècle* (Tours: Farrago, 2000), 56 (translation slightly modified).

<sup>16</sup> *Godard on Godard*, 172. This new relationship to the archive of film history recalls the important role played by the various institutions for archiving the past (libraries, the modern museum, the modern university system, etc.) in the formation of movements like Romanticism. On this issue, see the work of Theodore Ziolkowski: *Clio the Romantic Muse: Historicizing the Faculties in Germany* (Ithaca et Londres: Cornell University Press, 2004) and *German Romanticism and its Institutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

<sup>17</sup> *Godard on Godard*, 236; *JLG par JLG*, 282 (translation modified).

<sup>18</sup> *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*. (London: Methuen & Co. LTD., 1953), 49.

<sup>19</sup> Godard was fond of identifying Nicholas Ray with cinema itself (see, for instance, *JLG par JLG*, 96 and 119).

<sup>20</sup> *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. Jonathan Mayne. (London: Phaidon Press Ltd, 1964), 202; *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 1, ed. Claude Pichois. (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1975), 587.

<sup>21</sup> Godard’s infatuation with anagrams can serve as a microscopic exemplar of this macroscopic tendency in his work: words are broken down into their component parts (as images or sounds) in order to be recomposed in such a way as to reveal the promise of something essential that is hidden within them.

<sup>22</sup> Raymond Bellour has sagaciously observed: “And so, Godard destroyed the image. He did so, of course, out of the excessive love he bears it—as if anyone could, still or ever, go to the movies for the first time—but it’s also in proportion to the aura he lends the image” (“(Not) Just an Other Filmmaker,” in *Jean-Luc Godard: Son + Image 1974-1991*, ed. Raymond Bellour with Mary Lea Bandy. [New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1992], 217).

<sup>23</sup> See *JLG par JLG*, 316.

<sup>24</sup> See “Comment peut-on être moderne?” and “*Une femme est une femme* de Jean-Luc Godard,” in *La nouvelle vague*, 5-20 and 100-104.

<sup>25</sup> “The Godard Paradox,” in *For Ever Godard*, ed. Michael Temple, James S. Williams, Michael Witt. (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2004), 71. Charles Baudelaire bore witness to a similar sense of chronological crucifixion: “It is true that the great tradition has been lost, and that the new one is not yet established” (*Art in Paris 1845-1862: Salons and Other Exhibitions*, trans. and ed. Jonathan Mayne. [London: Phaidon Press Ltd, 1965], 116; *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2, ed. Claude Pichois. [Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1976], 493).

<sup>26</sup> “*Une femme est une femme* de Jean-Luc Godard,” 104 (my italics).

<sup>27</sup> “The Godard Paradox,” 71.

- <sup>28</sup> "(Not) Just an Other Filmmaker," 217; *L'entre-images 2: Mots, images*. (Paris: P.O.L. éditeur, 1999), 116.
- <sup>29</sup> *Godard on Godard*, 173; *JLG par JLG*, 218.
- <sup>30</sup> Bart complains, in marked distinction to Michel Poiccard: "It's just that everything's going so fast. It's all in such high gear that sometimes it doesn't feel like me."
- <sup>31</sup> "The character played by Jean Seberg was a continuation of her role in *Bonjour Tristesse*. I could have taken the last shot of Preminger's film and started after dissolving to a title, 'Three Years Later.'" (*Godard on Godard*, 173; *JLG par JLG*, 216-18).
- <sup>32</sup> "*Une femme est une femme* de Jean-Luc Godard," 102.
- <sup>33</sup> Jean-Luc Godard, *Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma*. {Paris: Editions Albatros, 1980}, 65. On the use of language in *Breathless*, see Michel Marie's thesis on the impossibility of communication in "It Really Makes You Sick!" in *French Film: Texts and Contexts*, ed. Susan Hayward and Ginette Vincendeau. (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 158-173.
- <sup>34</sup> On Godard's embrace of realism, see *JLG par JLG*, 82, 218-19, 323.
- <sup>35</sup> See *Cinéma et société moderne*, 62. Goldmann distinguishes, moreover, between *realism*, which provides a representation of the global structure of society, and *naturalism*, characterized by a precise and detailed description of a particular secteur of reality. Based on this distinction, she claims that Godard "is an utterly realist filmmaker" (*Cinéma et société moderne*, 73-4).
- <sup>36</sup> *Godard on Godard*, 27; *JLG par JLG*, 81.
- <sup>37</sup> *Godard on Godard*, 185; *JLG par JLG*, 228 (translation modified).
- <sup>38</sup> It is worth noting in passing that Godard pays homage to two Lumière brothers' films in this short sequence by "rediscovering" them as if for the first time: *Arrival of a Train at a Station* (which he would revisit in *Hélas pour moi*) and *Baby's Breakfast*.
- <sup>39</sup> *JLG par JLG*, 238.
- <sup>40</sup> *Introduction à une véritable histoire*, 30. Godard also claims in this passage and elsewhere that he would have filmed in a studio if he had had the opportunity.
- <sup>41</sup> See *Introduction à une véritable histoire*, 34.
- <sup>42</sup> Michel Marie highlights this aspect of *Breathless* in *The French New Wave*, 92: "This extension [of the traditional length of a sequence] shows no concern for the conventional constraints founded on continuity editing. Those rules had become absurd. Godard breaks them with elation and thus invents modern montage by rediscovering the poetic inventions of the great montage editors of 1920s Soviet cinema."
- <sup>43</sup> *Godard on Godard*, 173; *JLG par JLG*, 216.
- <sup>44</sup> Michel Marie discusses the alternation between ultra-short sequences of an Eisensteinian nature and extremely long sequences inspired by Rossellini in *Comprendre Godard*, 78-9.
- <sup>45</sup> See *JLG par JLG*, 267, 280 and 314.
- <sup>46</sup> Raymond Bellour writes in "(Not) Just An Other Filmmaker," 221: "Godard may well be the only one who, given the complexity of the present media landscape, can manage all three registers at the same time: silent, classical, and modern cinema. He constantly revisits film history, settling on its most tangible forms and modes [...]."

- <sup>47</sup> For a detailed list, see Michel Marie, *Comprendre Godard*; Marc Cerisuelo, *Jean-Luc Godard*. (Paris: Éditions des Quatre-Vents, 1989), 43-58; Richard Brody, *Everything Is Cinema: The Working Life of Jean-Luc Godard*. (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2008), 53-79; and Dudley Andrew, “Breathless: Old as New” in *Breathless*, ed. Dudley Andrew. (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 3-20.
- <sup>48</sup> In replacing the script of *Westbound* by the words of Aragon and Apollinaire, Godard explicitly intertwines literature and cinema.
- <sup>49</sup> Annie Goldmann argues, for instance, that Godard’s references to the classics serve to foreground the ways in which their meaning has been lost in the modern world (*Cinéma et société moderne*, 80).
- <sup>50</sup> *Comprendre Godard*, 126.
- <sup>51</sup> In a classic example of Godard’s referential logic, he has Patricia say that she would like to be named Ingrid, which anecdotally refers to Ingrid Bergman, who had interpreted Joan of Arc prior to Jean Seberg.
- <sup>52</sup> *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard [tome 2 1984-1998]*. (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1998), 21.
- <sup>53</sup> *The Sacred Wood*, 48.
- <sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.
- <sup>55</sup> *The Painter of Modern Life*, 12. The French original reads as follows: “Il s’agit, pour lui, de dégager de la mode ce qu’elle peut contenir de poétique dans l’historique, de tirer l’éternel du transitoire” (*Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2, 694).
- <sup>56</sup> *The Painter of Modern Life*, 12; *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2, 694.
- <sup>57</sup> *The Painter of Modern Life*, 14; *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2, 696. Baudelaire also writes: “This transitory, fugitive element, whose metamorphoses are so rapid, must on no account be despised or dispensed with. By neglecting it, you cannot fail to tumble into the abyss of an abstract and indeterminate beauty, like that of the first woman before the fall of man” (*The Painter of Modern Life*, 13; *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2, 695).
- <sup>58</sup> *The Painter of Modern Life*, 3; *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2, 685; *The Sacred Wood*, 51. It is not my goal here to unduly identify the positions of Eliot and Baudelaire but rather to foreground an important point of convergence. Regarding their differences, it is worth noting, for instance, that Eliot does not insist on the transitory to the same extent as Baudelaire.
- <sup>59</sup> *The Painter of Modern Life*, 3; *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2, 685. Baudelaire also underscores the national and social character of the beautiful: “every age and every people has enjoyed the expression of its own beauty and ethos” (*Art in Paris*, 45; *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2, 419); “since all centuries and all peoples have had their own form of beauty, so inevitably we have ours” (*Art in Paris*, 117; *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2, 493).
- <sup>60</sup> *The Painter of Modern Life*, 1; *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2, 683.
- <sup>61</sup> “The past is interesting not only by reason of the beauty which could be distilled from it by those artists for whom it was the present, but also precisely because it is the past, for its historical value. It is the same with the present” (*The Painter of Modern Life*, 1; *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2, 684).
- <sup>62</sup> *The Painter of Modern Life*, 13; *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2, 695.

- <sup>63</sup> *The Sacred Wood*, 49 (my emphasis). Also see Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire* (London, New York: Verso Books, 1997): “Modernity designates an epoch, and it also denotes the energies which are at work in this epoch to bring it close to antiquity.” (80)
- <sup>64</sup> See *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983): “Modernity exists in the form of a desire to wipe out whatever came earlier, in the hope of reaching at last a point that could be called a true present, a point of origin that marks a new departure.” (148) De Man goes on to inscribe this definition of modernity in a contradictory and irresolvable dialectic between two forces that purportedly drive literary history: the desire to instantaneously wipe the slate clean, and the inevitable temporal inscription of the act of writing, i.e. the impossibility of doing something absolutely novel.
- <sup>65</sup> *The Painter of Modern Life*, 16 and 15; *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2, 698 and 697. This apparent contradiction can perhaps be explained away as a description of Monsieur G.’s early work: “He began by being an observer of life, and only later set himself the task of acquiring the means of expressing it” (*The Painter of Modern Life*, 15; *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2, 697).
- <sup>66</sup> *The Painter of Modern Life*, 16; *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2, 698-9.
- <sup>67</sup> *The Painter of Modern Life*, 3; *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2, 686.
- <sup>68</sup> *The Painter of Modern Life*, 18; *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2, 700. Regarding Godard’s vision of history, which dominates *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1998), see *JLG par JLG*, vol. 2, 21 and 92.
- <sup>69</sup> *The Painter of Modern Life*, 40; *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2, 724.
- <sup>70</sup> *The Painter of Modern Life*, 4; *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2, 686. Richard Brody describes *Breathless* as a form of “action cinema” akin to the already well-known “action painting” of the Abstract Expressionists (*Everything Is Cinema*, 61).
- <sup>71</sup> See *Cinema 56*; *Archéologie du cinéma*, 45.
- <sup>72</sup> *The Painter of Modern Life*, 15; *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2, 697.
- <sup>73</sup> *The Painter of Modern Life*, 13-14; *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2, 695.
- <sup>74</sup> *Godard on Godard*, 26; *JLG par JLG*, 80-1. This is nearly a direct quotation of Baudelaire (see *The Painter of Modern Life*, 3; *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2, 685). In another significant reference to the author of *The Flowers of Evil*, Godard writes: “At the time when I began making films, I thought of cinema in terms of eternity. Now, I really think about it as something ephemeral” (*JLG par JLG*, 313-14).
- <sup>75</sup> To take but two examples, Godard is arguably more interested in the canonical figures and works of the past than Baudelaire, and Eliot focuses more on literary tradition than on the Baudelarian appeal to the eternal.
- <sup>76</sup> *The Painter of Modern Life*, 17; *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2, 699.



