Original Paper

An Analysis of the Creative Style of French New Wave Cinema, Illustrated by Godard's Film "Breathless"

Anran Liu[1*]

[1] Hong Kong Baptist University, Kowloon, Hong Kong, China

[*] Anran Liu, E-mail: anranliu832@gmail.com

Abstract

When delving into the annals of film history, the pivotal juncture of the French New Wave movement in the 1940s stands as an indispensable focal point, leaving an indelible mark on cinematic evolution and the advancement of the film industry. By introducing a distinctive creative paradigm, the movement notably championed the notion of "auteur cinema", and encouraged novel production methodologies while endorsing personalized themes, distinctive narrative architectures, unique cinematographic aesthetics, and pioneering editing techniques. As a luminary within the constellation of the French New Wave, Jean-Luc Godard orchestrated elaborate and audacious cinematic experiments in the realms of visual and auditory language. Godard dismantled entrenched narrative conventions and cinematic mores of the studio apparatus, thereby clearing a path for a more self-revealing and artistically-inflected cinematic discourse. This cinematic idiom exerted a profound influence not only upon contemporaneous directors but also furnished subsequent generations of cineastes with a wellspring of inspiration.

From the vantage point of Godard, this research attempts to explore and synthesize the historical backdrop of the New Wave era, the idiosyncrasies and shared traits of movie auteurs, and analyzed in a meticulous manner of his magnum opus, "Breathless". This analytical research encompasses editing methodologies, cinematographic modalities, narrative architectures, and proclivities toward expression with the overarching goal of unearthing the unique cinematic lexicon emblematic of the New Wave. Conclusively, this study pivots back to appraise the French New Wave, unraveling its cultural import and historical limitations.

Keywords

French New Wave, Jean-Luc Godard, Experiment, Rebellion, Realistic aesthetics

1. Introduction

1.1 The Historical French New Wave Movement

The French New Wave movement, originating in the 1950s, unfolded against the backdrop of a politically tumultuous post-World War II France. With the establishment of the Fifth Republic, the nation embarked on a new trajectory. At this juncture, France ardently championed autonomy, resisting hegemony, and witnessed the burgeoning of a counter-cultural ethos and the demand for societal change driven by the youth.

This era has seen France's rapid economic ascendancy and a concurrently stable domestic and international political landscape. In stark contrast to the material abundance and stability, however, there existed a dearth of ordered spiritual engagement. In a bid to counterbalance the dominance of American movies, French movies during this epoch predominantly embraced a quest for "quality cinema", inadvertently resulting in issues like content paucity, stylistic uniformity, and dearth of innovation. Compounded by the meteoric rise of television, the movie industry faced formidable challenges, and was subject to a profound crisis. In response to this issue, a cohort of emerging filmmakers clamored for a re-invigoration of stagnant French cinema, setting in motion the resounding wave of the New Wave movement.

Fundamentally underpinned by existentialism, French New Wave movies deftly examine the philosophical tenet of "existence preceding essence", influenced by Sartrean existentialism. This cinematic movement undertook an audacious subversion of mainstream movie and middle-class conventions, relentlessly interrogating the bedrock values of contemporary society. Instead, it ventured into the realm of heightened philosophical introspection, with characters and narratives serving as mere conduits for the exploration of the human spirit and intricate relationships. Within this contextual framework, dogmas and survival wane in concrete significance, evoking an experimental milieu delving into the enigmatic realms of chaos and ultimate nothingness—a thematic resonance that encapsulates the quintessence of French New Wave cinema. Engaging with French New Wave movies predominantly unfurls an opportunity for profound contemplation on existence and prompts an incisive scrutiny of the duality of human nature's nobility and malevolence under the crucible of extreme circumstances.

1.2 The Innovative Significance of the "Breathless", the Iconic work of French New Wave

The concept of the New Wave style encompasses a documentary-like filming approach and a thematic underpinning of humanitarian ideals interwoven with philosophical reflections, occasionally tinged with a sense of existentialist pessimism. In terms of narrative technique, it adheres to a stream of consciousness, resulting in a fragmented storytelling style often adorned with symbolic metaphors. This style, further, is marked by a distinct auteur perspective, where the director's signature vision is prevalent.

Jean-Luc Godard's "Breathless" serves as the pioneering cornerstone of the New Wave cinema, epitomizing the cinematic zeitgeist of its era. The defining traits of French New Wave cinema include

cost-effective production methods, eschewing the use of professional actors, and a dedicated focus on capturing the authenticity of human lives. In contrast to ornate studio settings, this movement frequently harnessed portable cameras to amplify the sense of realism. Long takes and tracking shots were skillfully deployed to evoke a heightened immersive experience. The internal musings of protagonists and the inclusion of voice overs were recurrent tools, effectively channeling the inner thoughts of creators and challenging conventional cinematic structures.

During the New Wave era, Godard's innovative manipulation of visuals in "Breathless" resoundingly severed ties with conventional studio aesthetics and the classical narrative structure pervasive in French cinema. Instead, a commitment to naturalism emerged, shaping choices regarding lighting, filming techniques, and editing practices. The overarching aim was to underscore spontaneity and authenticity. For instance, the preference for natural lighting and the deliberate avoidance of artificial illumination were underscored. Techniques reminiscent of documentary film-making, such as handheld and candid shots, were artfully integrated, imbuing the visual narrative with a palpable rhythm and dynamic energy. Godard's approach vehemently defied prescriptive norms, privileging the photographic essence of film over formal composition and aesthetic conventions. The strategic utilization of jump cuts throughout the editing process functioned not merely as vehicles for expressing ideas, but as instruments for the segmentation of both temporal and spatial dimensions.

2. Audiovisual and Linguistic Analysis of Godard's "Breathless"

"Breathless", crafted in 1959, unfolds the tale of Michel, a Parisian street rogue who commits murder, car theft, and eventually faces betrayal by his paramour Patricia, culminating in a fateful street encounter with law enforcement. Though from a conventional moral stance, Michel is cast as a transgressor, the film orchestrates his demise in a tragic light, rendering him a figure of pity and tragedy.

As a seminal opus by Jean-Luc Godard, an iconic figure of the French New Wave, "Breathless" symbolizes a groundbreaking shift in cinematic aesthetics and creative methodologies. Disavowing classical narrative norms and dissociating from Hollywood's continuity editing, the movie harnesses an array of kinetic tracking shots along Parisian thoroughfares. These are coupled with expansive employment of wide-angle handheld camera movements, thus transcending classical dramatic paradigms and aesthetic conventions. During this epoch, movies frequently bore the hallmark of pronounced personal stylization in thematic concerns, filming techniques, and narrative strategies. Meanwhile, Godard, dubbed the patriarch of the French New Wave, with his documentary-infused aesthetics and auteurist philosophy, set the stage for a shared canvas of the New Wave directors. Godard championed a novel aesthetic ideology, termed the "classical combinatory structure", asserting that "film is the truth at 24 frames per second". This stance aimed at dismantling the strict bifurcation between "mise-en-scène" realism and the "montage" theory of editing. He adroitly melded ostensibly contrasting aesthetics, positing montage as an integral facet of mise-en-scène, enabling the latter to

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restore surface verisimilitude, while montage, in turn, captures psychological authenticity.

Within the "Breathless", Godard deftly assimilates Bertolt Brechts' "fourth wall" theory and the distancing effect. This intentional narrative strategy circumvents the traditional linear arc and climactic crescendo, engendering a restrained narrative framework. This nuanced approach augments the movie's veracity, and the open-ended trajectory of the plot and narrative entails an "aesthetic distance", fostering a pivotal breakthrough in Godard's aesthetic lexicon.

2.1 The Auteur Cinema: The Individualization Tendency of the Theme

The emergence of the French New Wave film movement was closely intertwined with the prevailing sense of uncertainty and melancholy that followed World War II. A considerable portion of the movie content was a reflection on the aftermath of the war, as it left many young people grappling with crises of faith and a spirit of societal resistance. At this juncture, the existentialist philosophy epitomized by figures like Jean-Paul Sartre exerted a profound influence on the ethos of the New Wave films, effectively encapsulating the prevailing confusion and introspection about the realities of life.

New Wave movies are distinct in themes. These films often serve as a canvas for filmmakers to channel their own lived experiences and insights, resulting in a discernible personal touch. Frequently, these works manifest as a form of "director's self-narrative", encapsulating elements that resonate with the filmmaker's identity. The core tenet of the "auteur theory" places considerable emphasis on illuminating the personalized aspects of a director's creative input. Often, traces of the director's persona can be discerned within the characters depicted on screen, where the director is no longer a mere executor of cinematic conventions but rather an intellectual steward, shaping and guiding the cinematic narrative.

Jean-Luc Godard, for instance, is a proponent of crafting films that are infused with a distinct "personal style". Taking "Breathless" as an illustration, the plot weaves through deliberately unordered sequences, the cinematography takes whimsical directions, the male protagonist emanates an air of languor, while the female protagonist exudes spontaneity. The pacing is brisk, editing exhibits an unrestrained quality, and performances are imbued with a lifelike authenticity. Notably, in the movie, the male protagonist Michel, to some extent, functions as an embodiment of director Godard himself. Steeped in the influences of existentialist philosophy, Godard crafts Michel's life experiences with an overtly pessimistic hue. Michel's disregard for legal confines and his immersion in a realm of self-determined freedom underscores an attempt to escape the absurdities of existence. His perception of the world as bereft of significance and unworthy of trepidation resonates strongly with the themes of existentialist thought.

2.2 Narrative Structure: Breaking the Traditional Narrative of Hollywood

The emergence of the French New Wave cinema movement owes a significant debt to André Bazin's doctrine of documentary aesthetics, as evidenced by its frequent adoption of documentary-style narrative structures. Bazin's doctrine posits that cinema should mirror reality closely, embracing its inherent unpredictability instead of conforming to preconceived notions. The French New Wave

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movement placed a pronounced emphasis on documentary techniques and individualistic style, allowing it to liberate itself successfully from the traditional narrative frameworks in conventional cinema, while seamlessly integrating a profound value of "self" imbued with vitality.

In the movie "Breathless", the narrative architecture exhibits a keen focus on capturing the subtleties of emotions through characters' quotidian details. This technique carries an improvisational quality, spotlighting reactions to everyday circumstances and affording actors ample space for creative expression, with the hope of performing organically on actors' side, adapting freely to changes in camera angles. Consequently, the production paradigm of the movie stands out as a clear departure from established norms, accentuating the personalized. Furthermore, its narrative structure is conspicuously fragmentary, intentionally deviating from conventional Hollywood dramatization. Within the narrative framework of French New Wave cinema, the construction of a coherent story arc is often eschewed, and explicit temporal and spatial markers are deliberately omitted, fostering a sense of detachment between the audience and the narrative.

The movie "Breathless" advances its plot through a series of leaps. Take, for instance, the scene where Patricia Franchini returns home and the approximately 25-minute conversation between Michel and Patricia in the bedroom—both brim with mundane, non-thematic dialogues. This sequence evokes the spontaneity of documentary footage, echoing individual monologues and introspective contemplation. Instead, it avoids contrived pursuit of dramatic conflicts, but adopts an observational stance, allowing the narrative to unfold naturally. This distinctive narrative approach further amplifies the film's sense of realism.

On a separate note, while American genre movies tend to emphasize a stark dichotomy between justice and evil, "Breathless" deliberately sidesteps moral absolutism and stereotypical character traits. Even when Patricia betrays and reports Michel, her actions might appear morally justified. However, Michel emerges as the more pitiable character. The movie deliberately avoids overemphasizing the theme of good prevailing over evil; instead, it serves as a portrayal of the contemporary youth's state of being.

2.3 Editing Techniques: Jumping Cuts and Omitting

The French New Wave cinema disrupted the conventional temporal and spatial coherence adhered to in traditional film editing, opting for a more flexible and unconstrained approach. French New Wave films adeptly employed techniques such as jump cuts and rapid editing. Jump cuts, a method of splicing shots together, effectively eliminated many intricate narrative elements, and streamlined the expression of visual language so as to notably hasten the movie's rhythm. The distinct utilization of jump cuts in New Wave cinema expanded the cinematic repertoire, representing a deliberate departure from and innovation within the established conventions of traditional film.

2.3.1 Jump Cuts: Breaking through the Classical Concept of Continuous Play

The emergence of French New Wave cinema significantly diverged from the conventional practice of traditional film editing, which upheld D.W. Griffith's classical continuity principle. Instead, New Wave directors embraced a paradigm shift by introducing the distinct editing style known as "jump cuts".

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This departure aimed to prioritize emotional expression and underscore the depth of characters and thematic elements within the movies.

Technically, Jump cuts involve maintaining similar framing and focal length in sequential shots, yet punctuated by sudden interruptions. This technique produces a jarring effect, creating a deliberate disconnection in time and space. In fact, it made its initial appearance in George Méliès' film. In "Breathless", Godard transformed these jump cuts into a recognizable and intentional stylistic choice.

In the opening sequence of "Breathless", for instance, the protagonist Michel's drive along a forest road features jump cuts, where the foreground remains almost consistent—predominantly capturing the front of the car—while the scenery beyond the car window undergoes continual transformation. This dynamic use of jump cuts effectively captures the passage of time, contributing to Godard's distinctive aesthetic approach.

Moreover, in the movie, there are 12 jump cut shots depicting Michel's theft of a car, assisted by an unfamiliar young woman. This sequence has now become a cinematic classic. The ongoing dialogue between the central characters unfolds within the stolen car, with the camera consistently centered on Patricia's position. Ingeniously, Michel's voice takes the form of voice over narration, subtly introducing Patricia to the audience. Although jump cuts are employed, Patricia's position remains the same, and the changing background contributes to a less pronounced spatial rupture. The jump cut here is different from that in the opening scene where Michel drives, and hence, the technique eliminates unnecessary temporal gaps, sharpens the focus, intensifies the rhythm, and nurtures a heightened sense of pace.

The incorporation of jump cuts in "Breathless" disrupts the traditional linear narrative, instead shaping a fresh set of paradigms for the overall movie style. The unconventional alignment of perspectives and intermittent editing, illustrated by the series of jump cuts when Patricia turns her head inside the car, marks a symbolically groundbreaking achievement during the French New Wave era.

2.3.2 Omission: Jump Cuts of Larger Spans

"Omission" denotes a deliberate cinematic technique wherein substantial gaps between successive scenes are employed, simultaneously encompassing a more pronounced form of "jump cut." This practice disrupts the temporal and spatial flow, introducing a distinct narrative leap in the plot's progression. Tedious and intricate narrative elements are deliberately excised, thereby achieving heightened conciseness and dynamism. This process is particularly accentuated in the evocation of emotional resonance and atmospherics.

In "Breathless", the segment featuring the male protagonist Michel's fatal shooting of a police officer exemplifies Godard's audacious experimentation with the cinematic lexicon. Michel, the central character, becomes a subject of pursuit by law enforcement, prompting his retreat into a rural byway. His refuge, however, is ephemeral as the police promptly converge. It is in this juncture that Michel retrieves a handgun from his vehicle. The subsequent cinematic articulation juxtaposes an intimate close-up of the firearm with an off-screen gunshot reverberating in voice over. The ensuing sequence

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reveals the prostrate police officer, seamlessly followed by Michel's successful evasion to a sylvan expanse at the city's periphery. In the subsequent encounter, Michel is situated behind the wheel of an automobile navigating the Parisian landscape.

This punctuated gunfight episode, lasting a mere ten seconds and comprising a sparse sequence of five shots, deviates markedly from the prevailing continuity editing paradigms prevailing in Hollywood. This deviation becomes manifest in the pronounced discord between auditory and visual elements. The established choreography of actions, encompassing the trajectory of the gunshot and the policeman's subsequent descent, undergoes deliberate disjunction. Notably, the filmmaker opts for a profusion of proximate shots, supplanting the anticipated panoramic vista that would otherwise meticulously document every facet. The sum effect coalesces through a mosaic-like concatenation of shots, consciously omitting the expanse of tension and economizing visual information. Such approach simplifies the narrative, foregrounding solely pivotal incidents while inducing an affective disarray in the audience. The film, by design, refrains from divulging temporal elapse, the extent of Michel's hitchhiking endeavors, or the police's discovery of the crime scene. Notwithstanding, such interpretational voids find resonance within the audience's sensibilities.

2.4 Photography Technique: The Follow-up of Documentary Prolonged Takes

French New Wave cinema draws inspiration from Bazin's principles of documentary aesthetics in its cinematography, often embracing real locations for shooting, extensive utilization of prolonged takes, and dynamic handheld camera movement. These techniques accentuate the authenticity of the films, manifesting a distinct sense of realism. The New Wave movement champions the adoption of prolonged takes, regarding them as a "gradual path to reality", with the aim of presenting unvarnished authenticity and an objective view of the subject. Bazin contends that prolonged takes can encapsulate the innate ambiguity of objects, thereby affording audiences an augmented space for perception and interpretation.

In the movie "Breathless", the cinematographic approach involves continuous camera motions that deftly frame elements within the visual composition. The arrangement of scenes exhibits elasticity, a strategy elucidated by Godard himself: dispensing with a tripod, minimizing artificial illumination, and eschewing the confinement of tracks. This methodology harnesses the spontaneity and randomness inherent to filming. Godard's oeuvre frequently integrates handheld cameras to evoke an unadorned documentary sensibility, enabling the camera to closely trail characters. "Breathless" extensively employs real-life locations for filming, sidestepping contrived lighting, and abounds in protracted handheld tracking shots.

The movie's inception features a scene wherein Michel, the male lead, engages in conversation with Patricia along Champs-Élysées regarding her potential companionship to Rome. This three-minute long tracking shot adeptly captures their unscripted discourse. Moreover, within Patricia's domicile, an extended conversational sequence between the protagonists unfolds. Godard situates the camera operator in a wheelchair, employing handheld camera maneuvers to shadow the characters' spatial

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dynamics and fluidly capture the scene's cadence, which amplifies the camera's maneuverability. During the film's culmination, a protracted shot portrays Michel stumbling forward in a slow jog subsequent to being shot. Upon discovering Patricia's treachery, Michel's psychological disintegration is portrayed as he stumbles forward. The camera unerringly documents his faltering progression, providing audience insight into Michel's internal realm as he aspires to evade societal conventions and constraints.

2.5 Breaking the "Fourth Wall": Direct Camera Dialogue

Diverging from the conventional "breaking of the fourth wall" as seen in Annie Hall, Godard takes a different approach in "Breathless", one that exudes an air of nonchalance. Such a specific strategy is intended to expose the camera's presence, acknowledge the process of documentation, and underscore the tangible reality that underlies cinema; furthermore, it can serve as a reminder to the audience of their participatory role in the cinematic encounter. In contrast to characters directly addressing the audience, Godard's intention is to unveil the machinery of film making itself, emphasizing the realism inherent in filmmaking and prompting the audience to acknowledge their status as onlookers. An illustrative episode occurs when the male protagonist, Michel, absconds with a car and speeds through the streets of Paris; he suddenly swivels towards the camera and engages in a dialogue with the audience. This instant epitomizes Godard's and the New Wave era's inclination towards wit and provocation.

In fact, Godard's usage of close-up shots departs from the conventional Hollywood approach, which often delves into characters' inner emotional states. Instead, his close-ups frequently evoke a heightened sense of unfamiliarity and futility. For instance, during the film's conclusion, as Patricia bends down to observe Michel after he is shot, her expressionless countenance is captured in a close-up shot. She locks eyes directly onto the camera, imitating Michel's thumb-across-lips motion, and queries somewhat bewilderedly, "What does 'disgusting' mean?" Devoid of sorrow, elation, or trepidation, this scene embodies a sense of aimlessness. Concurrently, "feminism" emerges as a pivotal theme in Godard's cinematic oeuvre.

3. Comparison of Aesthetic Characteristics between French New Wave Movies and Classic Hollywood Counterparts

3.1 The Aesthetic Characteristics of Classic Hollywood Movies

Classic Hollywood cinema adheres fundamentally to the principles of theatrical film aesthetics, while also retaining vestiges of its origins in drama. This essence is primarily manifested through three dimensions: a dramatized narrative structure, standardized character portrayals, and a seamless visual language. To delve deeper, classic Hollywood films accentuate the necessity for vigorous plot conflicts within their narratives, characterizing them through standardized personas, and centralizing their narrative framework on the principles of continuity editing and an organically flowing cinematic discourse.

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3.2 The Aesthetic Characteristics of French New Wave Movies

French New Wave films often display a highly personalized stylistic approach in terms of thematic exploration, cinematographic techniques, and narrative methods. Nevertheless, the foundational undercurrent of these works is interwoven with the realist aesthetics championed by the "father of the French New Wave" and the overarching concept of "auteur cinema". When comparing French New Wave films with American classic Hollywood counterparts, distinct aesthetic features emerge even when addressing similar subjects.

Analyzing the origins of movie themes reveals a recurring mode of expression, namely the "director's self-narrative". For instance, François Truffaut's movie "The 400 Blows" directly draws from his personal experiences, reflecting his retrospective contemplation of life's journey. Conversely, the subject matter of the film "Rebel Without a Cause" is rooted in a psychological treatise of the same name, probing the rebellion of American adolescents during the 1950s.

At the level of film production, American filmmakers tend to prioritize technological innovation and visual effects within the realm of commercial cinema. In contrast, French New Wave counterparts deliberately eschewed conventional films adhering to standardized formulas, showing distaste for both technical prowess and polished production values in favor of accentuating the aesthetic essence of cinema. Such emphasis on aesthetics is conspicuously present in "The 400 Blows", showcasing the poetic structure and art-house style emblematic of French New Wave movies.

Regarding narrative structure, classic Hollywood cinema is anchored in dramatization, encompassing both the story and the development of the plot. The narratives are imbued with dramatic conflicts, while the structure remains elegantly self-contained, culminating in a "Hollywood-styles" resolution. In contrast, a pivotal aesthetic characteristic of New Wave cinema is its disruption of the traditional Hollywood storytelling approach, with movies often foregoing the conventional structure of classical dramas.

In the realm of cinematographic language, Hollywood directors prioritize clarity as the paramount vehicle for communication, and the "three-act structure" augments conflict and audience engagement. Conversely, New Wave cinema heavily employs long takes, exemplifying a distinct hallmark of the movement. Furthermore, the New Wave movement introduced innovative cinematic techniques, such as the utilization of jump cuts in editing. Notably, in numerous instances throughout films, only a rudimentary context is provided, allowing actors to improvise and shape their performances. This approach confers a documentary-like quality to the films.

4. The Cultural Value and Historical Limitations of French New Wave Movies

4.1 The Elite Tendency of French New Wave Movies

The French New Wave cinema gradually transitioned into the realm of niche and art-house movies, moving beyond its previous scope of engagement with society, politics, and everyday reality. The directorial focus shifted from broader societal concerns to becoming a medium for self-expression by

the directors themselves. The excessive penchant for intellectual discourse has, to a certain extent, compromised its ability for emotional resonance. While distancing itself from the commercial market, it has also distanced itself from the general audience. Over time, French auteur cinema, while aiming for distinctiveness and individuality, has somewhat neglected the movie's role in fostering social cohesion and its potential for societal impact on a spiritual level. This oversight can be viewed as a regrettable aspect of the genre.

4.2 The Singular Value Standard of French New Wave Documentary Aesthetics

Within the context of French cinema, the documentary aesthetic could be likely to be regarded as emblematic of the core essence of French film spirit. This may, whether intentionally or inadvertently, marginalize non-documentary creative endeavors. As integral components of the cinematic ecosystem, encompassing film festivals, critiques, and education, when these elements, vital to the landscape, monopolize the value framework with a singular perspective instead of nurturing a plurality of ideas, they often become entrenched, impeding the natural flow of the cinematic ecosystem. A thriving cinematic ecosystem should ideally exhibit a profusion of diverse and vibrant expressions, allowing for a chorus of voices. While the documentary aesthetic holds significance, it should not monopolize or dominantly dictate the cinematic ethos.

4.3 The Decadence and Nihilism Inflicted by the Free Expression of French New Wave Arts

However, should this diversity and vigorous discourse necessitate a hands-off approach to societal governance? The modern film movement, centered around the French New Wave cinema, has championed the cause of liberty. During this New Wave era, filmmakers unfurled the banner of freedom, aiming to shatter political and ethical taboos and attain unbridled artistic expression. This period brought forth two significant concerns. Firstly, auteur directors pursued profound intellectual themes with little concern for their alignment with fundamental ethical and moral values or legal frameworks. Secondly, an excessive revelation of human nature in cinema spawned an overabundance of nihilistic sentiments and an atmosphere of decadence. The unbridled pursuit of negative artistic expression, unrestricted and unbounded, ultimately demonstrated that an excessive emphasis on self-liberty fails to confer enduring vitality to films. In such a juncture, it becomes crucial to draw insights and lessons from the experiences of the preceding three stages in the Western trajectory. By formulating a more scientific mechanism for managing desires, the public can enable cultural endeavors, including movies, to genuinely fulfill their beneficial role in nourishing the human spirit and harmonizing interpersonal relationships.

4.4 The Fade and Future of the New Wave Film Movement

In just a span of one year, the formidable surge of the "Nouvelle Vague" encountered a significant setback at the box office. François Truffaut's second full-length film, Shoot the Pianist, attracted a meager audience of only 70,000, while Jean-Luc Godard's A Woman Is a Woman garnered fewer than 65,000 viewers. Accompanying this commercial downturn was a collective outcry from major French media outlets. The critical community widely opined that the "Nouvelle Vague" had brought a transient

novelty to the French film market, but its aftermath ushered in a countercurrent of commercial interests and an array of adverse consequences. Faced with such skepticism, Truffaut responded assertively, his third feature film, Jules and Jim, achieved immense success despite its modest budget. Nevertheless, the monetary gains and market acclaim gradually prompted a shift in Truffaut's stance. From then on, the filmmaker who had staunchly resisted Hollywood and shunned narrative storytelling, gradually succumbed to the allure of commercial cinema, embracing it wholeheartedly. This transformation profoundly disappointed Godard, leading to a public rupture between Truffaut and Godard, marking the culmination of a momentous cinematic movement—the conclusion of the French New Wave.

Notwithstanding, the cessation of the New Wave film movement does not signify the dissipation of the New Wave's legacy. Analogous to the metaphorical "wave" in its name, the New Wave movement continues to exert a sustained influence on subsequent cinematic developments. For contemporary observers, the early proclamation of the New Wave, encapsulated in the "auteur theory", also imparts illuminating insights: an outright prohibition of literary adaptations, safeguarding directors' creative autonomy from production companies, and the insistence that films uphold a cohesive stylistic approach. These resounding declarations persistently reverberate, particularly as the current film industry appears to be treading a course diametrically divergent. Thus, revisiting the "New Wave" encompasses more than sheer retrospection; it encompasses the potential to chart the course for the future.

5. Conclusion

In summation, whether examined through Godard's "Breathless" or within a broader scope encompassing New Waves transcending national and regional confines, these movements epitomize experimental and exploratory endeavors in artistic individualism that defied conventional norms within their respective temporal contexts. They emblemize an era both distinct and interconnected, wherein pioneering filmmakers dared to probe, transcend, risk, critique, and interrogate—both societal norms and their own identities.

Hence, the underlying New Wave ethos this research discusses is, in essence, an engagement with the cinematic medium to address contemporary realities and human existence. It harnesses the language of film to serve the purpose of expressing ideas. Embedded within realms of artistic innovation and creation, it not only amplifies our own voices but also undertakes the responsibilities of its era through expression and introspection.

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