

## Chapter 6

# French Cinema of the 1970s

- > *May '68: A New Cultural Era*
- > *Economic Assessment of French Cinema*
- > *The "Scandal" of the Cinémathèque Française*
- > *Political Cinema as a New Genre: Louis Malle, Joseph Losey, and Costa-Gavras*
- > *The Last Days of the French Polar: Jean-Pierre Melville and Henri Verneuil*
- > *The Humanists' School: Claude Sautet, François Truffaut, and Eric Rohmer*
- > *The Storytellers: Bertrand Blier and Bertrand Tavernier*

Numerous film critics and historians have maintained that French cinema after 1968 was visually overpowered by a nostalgia for the New Wave and the veneration that movement elicited from the media. The visual prominence of the New Wave and the revelations it brought to world cinema were a landmark in modern filmmaking. Indeed, for the new filmmakers of the 1970s, taking over its legacy was a difficult task. The three major movements which occurred during the post-1968 era can be described as follows: first, the coming of a brand-new genre, labeled the "political thriller," which gradually began to replace conventional *polars* (crime movies) born three decades earlier; second, the emergence of newcomers such as Bertrand Tavernier and Bertrand Blier, who gave a fresh start to a new generation of young filmmakers (many of whom are still active in film production today);<sup>1</sup> and third, the ascension of humanist film directors such as François Truffaut, Eric Rohmer, and Claude Sautet, whose successful rendition of one of the most prolific periods in film history incorporated powerful reflections of the medium itself. Because the 1970s were characterized by an unprecedented liberalist wave (1974 represented the last year for cinematographic censorship), three decades later many film productions of that period appear forever modern, relevant, and truthful in their representation of the spirit of the times.

Aside from mainstream cinema, the development of the erotic and pornographic film industry characterized a cultural transformation in the post-'68 era. The last bastions of "correctness" and conservative values ceased to be obstacles to physical representations of the body as well as the mental dimension of sexuality. Born with the events of the late 1960s, one of the most popular and powerful slogans associated with the concept of freedom was *Faites l'amour, pas la guerre* (Make love, not war), which indirectly contributed to the gradual rise of erotic<sup>2</sup> filmmaking (Just Jaeckin's *Emmanuelle*<sup>3</sup> in 1974 initiated a series of soft-core porn movies known as "Emmanuelle films," starring Sylvia Kristel).<sup>4</sup> Although already present during the initial years of cinema as a form of entertainment, erotic and pornographic film productions<sup>5</sup> increased dramatically and developed as a money-making industry in the mid-1970s. This trend, evolving apart from mainstream cinema, serves as a reminder that the real era of liberalism started in the 1970s and not in the 1980s. The phenomenally successful trend of liberal and progressive movies of this period can be considered the direct outcome of a social and political sea change in attitudes toward sex and other taboo topics. (Some film historians argue that it was the consequence of an ill-fated reaction toward a society in decline, the main escape of which was a creation of artificial desire.)

### MAY '68 AND AFTER: A NEW CULTURAL ERA

The events of May 1968 were a turning point in French history. On May 3, 1968, police forcefully evacuated more than 500 striking students who were at the time occupying the Sorbonne. On May 13, workers joined students in the protest with a revealing slogan undeniably capturing the spirit of the times: *Dix ans, ça suffit* (Ten years are enough). For many, it was the beginning of a new era, culturally, socially, and politically. After an entire month of general strikes, the Agreements of Grenelle were signed by Premier Georges Pompidou, who consented to raise the minimum wage by 35 percent: life could start anew. On May 30, close to a million Parisians walked down the Champs-Élysées in support of Charles de Gaulle's regime and indirectly heralded a large right-wing victory in the coming elections. Although de Gaulle had dissolved the National Assembly, the conservative majority not only claimed victory at the legislative election in June 1968 but also gained an unanticipated absolute majority. However, the signs of rejuvenation within French society corresponded to the end of the Gaullist era.

Following the rejection of his referendum for regional reorganization, de Gaulle resigned in April 1969. From that moment, many political observers anticipated that the Fifth Republic would quickly

disintegrate since the configuration of the presidency had been tailor-made for de Gaulle. Nevertheless, after de Gaulle's death on November 10, 1970, Georges Pompidou replaced the former president with no trouble at all, despite the oil crisis of 1973 that was sparked by the Arab-Israeli conflict. The unexpected death of Pompidou in 1974 corresponded to the end of a period commonly called the *Trente glorieuses* (the Thriving Thirty).

The conservative Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, Pompidou's former finance minister, was elected president in 1974, defeating Socialist leader François Mitterrand in a close election. For the first time since World War II, industrial production began to decelerate, unemployment suddenly became a growing political and social issue, and inflation became widespread. The new government, led by the young president, carried out a reform program that immediately favored young voters; it changed the voting age to eighteen and partially legalized abortion. Meanwhile, Mitterrand, who had already lost two presidential elections (1965 against de Gaulle and 1974 against Giscard d'Estaing), persuaded the Communists to merge with the Socialists in drafting what was to be called *le programme commun*, a project that united the parties in future elections and in an eventual coalition government. It quickly occurred to political observers that the Socialists had made considerable improvements at the Communist Party's expense, and consequently many Communist leaders felt left behind in the "common program." The repudiation of the agreement came at the worst moment for the Left since the dissensions enabled conservative forces to keep a majority in the National Assembly in the 1978 legislative elections. On the conservative side, political dissension also existed, as Prime Minister Jacques Chirac resigned in 1976 from his position to create a new Gaullist party called the *Rassemblement pour la République* (RPR), appointing himself its general secretary. Mitterrand's victory in the presidential elections on May 10, 1981, broke new ground in the country's political landscape and terminated a long and eventful decade, which began and ended with cultural euphoria. In a way, the 1970s were born in the events of May '68 and can be seen today as a cultural benchmark in French history; the decade ended in May 1981, which can be considered one of the major political landmarks of twentieth-century French history.

The 1970s can best be described as one of the most sensitive periods, reflecting the anger and impatience of the post-'68 era.<sup>6</sup> Outside the political realm, the 1970s were an extremely prolific period in French cultural history (as seen in the 1977 inauguration of the Centre Georges-Pompidou, most commonly called Beaubourg). The explosion of new values infiltrated many different sectors of society such as social laws, trade unions, language, education, sexuality, and family values.

In 1972, one of the most significant trials of the century was at the center of a media storm, as judiciary, political, and medical institutions were vehemently contested. Divorce (by mutual consent) was finally authorized by law, and the controversial Veil Law was passed, which considerably improved access to birth control for women and legalized abortion.

This was a prolific time for women, particularly in the film industry. Women could now advance in a profession that had been heavily influenced and controlled by men. As film historian Susan Hayward stated, "The improvement of women's legal status and the legalisation of abortion certainly reflected Giscard's heeding of the claims of the women's movement in France which post-1968 had become extremely vocal and consolidated in its demands. Directly within cinema there is a manifest attestation to the presence of women on a political front by the greatly increased number of women making feature films, particularly in the second half of the decade. During the whole of the decade, some thirty-seven women filmmakers made their first feature films."<sup>7</sup> The 1970s also witnessed the first MLF (Mouvement de libération des femmes, equivalent to the American National Organization for Women) demonstrations.

In literature, Jean-Paul Sartre's ideas, although no longer as highly regarded by French intellectuals, allowed him to remain hugely popular among the young, the working class, leftist intellectuals, and especially the media.<sup>8</sup> Paradoxical as it may seem, Sartre's own persona surpassed his ideas. Structuralism, led by philosophers Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault and psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, became the prevailing intellectual school in France and abroad. It gradually resulted in doctrines designated as "poststructuralist." In addition to new intellectual and philosophical concepts, May '68 triggered an awareness of third world problems, anticapitalistic and anti-American points of view, the beginning of ecological alertness, and the development of environmental organizations (especially those against nuclear-power plants, such as in the Larzac region).

The post-'68 era allowed the French to take advantage of the return of consumerism generated by a leisure society (by the end of Pompidou's term, two-thirds of French families owned an automobile).<sup>9</sup> An authentic national transportation network became a reality on October 29, 1970, with the inauguration of the long-awaited first interstate, labeled Autoroute du Sud Lille-Marseille. More than three decades after the first paid vacation granted by the Popular Front in 1936, which sent thousands of French workers to discover the countryside, French vacationers were able to enter the modern age of highway travel. But a thriving economy (unemployment rarely exceeded more than two percent) came to a screeching halt in France with the first oil

crisis<sup>10</sup> in 1973. If the previous decade was dominated by economic prosperity and surplus, the new one is remembered for the international economic problems that were triggered by oil crises, the beginning of gradual and massive unemployment, and the paradoxical but insidious growth of inflation.

## ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT OF FRENCH CINEMA

In May 1968, the professionals of the French film industry organized themselves under the title *Etats généraux du cinéma* (General Estates of Cinema), a designation reminiscent of the idealistic pre-revolutionary concept intended to herald major political and economic reforms. A few years later, the first signs of change in film productions became noticeable. In addition, the CNC (Centre National de la Cinématographie), on which authorization visas as well as censorship committees depended, centralized all cinematographic activities and productions around the Office radio-télévision française (ORTF). The conservative state monopoly, which served as a direct division of the government to determine the visual culture for the nation, had begun to modernize its policies. However, French television began its race for power as the ORTF was split into four different companies TF1, Antenne 2, FR3, and the SFP (Société française de production)—all of which later became major partners in film production.<sup>11</sup> During the second part of the decade, the four companies steadily increased their activities in film as the number of movies screened on national television as well as films made for television grew annually.

The *avances sur recettes* (financial advances) program continued to grant loans to producers of full-length feature films based on screenplays. After a film generated profits, the loan was to be paid back directly to the state. This financial aid was usually earmarked for newcomers to the film industry, who without this particular type of loan did not have the funds to complete their first assignments. One of the changes in French cinema in the new decade was the emergence of different types of financial sources. No longer waiting for financial assistance from large film companies, many young directors (as well as other auteurs) financed feature films (for example, Robert Bresson's *The Devil Probably/Le Diable probablement*, 1977) with the assistance of corporations, such as smaller film production companies, and eventually French television itself.

One of the very first agreements between French television and the film industry was to establish the feasibility of their future cohabitation within the so-called PAF (Paysage audiovisuel français, the authority in charge of official statistics for the film and audiovisual industries). With a maximum of 10 percent of the entire broadcast

dedicated to film projections (half of the 500 films broadcast were to be French productions), the French film industry halted the decline in production, especially in comparison to Italy and England in particular. However, the situation was far from economically secure for new producers and filmmakers. Although at first appearing to be a fearful competitor of the film industry, French television contributed in a not negligible way to the resuscitation of the *cinéphilie*<sup>12</sup> movement. In 1971, the first *ciné-club* was created on channel Antenne 2, which was followed in 1973 by an analogous program entitled "Cinéma de minuit" on FR3. Each week, both programs screened French film classics and other world masterpieces. The majority of viewers were new, having never set foot in a *ciné-club*.<sup>13</sup> In addition to the late night shows, French television, with the assistance of advertising tycoon Georges Cravenne and under the presidency of Jean Gabin, started to broadcast in February 1976 the newly formed French Academy Awards ceremony, created for the occasion, called the Césars (Académie des arts et techniques du cinéma).<sup>14</sup> Similar to its American counterpart, the French Academy Awards ceremony attracted record audiences and undeniably served as a great commercial opportunity for the industry.

If the means of production underwent many changes, the distribution networks remained unaffected in their organization. By the 1970s, most movie theaters in France were located within city limits and were owned by large distribution companies. Beginning in the early 1970s, many of the older theaters began to be divided into two or more smaller theaters because of decreasing attendance (an indirect cause of free television as a new device for home entertainment). The number of large theaters, which had been extremely popular during the postwar era, decreased dramatically and left the space wide open for smaller-size theaters. For exhibitors, the advantage of smaller auditoriums was the speedier rotation of feature films, as opposed to larger theaters, which were obligated to screen films for a longer period of time. The declining situation was all the more difficult to manage now that French audiences attended movies an average of a couple of times a year as opposed to the immediate postwar era, which experienced at least three times more attendance. When theater viewership slowly began to resume in the mid-1980s, multiplexes became the standard and quickly expanded in urban and suburban shopping malls. As far as the exhibition companies were concerned, the situation in the early 1970s became alarming. Despite the huge changes in the cinematographic and economic landscape, the internal structure of movie theaters never quite adjusted to the changes and as they diminished in size and numbers, filmgoers' attendance lessened.

Did French moviegoers recognize themselves through French films

in the post-'68 era? Probably. Most New Wave films rarely chronicled the *faits de société* (real-life chronicles), nor did they make faithful representations of everyday life. Once the wake of the French New Wave dissipated among general audiences, French cinema of the 1970s appeared as a much more transparent medium since its thematic content translated not only the state of mind of an eventful era but also, uniquely, the physical and emotional background of contemporary society. Despite the huge transformations generated more than ten years earlier by the directors of the New Wave, French cinema did not fundamentally alter its cinematographic standards or the modes of visual consumption. The attempt to transform French cinema radically and exclusively into a full-fledged medium of the Seventh Art failed as audiences expressed renewed interest in commercial films<sup>15</sup> (without denying nevertheless the appreciation for the New Wave). Consequently, literary adaptations and big-budget comedies were favored by investment companies—the *qualité française* was back. But despite popular demand and sudden mood variations the spirit of May '68 and its aftermath remained very much alive in French cinema of the 1970s. Militant cinema, new types of commercial cinema, and theoretical discussions captured for the first time the curiosity of accomplished filmmakers. Although not always reliable in format, French films were politically thorough, regularly intervening at every level of society, such as social reevaluation, political contestation, and cultural interrogation (for example, Jean-Luc Godard's *Tout va bien*, 1972). The numerous *films militants* were, however, limited in their audience appeal and did not last long at the box office.

One of the biggest headaches of militant and out-of-the-mainstream cinema was the financial distance separating production and actual distribution. The risk run by a distribution company was always great, and the only guarantee for a filmmaker to have his or her film commercialized was to secure a distribution deal before shooting. For the new filmmakers of the post-'68 era, unlike the young directors of the New Wave ten years before them, the approach to cinema represented a different reality in comparison to the obstacles filmmakers such as Jean-Luc Godard, François Truffaut, and Alain Resnais had to face. Their auteur "responsibility" was an already endorsed factor this time with no establishment to challenge and no respectability to secure. In fact, the 1970s turned out for many New Wave directors (with the exception of several films made by Truffaut) to be a decade of fruitless productions for aesthetic and professional reasons since most of them did not follow the main current dictated by popular audiences. Alain Resnais did not produce any significant pictures aside from *Stavisky* (*Stavisky*, 1974) and *My American Uncle* (*Mon oncle d'Amérique*, 1980);<sup>16</sup> Claude Chabrol mainly produced run-of-the-mill commercial assign-

ments such as *The Twist* (*Folies bourgeoises*, 1975) and *Innocents with Dirty Hands* (*Innocents aux mains sales*, 1975), the exceptions being serious accomplishments such as *Violette* (*Violette Nozière*, 1978) and *The Horse of Pride* (*Le cheval d'orgueil*, 1979); and Louis Malle, excluding *Lacombe Lucien* (*Lacombe Lucien*, 1974), did not produce representative artistic contributions and eventually left for the United States.

## THE "SCANDAL" OF THE CINÉMATHÈQUE FRANÇAISE

Founded by Henri Langlois (1914-77) in 1936, the Cinémathèque française (see the discussion on page 208) rapidly became the most important film archive in the world. At a time when movies were considered an inconsequential entertainment medium, the Cinémathèque found them a sophisticated art form and sought to preserve them. The Cinémathèque gradually gained financial security through regular government subsidies in order to maintain good care of its enormous volume of stock and state of preservation. Eventually gaining a majority of shares in the institution, however, the French government decided on February 9, 1968, to replace Langlois as its head with Pierre Barbin, a more financially responsible civil servant (in direct opposition to Langlois's lack of organization that was described by his detractors). Part of the allegations against Langlois involved negligence, not only with respect to financial matters, but also at the level of institutional organization. On several occasions this negligence led to the deterioration, or even disappearance, of films, as well as other negative financial aspects. Indeed, the problems were numerous, from decisions on the films to be purchased to the storing of new acquisitions under difficult conditions (light, temperature, and humidity) and classifying them into records in order to allow them to be viewed without damaging the copies. André Malraux, at the time the *Ministre de la Culture* (secretary of culture), was severely criticized by the press, in particular by *Les cahiers du cinéma*, for the sudden decision and more importantly by the entire French-film industry. On February 12, 1968, more than three hundred filmmakers demonstrated their dissent with the government's decision to eradicate Langlois's leadership in what, in their minds, was the founder of the greatest film institution. A couple of days later, several thousand demonstrators gathered in support of the movement (as a prearranged rehearsal of the future events of May) in the garden of the Trocadéro in Paris. The confrontation with the police resulted in several injuries (Jean-Luc Godard even lost his glasses that day).

Immediately aware of the scope of the movement, a number of French directors founded the *Comité de défense de la Cinémathèque*



(Cinémathèque Defense Committee), including the omnipresent François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, and Claude Chabrol, as well as old-school veterans Marcel Carné and Jean Renoir. On April 22, after countless hours of negotiations between the government and film-industry representatives, the government hastily reinstated Langlois as director of the Cinémathèque. A few years later, on June 14, 1972, Langlois achieved his lifetime goal: the creation of a museum dedicated to film (Musée du Cinéma) at the prestigious Palais de Chaillot in Paris.

After Langlois's death in 1977, the Cinémathèque went through another major crisis. A fire in 1980, in one of its stock rooms, led to the loss of several thousand reels. (Subsequently, the Cinémathèque budget increased from seven to twenty-three million French francs.) The question of film conservation and restoration was once again raised. This time the answer was a new type of film preservation: cellulose acetate and polyester-film base. Despite the fact that film can be indefinitely duplicated, few have been preserved to this day and many are still in poor condition.<sup>17</sup> The difficulty in maintaining film stock contributed to the film industry's negligence in preservation.

The Langlois case was long remembered since it concomitantly came to symbolize the unavoidable disconnection between the French government's rigid administration and the unpredictable evolution of a nation's artistic creativity. In such a difficult context, French cinema proved once more, just as it did on January 4, 1948 (see chapter 4), a deep kind of collective vision regarding the future of the medium. Jean-Luc Godard said about Henri Langlois that without his precious concurrence, "Lumière, Méliès, Griffith, von Stroheim, and others would have died twice." On the other hand, the cost of the victory was for this prestigious institution to see state subsidies gradually diminish during the coming years. Although more remote in chronological comparison, the history and vicissitudes of the Cinémathèque are not directly linked with the events of May '68, despite the presence at both rallies of personalities like political activist and student leader Daniel Cohn-Bendit, who like many professionals of the French film industry continued to support the cause of cultural integrity.

### **POLITICAL CINEMA AS A NEW GENRE: LOUIS MALLE, JOSEPH LOSEY, AND COSTA-GAVRAS**

According to film historian Jacques Siclier, "French society of the 1970s resembles that of the victorious Second Empire. It is dominated by the cult for money, extensive urbanism, and financial greed generating real estate scandals in which the political class in power becomes entrapped."<sup>18</sup> It seemed as if French cinema's creative innovations

stalled after 1968. The great explosion of new talent and approaches to filmmaking did not survive into the next decade. However, with the subsequent social makeover triggering innumerable changes of thought and behavior, the post-'68 era gave birth to a new cinematographic genre: the politically oriented narrative.

The primary goal of political films was to represent French society realistically, including its social injustices. At the same time, it attempted to invent a new cinematography, a new kind of coherence linking extreme political ideology (mostly leftist) with a highly intellectual cinematic discourse. As film historian Jean-Michel Frodon defines it, "Within this narrative cinema, the authentic new 'politically oriented' films that characterized this period were no longer the quest for narrative pleasure in collective values but rather in the appreciation of individuals—what can be understood as a linguistic manipulation is eventually considered revolutionary."<sup>19</sup> In its exclusive format, French political cinema was en route to a thorough examination of the social structures of society and of the redefinition of individual rights versus the social order. In the post-'68 era, movies and politics were immediately put in the spotlight with the success of Costa-Gavras's *Z*, followed by *The Confession* (*L'aveu*, 1970). From now on, political movies were also successful among popular audiences as they showed signs of crystallizing into an ideology or worldview.

Within the French film industry, one of the most significant initiatives of this period was the creation of a politically oriented parameter, the Société des réalisateurs de films (SRF). This new association promoted filmmakers to a more recognized status within the industry (in comparison with, for instance, technicians and producers). It also established its own film festival, called the *Quinzaine des réalisateurs*, in 1969, which to this day functions as a preselection phase for the Cannes Film Festival as well as a "detection apparatus" for new talent. This parallel film festival offered more ambitious choices, as feature films chosen by their thematic content were openly more politicized as a direct result of the new consciousness that surfaced after 1968 (e.g., in comparison with Cannes, there was a larger number of young directors and easier access to the competition among a wider number of countries).

After 1968, Jean-Luc Godard, who was noticeably no longer willing to bear the emblem of authorism alone, began to shun a certain mode of filmmaking that he considered intellectually and politically "comfortable," thereby initiating an almost silent crusade in militant filmmaking (*Tout va bien*, 1972, starring Yves Montand and Jane Fonda). In his attempts to define his new political filmmaking, Godard developed the idea of experimental work, but this time not conceptually nor technically. The goal was to research and no longer to deliver a



Yves Montand (the deputy) in Costa-Gavras's *Z* (*Z*, 1969), (Photo courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art/Film Stills Archive/© KG Productions).

cinematic message. Despite the risk of a certain dose of incommunicability, which ultimately permeated his narratives and discouraged many of his admirers, Godard's militant cinema remained vital for film studies throughout the decade until his comeback in the 1980s. His professional itinerary recalls the trend adopted by the *Cahiers du cinéma* at the same time. William Luhr thus summarizes the financial and mental situation in the editing room of the *Cahiers*:

Along with the total radicalization of Godard was the leftward slide of *Cahiers du cinéma*. By 1969 [François] Truffaut and [Eric] Rohmer, formerly the cornerstones of this most famous of film journals, found themselves completely alienated from its positions. Truffaut ceased giving it financial support. Rohmer excoriated it in several interviews. *Cahiers*, like Godard, was committed to a Marxist position, to such an extent that it excised from its pages everything that had as its goal the reflection of cinematic pleasure. Out came photographs and reviews of popular films. Out came the interest in American cinema or in the New Wave. Soon advertising was dropped. Consistent to the end, it had to withdraw from the standard distribution companies that had seen to its popular diffusion. For four years *Cahiers* followed this ascetic policy, returning by degrees to the popular journal it once was. The results have been mixed. Its theoretical rigor utterly renewed the study of cinema in France, Great Britain, and the United States. And its team of editors, like their predecessors, ten years earlier, fought their way

into the margins of the cinema while striving to maintain their political purity.<sup>20</sup>

One of the most common flaws among the leading directors of the New Wave, in their desperate attempt to shift toward a more politicized and radical view in filmmaking, was the absence of a strong and perceptible storytelling device. Reality through a transparent medium could no longer motivate crowds intellectually, much less attract audiences to revisit movie theaters, unless along with this coherent realistic discourse movies combined accessible cinematographic language. This explains why most of the time popular audiences preferred films featuring streets, cities, and life in general that would be as easily recognizable as their daily routines. Protagonists had to resemble closely those who shared their quotidian existence, namely, the audience. In the early 1970s, Godard was unwilling to compromise for public consumption his longtime professional friendship with François Truffaut, since both directors took very different approaches in their film careers (Godard reproaching Truffaut for doing "commercial" cinema and thus betraying the ideals and foundations of the auteur theory). Although Truffaut was by then clearly preaching for intellectual independence, Godard's strategy was entirely opposed to the intellectually compromising and pragmatic trajectory of his former colleague and friend.<sup>21</sup>

The canon of this politically inclined cinema often represented fictional narratives involving outcast characters as in films like Louis Malle's *Lacombe Lucien* (*Lacombe Lucien*, 1974). Twenty years after Claude Autant-Lara's *Four Full Bags* (*La traversée de Paris*, 1956), Louis Malle's *Lacombe Lucien* again attempted to reevaluate the glamorous and undisputed image of urban resistance during the Occupation. Based on a script written by Patrick Modiano, *Lacombe Lucien* sought to re-create another reality that was radically opposed to the heroic concept of patriotic duty.

Based on Malle's own experiences in France during the Occupation, the film narrates the difficult choice seventeen-year-old farmer Lucien (Pierre Blaise) must make during the last days of the Nazi presence in France. Disturbed by the absence of his father, a prisoner in Germany, and the infidelity of his mother with her employer, he now works for the German police, after having failed to join the Resistance. Unluckily, he falls in love with a young girl, France Horn (Aurore Clément), who is the daughter of a wealthy Jewish tailor, and consequently attracts the wrath of the Gestapo as well as the unsympathetic Resistance fighters.

In Malle's film, there is no longer innocence or guilt but simply mistakes in each individual's existence, a sort of predestined and insur-

mountable pathway. Severely criticized for its ambiguous position toward the responsibility of those who enrolled as collaborators, *Lacombe Lucien* took the defense of what had never been questioned before. Far from staining the heroism of the French Resistance, the film put into perspective, through emotional dissociations, the entire function of the Resistance's cause without ever making a moral or value judgment. As a result, its screening, although three decades after the events depicted, remained controversial for years since it altered the traditional rendering of the glorious accomplishments of the Resistance. *Lacombe Lucien*, with a score by Django Reinhardt, which was by contrast universally esteemed and very popular, earned a nomination for Best Foreign Film at the 1974 Academy Awards and won the prize for Best Film at the 1974 British Academy Awards.

Also offering a retrospective investigation of an atypical approach to the Occupation was a film directed by Joseph Losey (1909–84) entitled *Mr. Klein* (*Monsieur Klein*, 1976). Controversial yet extremely coherent in the development of its story line, the film recounts the incredible vicissitudes of Robert Klein (Alain Delon), a successful Parisian art dealer who suddenly sees his cozy life come to an end when he realizes that another Robert Klein "hides" in Paris, a man with rather inexplicable underground connections. As a businessman, the first Klein does not mind taking advantage of the Parisian Jews who have to sell their possessions to survive. Far from being a crook, he is, however, an authentic, self-centered, and unscrupulous character. Ironically, Klein is himself mistaken for a missing Jew, a man who has been using Mr. Klein's name as a cover for his secret operations. One day, just as he concludes a deal with a Jewish man on a Dutch painting, he receives a newspaper from the Jewish community in France. Intrigued by the fact that his first and last name appear on the address, Klein conducts his own private investigation and learns from the newspaper's editor that his namesake, who lives at another address in Paris and subscribes to the newspaper, has replaced his address for the protagonist's own. Since the police control the Jewish residents of the capital, Robert Klein is now, to his dismay, officially registered as a member of the Jewish community. But the more he investigates, the more he sinks into this quicksand. The price of truth, justice, and peace of mind will be for Mr. Klein to assume the identity of his namesake. As Klein progresses toward the truth, he also locks himself into a fatal destiny. Because of his French Catholic ancestry, he goes back to his native Alsace to locate the family archive and obtain his certificates of family origins. His desperate quest to find his detrimental alter ego leads Klein from apartments to country castles and ultimately to the Vélodrome d'hiver (a bicycle-racing track). Since the official documents never arrive, he is temporarily de-

tained with more than 16,000 Jews, moved to the camp of Drancy near Paris, and ultimately sent to a German death camp.

At first glance, *Mr. Klein* appears to take the same approach as most Resistance movies. The film objectively represented the struggle and the dilemma of the French Resistance, but instead it makes a U-turn, indirectly denouncing the narrative structure of its predecessors. Unlike most Resistance films of the era, which focus on a collective representation of the tragedy (even when through the eyes of a single protagonist), *Mr. Klein* is entirely centered on a single individual without developing any other protagonist. The question of the shadowy "other" in one's existence, represented by the emblematic and nonexistent other Mr. Klein, who deliberately discharges his own identity on his alter ego, eventually leads to ruin. Constantly addressing the theme of the shifting relationship between victim and oppressor, Losey's film is directed with tremendous care and subtlety. Losey<sup>22</sup> directed a work more intellectually than emotionally involving. The end result is a devastating picture of the French authorities during the Nazi Occupation. The film is furthermore a serious reflection on human identity and human destiny, the state and condition of the individual within a community in danger. At the 1977 French Academy Awards, *Monsieur Klein* received the César for Best Director, Best Film, and Best Production Design (by Alexandre Trauner).<sup>23</sup>

The character of Robert Klein is unforgettably interpreted by Alain Delon. Following service in the Navy in Indochina, Delon began his film career in the company of little-known actor Jean-Claude Brialy, who invited him to attend the 1957 Cannes Film Festival. Immediately noticed by several film directors at the time, Delon made his cinematographic debut with a small part in Yves Allégret's *When the Woman Gets Confused* (*Quand la femme s'en mêle*, 1957), followed by an appearance in Marc Allégret's *Be Beautiful but Shut Up* (*Sois belle et tais-toi*, 1958). His first lead role in a picture came in René Clément's stylish thriller *Purple Noon*. A year later, Delon appeared in Luchino Visconti's *Rocco and His Brothers* (*Rocco e i suoi fratelli*, 1960), then in Michelangelo Antonioni's *The Eclipse* (*L'eclisse*, 1962), and again in Visconti's masterpiece *The Leopard* (*Il gattopardo*, 1963).

With so many renowned filmmakers after him, the young actor became one of Europe's most popular cinematic figures. In 1969, Delon and wife, Nathalie, found themselves at the center of a crime scandal when their bodyguard was found dead outside their home. While many dire predictions announced the possible end of Delon's film career, the tabloids weighed in on the Delons' side. To the French public, however, accustomed to seeing the actor in mobster roles, Delon's film personality took on a new and intriguing reality in light of the scandal. Nevertheless, Alain Delon spent much of the 1970s as

France's biggest star, performing in important films such as Henri Verneuil's *Any Number Can Win* (*Mélodie en sous-sol*, 1963), Jacques Deray's *The Swimming Pool* (*La piscine*, 1969), Jean-Pierre Melville's *The Red Circle* (*Le cercle rouge*, 1970), Pierre Granier-Deferre's *The Widow Couderc* (*La veuve Couderc*, 1971), José Giovanni's *Two Men in Town* (*Deux hommes dans la ville*, 1973), Volker Schlöndorff's *Swann in Love* (*Un amour de Swann*, 1984), José Pinheiro's *Cop's Honour* (*Parole de flic*, 1985), Jean-Luc Godard's *New Wave* (*Nouvelle vague*, 1990), Agnès Varda's *A Hundred and One Nights* (*Les cent et une nuits*, 1995), and Bertrand Blier's *Actors* (*Les acteurs*, 2000).

Since the beginning of the postwar era, French cinema had never fully produced a "politically" oriented national cinema (for reasons of political censorship as well as lack of political commitment), except for notable but sporadic examples such as René Clair's *Freedom for Us* (*A nous la liberté*, 1931), Jean Renoir's *The People of France* (*La vie est à nous*, 1936), and Alain Resnais's *Night and Fog*. The achievement of Greek filmmaker Costa-Gavras<sup>24</sup> was therefore all the more impressive since his project was conceived during a period little inclined toward political change. Born Konstantinos Gavra in 1933, Costa-Gavras moved to France in 1952 to study French literature at the Sorbonne and later switched to film studies, entering the IDHEC (graduating in 1958) where he became assistant to such prestigious directors as René Clair, Henri Verneuil, and most notably René Clément, who, according to Costa-Gavras, profoundly influenced his professional career.

*Z* chronicles the fraudulent process of politics in Greece, which resulted in the defeat of the democratic government with a coup d'état on April 21, 1967, led by military insurgents (the colonels' dictatorship lasted for seven years). When Costa-Gavras embarked on the film project, the military dictatorship was already in place in Athens, and it became obvious that finding another country for outdoor shootings was imperative. Algeria was the first choice as a substitute since the working conditions in Greece made filming there no longer an option. The problems Costa-Gavras had to face were immense. Because of the intense political nature of his film, as well as the recent date of the actual tragic events, many producers turned down the project with a similar reply: "Too political to be commercial." Finally, producer Jacques Perrin, who also played the role of the young reporter in the film, found a compromise solution by having the project coproduced in France and Algeria (most exterior scenes were shot in Algeria and interiors in France during the summer of 1968). Thus, *Z* became a Franco-Algerian production.

One of the very best political films of the decade, *Z* was inspired by the actual events that occurred during the 1963 assassination of Gre-

gorios Lambrakis in Thessalonica (interpreted by Yves Montand), a popular leftist-liberal member of the Greek Parliament, whose growing popularity challenged authorities by organizing a rally against the future installation of Polaris missiles in Greece. During a peace demonstration, he was knocked down and killed, while the police not only failed to protect him, but also tried to cover up the murder. The examining magistrate in charge (Jean-Louis Trintignant), despite numerous attempts by the police authorities to close the case, acted as a detective and eventually managed to solve the mysterious nature of the accident, thereby unveiling the political conspiracy. It soon became clear that Lambrakis had fallen prey to a scheme triggered by officials of the Establishment. The closing credits reveal that although the perpetrators were put on trial and condemned in 1966, they were eventually reinstated in their respective functions after the military coup a year later.

Costa-Gavras's film represented for the first time a new cinematographic genre: the political thriller. Both scenario and editing successfully combined to present the course of events without falling entirely into the thriller category. Many European filmmakers, who first had not anticipated the popular and commercial success of the project, took Costa-Gavras's lead, in a different style. They included Italian directors such as Francesco Rosi and his rendition of *The Mattei Affair* (*Il caso Mattei*, 1972) and *Illustrious Corpses* (*Cadaveri eccellenti*, 1974), as well as Elio Petri for his films *Investigation of a Citizen above Suspicion* (*Indagine su un cittadino al di sopra di ogni sospetto*, 1970) and *The Working Class Goes to Heaven* (*La classe operaia va in paradiso*, 1971). Costa-Gavras addressed the urgency of political issues of the early 1970s with perhaps a more flamboyant sensibility and style than others.

With its concentration on the theme of injustice, *Z* brought contemporary European audiences to the conclusion that cinema, as a medium, had a crucial role to play in the history of human ideas. Its opening credits could not have been more direct: *Toute ressemblance avec des événements réels, des personnes vivantes ou mortes, n'est pas le fait du hasard. Elle est volontaire* (Any similarity to actual events, to people living or dead, is in no way the result of coincidence. It is intentional). The original screenplay of *Z*, adapted from Vassilis Vassilikos's novel, Raoul Coutard's rousing cinematography, the lively music score by Mikis Theodorakis (a Greek musician whose work had been banned by the military regime in Greece), the kinetic editing, and clear-cut figures, all placed the film at the antithesis of traditional gangster pictures, to make it an unambiguous political statement, and contributed to the success of the enterprise. Its innovation was to combine European political awareness and commitment with the vigorous, dy-



namic, well-paced style of Hollywood action movies. Winning the Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival in 1969 and Best Actor award for Jean-Louis Trintignant, the film was screened for thirty-six weeks in France and enjoyed considerable success in the United States, where it received Oscars in 1969 for Best Foreign Language Film and Editing (Françoise Bonnot), as well as an Oscar nomination for Best Picture. Capitalizing on a sincere sense of political commitment and narrated in an unforgettable style, *Z* remains Costa-Gavras's most popular and influential film. Far from being prisoner to dogmatic concepts, Gavras's oeuvre questioned the frightening possibilities for perversion of ideologies when held in a nondemocratic way.

With his next picture, entitled *The Confession* (*L'aveu*, 1970), Costa-Gavras took on another kind of forceful condemnation: the Stalinist purges in Czechoslovakia of the 1950s. Here, he explored the nature of true believers in communism. Adapted from Artur London's autobiographical novel (which was published in 1968), *The Confession* retraced the difficult years of this hero of the Czech resistance, who devoted his entire life to the communist cause and at the end finds himself imprisoned with many other political activists from all over the Eastern block. Considered too intellectual for the Stalinist regime, the hero is forced to render prearranged confessions and consequently is sentenced to prison in 1951. The film was shot more than a year after the invasion of Prague by Soviet tanks in the spring of 1968. The depth and intensity of Yves Montand's performance directly suggest the possible redemptive act that the artist took upon himself for his past moral support of the Soviet regime. The dramatic function of the plot, although devoid of all the twists and turns present in *Z*, conveys a simple but moral emotion, powerful enough to attract audiences that over the years have been larger than the wildest predictions of its authors and investors. By indirectly denouncing the control of the "progressive" intellectuals by the PCF (French Communist Party), the story actually anticipated that political party's irremediable and gradual decline throughout the decade. With its horrifying evidence, the film expressed a solemn condemnation of the use of moral turpitude, falsified trials, artificial confessions, and Stalinist terror, as well as the approval of French communists at the time.

Back in France, Costa-Gavras's popularity experienced several ups and downs, since many political figures of both the Right and Left were outraged by the director's lack of patriotic consideration. But those attacks were easily silenced since Gavras never had a political agenda of his own. His true and observable lack of aspiration for a political career gave him the credibility he needed in France and abroad. His only agenda was his professional itinerary. Two years later he completed *State of Siege* (*Etat de siège*, 1972), a film that dealt with

activities of the CIA in Uruguay during the Mitrione scandal<sup>25</sup> while exploring dramatic problems of conscience and of moral ambiguity. Ironically, it was made in then-democratic Chile, just before the fall of Salvatore Allende. The success of the film encouraged the director, who ten years later made *Missing* (1982), starring Jack Lemmon and Sissy Spacek, a story about the political dictatorship in Argentina. (*Missing* received the Palme d'or at the 1982 Cannes Film Festival.) Despite the depth of the political message that Costa-Gavras's film conveyed at the time, his main cinematographic interest was to combine the best features of at least three different genres: the lurid atmosphere of film noir, the standard action-oriented melodrama, and the basic gangster picture.

With the critical reception of *Z* at film festivals around the world, it became clear that one of the most important, as well as enduring, qualities of the Cannes Film Festival was to promote and preserve the admiration of the art of film. Additionally, its role had often been to call attention everywhere to the social dimension of film in the general culture, using movies as vital parameters for the examination and propagation of moral and political ideas. The true wind of change at the Cannes Film Festival occurred in the spring of 1973 and brought new orientations for the rest of the decade. A year before, the French selection process was severely criticized for a predominance of commercial productions. The commission took note of it, and consequently opened its doors to a more apparently cultural and diverse cinema. The 1973 selection of the highly controversial French-Italian film *La grande bouffe*,<sup>26</sup> directed by Marco Ferreri, with a spectacular cast including Philippe Noiret, Marcello Mastroianni, Michel Piccoli, and Ugo Tognazzi, marked this change.

### THE LAST DAYS OF THE FRENCH POLAR: JEAN-PIERRE MELVILLE AND HENRI VERNEUIL

Based on Joan McLeod's novel *The Ronin*, Jean-Pierre Melville's *The Samurai* (*Le samourai*, 1967) was released shortly after its writer and director—the great maverick of French cinema—had made two other fatalistic crime thrillers: *Le Doulos* (*Le doulos*, 1961) and *The Second Breath* (*Le deuxième souffle*, 1966), both a dozen years after his classic noir thriller *Bob the Gambler* (*Bob le flambeur*, 1955). The richly textured story of *The Samurai* focused on the life and schemes of the professional hit man Jeff Costello and concentrated on relationships and human intrigues rather than violence. A particular atmosphere often enveloped the urban backgrounds of Melville's psychological thrillers. They featured deserted streets, steamy subways, seedy hotel rooms, and aban-



Alain Delon (Jeff Costello) in Jean-Pierre Melville's *The Samurai* (*Le samourai*, 1967), (Courtesy of BIFI/© 1967 Filmel Production).

doned police stations, as well as some clothing fetishism (Jeff Costello's raincoat). Melville's script was on a different level than most gangster films, offering much more than just crime and bloodshed. Jeff Costello (Alain Delon), a solitary professional hit man who lives in a one-room Parisian apartment with only a caged bird for companionship, is hired by a nameless Parisian mob to assassinate a nightclub owner. Shortly after accomplishing his task, the police apprehend him during a routine check of known criminals. He successfully goes through a police line-up identification thanks to the false testimony given by Valérie (Cathy Rosier), the piano player who saw him stepping out of the victim's office. In addition, his loyal girlfriend, Jeanne (Nathalie Delon), provides him with an unbreakable alibi by maintaining that he spent the night with her. Although no one can recognize him officially, the police are determined to nail him sooner or later. Constrained to release him, the inspector (François Périer) begins to tail him through the streets of the capital. Double-crossed by the mobster who hired him, Costello tries to discover the source of his betrayal, and at the same time becomes fascinated by a nightclub musician who purposely failed to finger him to the police. Although cheated out of his reward, he must threaten to kill his contact, who reveals to him the real name of his chief employer. Jeff once more receives a new mission. This time

he must eliminate the only eyewitness, Valérie, the piano player who saw him entering the club on the night of the crime. As Costello approaches her, the police shoot him down. Much to their surprise, his gun was not loaded.

Commercialized in the United States in a seriously abridged, re-edited, and poorly dubbed version entitled *The Godson*, the film was finally rereleased thirty years after its initial public airing in its intended form. Considered a seminal work by many film historians, *The Samurai* anticipated many American films, among them Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1976), Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994), and John Woo's 1989 remake *The Killer* (Woo once declared *The Samurai* a movie that is close to perfection).

Known for his low-budget productions, location shooting without film stars, self-written scripts, and complete artistic control during the immediate postwar era, Jean-Pierre Melville moved from independent art films to big-budget productions with internationally famous actors. In this European film noir, Melville consciously adopted the classic Hollywood style of his favorite directors, exploring the moral code of mobsters while confessing to be strongly influenced by the work of American filmmakers such as John Huston and Billy Wilder. Melville's clichés of the American version of film noir include the requisite nocturnal, bleak atmosphere; wet, gray, and gloomy Parisian streets; expressionless jazz nightclub musicians; and deserted police offices. Commenting on Melville's overpowering and absorbing thriller, director Henri-Georges Clouzot once said: "In this film void of soul and flesh, realism is then absent. It is rather the thriller's mechanism that is the real subject of *The Samurai*."<sup>27</sup>

In a film that omitted car chases, explosions, and other eye-catching effects, Melville's opening shot successfully established the existential nature of this gangster drama. *The Samurai* was about survival (as in the scene showing Jeff's punctilious technique for stealing a Citroën DS). At the same time, Melville's gangsters reflected a European sensibility, reminiscent of the existential gangster films of Jean-Luc Godard as the protagonists talk all night seemingly about every possible subject, voluntarily eluding the actual matter of the imminent plot. In addition, the film's opening quote was said to be taken from *The Book of Bushido* (it is actually an invention of Melville) and clearly set the tone of the main character: "There is no solitude greater than a samurai's, unless perhaps it is that of a tiger in the jungle." What ultimately emerged in this character study was an elaborate series of traps and double-crosses. Melville's nonromanticized view of Costello's professional obligation as a mob executioner was quite mesmerizing. The film was as much an interesting exploration of the human spirit and its failings as it was a story about crime and moral turpitude. Although

*The Samurai* is a bleak movie, both in tone and morality, the intrigue surrounding Costello sustained an exciting tale whose hero was repeatedly compelled to improvise in order to protect his cover. Thus, the outcome of Costello's conflict became far more than a foregone conclusion and was genuinely compelling to watch. The intense emphasis on Delon's impassive face created a sense of style. His stoicism actually elicits passion, heightening the psychological tension of the film, while the austere dialogues accentuate the introverted nature of the antihero character. Together, they render the protagonist passionless. Although the inclusion of the relationship between Costello and Valérie represented a redundant occurrence in the film, it did work with the rest of the narrative. It also brought some humanity to the tale, providing the vehicle for an explosive climax. The entire movie corresponded to a series of mini-climaxes, all building to the devastating, definitive conclusion.

The grim and dark passages of the film, in contrast to the rare, bright exterior scenes, were all part of the beautiful cinematography of Henri Decaë. The existential themes of alienation, solitude, and apprehension were particularly well illustrated through the Expressionistic lighting and framing techniques reminiscent of German Expressionism. To exclude the predominant and omniscient existentialist blackness of most film noir, the visual tones evolved around three colors (ice blue, cool gray, and murky green). Decaë's cold but stylish monochromatic photography, with its gloomy exteriors and dim interiors, nearly brought the movie to a black-and-white picture. Alain Delon's blue eyes and almost angelic features appeared so irrelevant with respect to his profession that the viewers were unexpectedly daunted, just as they were a few years earlier when he played the role of a boxer in *Rocco and His Brothers*. Melville claimed to have studied color for years before venturing to make his second color film,<sup>28</sup> *The Samurai*. The impeccable cold beauty of the bright-blue seats and walls inside the police station contrasts dramatically with the sickly grays and greens of the rest of the film, and the scarce presence of daylight accompanied with the omnipresence of closed doors, all to complete the feeling of entrapment.

This same feeling of entrapment is found in Melville's next feature film, *The Shadow Army* (*L'armée des ombres*, 1969). Widely regarded as the most historically accurate screen version of the French Resistance, the film (it was never shown commercially in the United States) chronicled a rare portrayal of authenticity. The vicissitudes of the story line and the vital performances of the actors combined for an atypical dramatic impact in this tale of the French underground during the Occupation.<sup>29</sup> Inspired by Joseph Kessel's 1943 novel *The Army of Shadows*,<sup>30</sup> *The Shadow Army* revealed from an internal point of view fictionalized accounts of the lives of members of the Resistance: their

tragedies, their solitude, their suspicions, and most of all the inhumane choices they had to make in order to survive. Set from October 1942 to February 1943, as noted the story depicts the plight of the French Resistance. The Gestapo in Paris arrest Philippe Gerbier (Lino Ventura), one of the Resistance's chiefs, and sends him to a concentration camp for political prisoners. Soon after, he manages to flee by killing a guard during an inquisition in Paris, and he later joins his group in Marseille. There, the conspirator Dounat (Alain Libolt), who had denounced Gerbier, is discretely executed by the Resistance survivors. He hides in Lyon, the main center of the French Resistance at the time, and organizes the expatriation of several members and downed pilots to England. Meanwhile, Felix (Paul Craucher), another Resistance fighter, is arrested and tortured by the Gestapo. So is Gerbier, a few days later. Both men are condemned to death by firing squad (at the moment of execution, the condemned are led to believe that they may save their lives by running away, unaware that this is actually a trick to train the firing squad for moving targets). Mathilde (Simone Signoret), a Resistance chief, manages to save Gerbier at the last second, and together they escape. But fate mercilessly falls prey on each member of the group; Mathilde is eventually captured herself. She is released, but as "bait" to capture the rest of the underground organization. Her choice is simple: if she does not disclose all the names of her Resistance group, her daughter will be immediately sent to a brothel for German soldiers in Poland. Later, the group discovers that two members have been arrested the same day Mathilde was released from the Gestapo headquarters. Heartbroken, the other members have no choice but to liquidate her. As they face her from inside their car, she seems to give her final agreement to her destiny, and they shoot her. None of the members of the group will survive the war, as the closing credits reveal the dreadful fate of each of them.

As a member of the French Resistance, for two years, who later moved to England to join the Free French forces, Melville dedicated two other feature films to the period of the Occupation: *The Silence of the Sea* (*Le silence de la mer*, 1949) and *Leon Morin Priest* (*Léon Morin, prêtre*, 1961). But for this assignment, he had waited twenty-five years to make the project come true. *The Shadow Army* was actually Melville's personal memoir, and it captured an honest look at the dignity of the French Resistance in its difficult missions of sabotage and spying for which its members were rarely prepared. Avoiding war clichés and a banal melodramatic background, Melville offered an altruistic view of the French Resistance, which contradicted other attempts to evoke the movement as downhearted and selfish (e.g., Louis Malle's *Lacombe Lucien*). For film Historian Freddy Buache, the greatest quality of the film in relation to the rendering of human courage was to "express a

certain idea of this fight motivated by conviction, with no concern for possibilities of success."<sup>31</sup> This appreciation of genuine "feel" of the movie was apparently not shared by many French-film critics. At the time of the movie's release, they declared that Melville's characters ironically lacked emotion, the human touch, and a sense of life in general. Although in essence these assertions may be true, it is important to remember that the most significant intention of Melville's *The Shadow Army*, despite its cold historical reconstitution, was the deliberate absence of dramatization, which, by conveying a singular spirit of the Resistance struggle, revealed a psychological mood with no exaggerated characterizations. The war or Resistance anecdotes, relegated behind a mood of abstraction (long shots with no sound), played a much greater role in the viewers' mind. Melville drew his actors out of diverse figures and deliberately rearranged and disguised events to prevent the movie from being classified a "historical reconstitution." Also worth noting is the musical score (Eric de Marsan), which was eventually used in "Les dossiers de l'écran," one of France's most popular TV shows of the 1970s and 1980s.

Director Henri Verneuil is also known for his contributions to *polar* or thriller/noir film, French style. Born Achod Malakian in 1920 in Rodosto, Turkey, Verneuil moved to France in 1924 and grew up in Marseille. Following the Liberation, he developed an interest in cinema. With the assistance of comedian Fernandel, he began directing several shorts in the late 1940s, and a few years later, he made several of the most popular feature films of France, such as *The Sheep Has Five Legs* (*Le mouton à cinq pattes*, 1954), *The Cow and I* (*La vache et le prisonnier*, 1959) with Fernandel, and later *A Monkey in Winter* (*Un singe en hiver*, 1962), *Any Number Can Win* (*Mélodie en sous-sol*, 1963), *100,000 Dollars au Soleil* (*Cent mille dollars au soleil*, 1963), *The Sicilian Clan*, *The Body of My Enemy* (*Le corps de mon ennemi*, 1976), *I . . . comme Icare* (*I . . . comme Icare*, 1979), and *Mille milliards de dollars* (1981).

Drawn from a novel of Auguste Le Breton, Verneuil's 1969 *The Sicilian Clan* made history in the thriller genre since it gathered three of the most prestigious film stars of the moment: Jean Gabin, Alain Delon, and Lino Ventura.<sup>32</sup> Needless to say, for the French film industry as well as the French public, this international crime drama was the equivalent of a Hollywood blockbuster. Adapted to the screen by José Giovanni (*Le trou*, *Le deuxième souffle*, *Le ruffian*), the story begins with convicted murderer Roger Sartet (Alain Delon), who, after escaping from prison, joins his clan, the Sicilian mafia, led by Vittorio Malanese (Jean Gabin). While in detention, Roger concocts a plan: to steal a precious jewel collection in exhibition at the Villa Borghese in Rome. The ultimate coup is to skyjack the plane that transports the



Lino Ventura (*Le Goff*), Jean Gabin (*Vittorio Malanese*), and Alain Delon (*Roger*) in Henri Verneuil's *The Sicilian Clan* (*Le clan des Siciliens*, 1969), (Courtesy of BIFI).

valuables. Under suspicion and tailed by Police Inspector Le Goff (Lino Ventura), Roger assumes the identity of a professional jeweler specializing in diamonds. His recalcitrant quest ultimately ends with the disastrous division of the family and the arrest of the patriarch Malanese himself.

This gangster film reinvented the classic gangster genre, elevating it to a higher level with its hard-boiled acting, deep character studies, and attractive photography. *The Sicilian Clan* can be viewed as an insightful sociological study of violence, power, corruption, and assassination, with the crime “family” serving as a metaphor for the way business is conducted in capitalistic, profit-making corporations and governmental circles. On many levels, Verneuil’s film provides equal satisfaction for viewers in search of a good story.

Ten years later, Verneuil renewed his success with *I . . . comme Icare*, starring Yves Montand. *I comme Icare*<sup>33</sup> looked at human behavior in opposition to established power and revealed the reason why people comply with almost every form of order, even murder. Following the assassination of a US president, (presumably JFK), district attorney Henry Volney (Yves Montand) refuses to sign the final report, which



holds a mental patient responsible for the murder. Volney is given the task of investigating the crime scene. He and his assistant have little evidence, aside from a seven-second tape from a security camera. However, this tape contains precious information: the features of a man filming the scene. The investigating team compare evidence and identify an eyewitness, and as the assistant tracks him down, there is a resulting series of crimes. One night, Volney enters the office of Mallory (Jacques Sereys), the head of the Secret Service, hoping to find a clue, and discovers proof of a cover-up. But once again he arrives too late; Mallory is no longer in the office. The plot continues with an overambitious attempt to scrutinize and ultimately to lash out at the government and Secret Service scandal behind the president's mysterious assassination and its cover-up. Unfortunately, at the very moment that Volney unveils the truth and obtains proof of the conspiracy, he is coldly assassinated.

Uniquely blending myth and reality, *I . . . comme Icare* reinforced the prevailing attitude on the issue of assassination and openly embraced the idea of conspiracy. The use of pseudoarchival material gave the film, through a series of rapid and striking editing techniques, an almost documentary character. Leaving aside all of its drama and emotion, the movie was a masterpiece of film assembly. The writing, the editing, the music, and the photography were all used to weave a persuasive tapestry out of an overwhelming mountain of evidence and testimony. Other than the obvious dramatic impact of the political puzzle, the film offered a minor melodramatic subplot in which the character played by Montand alienates his staff with his monomaniacal approach. This subplot was superficially added and resolved just as superficially. The detail of the investigation was narrated in such a way as to allow the individual viewer to decide what to believe following the depth of revelations on the assassination. Vaguely inspired by the details of the Warren Commission report, the movie somehow triumphed over the inundation of odds and ends and rendered a suspense thriller that never failed to disturb the moviegoer. One can argue that because *I . . . comme Icare* was never intended to be viewed as a documentary, it did not have to be historically accurate. Certainly, a film does not have to be historically correct to be entertaining.

Other important contributions to the thriller genre during that decade were José Giovanni's *Two Men in Town* (*Deux hommes dans la ville*, 1973), Jacques Deray's *Cop Story* (*Flic Story*, 1975), Verneuil's own *Night Caller* (*Peur sur la ville*, 1975), Alain Corneau's *The Case against Ferro* (*Police Python 357*, 1976) and *A Choice of Arms* (*Le choix des armes*, 1981), and Claude Miller's *Under Suspicion* (*Garde à vue*, 1981).

## THE HUMANISTS' SCHOOL: CLAUDE SAUTET, FRANÇOIS TRUFFAUT, AND ERIC ROHMER

Heirs to the humanistic, cinematic tradition of Jean Renoir, filmmakers such as François Truffaut and Claude Sautet (1924–2000) made movies that reflected three professed passions: a love of cinema, an interest in male–female relationships, and a compassionate obsession with midlife crises. It may be said that Sautet's earlier inspiration was embedded in the reminiscence, melancholy, and despair of his middle-aged stance, and with success he matured into an experienced filmmaker and storyteller. Although his films lost their lyricism, they maintained their fidelity to life's prosaic side. But the "discoloration" and monotony of life were chronicled with a sense of resignation and quiet achievement quite distinct from the banality of traditional autobiography. Truffaut, who collaborated on occasion with Sautet, considered him the most "French" of all French filmmakers and explained the quintessential quality of the French director in his memoir, *The Films in My Life*:

To love American cinema is fine; to try to make French films as if they were American is something else again, very much open to argument. I am not going to attack anybody for it, having myself fallen into that trap two or three times. Jean Renoir learned a lesson from Stroheim and Chaplin when he was making *Nana* and *Tire au flanc*, that is to say, he reinforced the French side of his films while he absorbed the Hollywood masters. In the same way, Claude Sautet understood, after the unavoidable detour through the crime films,<sup>34</sup> that he should, in Jean Cocteau's words, be a bird who sings in his own genealogical tree.<sup>35</sup>

A former graduate of the prestigious IDHEC, Claude Sautet did not enjoy immediate success in the early years of his career. Mostly known as an excellent technician (due principally to his editing skills, Truffaut baptized him the "patcher-upper"<sup>36</sup> of screenplays, as he was able to bring a mediocre film back to life via his great talent of montage), Sautet's contribution to French cinema was far from substantial in films such as *The Big Risk* (*Classe tous risques*, 1959) and *The Dictator's Guns* (*L'arme à gauche*, 1964). Unlike many other directors of his generation, Sautet never pretended to fight for a political or social cause. What Sautet is remembered for is his faithful and sincere portrayal of the French upper-middle-class bourgeois<sup>37</sup> (doctors, lawyers, businessmen, and architects) experiencing a reevaluation of their place and purpose in society. Sautet's cinema was centered on a meticulous yet humanistic study of the evolution of modern lifestyles, couple values, and society in general, as in *César and Rosalie* (*César et Rosalie*, 1972); *Vincent, François, Paul and the Others* (*Vincent, François, Paul . . .*

*et les autres*, 1974); *A Simple Story* (*Une histoire simple*, 1978); *Waiter!* (*Garçon!*, 1983); *A Heart in Winter* (*Un coeur en hiver*, 1992); and *Nelly and Monsieur Arnaud* (*Nelly et Monsieur Arnaud*, 1995). Popular audiences clearly understood Sautet's discourse since he transmitted the credible dimension of a pseudoautobiographic depiction and a self-critical rendering of the society of his time. (In many ways, one could easily draw a parallel between Sautet and Woody Allen if the latter did not often play his own character.)

Faithfully adapted from Paul Guimard's novel *Les choses de la vie*, *The Things of Life* (*Les choses de la vie*, 1969) was an immediate success and launched Sautet's career. The narrative expressed the fundamentally absurd nature of human existence as well as the consequences of the "little" moments in life that make up its essence. Although the story line featured an ensemble cast with multiple overlapping plots, the scenes were organized chronologically, including sporadically inserted conversations unrelated to the film. Through numerous flashbacks, the story describes the last moments of Pierre (Michel Piccoli), a forty-year-old architect, as he is killed in a car accident. During the last moments of his life, he reviews his intimate past, especially with his lover H el ene (Romy Schneider), for whom he had left his wife. Pierre is separated from his wife, Catherine (L ea Massari), and lives with H el ene, a young German architect. Trying to take a major step forward in his life, Pierre decides to terminate his relation with Catherine. To this end, he has written a letter that he intends to mail the next day. But at the last moment he changes his mind while at the post office, puts the letter in his pocket, and calls Catherine to arrange to meet her in Rennes. The accident occurs shortly after. As the car rolls over, Pierre relives the most important episodes of his life. On the brink of death, he sees all the various protagonists of his own existence gathered around a banquet table, silently accompanying him to his death. While peacefully expiring, he continues to perceive the discontinuous reality of his present situation, which triggers a series of mental images.

Although the narrative technique, intermingled with flashbacks, was not new at the time, the real innovation of the film relied on the characters' depiction through a sharp sociological eye and a constant hidden fascination for an existentialist vision of middle-aged happiness. In addition, the essential characteristic that set this film apart from its many predecessors and later imitators (in 1994 Mark Rydell directed *Intersection*, the remake of the film) was its weaving of often disparate layers of the story into a coherent whole. Each and every individual strand of *The Things of Life* was strong enough to form the foundation of a movie. Rarely would a film depict as many assorted chronicles, yet interconnected personal stories and tragedies.



Michel Piccoli (Pierre) in Claude Sautet's *The Things of Life* (*Les choses de la vie*, 1969), (Photo courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art/Film Stills Archive/© Studio Canal).

The different stages of *The Things of Life* were not compiled to satiate the sentimental appetite of the theater masses; rather, the film was carefully and painstakingly crafted to substantiate every character's tragedy and eventually mold them into distinct, complex individuals. The slow camera movement possesses a dreamlike power, and, when combined with the intensity of the accident motions, gives a somnolent impression to express mental recollection or even, at times, hallucination. In fact, Sautet's cinematography communicates a sudden surge of emotion, a contemplated action, making strongly rhetorical points by juxtaposing shots. The overall impression Sautet conveyed derived from the use of a seemingly floating camera to join not only elements within a scene but also the scenes themselves. In Sautet's filmmaking, the cinematography in motion, one of the strategic indicators of the existence of the narrator (Piccoli as Pierre), moved independently from the actions of the narrator, poetically reacting to them or commenting on what happens. Sautet's viewpoint progresses to keep the action in view and to follow as many elements as possible. The storyteller could well be considered a novelist investigating, but not commenting on, what was shown.

The actual meticulous montage of the film, which took nearly three months to carry out, was what essentially placed it above the ordinary.

Sautet's editing prompted a succession of resourceful tricks that allowed a passionate or catastrophic incident (a car accident, for instance) to appear as a very natural occurrence. For Sautet, the conception of common visual artifice in *The Things of Life* depended on the editing process for its force and excitement, since its plot would stay within the bounds of illusion and reality.<sup>38</sup>

Sautet and his cinematographer, Jean Boffety (1925–1988),<sup>39</sup> developed or enhanced already established techniques for allowing the drama to develop on multiple planes of vision and sound. Deep-focus photography, which Boffety had used in a more restricted manner in earlier films, permitted actors and objects to stay in focus regardless of their distance from the camera. Using this particular technique, multiple sequences could be staged within a single frame and remain intelligible, allowing for multifaceted interactions between a subject and his or her—or its—surroundings. Boffety's camera captured the spontaneity of life and the passion of lust.

Out of an almost banal event, a man in his prime hit by tragic fate, Sautet was able to touch on universal themes and concerns. *The Things of Life* was one of the great popular successes of the decade, as it was awarded the Prix Louis Delluc in 1969. For Sautet, cinema had to be, on the one hand, personable, and on the other, a splendid spectacle. His style as seen in *The Things of Life*, at once delicate, lyrical, and exceptionally fertile in its cinematographic invention, would become, partly by design, more prosaic and conventional with Sautet's later projects. As a result, some elements of controversy developed regarding the extent to which his later films involved a sense of ostentatious militant conservatism, such as in *César and Rosalie* and *Vincent, François, Paul and the Others*.

On a stylistic level, one can locate a diverging strain that characterized most of Sautet's work from the early 1960s on. The director celebrated life in the humanistic tradition of Jean Renoir, which includes the masterwork of 1970s cinema *César and Rosalie*. This film defined the modern romantic triangle for a generation. It is the bitter-sweet story of Rosalie (played by Romy Schneider), a woman who dominates others' lives and is at last free to choose her own. This sentimental drama-comedy must be seen as a contemporary novel. Self-made businessman César<sup>40</sup> (Yves Montand) and his amicable wife, Rosalie, have a happy marriage until an artist, David (Sami Frey), Rosalie's ex-lover, comes back into her life seeking to reclaim her. César comports himself like a friendly bourgeois who believes he has succeeded in life. Financially successful, he never misses an opportunity to boast about it. As the presence of David becomes a tangible reality, Rosalie realizes that she is still in love with him. At first furious, César understands the nature of the situation and decides to allow David to

share their happiness. As the friendship between the two men grows stronger each day, Rosalie begins to feel differently about the arrangement and eventually leaves both men and their friendship.

Yves Montand and Romy Schneider (1938–1982) were Sautet's favorite actors. Montand worked for film directors such as Claude Sautet and Costa-Gavras at the peak of his career in the early 1970s. Along with Jacques Brel, Georges Brassens, and Léo Ferré, he was also one of France's most popular singers in the twentieth century ("Les feuilles mortes," "La bicyclette," "C'est si bon," "Le temps des cerises"). Born Ivo Livi near Florence, Montand, came with his parents to France in 1923 and grew up in Marseille, working as a docker at an early age. In 1944, sponsored by the legendary French singer Edith Piaf, he began a singing career, which quickly took him to the big screen where he landed his first role in Marcel Carné's *The Gates of the Night* (*Les portes de la nuit*, 1946), a role which was prior assigned to Jean Gabin. His major breakthrough was with Henri-Georges Clouzot's *The Wages of Fear* (*Le salaire de la peur*, 1953), which won the Palme d'or at the 1953 Cannes Film Festival. In 1951, as noted, Yves Montand married Simone Signoret (see chapter 4), and their marriage lasted until her death in 1985. Montand's national fame took him temporarily to Hollywood, where he starred as Jean-Marc with Marilyn Monroe in George Cukor's *Let's Make Love* (*Le milliardaire*, 1960).

Throughout his life, Montand was involved in various political and humanitarian campaigns. Along with countless artists and intellectuals, he petitioned against the atomic bomb in March 1950. The conservative press severely attacked him for his position against the deployment of troops in Indochina and Algeria, and especially for his support of socialist regimes. Years later, Montand recognized the mistake that led him to underestimate the reality of political trials in Prague and Budapest, and the restriction of human rights in the entire Eastern bloc. Following the invasions of Budapest and Prague, he stepped out of the political arena but never relinquished his support for politically oriented films. Montand acted for the most prestigious American and French directors: Vincente Minnelli, Joseph Losey, Costa-Gavras, Jean-Pierre Melville, Alain Resnais, René Clément, Claude Lelouch, Jean-Luc Godard, Claude Sautet, Pierre Granier-Deferre, Alain Corneau, and Henri Verneuil. With Sautet, Montand was able to communicate his showman talents as well as his joviality, particularly in *Garçon!* After his most memorable roles in the 1970s, Montand experienced a second wind not only as president of the 1987 Cannes Film Festival but with his performance in *Jean de Florette* in 1986. Yves Montand died at age seventy while finishing Jean-Jacques Beineix's *IP5: The Island of Pachyderms* (*IP5: l'île aux Pachydermes*, 1992).

The role of Rosalie, one of the most influential in all of French cinema, was interpreted by one of the great French actresses of the 1970s, Romy Schneider. Schneider was born Rosemarie Albach-Retty in 1938, in Vienna. After working in films directed by prestigious filmmakers such as Luchino Visconti in *Boccaccio 70* (1962) and Orson Welles in *The Trial* (1963), the young actress settled in France in the 1960s and became one of the country's most respected actresses. Far from being a classical beauty, she sometimes appeared glowing (in Jean Giroud's *The Woman Banker/La banquière*, 1980) and sometimes morose (Bertrand Tavernier's *Deathwatch/La mort en direct*, 1980). But once her character was engaged, viewers had the impression of an intelligent, intuitive actress wanting to commit herself to the inner rhythm of her role. At her best, she was riveting, capable of persuading spectators that she was beautiful and able to vary her own appearance according to the mood of the film, as for instance, in her performances in *The Main Thing Is to Love (L'important c'est d'aimer)*, 1975) and *A Simple Story (Une histoire simple)*, 1978), (she won Césars for Best Actress for both films). Above all, she bared a vivid but vulnerable soul.

No film better expressed Schneider's persona than the moment in *The Things of Life* when she glares at Pierre (Michel Piccoli) and says: *Tu m'aimes parce que je suis là, mais si il faut traverser la rue pour me rejoindre, tu es perdu. Tu es comme un vieux. Les avions s'en iront sans toi; en fait tu n'as plus d'espoir.* (You love me because I am here, but if you have to cross the street to meet me, you're confused. You're old. Planes will take off without you; in fact you have no hope.) Those words embodied not just the sensual dominance of the actress herself but also a residual sadness inherent to her personality. Like Catherine in *Jules and Jim*, Romy asserts her presence in a way that shows a woman encouraged to experiment in front of the demanding camera. Rosalie may be her most intense role, but it involved the greatest risks as well as the greatest triumph. Sautet was not renowned for his depiction of female characters, but Rosalie comes to life with Schneider's emotional pragmatism and her instinctive, dour fun. The long sequence in which she departs is a perfect expression of spitefulness and playfulness.

In her later years, the actress experienced several personal tragedies, including the accidental death of her fourteen-year-old son. A few months later, Romy Schneider was found dead in her Paris apartment. The official cause was heart failure, though friends of the actress believe that she committed suicide.

Following the success of *The Things of Life* as well as of *César and Rosalie*, Claude Sautet's *Vincent, François, Paul and the Others* (1974), one of the rare Sautet films in which Romy Schneider did not star, renewed his favorite theme—the relationship between men and women over forty. All the different aspects of existence are scrutinized in a

Romanesque manner: love, work, friendship, ambitions, and disillusionment. A group of middle-aged, long time friends face midlife crises. Although sharing common social successes, Vincent (Yves Montand), the owner of a small company, sees trouble in his life as he faces bankruptcy, the sudden departure of his lover, and the relentless desire of his wife for divorce. François (Michel Piccoli), a successful physician, has lost his ideals in medicine and simply works for money as he entertains a tumultuous relationship with his wife, who does not hide her relation with another man. Paul (Serge Reggiani), a thriving journalist, struggles with a never-ending novel he has been writing for twenty years. One day, a sudden heart attack sends Vincent to the hospital, strengthening the friendship among the friends. The realistic depiction of the group's plight, the disappointment in their lives, and the loss of their youthful dreams to change the world, despite their social accomplishments, carries along with the simple story line a heavy burden of human failure, the price of which seems high. In theory, the friends would all seek to help one another, but when money creates conflicts, the friendships disappear until reconciliation (re-)occurs. The group of friends see Vincent's heart attack as an ineluctable stage of life that awaits each one of them; it symbolically represents the end of youth.

Similarly, in *A Simple Story* Romy Schneider plays Marie, an independent, forty-year-old, middle-class woman who chooses to rule over her dull existence as she seeks separation from Serge (Claude Brasseur) when Georges (Bruno Cremer), her former husband, comes back into her life. The film is a description of the characters' struggles, an examination of their behavior as they make the transition between youth and their future.

Jean-Loup Dabadie, who authored the script for *A Simple Story* in collaboration with Claude Sautet, played a major role in Sautet's success. *A Simple Story* earned an Academy Award nomination for Best Foreign Film in 1979. François Truffaut described him as one of the most influential screenwriters of the postwar era: "The common denominator [. . .] is Jean-Loup Dabadie, a true cinema writer, quite simply an excellent writer in any case, a musician of words that sound like what they are, modest and mischievous, scrupulous and inspired, a daring young man on the flying typewriter, and trained in Sautet's school."<sup>44</sup> The strong performances, the solid directing, and the tightly structured script all contributed to the film's success. Romy Schneider, despite her prestige in the French cinema of the 1970s, was convincing in her rendition of an ordinary woman emotionally affected through her own personal and professional struggles. The framing device worked to make Marie a gentle character and worthy hero. Once again, Sautet depicted the dead-end lives of a series of characters



from a humanistic perspective. Romy Schneider, Michel Piccoli, and Yves Montand were undeniably the speakers for Sauter at his best, a constant visual movement between character studies and social chronicles.

In the early 1970s, François Truffaut, who, after a phenomenal first decade of filmmaking in the 1960s, was reaching a turning point in his career. Following more or less successful films such as *Wild Child* (*L'enfant sauvage*, 1970) and *Day for Night* (*La nuit américaine*, 1973), Truffaut's second international breakthrough occurred with *The Story of Adèle H.* (*L'histoire d'Adèle H.*, 1975), an openly humanistic film that narrated Adèle Hugo's secret diary. The mesmerizing Isabelle Adjani played Adèle, a young woman crushed by the weight of her famous father figure, the writer Victor Hugo, and the sudden death of her sister Léopoldine (who drowned in 1843). Under a false identity Adèle arrives in Halifax in 1863 to find her English lover, Albert Pinson (Bruce Robinson), the Hussard lieutenant with whom she was madly in love. The two met on the Channel Island of Guernsey, where Victor Hugo lived in exile after Napoléon III overthrew the French Republic. In order to survive, Adèle constantly has to solicit the financial help of her father. Adèle receives her father's consent to marry, but the young officer does not return her affections and eventually turns her down. The consequences are dreadful for Adèle's young, sensitive mind. The unbearable solitude, the need to relentlessly imagine new impostures, and the repeated lie to her parents who think that she is indeed married all work to entrap her in a swirl of revolt and, ultimately, madness. She is eventually taken back to France in 1872 and sent to a mental institution, where she dies in 1915 at the age of eighty-five. Somber and romantic, passionate and obsessive in love, Adèle self-destructs. The 1975 New York Film Critics' Circle awarded Isabelle Adjani the prize for Best Actress and Truffaut the prize for Best Screenwriting.

Isabelle Adjani (b. 1955), whose glamorous French femininity attracted and still attracts the attention of many French and foreign directors, is undeniably entitled to the status of international stardom. In 1977, *Time* magazine dedicated its cover to the twenty-two-year-old who quickly drew attention with her emotional sincerity and rare dedication to dramatic acting. Adjani's first important movie role following her apprenticeship at the Comédie-Française, was in Claude Pinoteau's *The Slap* (*La giffle*, 1974) revealing another aspect of her intriguing individuality. The depth of her acting talents was further demonstrated through intense, self-destructive, and passionate characters in love stories like Jean Becker's *One Deadly Summer* (*L'été meurtrier*, 1983). Later, Bruno Nuytten's *Camille Claudel* (*Camille Claudel*, 1988) confirmed Adjani as one of the most talented French actresses of all

time. She received Oscar nominations for her performances in *The Story of Adele H.* due to the dramatic intensity of the film, which also revealed her talent as unclassifiable, as well as *Camille Claudel*, and in the 1990s she won the César for Best Actress in Patrice Chéreau's *Queen Margot* (*La reine Margot*, 1994). She also starred with Sharon Stone and Chaz Palminteri in Jeremiah Chechik's *Diabolique* in 1996, a Franco-American coproduction (and remake of Henri-Georges Clouzot's *Les diaboliques*). Other significant films include Alain Berbérian's *Paparazzi* (*Paparazzi*, 1998), Luc Besson's *Subway* (1984), Werner Herzog's *Nosferatu the Vampyre* (*Nosferatu: Phantom der Nacht*, 1979), and André Téchiné's *Barocco* (*Barocco*, 1976) and *The Bronte Sisters* (*Les soeurs Brontë*, 1978).

In his numerous explorations of psychological truths, Truffaut has rarely disclosed a need to limit himself to what can be considered "realistic." With *The Man Who Loved Women*<sup>42</sup> (*L'homme qui aimait les femmes*, 1977), Truffaut depicted a man whose main passion in life was concocting elaborate erotic intrigues, and who dedicated his adult life to an unremitting courtly pursuit of female lovers, none of whom could fulfill his aspirations. Suzanne Schiffman, in collaboration with Michel Fermaud and Truffaut, wrote the script.

The story begins in Montpellier with the funeral of the main protagonist, Bertrand Morane (Charles Denner), a forthright gentleman who preys on female hearts and minds for personal pleasure. Attending the funeral are dozens of female companions, all of whom he had loved at a moment during his life. The forty-year-old engineer Bertrand, who does not find much satisfaction in his professional career, cannot keep his eyes and mind off women. For this modern-age libertine, the only real passion in life is the pursuit of women. Although dealing with an old theme—Don Juan and his sexual exploits—the film relentlessly examines the central subject matter in every scene. The character of the "traditional womanizer" is portrayed differently since the story glorifies not the protagonist but instead the intricacy of his strategies, the man's forged destiny, and his unavoidable series of elaborate lies.

Struck by an unknown woman's legs in a laundry room (supposedly Nathalie Baye's), Bertrand has just enough time to write down her car's license plate. He makes a dent in his own car while tracking down her telephone number. Then he calls her under the pretense that she has caused this dent so that he may set up a meeting with her. A solitary hunter, Bertrand loves all women: a nanny whose number he had copied off a bulletin board in a department store, a car rental agent, a movie usherette, a bar waitress, a lingerie store owner, and a wake-up call telephone operator whose voice is the only tangible source of seduction. A female phone operator awakens him every morning



Charles Denner (Bertrand) and Brigitte Fossey (Geneviève) in François Truffaut's *The Man Who Loved Women* (*L'homme qui aimait les femmes*, 1977), (Courtesy of BIFI/ © Dominique Le Rigoleur).

and, although he is half-asleep, he relentlessly begs her to meet him. While constantly on the prowl for new adventures, Bertrand decides to write an autobiographical compilation of the accounts of his love adventures. The book, first entitled *Le cavaleur* (The flirt or the skirt chaser), is changed to *The Man Who Loved Women* and is eventually published. On Christmas Eve, unable to spend the holidays alone, Bertrand, in his relentless search for a female companion that night, is hit by a car while crossing a street (he had just recognized a former lover). As he regains consciousness in the hospital, he notices at a distance the elegant features of a nurse's legs. As he tries to get out of bed, he falls badly and dies doing what he has done his entire life: pursuing a woman.

Truffaut chose Charles Denner, an actor he had long admired for his natural intelligence, to avoid succumbing to the "handsome" stereotype of the traditional Casanova, which would have irrevocably changed the nature of the hero. Instead, the ordinary looks of Bertrand Morane win over our sympathy. The anxious, introverted, and serious nature of the hero, in addition to his ordinary look, gives the film all the force it requires to impart Bertrand's credo: a man who values the

love of women above everything else in his life. Far from being salacious, the impulsive behavior of the protagonist actually reveals the joy found in innumerable relationships and sexual quests. Denner brought an interesting dimension to his character that would have been absent with a more conventionally handsome leading man. His physical presence emphasizes just how irrelevant a role physical beauty can play in the game of seduction. With the character of Bertrand, everything turns on creativity and experience, as he announces early in the narrative: "Women's legs are compasses which circle the globe, giving it its equilibrium and harmony."<sup>43</sup> For him, lovemaking is a matter of technique, preparation, and will. Sex, jealousy, envy, and revenge are so chaotic in his mind that he hardly bothers to separate these strands. His impulse, simply, is to exert his influence in his little world of women; how he exerts himself is almost beside the point. He uses his power willfully, whenever and wherever he likes, without a thought for consequences. In Montpellier, Bertrand lives the life of a single man. When he goes out to restaurants or to the movies in search of a possible conquest, the pursuit of an idea or an image takes over. The more the road presents obstacles, ambushes, and deceptions, the more the quest becomes mystical.

Through an earthy yet detached cinematography, Truffaut's fantasy blurred with reality and beautifully rendered an atypical protagonist driven to the edge of his obsession. What happens for the viewer is mirrored in the changes in the characters, and what begins as amusement deepens into tragedy. The richness at the conclusion of the film is not quite what is expected at the beginning, which features the lightness of Truffaut's cinematography. Truffaut was able to achieve a persuasive meditation on the theme of human obsession—obsession to seduce and to create (as in literature), which eventually transformed a personal and intimate experience into a singular language.

Later in the story, Bertrand manages to get the phone number of Martine (Nathalie Baye). Although she lives in another city, Bertrand drives there and finally reaches her by phone, only to confess immediately the true purpose of his phone call. Five minutes later, they meet in a bar, and to his great disappointment he understands that the woman he saw was actually Martine's cousin, who was just visiting at the time. Once back in Montpellier, Bertrand stops by the car rental agency to thank the employee who helped him and invites her for dinner. After a romantic evening, she reveals why she accepted his invitation so quickly: "I think it's hard to refuse you anything. You have a special way of asking. It is as if your life depended on it. But then, maybe, it's just a trick on your part—the playboy who doesn't look like one, the wolf with a worried look."<sup>44</sup> It is precisely this anxiety that is the basis of his obsession.

Bothered by his personal problems created by his fascination for women, Bertrand seeks help through a self-imposed therapy, writing an autobiographical novel of his innumerable conquests. Unlike the traditionally represented Casanova and other celluloid heroes, for whom love corresponds more to an unadorned serial quest for lust, Bertrand's seduction is just the opposite. An introverted and restless hunter, Bertrand strives to seduce women despite the most difficult obstacles that make the venture an intricate passion, a convoluted way of life on which the very purpose of his existence depends. Beleguered by the presence of all the letters and photos of his ex-lovers that he has stocked for years, Bertrand finally decides to write his memoir to vent his obsession but also to avoid oblivion. He does not want to forget the women's names. As he locks himself in his bathroom to avoid the distraction of daylight, the first-time author resuscitates his childhood memory (which indirectly recalls Antoine Doinel's) before setting his imagination free and confessing the most intimate details about the women who have crossed his path. He writes: "Some are so beautiful from the back that I prolong the moment to catch up so as not be disappointed. But I'm never disappointed. When they turn out to be ugly, I feel somehow relieved . . . since it's out of the question to have them all!"<sup>45</sup>

Even failures are counted as victories. One day he witnesses an attractive young woman who just left her baby sitting job. He calls to hire her services, and when the young woman enters his apartment, she wonders where the baby is. Bertrand, who pretends that the baby is sleeping in his room, gets caught by the babysitter, who discovers a big baby doll tucked in the cradle. Another day the lingerie-store owner, Catherine, who sees him regularly, reveals after an intense flirting game, her secret attraction for younger men, much to Bertrand's dismay.

Once Bertrand's book is finished, the manuscript is sent to a Parisian publisher. At first the publishing committee, mainly made up of men, express no interest in the book. One of the editors, Geneviève (Brigitte Fossey), however, takes up the defense of the first-time author and finally persuades the rest of the group that with some necessary changes the book is meant to be published. The new title of the book, *The Man Who Loved Women*, suits Bertrand, but one detail puzzles him, namely, the use of the past tense. For Geneviève, the particular use of this tense suggests the ephemeral course of love in man's existence and, therefore, its preciousness. Geneviève is the ultimate woman in Bertrand's life:

Amid these kaleidoscopic fragments of Bertrand's amorous universe, one woman does emerge as the most significant—as well as Truf-

faut's most intelligently engaging female characterization. Geneviève Bigey is an editor who convinces her publishing house to accept Bertrand's autobiographical novel, *The Man Who Loved Women*. Her structural importance is evident from the film's opening scene, as she is the first (and last) narrator; her voice-over is the frame and the vehicle for his story. Even before we know who is speaking, Geneviève is visually set apart from the crowd of women at Bertrand's funeral: she stands above the rest, and is occasionally given her own frame in close-up. . . . She is a professional and therefore liberated woman . . . Geneviève is in a sense an even more hopeful character . . . since romance is integrated into her work: after being close to a text, she grows closer to its author.<sup>46</sup>

Truffaut succeeded with the difficult task of making a film that captures the background and ethos of a particular male behavior, a social group for which manipulation and sexual-power games are often a way of life. According to Diana Holmes and Robert Ingram, Geneviève's role as master narrator "does not negate the 'phallogocentric' tone of much of the film, but it did confirm that the film is also about the problematic nature of conventionally andocentric sexual relations."<sup>47</sup> It is also important to note that the central theme is not the portrayal of innocent women, exploited and betrayed by a corrupt, decadent, and discredited man. This confusion of behaviors, although often misunderstood by audiences, captured the spirit of the times and the breath of social and artistic liberalism. It was a metaphor for total masculine control over sexuality and an extreme expression of the basic subconscious attitude of many men toward women.

Truffaut's films were also known for their surface charm, which often concealed highly paradoxical nuances, as he even occasionally took leading or supporting roles in his own films (in *The Man Who Loved Women*, he is an extra in the opening funeral scene). Despite the appearance of both traditional and "on the spur of the moment" aspect of the film, *The Man Who Loved Women* might very well be Truffaut's most personal film (excluding *The Four Hundred Blows*).<sup>48</sup> Truffaut repeatedly chose dazzling and strong leading ladies: Jeanne Moreau in *Jules and Jim* and *The Bride Wore Black* (*La mariée était en noir*, 1967), Catherine Deneuve in *Mississippi Mermaid* (*La sirène du Mississippi*, 1969) and *The Last Metro* (*Le dernier métro*, 1980), Jacqueline Bisset in *Day for Night*, Isabelle Adjani in *The Story of Adele H.*, and Fanny Ardant in *The Woman Next Door* (*La femme d'à côté*, 1981) and *Confidentially Yours* (*Vivement dimanche*, 1983). But when *The Man Who Loved Women* opened in April 1977, the French feminist press hammered it for Truffaut's unequivocal misogynistic elements. Despite this negative publicity, however, the film was a commercial and critical success, with a screening totaling twelve weeks that year. Interestingly enough,



François Truffaut and Jean-Pierre Léaud (Photo courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art/Film Stills Archive).

the film met with greater success in northern Europe while it remained largely misunderstood in Latin countries where “ostentatious womanizing” is traditionally a more overt theme in cinematic pop culture.<sup>49</sup>

One of the least known of Truffaut’s films from the 1970s, *The Green Room* (*La chambre verte*, 1978), was solemn and serious in tone and dealt principally with the subject of death. Truffaut himself played the death-obsessed chronicler who created a pantheon devoted to the memory of the people he loved. The pivotal questions of life versus death and love versus the memory of those who have passed away were treated both rationally and emotionally.

More than ten years after the end of World War I, Julien Davenne (Truffaut), an unassuming newspaper reporter, specializes in the obituary section. He lives a peaceful life in a small provincial town. Deeply moved by the death toll of the war, he is constantly haunted by the idea of death, especially the memory of his wife, who passed away shortly after they were married. On the first floor of his house, Julien has created a room for his lost loved ones. One day in an auction room, Julien meets Cécilia (Nathalie Bayé), who helps him find the ring that Julie, his late wife, used to own, and a sort of mutual feeling begins to flourish between them. Julien receives permission from the ecclesiastical authorities to rehabilitate an abandoned chapel close to a ceme-

tery. Julien, whose only wish is to join Julie in death, gives up on life and gradually weakens. And among all the photographs of those who gave their lives during the war, he peacefully dies.

One of the motivations for the film was a peculiar declaration made by the director, who said that, as the years go by, the number of one's acquaintances become smaller and smaller, until eventually one realizes that there are more people who are dead than alive in one's life. The director in part was inspired by several of Henry James's novels and tales, including "The Altar of the Dead," but mostly the film narrated a considerable part of his own life, his own reality and existential torments, reinforcing the centrality of his points of view. This particular aspect of "anticipated" autobiography (the fascination with death) is evidenced in the final scene when Julien's obsessions overwhelm him and lead him to death. For him, lost ones fall into oblivion when no one honors them; detached from the ideas of the Catholic church, the dead are alive and closer than what religion suggests as long as one remembers them and commemorates their names. Despite Truffaut's limitations as an actor (he lends little credibility to the words and existential sufferings of his character), his deeply personal involvement with the material conveyed an important constituent to the overall performance. Other features of the film helped convey the appropriate mood. The carefully crafted setting gave the narrative an element of solemnity and prevented the film from being overwhelmed by unnecessary lyricism and heavy symbolism. The editing was technically predominant, although misleading, with its mix of contemporary sources and staged dramatizations.

A year later, with *Love on the Run* (*L'amour en fuite*, 1979), Truffaut put an end to the series featuring Antoine Doinel's<sup>50</sup> sentimental tribulations. Through the use of extensive flashback to previous features, the film examined the ways in which art and passion could dispose of one's existence and happiness. The last episode of Antoine's vicissitudes, *Love on the Run* depicted the new relation between Antoine (Jean-Pierre Léaud), now thirty, and Sabine (Dorothée), a young salesperson in a record store. Antoine also runs into Colette (Marie-France Pisier), a former teenage love, who bought Antoine's first published autobiographical novel. Criticized for using too many former episodes of Antoine's past (*The Four Hundred Blows*, *Stolen Kisses*, and others), *Love on the Run* gave the series a captivating dimension to the memories of Antoine, thanks to the inimitable quality of the montage. Antoine Doinel displayed consistency in his character during the four episodes of the saga, and each time conveyed cinematographic intelligence and the sensitivity of the filmmaker.



The art of Eric Rohmer is a rather special case in the history of French cinema.<sup>51</sup> Born Jean-Marie Maurice Scherer in 1920, Rohmer has used perhaps some of the most humble *mise-en-scènes* in all of filmmaking history with his simple, low-budget films while exploring the dynamics and secrets of human relationships. Rohmer's narrative style explored in a calculated manner only those aspects of life that seemed most engaging to him, particularly between protagonists with his own idiosyncratic universe, a literary and philosophical background, all wrapped in an evocative narrative environment. Despite the recurrent format of their content (usually gathered in feature series such as *Moral Tales/Contes Moraux* and *Comedies and Proverbs/Comédies et proverbes*), Rohmer's romantic tales possess a refined and consistent talent that has been inspirational to many contemporary film directors. In his films, the visual lightness and informality of camera motions and the evocative treatment of the camera's relationship with reality revealed the presence of a number of cinematographic styles, such as intellectualism in *My Night at Maud's* (*Ma nuit chez Maud*, 1969), tenderness in *Pauline at the Beach* (*Pauline à la plage*, 1983), and sensuality in *Claire's Knee* (*Le genou de Claire*, 1970) and *Chloé in the Afternoon* (*L'amour l'après-midi*, 1972), as well as the "myth of youth" in an idiosyncratic vision of Chrétien de Troyes's *Perceval le Gallois* (*Perceval le Gallois*, 1978). Due to his deeply embedded lyrical personality, Rohmer's cinema intentionally limited its spectrum of concerns, and deliberately excluded certain human issues, involving social and political subject matter. For his detractors, Rohmer's cinema limited itself to the insubstantial, as part of a larger artistic and intellectual scheme, which, as a result, often failed to convey a persuasive artistic message. His narratives usually overlooked a possible contact with the spectator's deeper mental universe, and, as a result, the presence of unremitting melancholy in Rohmer's films has always had a limited impact on French popular audiences.

As undeniable as it is that Rohmer's cinema is a secluded one, it is also important to recognize the impact his films have had over some four decades. The fidelity of Rohmer's supporters has always assured his films reliable production; this is an unprecedented record of success in French cinema. The latest Rohmer cycle, *Contes des quatre saisons*, includes *A Tale of Springtime* (*Un conte de printemps*, 1989), *A Winter's Tale* (*Un conte d'hiver*, 1992), *A Summer's Tale* (*Un conte d'été*, 1996), and *Autumn Tale* (*Un conte d'automne*, 1998).

Rohmer earned numerous international prizes over the years, including the Silver Bear at the Berlin Film Festival for *The Collector* (*La collectionneuse*, 1966), an Oscar nomination for Best Foreign Film and Best Screenplay at the 1970 Academy Awards for *My Night at Maud's*, the Special Jury Prize at the 1976 Cannes Film Festival for *The Mar-*

*quise of O* (*La marquise d'O*, 1976), and the prize for Best Screenplay at the 1998 Venice Film Festival for *Autumn Tale*.

## THE STORYTELLERS: BERTRAND BLIER AND BERTRAND TAVERNIER

Bertrand Blier (b. 1939), son of the popular French actor Bernard Blier (1916–89), began his career as assistant to Georges Lautner and as an adept of “direct cinema” shorts (*Hitler, connais pas*, 1963). Blier the director is seen as the most truculent maker of French films of the 1970s, a time that he generally considered stale and too conventional. He promoted a mode of cinema that would allow the director to write intimate dialogues, invent stories, and, in general, produce a film as an artistic whole in his or her own style. In the 1980s and 1990s, Blier produced several of the most popular films at the French box office: *Stepfather* (*Beau-Père*, 1981), *Ménage* (*Tenue de soirée*, 1986), *Too Beautiful for You* (*Trop belle pour toi*, 1989), *Thank You, Life* (*Merci la vie*, 1991), *My Man* (*Mon homme*, 1996), and *Actors* (*Les acteurs*, 2000).

Following a “false” start in 1963 with *Hitler, connais pas*, Blier had to wait an entire decade to make a full-length feature. Unsuccessful in his repeated attempts to persuade producers with the first-draft scenario of *Going Places* (*Les valseuses*, 1974), Blier successfully published it as a novel and then, once it was recognized, remodeled it for cinema. When the film premiered in France in March 1974, *Going Places* was one of the major cinematographic events of the decade. With it came much more than simply a new type of filmmaking; it also corresponded to the starting point of a new generation of actors. Although far from making a *cinéma d'auteurs*, Bertrand Blier offered an innovative look at reality, reevaluating the supposedly “liberated” society of the early 1970s with a sharp psychological approach and a good dose of cynical eroticism.

*Going Places*, which mirrored the disaffected, anarchic mood of France's youth of the time, propelled Blier all the way to the Oscars. The action-packed “country” road movie set in a sort of postapocalyptic near future narrates the idle existence of two young ex-cons who rapidly become aimless thugs: Jean-Claude (Gérard Depardieu) and Pierrot (Patrick Dewaere). The pair bully, harass, and steal from the residents of surrounding neighborhoods for entertainment. During an attempt to swipe a car, the owner injures Pierrot. After finding a surgeon for Pierrot's wound, he and Jean-Claude decide to rob the surgeon of his money and make their way across France, pulling petty crimes and accosting women whenever possible. They eventually meet Jeanne (Jeanne Moreau), also an ex-con, who happens to have just gotten out of jail. Disregarding common decency, Jean-Claude and

Pierrot travel the length and breadth of the country in stolen cars, in pursuit of hedonistic freedom. They are joined by a hairdresser, Marie-Ange (Miou-Miou), who ends up their lover, domestic, and confidante.

Dehumanization and isolation are at the center of almost every film by Bertrand Blier, and can readily be seen in *Going Places*. What makes this story compelling is not the violence itself, but the film's suggestion that passion is an inherently human characteristic; once taken away, it will make the individual less human. Blier presented violence in an unremitting, heightened manner, rendering the film alarmingly evocative and overpowering. With close, handheld camera shots, he invited viewers to critically observe Pierrot and Jean-Claude stealing and pillaging through the cities and countryside of France, and ultimately displayed to them that violence and power could be portrayed as inherently seductive. Blier's film made millions of viewers all the more uncomfortable as they found themselves sympathizing with such morally adverse characters. Blier never gave Pierrot and Jean-Claude any excuse for their behavior. There is no doubt that *Going Places* painted an extremely disturbing portrait of society as the viewers found themselves understanding the position of the two main protagonists. It is a brilliant, darkly poetic work that is able to enrapture and disgust viewers simultaneously. The stoic humanistic portrait in *Going Places* was emblematic of Blier's discomfort, and faithfully represented the arduous difficulty for the outsider of French cinema to communicate his individualistic conviction. Always concerned with the process as well as the end product, Blier has maintained his role as critic and commentator throughout his filmmaking career, as proud of his books as he is of his films.

*Going Places* was not concerned with the representation of events, the narration of fates, or the adventures of chosen characters. Instead Blier's films focused on the presentation of individuals' basic situations, presenting intuition in its daily situations as his characters experienced it. Pierrot and Jean-Claude are isolated, static, and motionless; thus, they express themselves from the inside. In *Going Places*, the whole universe reveals the psychological state of the characters who are parts of it. Blier's characters were expelled from the stream of successive life events, which created the illusion of time that could stop at one single moment, to reveal a static, unceasing, incongruous, and cruel world of absurdity.

Yet despite all the innovations of his work, Blier remained surprisingly consistent and limited in the targets of his social satire: the Catholic church, bourgeois culture, and totalitarianism. Blier's oeuvre was also one of frustrating inconsistency. Unlike Jean-Luc Godard and Jacques Rivette, he never made an "unwatchable" movie; but he would never approach the brilliance or innovation of their best works either.

*Going Places* is regarded as one of the pioneering films that carried the film industry into the next decade, and its important legacy is a testament not only to the talent of its cast, filmmaker, and crew but also to the cinematographic renewal that has undoubtedly stood the test of time. *Going Places* is one of those classics that simply cannot be remade better than the original. As Ginette Vincendeau describes it, Blier's work possesses an ability to capture *l'air du temps*<sup>52</sup> with all its crude language (constant use of French suburban slang/argot of the *banlieues*), obscenity (*Going Places*), cold objectivity (*Stepfather/Beau-Père* 1981, and *Too Beautiful for You/Trop belle pour toi*, 1989), exteriorization of the angst of urban existence (*Cold Cuts/Buffer froid*, 1979), and sexual obsession (*Get out Your Handkerchiefs/Préparez vos mouchoirs*, 1978, and *Ménage/Tenue de soirée*, 1986). His regular attempt to screen the bitter truth about sexual conduct in modern-day society is perhaps a heralding signal of the dead end in which modern society has unfortunately entered, leaving the weakest ones to their own fate. As amoral as his narratives may be, Blier somehow managed to capture a raw and compelling vision of modern social decadence. While one must look elsewhere for a critical examination, Blier remained an authoritative and revelatory film artist whose permissive/transgressive cinematographic semantics remind the spectator of the extremely narrow line between order and chaos, *libération des mœurs* or pure provocation, erotic energy and provocative exploration of sexual extravaganza.

In establishing a new-style male protagonist in French cinema, *Going Places* consequently boosted the reputations of Gérard Depardieu and Patrick Dewaere, which grew considerably during the rest of the decade. One of Bertrand Blier's favorite actors was Patrick Dewaere (1947–1982), who undeniably was one of the most talented and popular French players of the 1970s. Following his debut at the famous Café de la Gare<sup>53</sup> (a stand-up comedy club that featured such future film stars as Gérard Depardieu), Dewaere (born Jean-Marie Bourdeau) landed his first important role in *Going Places*. Despite five César nominations for Best Actor and several participations at the Cannes Film Festival—in particular, for Alain Corneau's *Thriller Story (Série noire*, 1979) and Blier's *Stepfather*—Dewaere was never awarded a prize. For many directors, including Jean-Jacques Annaud, Claude Lelouch, and Bertrand Blier, Dewaere's vast psychological complexity was one of the most interesting and attractive facets of his talent, leading him toward unusual protagonists who are violent in their quest for love and desperately in search of sentimental comfort. In the second half of the 1970s, he was the symbol of a generation of actors, representing a certain discomfort and agitation expressed with no ambiguity. He gave expression and reality to characters destined to emptiness and oblivion. Despite Dewaere's obvious talent for comedy, he was often



Patrick Dewaere (Stéphane) and Gérard Depardieu (Raoul) in Bertrand Blier's *Get out Your Handkerchiefs* (*Préparez vos mouchoirs*, 1978), (Courtesy of BIFI/© Ariane).

successfully cast as fragile, neurotic individuals playing a wide variety of roles on both sides of the social order—for example, a judge in Yves Boisset's *Le juge Fayard dit "le Shérif"* and a thug in *Série Noire*. Dewaere was notable for projecting a screen image of masculine strength that was nevertheless imbued with gentleness and sensitivity. By the late 1970s he had become the most popular actor in France and had achieved international fame. From his first appearance in *Going Places*, Dewaere's roles in film, theater, and television grew steadily in prominence. Shortly after the release of *Paradis pour tous* (*Paradise for All*, 1982), a black drama in which his character commits suicide, Patrick Dewaere shot himself on July 16, 1982, during the making of Le-louch's *Edith et Marcel*. The Patrick Dewaere Award was established in 1983. In 1992, the actor was the subject of the French documentary *Patrick Dewaere*, which was screened at the Cannes Film Festival.

Blier's other favorite actor, Gérard Depardieu (b. 1948), went from the provincial town of Châteauroux, where he grew up to Paris, where he studied acting. He made his screen debut in the short film *Le*

*beatnik et le minet* (1965) and began to appear in full-length films in the early 1970s. Following his lead performance as a juvenile delinquent in *Going Places*, Depardieu was soon noted for his versatility and his unusual combination of gentleness and physicality. He subsequently appeared in such films as Bernardo Bertolucci's *Nineteen Hundred* (1900, 1976), Truffaut's *The Last Metro*, for which he won the César for Best Actor, Daniel Vigne's *The Return of Martin Guerre* (*Le retour de Martin Guerre*, 1981), Andrzej Wajda's *Danton* (*Danton*, 1982), and Claude Berri's *Jean de Florette* (*Jean de Florette*, 1986). In 1984, Depardieu also directed himself in stage and screen versions of Molière's *Tartuffe*. In 1988 he starred in *Camille Claudel*, and in 1990 he won the prize for Best Actor at the Cannes Film Festival for his exceptionally energetic role in *Cyrano de Bergerac* (*Cyrano de Bergerac*, 1990), which also received an Oscar nomination the following year. An international star due to his gift for performing an unlimited range of characters, Depardieu is today in a position to claim the title of greatest French actor of all time (before him, Jean Gabin was the only actor to have had such an aura).

Other significant films starring Depardieu include Sautet's *Vincent, François, Paul and the Others*; Blier's *Get out Your Handkerchiefs, Cold Cuts, Ménage, and Too Beautiful for You*; André Téchiné's *Barocco* (*Barocco*, 1976); Alain Resnais's *My American Uncle* (*Mon oncle d'Amérique*, 1980); Truffaut's *The Woman Next Door* (*La femme d'à côté*, 1981); Jean-Jacques Beineix's *The Moon in the Gutter* (*La lune dans le caniveau*, 1983); Philippe Labro's *Right Bank, Left Bank* (*Rive droite, rive gauche*, 1984); Alain Corneau's *Choice of Arms* (*Le choix des armes*, 1981), *Fort Saganne* (*Fort Saganne*, 1984), and *All the Mornings of the World* (*Tous les matins du monde*, 1991); Maurice Pialat's *Under the Sun of Satan* (*Sous le soleil de Satan*, 1987); Claude Berri's *Uranus* (*Uranus*, 1990) and *Germinal* (*Germinal*, 1993); Yves Angelo's *Colonel Chabert* (*Le Colonel Chabert*, 1994); Giuseppe Tornatore's *Una pura formalità* (*A Pure Formality*, 1994); Jean-Paul Rappeneau's *The Horseman on the Roof* (*Le Hussard sur le toit*, 1995); Claude Zidi's *Asterix and Obelix vs. Caesar* (*Astérix et Obélix contre César*, 1999); his own *The Bridge* (*Un pont entre deux rives*, 1999); Pitof's *Vidocq* (*Vidocq*, 2001); and Alain Chabat's *Asterix and Obelix: Mission Cleopatra* (2001), starring as Obélix.

The early 1990s were also Depardieu's introduction to American films, with his participation in Peter Weir's romantic comedy *Green Card* (1990), for which he received a Golden Globe Award, Ridley Scott's *1492: Conquest of Paradise* (1992), and Steve Miner's *My Father, the Hero* (a 1994 remake of Depardieu's 1991 French film *Mon père ce héros*). Depardieu received many international film awards and can best be described as one of France's most active professional actors in the



Gérard Depardieu (Alphonse Tram) and Geneviève Page (the widow) in Bertrand Blier's *Cold Cuts* (*Buffet froid*, 1979), (Photo courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art/Film Stills Archive/© Studio Canal).

industry as well as the champion of the so-called French cultural exception with his involvement in the international production of motion pictures (for example, coproducing in 1991 Saryajit Ray's last film, *Agantuk*, and financing the French distribution of the complete works of the American independent director John Cassavetes).

Blier's next important achievement in the 1970s was *Get out Your Handkerchiefs*, a film in which he self-consciously experimented with narrative form. The story opens in a Parisian bar where a young and depressed married couple, Raoul (Gérard Depardieu) and Solange (Carole Laure), struggle in their love life. Raoul is desperate because his apathetic wife will not give him a smile. Sunk in deep thought, she spends most of her days knitting pullovers: she barely looks at Raoul and does not talk much. To cure Solange's boredom and to release her from her sexual coma, Raoul unpredictably decides to offer her to the first stranger in the restaurant. This happens to be Stéphane (Patrick Dewaere), and Raoul begs him to become his wife's lover until she regains happiness. At first reluctant, Stéphane, a young physical education teacher (who, like Raoul, is a Mozart fan), eventually befriends

the couple. Stéphane, however, fails to cheer up Solange. The two men's greatest mistake is to constantly attempt to offer her what they think she desires without ever giving her the freedom to express herself. Because they believe that the presence of a child in Solange's life is the key to her happiness, the three decide to work as summer camp counselors. Indeed, for the first time, Solange's mood seems to improve. She is particularly attracted to a precocious thirteen-year-old boy. Together, a new friendship and love begin, which finally quench her erotic longing; she has regained her laughter. Sentimental yet extremely sarcastic, the story of *Get out Your Handkerchiefs* was a success in the United States—a success all the more surprising since American society is not usually open to the depiction of love stories featuring such an age discrepancy (preteen-student and older teacher) and therefore seemed to have adapted to the discomfort of the story's moral landscape. Now more than ever the film is a rare testimony to the free spirit of the 1970s which contrasts with the 1980s and even more with today's sensitivity. Highly provocative, Blier's film cannot be easily characterized: it does not follow prescribed cinematographic conventions, instead achieving success because of its uniqueness. The music of Mozart, omnipresent throughout the film, contributed to the Best Score (by Georges Delerue) award at the Césars. *Get out Your Handkerchiefs* also earned the Oscar for Best Foreign Film in 1979 and the award for Best Screenwriting and Best Direction at the New York Film Critics' Circle in 1978.

One year later, it was again the on-screen personality of Gérard Depardieu that stood at the center of Blier's next film, *Cold Cuts*. The film heralded the director's movement into the Surrealist sphere. It also belonged to the black comedy genre and clearly epitomized, through the escapades of three men, the alienation and dehumanization process of the modern world and the pace of urbanization.

In a deserted Parisian subway station an unemployed young man, Alphonse Tram (Depardieu), finds an unknown man (Michel Serrault) stabbed to death with his own knife. As the film progresses, several deaths occur as Alphonse comes across other odd individuals with connections to the universe of death and alienation. Later, he meets an anomalous character who happens to live alone in his empty high-rise apartment block in the ultramodern district of La Défense. This man is a bored chief inspector, Morvandieu (Bernard Blier), a crooked individual who killed his wife years ago because he could not put up with her music. Soon after, Alphonse's wife is murdered, and although the psychotic killer (Jean Carmet) immediately begs Alphonse for forgiveness, neither the new widower nor the police inspector seems to be troubled. The three men now live together in a dehumanized universe of wide-open spaces, devoid of people or animals, and their eccentric



demeanor is uniformly bleak and lacking in compassion. Indifferent to manslaughter (even of their own spouses), Alphonse and Morvandieu appear incapable of circumventing their existential anguish. Unable to sustain the stress of urban life, they decide to retreat to the countryside to calm their nerves. The bleak ghost-town background of the beginning of the film sets the tone and deliberately grants a disquieting gap with respect to the rural scenes of the epilogue. But there, too, a professional hit man tracks them down. The inspector and Alphonse, who now chase the killer, are eventually helped by a beautiful stranger (Carole Bouquet). While on a barge, Alphonse discovers that the police inspector does not know how to swim and immediately pushes him overboard in order to be left alone with the stranger. Alphonse's hope to elope with the mysterious woman is obliterated after she reveals her true identity. She is in fact the daughter of the victim stabbed in the metro. She shoots him and leaves.

*Cold Cuts* certainly reevaluated the standards of the crime thriller. As a distinctive film with a strong identity and clarity of purpose, it displayed an obvious moral indifference through images of urban paranoia and many discussions of sex and death. The film also provided a statement about the morality of power and contained an avalanche of affectionate references to the noir genre (Blier's favorite). Although the plot is ponderous, it defies the conventions of noir storytelling by not being open to a literal interpretation. The ambiguous, almost unintelligible nature of the dialogue, cryptic and literate at the same time, recalled Surrealism. The film received the César for Best Original Screenplay in 1980.

As a self-conscious moral satirist, Blier was not interested in a conventional narrative. According to film historian Jacques Siclier,<sup>54</sup> *Cold Cuts* was a pioneering film and inspired many filmmakers. Although the film evoked a situation similar to those found in the theater of the absurd of Eugène Ionesco, Blier never indulged in filmed theater, which would have meant possible rejection by audiences. The popular success of Blier's humor thus lay directly in its melodramatic subtext and the constant unpredictability of his characters.

Although radically different in style, the cinema of Bertrand Tavernier (b. 1941) also took its first steps in the mid 1970s. Discouraged by the obscurantism of certain auteurs, new directors, such as Blier and Tavernier began their careers with an already-established concept of storytelling. While working as a film critic for such journals as *Positif* and *Les cahiers du cinéma*, Tavernier wrote important books on American cinema and was hired as assistant director for Jean-Pierre Melville. His first feature film assignment, *The Clockmaker of St. Paul* (*L'horloger de Saint-Paul*, 1973), allowed him to impose his new "concept" on

French cinema. Surprisingly he collaborated with Jean Aurenche and Pierre Bost (the two screenwriters of the postwar era who were vehemently criticized by Truffaut in *Les cahiers du cinéma*) to direct *The Clockmaker of St. Paul*, which was also dedicated to Jacques Prévert. This collaboration was all the more surprising in that Tavernier was usually considered a New Wave critic. Although the screenplay was adapted from the novel *L'horloger d'Everton* by Georges Simenon, several producers had originally refused the project until Raymond Danon accepted it. In Simenon's novel, the action actually took place in an American town, where no one actually embodies the role of the enemy or of the villain. However, due to a small budget, the scene was transferred to Tavernier's native city of Lyon. The re-creation of an American town would have involved a much more significant budget and most likely would have diminished the credibility of the plot.

In *The Clockmaker of St. Paul*, Tavernier unveils the complex relationship that Michel Descombes (Philippe Noiret) faces with his passionate twenty-year-old son and the bourgeois society that has fostered his son's anger. Despite being divorced, Michel has a peaceful life. He meets his friends at restaurants in the district of Saint-Paul in the Vieux Lyon, where he enjoys his work, until tragedy steps in. Although not interested in politics, Michel respects the laws of society as he peacefully maintains his existence as a good citizen. The serene bliss comes to an end when his son, who lives with him, commits murder. Since the son (Sylvain Rougerie) is now a fugitive, Police Inspector Guiboud (Jean Rochefort) seeks Descombes to retrace the young man's steps and make him surrender. Between the two men, a confidential relationship grows. Eventually, the son surrenders, and after an "expeditious" trial, he is condemned to twenty years in prison. Despite their lack of intimacy, at the end of the story the father and son realize that a sincere tie unites them for good, as Michel begins to feel that he is unable to put the blame entirely on his son. Winner of the 1974 Prix Louis Delluc, and the Silver Bear at the Berlin International Film Festival for that same year, *The Clockmaker of St. Paul* is a brilliant authentication of introspection and humanity, through progressive and compassionate figures.

The strong elements of the narrative were the unique relationships between completely opposite characters and the irreducibility of social barriers. These helped model Tavernier's next feature film, *The Judge and the Assassin* (*Le juge et l'assassin*, 1975). The narrative compares two social portraits to prove that they are both the result of a social order dominated by absurdity and injustice. There are references to the intolerant climate at the end of the nineteenth century: Zola's books are burned in public, anti-Semitic posters are displayed in the street,

and there is an exaltation of colonial grandeur. In 1893, Joseph Bouvier (Michel Galabru)<sup>55</sup> a former sergeant in the French military, is repudiated by his fiancée, Louise (Cécile Vassort). After attempting to murder her and botching his own suicide, Bouvier is sent to a hospital in Dole. The two bullets that the doctors are unable to remove from his skull cause him insurmountable pain. Although officially recognized as healthy and sound, Bouvier, once released from the hospital, commits a dozen atrocious crimes over the next few years all over southern France, attacking, raping, and killing isolated shepherdesses. Apparently mentally ill, he believes himself to be God's anarchist, assigned to reestablish justice on earth. Meanwhile, in Privas, provincial Judge Rousseau (Philippe Noiret), who is determined to solve the case to promote his own stagnant political career, suspects the murders are linked. When Bouvier is finally arrested, the judge begins to enact his plan. Convinced that Bouvier is faking his mental illness, he gradually becomes the murderer's confidant, uncovering more and more revelations as he convinces him that his madness will eventually be sufficient reason to rule out the death penalty. Once all the irrefutable proof is gathered, the trial begins, and Bouvier is condemned to death.

Directly inspired by a true story, the case of Joseph Vacher, the film was shot partly in the same region as the actual murders. The film probed the intriguing relationship between the condemner and the condemned, which echoed the circumstances of the late-nineteenth-century Dreyfus scandal, the anarchist movement, the division between church and state, and the difficult birth of trade unions as a latent social and historical background. In his second feature, Tavernier's narrative skills were characterized by the absence of stylistic excess and predominance for a simple discourse in order to reach emotion rather than visual impression. *The Judge and the Assassin* was critically acclaimed and enjoyed considerable success at the 1977 French Césars with the award for Best Actor to Michel Galabru, Best Music to Philippe Sarde, Best Original Screenplay to Jean Aurenche<sup>56</sup> and Tavernier.

Tavernier continued to produce solid quality work, with *Deathwatch* (*La mort en direct*, 1980), *Clean Slate* (*Coup de torchon*, 1981), *Mississippi Blues* (1983), *A Sunday in the Country* (*Un dimanche à la campagne*, 1984), *'Round Midnight* (*Autour de minuit*, 1986), *Life and Nothing But* (*La vie et rien d'autre*, 1989), and *It All Starts Today* (*Ça commence aujourd'hui*, 1999). He has been president of the Institut Lumière in Lyon since its creation in 1982.

Closely associated with Tavernier's career is the presence of actor Philippe Noiret (b. 1930). Part of the group of great actors able to perform a wide variety of different characters without ever having to

relinquish the proper individuality, Noiret achieved several of his best performances in Tavernier's works. He is also one of the few French comedians to collaborate regularly with the best Italian directors, such as Marco Ferreri in *La Grande Bouffe* (1973), Mario Monicelli in *Amici miei* (*Mes chers amis*, 1975), and Giuseppe Tornatore in *Cinema Paradiso* (1989). Noiret began a successful career in Louis Malle's 1960 *Zazie dans le Métro*. He won a César for his performance in *The Old Gun* (*Le vieux fusil*, 1975), an honor he again earned for his portrayal of a World War I major in *Life and Nothing But*. Recipient of the Best Actor award at the 1976 New York Film Critics' Circle for *The Clockmaker of St. Paul*, Noiret also performed in Oscar-winning movies such as Michael Radford's *The Postman* (*Il Postino*, 1994).

It is important to keep in mind that despite the highs and lows of the industry throughout the decades, comedies have always been faithful economic boosters for French cinema. In part due to the sudden absence of veteran comedians Bourvil and Fernandel—who died in 1970 and 1971, respectively—the 1970s produced a number of mediocre comedies the majority of which, ironically, happened to be considerable commercial successes. Despite their sociological and cultural contents, French comedies are still neglected by film anthologies, film studies conferences, and, in particular, film festivals all over the world. The success of Gérard Oury at the beginning of the decade can be easily explained by the "commercial" stature of his first two successes (*Don't Look Now We're Being Shot At/La grande vadrouille* and *The Sucker/Le corniaud*), but also by the better quality of the scripts when compared to average comedies. More sophisticated and sharper in its vocabulary, the plot gave access to very large means to complete its goals, which surpassed the average French comedies of the time. One of the most celebrated successes of French comedy is Edouard Molinaro's *La Cage Aux Folles* (*La cage aux folles*, 1978). Adapted from a play written by Jean Poiret, the story depicts the vicissitudes of a happily settled homosexual couple, Renato Baldi (Ugo Tognazzi), manager of the travestite nightclub La Cage aux Folles in Saint-Tropez, and his long-time life companion, Albin (Michel Serrault), also the club's biggest attraction, Zaza Napoli, professional female impersonator. Laurent, Renato's son, announces to his father his future marriage to Andréa, daughter of an ultraconservative senator (Michel Galabru). As Andréa's parents come down to Saint-Tropez to meet Renato for the first time, Laurent attempts to persuade Albin to step out of the family picture. But because Laurent's mother, Simone, (Claire Maurier) refuses to attend the dinner, Albin decides at the last minute to replace her in his role as Zaza.

In the late 1970s, the gay subtext of the film helped bring about a new outlook among audiences who for the most part were unpredictably swept away by the new energy of this comedy. Using the classic stratagem of vaudeville, the authors were able to redirect the plot toward a parade of frenetic and ingenious situations rather than a display of low and derisive vulgarity. The success of *La Cage Aux Folles* generated the completion of two sequels, *La Cage Aux Folles II* (1980) and Georges Lautner's *La Cage Aux Folles III*, and earned Michel Serrault the César for Best Actor in 1979. In 1996, the American remake of the film, Mike Nichols's *The Birdcage*, was similarly quite a success in American theaters. It starred Robin Williams, Nathan Lane, Dianne Wiest, and Gene Hackman.