
Cahiers du Cinéma

Cahiers du Cinéma

The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave

Edited by
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Preface and Acknowledgments

When this anthology of selections from *Cahiers du Cinéma* was first discussed, it was planned that each volume should be self-contained and coherent within its own terms, should be representative of the period covered (in this case, some nine years and over a hundred issues of the magazine), should contain largely newly translated material rather than material already easily available in English, should be relevant and useful within contemporary film culture and film education, and should be pleasurable and accessible.

I hope that this somewhat tall order has been filled to a large extent, but some of the requirements have worked against each other. If, for example, work by André Bazin, Jean-Luc Godard and François Truffaut is not as fully represented in the volume as their importance to *Cahiers* would merit, this is because a great deal of their critical work is already available in English (and the same goes for work on Renoir, for example). At the same time, not to have represented Bazin, Godard and Truffaut by important writings would have been quite wrong. As a result, all three are represented here both by some already available material and by some newly translated contributions. In any case, what could being 'representative' of *Cahiers* mean? It could be taken to mean several rather different things: representative of contributions by quantity, or by importance – at the time or in retrospect – or representative of the magazine's broad range of concerns. The volume is, I think, generally representative in most of these ways, but I am conscious that, among other omissions, some *Cahiers* contributors, often with long and important associations with the magazine between 1951 and 1959, are poorly or not at all represented.

I have in mind, for example, Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, represented here only in discussions; Louis Marcorelles (independently minded in his interest in such areas as Polish cinema and New York American cinema); André Martin (specialist in animation and comedy); Claude Beylie (Renoir specialist); François Mars (comedy specialist); Jean Douchet, Philippe

Demonsablon, André-S. Labarthe, Claude de Givray, Jacques Siclier and, from the early years, Jean-José Richer and Michel Dorsday, as well as many others. There is no intention to underestimate the value of their work. In some cases, their work is likely to be included in future volumes; in some other cases, examples of their work are available elsewhere in translation. Appendix 2, a guide to *Cahiers* articles from the period April 1951 to December 1959 in translation, is designed very precisely to extend the necessarily limited scope of this volume, and hence its usefulness, by pointing to other *Cahiers* (and related) material available in English. No definitive listing of such material exists, and our listing, although the best we have been able to achieve, is almost certainly incomplete; we would be grateful for additions and/or corrections from readers.

It has proved difficult to fix upon an appropriate structure for the book, but attempts to organize it by critics, or chronology, or theoretical issues, for example, seemed less successful than the present structure. Certainly, the major categories which provide the book's structure – French cinema, American cinema, Italian cinema, polemics – were meaningful ones (though certainly not the only ones) for *Cahiers* during the 1950s. I have felt this perspective to be generally important in the sense that I have preferred to work broadly within the critical work's own terms rather than constantly to subject it to a critique whose terms belong to much later debates. On the other hand, I have wanted to make it clear in my introductions, particularly my general introduction, what kinds of relationships exist between the work of *Cahiers* in this period and later work in *Cahiers* and elsewhere, and why. In my introductions to each section I have tried to tease out some of the major critical threads and implications in the material as well as to relate it both to other *Cahiers* material and to its influence on contemporary and later work in English (hence the – I hope, productive and suggestive – profusion of footnote references).

A Note on translations

Translation always poses problems about accurate rendition, especially when, as in this case, several different translators are involved and some of the original writing is quite difficult or dense. In particular, I should point out that the French *auteur* is usually, but not always, retained when 'author' would have been the straight translation, and *mise en scène* when 'direction' would have been the likely translation. Both terms have entered critical discussion in English, but *auteur* in particular did not always have the meanings currently attached to it: we have tried to be sensitive to the varying usage of the two terms

Les Cahiers du Cinéma – literally 'Cinema Exercise (or Note) Books' – are of course plural, and should perhaps be referred to as 'they', but we have preferred to refer to *Cahiers* as if in the singular. *Cahiers* is the normal abbreviation used.

Notes and references

All notes are the editor's except where specifically designated as authors' or translators' notes.

A number of books referred to in notes with some frequency are given in abbreviated form in references. Full details are provided under 'Books Frequently Cited in Text', on pp xii–xiii.

Acknowledgments

My principal debts relate less to this particular volume than to the more general perspective which informs it. First, like any teacher, my greatest debts are to my students, over a period of almost fifteen years, at British Film Institute summer schools, at BFI–University of London extra-mural classes, and at Bulmershe College of Higher Education: their puzzlements and excitements, their understandings and insights, constantly renewed, have always been the most vital stimulus. Second, over the past fifteen years or so I have been fortunate to find myself among colleagues whose ideas, interests and enthusiasms have also been constantly stimulating – my colleagues at BFI Education and on BFI summer schools 1969–79, on the editorial board of *Movie* and in the Film and Drama division at Bulmershe College. To all of them, my continuing thanks; the value I place on some of these colleagues should be clear from my references to their work, but I do not place less value on the less visible or available work of the others. Third, very specific thanks to BFI Library Services, whose help is so fundamental to this book as to so many others, and to my editors, Angela Martin and David Wilson. Behroze Gandhi has been both support and stimulus and she, and my children Joachim and Amy, have suffered from time spent with *Cahiers* which should have been spent with them: my thanks and apologies to them.

In my own formation, the late Paddy Whannel – my first film teacher, later a colleague at BFI Education, and a friend – was probably the most important single influence. The vitality of British film culture – publications, education, exhibition – over the last twenty years owes a great deal to Paddy's work and to the spirit in which he undertook it, more than has been generally acknowledged. I miss him, and this book is dedicated to the memory of him and his work.

Chapters 3, 4, 13 and 14, translated by Tom Milne, are reprinted from *Godard on Godard*, ed. Jean Narboni and Tom Milne (© Martin Secker & Warburg, 1972).

Chapter 16, translated by Russell Campbell and Marvin Pister, originally appeared in *Focus on Howard Hawks*, ed. J. McBride (Prentice-Hall and Spectrum Books, 1972). It is adapted from a translation by Adrian Brine which appeared in *Movie*, December 1962.

Chapters 19 and 26, translated by Tom Milne, are reprinted from *Rivette*, ed. J. Rosenbaum (© British Film Institute 1977).

Preface and Acknowledgments

Chapter 31, translated by Peter Graham, is reprinted from *The New Wave*, ed. Peter Graham (© Martin Secker & Warburg, 1968).

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Books Frequently Cited in Text

Abbreviated forms and full bibliographical details

Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol. 1*

Bazin, André, *What is Cinema? Volume 1* (Essays selected and translated by Hugh Gray, foreword by Jean Renoir), Berkeley, University of California Press, 1967; selected from Bazin, *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma? tome 1: Ontologie et langage* and *tome 2: Le Cinéma et les autres arts*, Paris, Editions du Cerf, 1958, 1959.

Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol. 2*

Bazin, André, *What is Cinema? Volume 2* (Essays selected and translated by Hugh Gray, foreword by François Truffaut), Berkeley, University of California Press, 1971; selected from Bazin, *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma? tome 3: Cinéma et sociologie* and *tome 4: Une esthétique de la Réalité: le néo-réalisme*, Paris, Editions du Cerf, 1961, 1962.

Cameron, *Movie Reader*

Cameron, Ian (ed.), *The Movie Reader*, London, November Books; New York, Praeger, 1972.

Caughie, *Theories of Authorship*

Caughie, John (ed.), *Theories of Authorship*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981 (BFI Readers in Film Studies series).

Godard on Godard

Godard, Jean-Luc, *Godard on Godard: Critical Writings by Jean-Luc Godard* (edited by Jean Narboni and Tom Milne, with an introduction by Richard Roud), London, Secker & Warburg; New York, Viking, 1972 (Cinema Two series); originally published as *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, Paris, Editions Pierre Belfond, 1968.

Graham, *New Wave*

Graham, Peter (ed.), *The New Wave* (Critical landmarks selected by Peter Graham), London, Secker & Warburg; New York, Doubleday, 1968 (Cinema One series).

Magny, *Age of the American Novel*

Magny, Claude-Edmonde, *The Age of the American Novel: The Film Aesthetic of Fiction between the Two Wars* (translated by Eleanor Hochman), New York, Frederick Ungar, 1972; originally published as *L'Age du roman américain*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1948.

Books Frequently Cited in Text

Nichols, *Movies and Methods*

Nichols, Bill (ed.), *Movies and Methods: An Anthology*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1976.

Perkins, *Film as Film*

Perkins, V. F., *Film as Film*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1972.

Rohmer and Chabrol, *Hitchcock*

Rohmer, Eric, and Chabrol, Claude, *Hitchcock: The First Forty-Four Films* (translated by Stanley Hochman), New York, Frederick Ungar, 1979; originally published as *Hitchcock*, Paris, Editions Universitaires, 1957.

Sarris, *American Cinema*

Sarris, Andrew, *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions 1929–1968*, New York, E. P. Dutton, 1968.

Screen Reader 1

Screen Reader 1: Cinema/Ideology/Politics, London, Society for Education in Film and Television, 1977.

Truffaut, *Films in My Life*

Truffaut, François, *The Films in My Life* (translated by Leonard Mayhew), New York, Simon & Schuster, 1978; London, Allen Lane, 1980; originally published as *Les Films de ma vie*, Paris, Flammarion, 1975.

Wollen, *Signs and Meaning*

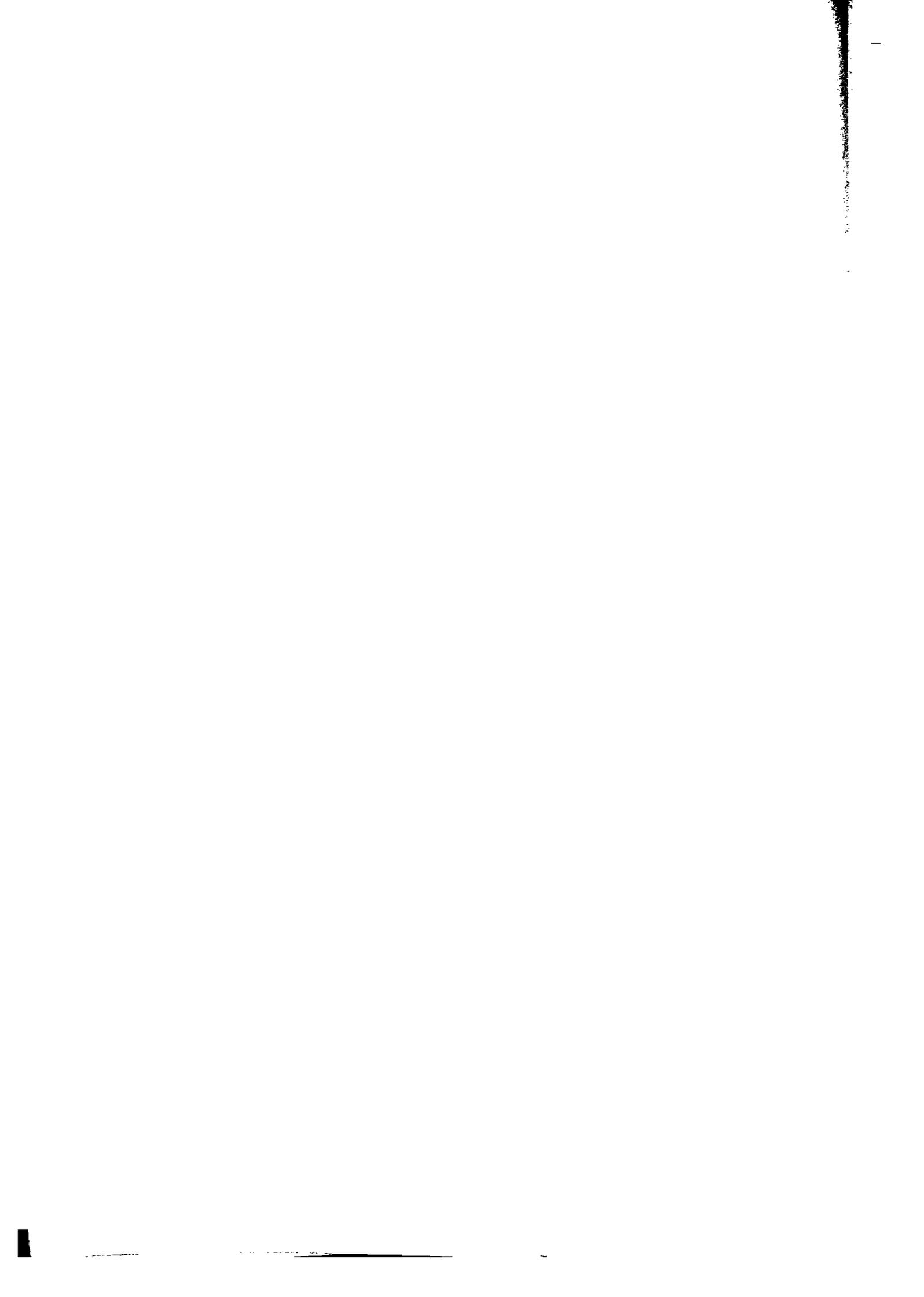
Wollen, Peter, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, London, Secker & Warburg; Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1969; second edition 1972 (Cinema One series).

Wood, *Hitchcock's Films*

Wood, Robin, *Hitchcock's Films*, London, Zwemmer; New York, A. S. Barnes, 1965; second and third editions 1969, 1977.

Wood, *Hawks*

Wood, Robin, *Howard Hawks*, London, Secker & Warburg; New York, Doubleday, 1968; second edition London, British Film Institute, 1981 (originally in the Cinema One series).



Introduction

It is still a pretty widespread, though rather vague, idea that film criticism and theory as we know it today – and even film-making too – owe almost everything to French film criticism in the period since 1945, and particularly to the achievements of the journal *Cahiers du Cinéma*, founded in 1951. Two especially important phases are usually cited: the period of *Cahiers* in the 1950s, which brought forth the films of the *nouvelle vague* and helped set off an important critical debate in Britain and the USA in the late 1950s and early 1960s (effectively the period of *Cahiers* covered by this volume, the first in a planned series of four); and the post-1968 period of theoretical elaboration and politicization of *Cahiers* and subsequently of film theory and criticism in Britain and the USA in the 1970s.¹

Within the narrower focus of 'the systematic elevation of Hollywood movies to the ranks of great art' (but a focus which incorporates the essential critical-theoretical assumptions about authorship and *mise en scène* which characterized *Cahiers* in the 1950s), Thomas Elsaesser noted that 'Legend has it that the feat was accomplished almost single-handed by motivated and volatile intellectuals from Paris sticking their heads together and pulling off a brilliant public relations stunt that came to be known as *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *nouvelle vague*.'² This volume, and the volumes planned to follow, have been designed to make possible a proper examination of that legend, with a view to its modification, while at the same time making clear the real and vital contributions to criticism that *Cahiers* did make.

French film culture and *Cahiers du Cinéma*

Among some common misconceptions is the idea that *Cahiers* was alone in taking American cinema seriously: *Positif*, founded shortly after *Cahiers*, in 1952, for example, also took American cinema seriously, though in a rather different overall perspective.³ But, more important, neither *Cahiers*

nor *Positif* was being particularly radical or original in its interest. The cinema, and the popular culture aspect of it best represented by Hollywood, had long been taken more seriously in France than in Britain, while Britain in turn had often been a good deal more interested than the USA itself: one need think only of the French Surrealists' interest, for example, not only in the 1920s when cinema was more generally a respectable concern for intellectuals,⁴ but also consistently since then (*Positif* itself being an important manifestation of this continuing interest), while John Grierson's writings from the 1920s and 1930s on American cinema⁵ provide a good example of (rather different) British interest.

In the case of *Cahiers* the relationship to historically well-defined ideas and areas of interest is particularly clear. A great deal of André Bazin's important work had been done well before the inception of *Cahiers* in 1951, much of it in a journal that was very specifically the forerunner of *Cahiers*, the *Revue du Cinéma*, which had been published 1929–31 and 1946–9 under the editorship of Jean-George Auriol. In the hundredth issue of *Cahiers* in 1959 Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, looking back, leaves no doubt about the relationship: 'In the minds of the founders of *Cahiers* it was never a matter of anything other than continuing the work undertaken by Jean-George Auriol.'⁶

Even a cursory examination of the contents of the *Revue du Cinéma* reveals a profile strikingly similar to that of the later *Cahiers*. In the 1929–31 period, more or less equal weight was being given to European 'art cinema' and avant-garde film (Pabst and Lang, Eisenstein and Pudovkin, Man Ray, Ruttmann and Buñuel, Dreyer) and American cinema (articles on Stroheim, Chaplin, of course, but also on Laurel and Hardy, Langdon, King Vidor, Hawks, Borzage, Sternberg, Lubitsch, Dwan), alongside discussions of technology and aesthetics (pre-eminently, at this time, the coming of sound, of course) and of historical origins (Méliès, Emile Cohl, for instance). None of which would have seemed at all out of place in *Cahiers* in the 1950s. It is hardly surprising that the similarities should be even greater between *Cahiers* and the *Revue* in its 1946–9 phase, when both externally (*Cahiers* inheriting its familiar 1950s and early 1960s yellow cover from the *Revue*) and internally (in content) clear continuities exist: a concern with American cinema, in particular *films noirs* and, via Welles, Wyler, Toland and Flaherty, questions of realism; an interest in realism also in relation to Italian cinema, and Rossellini in particular; a special concern with French cinema, with articles on or by Clément, Clair, Cocteau, Rouquier, Renoir, Autant-Lara, Grémillon, Clouzot, Leenhardt, Becker; a continuing interest in the work of film-makers such as Lang, Eisenstein, Dreyer, Lubitsch, Hitchcock; regular critical contributions from subsequent *Cahiers* editors Bazin and Doniol-Valcroze, as well as from later occasional contributors to, and friends of, *Cahiers* (such as Lotte Eisner, Henri Langlois, Herman Weinberg, Georges Sadoul), plus the first articles by Eric Rohmer (then writing under his real name, Maurice Schérer), later also a *Cahiers* editor. If we then glance forward ten years to 1959, at the

end of the period covered by this volume, what are the typical contents of *Cahiers*? A continuing concern with American cinema, with many names familiar from the *Revue* in the 1920s (Hawks, Hitchcock, Ford, Lang), as well as, of course, some newer names (Brooks, Fuller, Lumet and Frankenheimer, Ray, Minnelli, Tashlin, Mann, Preminger); a continuing concern with Italian cinema and realism (Zavattini, Visconti, Rossellini) as well as with realism more broadly (the first signs of interest in 'direct cinema'); a continuing attention to Soviet cinema (Eisenstein and Dovzhenko) and 'art cinema' generally (Bergman, Buñuel, Mizoguchi, Wajda); and polemics for French cinema, with articles on or by Cocteau, Becker, Renoir, Vigo as well as newer names more associated with the *nouvelle vague*, such as Franju, Chabrol, Truffaut, Resnais.

Clearly, polemical and influential though *Cahiers* proved to be, it inherited a great deal both generally from French culture and very specifically from a tradition of film cultural concerns and interests well established since the 1920s. More immediately, the central elements of Bazin's theses about realism – generally endorsed by *Cahiers* as a whole in the 1950s – had already been established in the 1940s through articles not only in the *Revue du Cinéma* but also in the Catholic journal *Esprit* and elsewhere⁷ well before *Cahiers* began. Bazin and Pierre Kast had also written for the Communist-sponsored journal *Ecran Français*, which also published, for example, Alexandre Astruc's important essay 'The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: *la caméra-stylo*' in 1948,⁸ until, apparently, that journal's hostility to American cinema caused them to stop writing for it; Kast's first article for the *Revue* appeared in 1948. As well as Bazin, then, the *Revue* helped to establish Doniol-Valcroze, Kast and Rohmer: Bazin and Rohmer were to be decisive editorial influences on *Cahiers* in its first decade. Almost certainly Jean-George Auriol, editor of the *Revue*, would have become editor of the new journal already being planned before the final demise of the *Revue*. As it was, Auriol's death in a car accident in 1950 gave considerable impetus to the birth of *Cahiers*: the first issue was dedicated to his memory. But there had been other influences at work, linked to the same personalities. In 1948–9, something else was being born, as Doniol-Valcroze put it, which would 'constitute the first link in the chain which is resulting today in what has been called the *nouvelle vague*, the first jolt against a cinema which had become too traditional: "Objectif 49", a ciné-club unlike any other, which under the aegis of Jean Cocteau, Robert Bresson, Roger Leenhardt, René Clément, Alexandre Astruc, Pierre Kast, Raymond Queneau, etc. brought together all those – critics, film-makers and future film-makers – who dreamed of a *cinéma d'auteurs*'.⁹

It was, then, from the background of the *Revue du Cinéma* and 'Objectif 49' that *Cahiers* derived its main contributors and concerns when the first issue was finally published in April 1951, with Lo Duca (who had also been active on the *Revue*), Bazin and Doniol-Valcroze as joint editors (though Bazin was ill and was not officially on the editorial mast-head until the second issue) and Léon Kiegel financing. But by the end of 1953

the tenor of *Cahiers* was already changing: over the period of a year or so in 1952–3 Jean-Luc Godard (initially under the pseudonym Hans Lucas), Jean Domarchi, François Truffaut, Jacques Rivette and Claude Chabrol wrote their first articles for *Cahiers* and became regular contributors, Truffaut coming from a close personal relationship with Bazin, and Godard, Rivette and Chabrol from an involvement during 1950–1 with Rohmer through the Ciné-Club du Quartier Latin and its bulletin, edited by Rohmer, the *Gazette du Cinéma*, which published articles by Rivette and Godard.¹⁰

Among the early contributions to *Cahiers* which in retrospect he singled out as important, Doniol-Valcroze mentions¹¹ Bazin on Bresson,¹² Rohmer on Murnau, Flaherty and film space,¹³ the special issue on Renoir,¹⁴ the first articles by Godard¹⁵ and Truffaut,¹⁶ articles on Murnau by Astruc and Domarchi¹⁷ and Rivette on Hawks.¹⁸ Thus, in retrospect at least, the so-called 'young Turks' were seen to have made their mark on *Cahiers* very quickly. As if to emphasize the point, Doniol-Valcroze remembers that the publication of Truffaut's article 'Une Certaine Tendance du cinéma français' in January 1954¹⁹ – apparently after some months of hesitation – consciously marked a definitive new departure for the journal:

the publication of this article marks the real point of departure for what, rightly or wrongly, *Cahiers du Cinéma* represents today. A leap had been made, a trial begun with which we were all in solidarity, something bound us together. From then on, it was known that we were *for* Renoir, Rossellini, Hitchcock, Cocteau, Bresson . . . and against X, Y and Z. From then on there was a doctrine, the *politique des auteurs*, even if it lacked flexibility. From then on, it was quite natural that the series of interviews with the great directors would begin and a real contact be established between them and us. Ever afterwards people could pull the *hitchcocko-hawksiens* to pieces, get indignant about the attacks on 'French quality cinema', declare as dangerous the 'young Turks' of criticism . . . but an 'idea' had got under way which was going to make its obstinate way to its most logical conclusion: the passage of almost all those involved in it to directing films themselves.²⁰

With Truffaut's salvo fired, the journal's complexion was now clearer, and everything seemed in place for *Cahiers* to do what its subsequent reputation suggested that it did. Editorially speaking, *Cahiers* was then relatively stable through the 1950s: Bazin, Lo Duca and Doniol-Valcroze continued as joint editors, with Bazin (and perhaps Truffaut) exercising most influence, until early 1957, when Rohmer replaced Lo Duca and began to exert increasing influence, in part just because others were so busy (Truffaut and Godard were also writing for the weekly newspaper *Arts* and other publications²¹ while also, like Chabrol, preparing films), in part because of Bazin's illness; Rohmer's position as joint editor with Doniol-Valcroze was then confirmed after Bazin's death in November 1958 and continued until 1963.²² But it is always wrong to think of the *Cahiers* writers during this period as a really homogeneous group: Bazin and

Rohmer were close in their Catholicism and their theses about the realist vocation of film, but Bazin argued strenuously against Rohmer on Hitchcock and Hawks; Rivette and Godard admired Rossellini for reasons considerably different from those of Rohmer; Godard and Rivette were more inclined, relatively speaking, to 'modernism' than most of their colleagues; Kast stood out in this period as almost the only *Cahiers* writer with clearly left-wing, anti-clerical sympathies, but like Bazin he opposed aspects of the *politique des auteurs*, though for different reasons; Truffaut was personally close to Bazin but proved very often distant from him in his tastes and values, and so on. Yet Doniol-Valcroze is right to talk about 'solidarity' in the sense that despite their differences there were usually broad areas of agreement and shared assumptions on some fundamental questions.

Authorship

Among the broad areas of agreement the most important was probably the idea of 'authorship', implied by Truffaut's discussion of *auteurs* in 'Une Certaine Tendance du cinéma français' but by much that had gone before also, by Rivette's essay on Hawks,²³ for example: it provided a doctrine, a *politique*, though hardly a 'theory'.²⁴ The concept of authorship, and its essential underpinning, the concept of *mise en scène*, are introduced here, then fleshed out and more fully discussed in relation to the critical writings translated in this volume in the introductions to the individual sections of the book.²⁵

The November 1946 issue of the *Revue du Cinéma* had contained an article by the American director Irving Pichel entitled 'La création doit être l'ouvrage d'un seul' ('Creation must be the work of one person'). Truffaut prefaces his collection of his critical writings²⁶ with a quotation from Orson Welles: 'I believe a work is good to the degree that it expresses the man who created it.' At these levels, authorship was for *Cahiers* a relatively simple concept, essentially the idea that the film *auteur* was to be considered as fully an artist as any of the great novelists, painters or poets. As Eric Rhode summarized their views: 'the director as the ultimate authority and the sole arbiter of a film's meaning . . . they required one consistency only: that the director should have a strong personality and that he should be able to project his convictions'.²⁷ Thus, for Truffaut in 'Une Certaine Tendance', that the 'enemies' – primarily, for French cinema, screenwriters Jean Aurenche and Pierre Bost – lack authentic and individual personality (or, as Jean-José Richer said of Astruc, 'the thing most important to the artist: a *temperament*',²⁸) is 'proved' by the fact that they collaborate with the most diverse directors on a wide diversity of themes. But, as we shall see in relation to the favoured *auteurs* of *Cahiers*, this was not all: it was not *any* world view but rather a *particular* world view that was being privileged. It was not just that Renoir or Bresson had 'a world view at least as valuable as that of Aurenche and Bost',²⁹ nor that

they created their own stories and dialogue; it was also that Truffaut considered the films which Aurenche and Bost had written manifested a distinctly 'negative' view of the world. In two important and acute articles analysing the early years of *Cahiers*,³⁰ American critic John Hess argues that the films favoured by *Cahiers* tended to tell very much the same kinds of story: 'the most important determinant of an *auteur* was not so much the director's ability to express his personality, as usually has been claimed, but rather his desire and ability to express a certain world view. An *auteur* was a film director who expressed an optimistic image of human potentialities within an utterly corrupt society. By reaching out emotionally and spiritually to other human beings and/or to God, one could transcend the isolation imposed on one by a corrupt world.'³¹

Going further, Hess links this analysis explicitly with the social-political history of post-war France: '*la politique des auteurs* was, in fact, a justification, couched in aesthetic terms, of a culturally conservative, politically reactionary attempt to remove film from the realm of social and political concern, in which the progressive forces of the Resistance had placed all the arts in the years immediately after the war'.³² If Hess's argument depends on a somewhat selective reading of early *Cahiers*, and if it fails to recognize the diversity of positions and the struggles going on there, there is nevertheless no doubt that he identifies and analyses probably the most important tendencies in *Cahiers* during this period: reading the material in this volume one is reminded time and time again of the trenchant accuracy of his analysis. The tendency Hess describes embodied, of course, an essentially romantic conception of art and the artist which we can find expressed elsewhere in the period, for example in André Malraux, for whom art transcended history, expressing man's freedom over destiny. In a formulation perfectly in accord with the assumptions of *Cahiers* during this period, Malraux argues, for example, that 'we now know that an artist's supreme work is not the one in best accord with any tradition – not even his most complete and "finished" work – but his most personal work, the one from which he has stripped all that is not his own, and in which his style reaches its climax'.³³

Malraux can also provide a useful reference for the more explicitly political position of *Cahiers*. Militantly Leftist during the Spanish Civil War, Malraux mirrored broader political-cultural currents in moving steadily to the Right in the post-war period (ending up as de Gaulle's Minister for Culture). *Cahiers* (as opposed to *Positif*, which was consistently Leftist in sympathies) was very much part of this context, varying between being more or less overtly anti-Left and simply being silent on political issues of the day such as the Algerian struggle for independence, despite the exceptions of people like Kast who maintained Left positions within *Cahiers*. In a 1962 interview Godard expresses the general situation and attitude of the period rather well while discussing the politics of his film *Le Petit Soldat*: 'I have moral and psychological intentions which are defined through situations born of political events. That's all. These events are

confused because that's how it is. My characters don't like it either. My film belongs to the generation which regrets not having been twenty at the time of the Spanish Civil War.'³⁴

If the *politique des auteurs* caused ripples, and more, in French film culture and beyond, it was not because of the idea itself but because the idea was used in *Cahiers* with polemical brio to upset established values and reputations. There was nothing new or scandalous in either France or Britain or the USA in discussing, say, Murnau, Buñuel, Dreyer, Eisenstein, Renoir, Cocteau or Bresson or, from the USA, Stroheim or Welles or Chaplin, as the *auteurs* of their films. It was a slightly different matter – but only slightly – to propose, say, Howard Hawks as an *auteur*, mainly because, unlike Stroheim, Welles or Chaplin, Hawks had not been noticeably in conflict with the production system. It was perhaps a significantly different matter when the cultural perspectives brought to bear on the proposal of Hawks as *auteur* of Westerns, gangster movies and comedies derived their terms from classical literature, philosophy or the history of art.³⁵ It verged on positive outrage when, at the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, such perspectives were brought to bear on, say, Vincente Minnelli or Samuel Fuller,³⁶ not to mention Don Weis or Edward Ludwig.³⁷ In other words, the closer *Cahiers* moved to what had been traditionally conceived as the 'conveyor belt' end of the cinema spectrum, the more their 'serious' discussion of film-makers seemed outrageously inappropriate. As it happens (even if *Cahiers* did not see it in quite these terms at the time), the more they outraged in this way, the more acutely they raised crucial questions, however unsystematically, about the status and criticism appropriate to film as an art form in which unsystematic divisions were constantly being made between art and commerce.³⁸ If *Cahiers* came to be associated primarily with American cinema and a revaluation of its status, it was not because they talked about American cinema more than about other cinema – quite simply, they did not – but because American cinema as a whole, so generally ignored, misunderstood or undervalued, provided the most obvious site for engagement with these critical questions.

Although *Cahiers* could be said to have been predisposed towards American cinema because of the perspective on film language opened up by Bazin in the post-war years,³⁹ a perspective which did away with some of the traditional distinctions in a European/American film, and a silent/sound film, dichotomy, that predisposition undoubtedly owed most, given the political atmosphere of France in the 1950s described above, to the ways in which American cinema was perceived to relate to American society: it was, often enough, socially 'critical', but critical without being directly 'political'. This relationship was likely to be very appealing to the apolitical nature of much of French intellectual life in the 1950s. Thomas Elsaesser puts it well:

That the dramatic pattern inevitably engineered a 'personalised' solution to

social problems and that they distinguished only with difficulty the dividing line between the moral and the political is a matter which affects a lot of social thinking in America . . . Not only is Hollywood ideologically transparent in the way films aim at internalising and psychologising the public and social issues of American history, but their aesthetic and stylistic devices are geared towards locating the value and purpose of that experience in recognisably commonplace situations and everyday contexts, mainly by means of a visual-dramatic rhetoric, a strategy of persuasion as 'classical' and subtly adaptable as any which past civilisations have produced in periods of hegemony. During the apogee of Hollywood, even the most outlandish adventure story or musical extravaganza had to build its dramatic structure and narrative development on a familiar, easily identifiable subsoil of emotional reactions, drawn from the basic psychological dilemmas of the age . . .

What French intellectuals expected from things American were works of fiction that could serve as creative models, representative of their own situation and embodying specifically modern tensions – between intellect and emotion, action and reflection, consciousness and instinct, choice and spontaneity.⁴⁰

Raymond Durnat expressed it rather differently: 'One can understand why Hawks's films mean so much to French intellectuals. His very simplicity can have a tonic, and a real value, as a corrective to various debilitating concomitants of European culture ("confusionism", snobbery, contempt for decision, action, efficacy, simplicity).'⁴¹ These are very much the perspectives informing Godard's thought in commenting, in 1962, that 'The Americans, who are much more stupid when it comes to analysis, instinctively bring off very complex scripts. They also have a gift for the kind of simplicity which brings depth – in a little Western like *Ride the High Country* [GB title: *Guns in the Afternoon*], for instance. If one tries to do something like that in France, one looks like an intellectual. The Americans are real and natural. But this attitude means something over there. We in France must find something that means something – find the French attitude as they have found the American attitude.'⁴²

Mise en scène

However, in terms of *auteurs'* ideas about the world, *Cahiers* conceded, in an important 1960 article by Fereydoun Hoveyda, 'the consistency of the ideas we came across in the films of Lang, Rossellini, Renoir, Welles . . . we realized that our favourite *auteurs* were in fact talking about the same things. The "constants" of their particular universes belonged to everybody: solitude, violence, the absurdity of existence, sin, redemption, love, etc. Each epoch has its own themes, which serve as a backcloth against which individuals, whether artists or not, act out their lives.'⁴³ But if these themes were more or less constant across different *auteurs*, how were they to be told apart, and what made them original?

The originality of the *auteur* lies not in the subject matter he chooses, but in

the technique he employs, i.e. the *mise en scène*, through which everything on the screen is expressed . . . As Sartre said: 'One isn't a writer for having chosen to say certain things, but for having chosen to say them in a certain way'. Why should it be any different for cinema? . . . the thought of a *cinéaste* appears through his *mise en scène*. What matters in a film is the desire for order, composition, harmony, the placing of actors and objects, the movements within the frame, the capturing of a movement or a look; in short, the intellectual operation which has put an initial emotion and a general idea to work. *Mise en scène* is nothing other than the technique invented by each director to express the idea and establish the specific quality of his work . . . The task of the critic thus becomes immense: to discover behind the images the particular 'manner' of the *auteur* and, thanks to this knowledge, to be able to elucidate the meaning of the work in question.⁴⁴

Mise en scène thus establishes itself as a – perhaps *the* – central and essential concept in *Cahiers* and in later criticism influenced by *Cahiers*. There is clear continuity, for example, between Truffaut's comment that 'it is not so much the choice of subject which characterizes [Jacques] Becker as how he chooses to treat this subject'⁴⁵ and V. F. Perkins's comment on *Carmen Jones* that 'what matters is less the originality or otherwise of Preminger's theme than the freshness, economy and intelligence of the means by which the theme is presented'.⁴⁶

In origin *mise en scène* is a word drawn from the theatre, neutral in intention, meaning literally 'placing on the stage' or 'staging', that is, the way in which a play-text becomes a staged play. For several reasons, the word's original descriptive neutrality no longer applied to its usage. Firstly, Antonin Artaud, in *The Theatre of Cruelty*, had used the term polemically in relation to theatre in arguing for the supremacy of the director, as the person responsible for visualizing the spectacle, over the writer:

The typical language of the theatre will be constituted around the *mise en scène* considered not simply as the degree of refraction of a text upon the stage, but as the point of departure for all theatrical creation. And it is in the use and handling of this language that the old duality between author and director will be dissolved, replaced by a sort of unique Creator upon whom will devolve the double responsibility of the spectacle and the plot.⁴⁷

In the 1940s Alexandre Astruc, arguing for the *caméra-stylo* as a 'means of expression, just as all the other arts have been before it, and in particular painting and the novel . . . in which and by which an artist can express his thoughts', had taken a recognizably similar position in relation to the *auteur*-director in cinema (and one similar to Truffaut's in 'Une Certaine Tendance'): 'this of course implies that the scriptwriter directs his own scripts; or rather, that the scriptwriter ceases to exist, for in this kind of film-making the distinction between author and director loses all meaning. Direction is no longer a means of illustrating or presenting a scene, but a true act of writing.'⁴⁸

Secondly, the way *Cahiers* conceived *mise en scène* tended toward an

aesthetic which privileged realist, or illusionist, narrative. In this sense *mise en scène* became a sort of counter to theories of montage, privileging the action, movement forward and illusion of narrative against any foregrounding of the relations between shot and shot, and narrative function against any sense of pictorialism in the individual shot (hence Astruc's 'tyranny of what is visual; the image for its own sake').⁴⁹ The body of conventions to which this conception of *mise en scène* was attached was, of course, broadly that of mainstream narrative cinema, particularly American cinema – that cinema characterized so effectively by V. F. Perkins in *Film as Film*. It is a relatively 'conservative' aesthetic, and one broadly adhered to by *Cahiers* in the 1950s. There is a clear enough continuity, for example, between Bazin's pre-*Cahiers* writings on realism⁵⁰ and both the aesthetic assumptions of most *Cahiers* critics and the aesthetic practices of the films they themselves made in the late 1950s – see, as an instance, Hoveyda's account of Truffaut's *Les 400 Coups*.⁵¹ Interestingly enough, at the same moment that this aesthetic triumphs with *Les 400 Coups* and the *nouvelle vague*, it is also 'challenged' by the relative modernism of *Hiroshima mon amour*.⁵²

Thirdly, *mise en scène* was not a neutral term in the sense that it was the start of an attempt to raise the very important question – fundamental to the critical-theoretical debates which *Cahiers* provoked in Britain and the USA – of *specificity*: 'the specificity of a cinematographic work lies in its form rather than in its content, in the *mise en scène* and not in the scenario or the dialogue'.⁵³ This concept of specificity was absolutely central to the discussion and validation of American cinema, as Elsaesser points out:

Given the fact that in Hollywood the director often had no more than token control over choice of subject, the cast, the quality of the dialogue, all the weight of creativity, all the evidence of personal expression and statement had to be found in the *mise en scène*, the visual orchestration of the story, the rhythm of the action, the plasticity and dynamism of the image, the pace and causality introduced through the editing.⁵⁴

Much *Cahiers* discussion of genre, for example, depended on the supposedly transcendent qualities of *mise en scène*: 'the strength of the cinema is such that in the hands of a great director, even the most insignificant detective story can be transformed into a work of art'.⁵⁵

It was this question of the cinematographic specificity of *mise en scène* which contributed so decisively to what John Caughie calls the 'radical dislocation' in the development of film theory: *auteurism* 'effected . . . a shift in the way films were conceived and grasped within film criticism. The personality of the director, and the consistency within his films, were not, like the explicit subject matter which tended to preoccupy established criticism, simply there as a "given". They had to be sought out, discovered, by a process of analysis and attention to a number of films.'⁵⁶ As Geoffrey Nowell-Smith put it: 'It was in establishing what the film

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