

J E A N - L U C G O D A R D ' S

BREATHLESS

50th Anniversary Restoration

RIALTO PICTURES PRESSBOOK

BREATHLESS

- RIALTO PICTURES -

Director/Screenplay
Jean-Luc Godard

From an original treatment by
François Truffaut

Producer
Georges de Beauregard

Cinematography
Raoul Coutard

Assistant Director
Pierre Rissient

Editor
Cécile Decugis

Music
Martial Solal

Sound
Jacques Maumont

Technical Advisor
Claude Chabrol

English subtitles
Lenny Borger

Subtitle editors (2010)
Bruce Goldstein
Adrienne Halpern

A RIALTO PICTURES RELEASE

Shot August-September 1959 in Paris and Marseilles
Released March 16, 1960 (Paris)

France Black and White Aspect ratio: 1.33:1
In French with English subtitles
Running time: 90 min.

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CAST

Patricia Franchini
Jean Seberg

Michel Poiccard
Jean-Paul Belmondo

Police Inspector Vital
Daniel Boulanger

Antonio Berruti
Henri-Jacques Huet

Carl Zumbach
Roger Hanin

Journalist Van Doude
Van Doude

Parvulesco
Jean-Pierre Melville

Liliane
Liliane David

Other Inspector
Michel Fabre

Used Car Dealer
Claude Mansard

Informer
Jean-Luc Godard

Tolmatchoff
Richard Balducci

With appearances by
**André S. Labarthe, Jean Domarchi, Philippe de Broca, Jean Douchet,
Jacques Siclier**

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SYNOPSIS

*Dedicated to Monogram Pictures.*¹

Michel Poiccard [Belmondo] is discovered smoking and reading a newspaper. "After all, I'm a jerk," he says in a voiceover, and rubs his lips with his thumb.

At the old port of Marseilles, he heists a car, but refuses to take his female lookout along. On the road, he repeats the name "Patricia," addresses the camera on why he likes France, passes up two female hitchhikers, whom he decides are "dogs," and finds a gun in the glove compartment. He temporarily ditches two trailing motorcycle cops, but when confronted by one of them, shoots him and runs off, hatless and coatless, across empty fields.

In Paris, he checks the papers, skips out on a breakfast order, is told Miss Franchini is out. Dropping in on another girl [Liliane David] just getting up, he asks for a loan of 5,000 francs until noon. Counter-offered 500, he feigns indifference but empties her purse while she's dressing. Now sporting a hat, coat, tie, and shades, he goes to a travel agency to find "Tolmatchoff," but he's out.

On the Champs Elysées, Michel finds Patricia Franchini [Seberg] hawking the *New York Herald Tribune* and asks her to come with him to Rome, but she must enroll at the Sorbonne to keep her parents sending her money. They differ on how many nights they spent together: she says three, he says five. They agree to meet later. Michel passes a poster for a Jeff Chandler movie with the ad line "Live Dangerously till the End," then witnesses an apparently fatal auto accident.² A newspaper headline indicates that the cop killer has been identified.

Tolmatchoff [Richard Balducci] is in and has his money. But it turns out to be a check, so Michel asks after his friend Berruti. He leaves just as Police Inspector Vital [Daniel Boulanger] enters. Tolmatchoff -- who previously ratted on his friend Bob Montagné³ -- professes ignorance, but a female co-worker tells them that he had a tall visitor who just left. Michel enters the Métro reading a paper, then the cops hurtle down the steps after him, even as he emerges from the Métro entrance across the street.

¹ Monogram was a Poverty Row studio in Hollywood that churned out bottom-of-the-bill Westerns, crime melodramas and program pictures like the Charlie Chan and Bowery Boys series. It was discontinued as a trademark in 1953, when the studio evolved into Allied Artists.

² The victim is *Cahiers* critic and future director Jacques Rivette.

³ Bob Montagné is the name of the main character in Melville's *Bob Le Flambeur*.

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After he pauses before a poster of Humphrey Bogart in *The Harder They Fall*⁴, Michel meets Patricia and tells her he's just seen a man die. They plan dinner but he must make a call. In the men's room, he disables a mark with a karate chop and leaves with his money. Patricia says "I don't know" when he suggests they sleep together; he tells her how a girl stayed with a guy who confessed that the money he'd lavished on her was the product of a scam; then she remembers an appointment and leaves, nixing his plea to stay with her that night. He trails her as she meets with a journalist [Van Doude] from whom she hopes to get writing assignments. He gives her a book about a girl who dies after a botched abortion, tells her a story about exchanging telegrams with a girl about wanting to sleep with her, and gives her an assignment to interview novelist Parvulesco at Orly the next day. Michel watches as they drive off.

The next morning, she returns to her apartment in the same clothes only to find Michel waking up in her bed. She says she didn't sleep with the journalist. He demands a smile in 8 seconds or he'll strangle her. She laughs at 7 and three quarters. He asks her if she thinks about death, saying that he does, "all the time." After they have a staring contest, he critiques her Renoir poster as "not bad." She tells him that she is pregnant; asked if it's his, she says "I think so." After several futile calls, he makes a date with Mansard to sell him an American car. Michel asks Patricia her age and she replies she's 100; then they count up their lover scorecards: she, seven, he twenty-two – both "not so many." She quotes the last line of Faulkner's *Wild Palms* to him: "Between grief and nothing, I will take grief." Michel votes for nothing. After they grapple beneath the sheets, he asks if it was good. "Yes, sir," she replies.

After he steals a convertible, they stop at the *Herald Tribune* office where a bystander [Godard in a Hitchcock-like cameo] spots Michel and tips off the cops as they drive off. At Orly, Patricia asks a question at the noisy press conference for Parvulesco [Jean-Pierre Melville]: "What is your greatest ambition?" He replies, "To become immortal. And then...die." Meanwhile, Michel meets with Mansard [Claude Mansard] who offers him 800,000 francs for the car, but will only pay next week – he has seen the paper with Michel's photo and has pulled the wires from the car so he can't drive off. Michel finally makes a date to meet Berruti at 4, then beats up Mansard and takes his money.

In a taxi, Michel and Patricia race to the meeting but miss Berruti by five minutes. After they leave the cab without paying, she checks in at the *Herald Tribune* offices where she's confronted by Inspector Vital. She fends him off as he gives her his number. Michel trails the plainclothesman trailing Patricia, but she goes into a moviehouse, where she ditches him and meets Michel outside. They hide out at a screening of Budd Boetticher's *Westbound* until it's dark. From a newspaper,

⁴Directed by Mark Robson and written by Budd Schulberg, *The Harder They Fall* (1956) was Bogart's last film. He died in February 1957.

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Patricia learns that Michel is married but “that was a long time ago.” They steal a Cadillac from a parking garage, with Patricia’s breezy “Good Night” getting them past the barrier. At the Café Pergola they learn, at the cost of a kiss for the bartender, that Berruti is with Carl Zumbach [Roger Hanin]. Zumbach points out Berruti [Henri-Jacques Huet], who agrees to cash Michel’s check the next morning, in between working a photo scam at the café – where Patricia briefly chats with the journalist. They decide to spend the night at Zumbach’s Swedish girlfriend’s place, where she is wrapping up a photo shoot.

The next morning, Michel sends Patricia out for a *France Soir* and milk. She calls the inspector and informs on Michel. When she returns, he tells her that Berruti is on his way with the money and a car, but Patricia says she isn’t going and that she has called the police, thus proving to herself that she doesn’t love him. Michel runs out to meet Berruti and gets the money, but tells him that he will stay, refusing Berruti’s gun. The police arrive and when Michel picks up the gun Berruti throws to him, they shoot him. As he dies, he runs through his trio of funny faces for Patricia and says, “Makes me want to puke.” She asks the cops what he said, and then, rubbing her lips with her thumb, asks, “What’s puke?”

RICHARD BRODY ON *BREATHLESS* (BACKGROUND)

Godard kept the technical crew to the scant minimum, but nonetheless found their presence cumbersome. Union regulations required him to hire a makeup artist, but Godard prevented her from doing any makeup, though Seberg said that the makeup artist sometimes slipped her a powder puff. The script supervisor was unable to keep track of continuity because Godard kept her away from the shoot; when the crew filmed the hotel room scenes, he made sure she stayed in the hallway. Godard’s state of “not thinking of anything” made him utterly indifferent to continuity or planning; the result was a rare cinematic spontaneity, an “action cinema” akin to the “action painting” for which Abstract Expressionists were already famous. He was aware that the film would reflect the conditions under which it was made, and that his methods were inseparable from his aesthetic.

Wednesday, we shot a scene in direct sunlight with Geva 56. Everyone found it awful. I find it fairly extraordinary. It is the first time that one obliges the film stock to give the maximum of itself by making it do that for which it is not made. It is as if it were suffering by being exploited to the outer limit of its possibilities. Even the film stock, you see, will be out of breath.

...Godard included his friends in the film. He asked Jean-Pierre Melville -- an independent filmmaker (born in 1917) who owned his own studio and made French crime movies with an American flair, including the legendary *Bob le flambeur* -- to play a voluble novelist whom Patricia would interview at Orly Airport for the *New York Herald Tribune*, and he named this character Parvulesco, after his Geneva

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friend, the right-wing philosopher. Godard wanted the scene to play like a real interview, and he asked Melville to improvise his answers -- "to talk about women or anything I wanted, the way we did when we drove around at night." Roland Tolmatchoff was supposed to come to Paris to play a gangster named Balducci (the last name of the film's publicist Richard Balducci); when Tolmatchoff was unable to come on the appointed day, Godard asked Balducci to play a gangster named Tolmatchoff. He cast Jacques Rivette in a cameo role.

But the most unusual aspect of Godard's technique concerned the script, or rather, the lack of one. As Godard wrote to [Pierre] Braunberger⁵, "At the moment we really are shooting from day to day. I write the scenes while having breakfast at the Dumont Montparnasse." He was not exaggerating. Before the shoot, Godard had begun to write a traditional screenplay, filling in dialogue for each scene... He attempted to write more dialogue (some of which he passed along to Seberg), but was dissatisfied with the results. In early August 1959, Seberg wrote to a friend, "Day by day, the scenario seems to be getting bigger and worse in every way." Godard did not like the script either, so he got rid of it and decided to write the dialogue day by day as the production went along. Of course, the actors found this procedure odd. They hardly had time to learn their lines. The film, however, was shot without direct sound (the entire sound track, including the dialogue, was to be post synchronized, i.e., dubbed), and so, when the actors' memory failed, Godard called their lines out to them while the camera was rolling. He wrote to Braunberger, "Seberg is crazed, and regrets doing the film. I start with her tomorrow. I'll say goodbye to you because I have to find what is going to be filmed tomorrow."

Having worked on Hollywood shoots, Seberg was shocked. Belmondo was able to take the proceedings as something of a joke. Seeing himself at rushes in a hat and with a Boyard cigarette dangling from his mouth (Godard's brand, cheap, thick, yellow corn-paper cigarettes renowned for the pungency of their smoke), Belmondo feared for his career. Eventually, he felt reassured by the chaos of the shoot: Belmondo was sure that the film could not be edited into anything coherent and figured that it would never be released.

This idiosyncratic scripting produced a particular on-screen result. Godard's spontaneous method deliberately frustrated the actors' attempts to compose their characters in any naturalistic or psychologically motivated way. And to make sure of the spontaneity, Godard told Belmondo, "Don't think about the film tonight. We'll lose two hours tomorrow making you forget whatever you were imagining off by yourself." In effect, Godard's actors were quoting Godard. Rather than becoming their characters, they were imitating them.

⁵ producer of Godard's first short films

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On August 17, 1959, the first day of the shoot, the crew gathered at 6:00 AM at a café across from Notre Dame. The action involved Belmondo, who in the story had just returned to Paris after killing the police officer on the rural highway. Godard asked him to enter a phone booth, say whatever he wanted, and leave the phone booth; Godard asked him to enter a café, place an order, and leave without paying. These brief sequences were the sole work of the day; such short work days would prove not atypical for Godard and his crew. The absence of additional lighting, the handheld camera, the lack of makeup, permitted the crew to work very rapidly. There were no cables or other equipment to limit the actors' freedom of movement; there was no crowd control, no attempt to modify the life on the street around the filming. Godard had calculated the rapidity of his methods, and counted on being able to fill a significant amount of screen time quickly leaving the rest of his time free so that he could figure out the next day's program. He often discharged his crew after what was officially only a half-day's work, and on days when he did not feel inspired, he cancelled the shoot altogether. Beauregard assumed that Godard was slacking off and wasting money. One day when Godard called off the shoot on the pretext of illness, Beauregard found him at a café near the production office; a physical altercation resulted, and Coutard himself had to separate producer and director.

...The first cut was two-and-a-half hours long, but Beauregard had required that Godard deliver a ninety-minute film. Godard asked Jean-Pierre Melville for advice on how to cut it down:

I told him to cut everything that didn't keep the action moving, and to remove all unnecessary scenes, mine included. He didn't listen to me and instead of cutting whole scenes as was the practice then, he had the brilliant idea of cutting more or less at random within scenes. The result was excellent.

Godard (and the editor, Cécile Decugis, who essentially executed Godard's instructions) did not, for the most part, cut at random; on the contrary he responded to his enthusiasms, and removed all moments—within scenes, even within shots—that seemed to him to lack vigor. He kept in the film only what he thought was strongest, regardless of dramatic import or conventional continuity, thus producing many jump cuts, where characters and anything else that moves within the shot seem to jump from one position to another in a relatively fixed frame. Such cuts were generally considered to be a cardinal error of an amateurish film technique and were scrupulously avoided in the professional cinema. They were seen as both intrinsically funny, a kind of cinematic solecism, and unsettling in the way they break the cinematic illusion by presenting two obviously discontinuous times as immediately sequential. The jump cut, despite—and because of—its ill-repute, became one of the principal figures of the visual style of *Breathless*.

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Godard also filmed from deliberately disorienting angles, filming the police chase of Michel from opposite sides of the road, so that the police car and Michel's car appear to be going in opposite directions rather than having one follow the other. He filmed a close-up of Michel's gun from the opposite side as he filmed Michel's body thus having the gun point not at the policeman but back toward Michel. On another set, such brazen disregard for standards would have been cited by a script supervisor and a cameraman, who would have informed the director of his "errors." Here, these playfully defiant shots occur in the film's first minutes, as if to announce up front that the old rules would not apply to *Breathless* or to Godard.

Through these decisions, Godard removed the scrim of convention by which the cinema transmits time and space to the viewer; however, by flouting the principles on which the classical cinema is based, he in fact ended up emphasizing them. In appearing amateurish, the film calls attention to the codes of professionalism, and in the end highlights the fact that they are merely conventions: it denaturalizes them. *Breathless* presents standard aspects of the classic cinema, but mediated, or quoted. Paradoxically this interpolation of Godard's directorial authority between the viewer and the action does not render the film arch, distant, or calculated, but rather produces the impression of immediacy, spontaneity, and vulnerability. Godard's presence is invoked as a sort of live-action narrator who calls the shots as they unfold, with as much potential for accident and error as any live performance. But here, the "errors" only reinforce the illusion of immediacy. The overall result is an accelerated and syncopated rhythm, made of leaps ahead and doublings back, a sort of visual jazz (with Godard as the improvising soloist) that outswung the American detective and gangster films that had served as Godard's models.

The jump cut is a device that Godard subsequently reused only rarely. He soon devised other, and more sophisticated, methods for conjuring his presence in his films. It was not in Godard's work, but in the work of lesser directors, that the jump cut would become a cliché, and then a commonplace in television commercials and, later, music videos. The great importance of its appearance in *Breathless* was that it served as a starting point for Godard's more thorough reconsideration of technique and convention in editing: years later, after his work had changed direction more than once, Godard said of his editing technique in *Breathless*: "Thinking about it afterward, it gave me new ideas about montage."

Breathless is notable for still another kind of montage, the assembly of allusions and references to film history. Not only did Godard film *Breathless* in the style of an American film noir, he stocked it with citations from the American cinema. *Breathless* is replete with visual quotations from movies by Samuel Fuller, Joseph H. Lewis, Anthony Mann, and from *The Enforcer* (as well as from *Le Plaisir* by Max Ophüls). In lieu of credits—the film has none—the film bears a dedication to Monogram Films, an American "B-movie" studio; and the film shows posters for *Westbound*, by Budd Boetticher, a poster of Humphrey Bogart from *The Harder*

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They Fall (his last film), another poster for another western (starring Jeff Chandler) bearing the remarkable French title *Vivre dangereusement jusqu'au bout* (to live dangerously to the end), the original American title of which was *Ten Seconds to Hell*; a clip from the sound track of Preminger's *Whirlpool*⁶. Michel Poiccard himself is obsessed with American movies and takes on the gestures and the attitudes, the perpetual pugnacity and casual misogyny of the noir hero, specifically, the sneer displayed on screen by Humphrey Bogart, as well as an aptitude for violence that seemed to him to constitute the genre and its promise, or myth, of freedom.

All of Godard's friends in the New Wave were deeply affected and influenced by the recent American cinema. However, the first films of the New Wave—those of Chabrol and Truffaut, as well as the early efforts of Rivette and Rohmer—hardly resembled it. As filmmakers, the group from *Cahiers* kept their relations with the films they loved tacit and implicit. Only Godard made a film that in story, in style, and in substance is directly derived from the American movies they admired.

Excerpted from *Everything is Cinema: The Working Life of Jean-Luc Godard* by Richard Brody (Metropolitan Books, 2008). Used with permission of the author.

GODARD ON *BREATHLESS*

I improvise, without doubt, but with material that dates from way back. One gathers, over the years, piles of things and then suddenly puts them in what one is doing. My first shorts had a lot of preparation and were shot very quickly; *Breathless* was started in this way. I had written the first scene (Jean Seberg on the Champs Elysées) and, for the rest, I had an enormous amount of notes corresponding to each scene. I said to myself, this is very distracting. I stopped everything. Then I reflected: in one day, if one knows what one is doing, one should be able to shoot a dozen sequences. Only, instead of having the material for a long time, I'll get it just before. When one knows where he is going, this must be possible. This is not improvisation, it's decision-making at the last minute. Obviously, you have to have and maintain a view of the ensemble, you can modify a certain part of it, but after the shooting starts keep the changes to a minimum; otherwise it's catastrophic.

I read in *Sight and Sound* that I was improvising in the Actors' Studio style, with actors to whom one says: you are such and such, take it from there. But Belmondo's dialogue was never invented by him. It was written; only the actors didn't learn it. The film was shot silent and I whispered the cues.

⁶ with Richard Conte and Gene Tierney (1949). José Ferrer played a character called Doctor Korvo, a name appropriated by Godard for *Made in U.S.A.*

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When you started the film, what did it represent for you?

Our first films were purely films by cinéphiles. One may avail oneself of something already seen in the cinema in order to make deliberate references. This was the case for me. Actually, I was reasoning according to purely cinematographic attitudes. I worked out certain images, schemes with relation to others I knew from Preminger, Cukor, etc.... In any case, Jean Seberg was a continuation of the role she played in *Bonjour Tristesse*⁷. I could have taken the last frame of that and linked it with a title: "three years later." ...This is to reconcile my taste for quotation, which I have always kept... I show people quoting, merely making sure that they quote what pleases me. In the notes I make of anything that might be of use for a film, I will add a quote from Dostoyevsky if I like it. Why not? If you want to say something, there is only one solution: say it.

Moreover, the genre of *Breathless* was such that all was permitted, that was its nature. Whatever people might do, this could be integrated into the film. This was even my point of departure. I said to myself: there has already been Bresson, we just had *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, a certain kind of cinema has just ended. Well then, let's put the final period to it: let's show that anything goes. What I wanted to do was to depart from the conventional story and remake, but differently, everything that had already been done in the cinema. I also wanted to give the impression of just finding or experiencing the processes of cinema for the first time. The iris shot showed that it was permissible to return to the sources of cinema and the linking shot came along, by itself, as if one had just invented it.

...What is hardest on me is the ending. Is the hero going to die? At first, I was thinking of doing the opposite of, for example, [Kubrick's] *The Killing*. The gangster would succeed and leave for Italy with his money. But this would have been a very conventional anti-convention, like having Nana succeed in *Vivre Sa Vie*.⁸ I finally told myself that since, after all, all my avowed ambitions were to make a normal gangster film, I couldn't systematically contradict the genre: the guy had to die.

...But improvisation is fatiguing. I am always telling myself: this is the last time! It's not possible anymore! It's too fatiguing to go to sleep every night asking oneself, "What am I going to do tomorrow morning?" It's like writing an article at twenty to twelve at a café table when it has to be delivered to the paper at noon. What is curious is that one always arrives at writing it, but working like this month after month is killing. At the same time there is a certain amount of premeditation. You say to yourself that if you are honest and sincere and in a corner and have to do something, the result will necessarily be honest and sincere.

⁷ A 1958 Preminger film, also starring David Niven and Deborah Kerr and based on the novel by Françoise Sagan. Like Preminger's *Saint Joan*, Seberg's debut, it was a flop in the U.S.

⁸ aka *My Life to Live*, 1962 Godard film starring his then-wife Anna Karina as a streetwalker

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Only, you never do exactly what you believe you're doing. Sometimes you even arrive at the exact opposite. This is true for me, in any case, but at the same time I lay claim to everything I have done. I realized, at a certain point, that *Breathless* was not at all what I believed it to be. I believed I had made a realistic film and it wasn't that at all. First of all, I didn't possess sufficient technical skill, then I discovered that I wasn't made for this genre of film. There are also a great number of things I'd like to do and don't do. For example, I'd like to be like Fritz Lang and have frames which are extraordinary in themselves, but I don't arrive at that. So I do something else. I like *Breathless* enormously--for a certain period I was ashamed of it, but now I place it where it belongs, with *Alice in Wonderland*. I thought it was *Scarface*.

Breathless is a story, not a subject. A subject is something simple and vast about which one can make a resumé in twenty seconds: revenge, pleasure . . . a story takes twenty minutes to recapitulate. In *Breathless*, I was looking for a subject all during the shooting; finally I became interested in Belmondo. I saw him as a sort of a façade which it was necessary to film in order to know what was behind it. Seberg, on the contrary, was an actress whom I wanted to make do many little things that pleased me -- this came from the cinéphile side I no longer have.

Excerpted from *Jean-Luc Godard*, ed. Toby Mussman (Dutton, 1968); first published in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, December 1962

Breathless is my film, but it's not me. It is only a variation on a theme of Truffaut who had the idea for the scenario. Using Truffaut's theme, I told the story of an American girl and a Frenchman. Things couldn't go well between them, because he thinks about death all the time, while she never gives it a thought. I told myself that if I didn't add this idea to the scenario, the film wouldn't be interesting at all. The guy is obsessed with death, even has presentiments of it. This is why I shot the scene of the accident where he sees a man die on the street. I quoted the phrase of Lenin's -- "We're all dead men on leave" -- and I chose the Clarinet Concerto by Mozart since he wrote it just before he died.

How do you see the relationship of the couple in the film?

The American, Patricia, is on a psychological level, whereas the guy, Michel, is on a poetic level. They use words -- the same words -- but they don't have the same meaning. When she betrays her lover to the police, Patricia goes right to the end of herself, and it is in this sense that I find her very moving. You don't see in the film the night preceding this betrayal. I prefer showing the moment when she acts. All in all, from one work to another, for example from a film by Bresson to one by Delannoy⁹, characters resemble each other. But the difference -- and it's

⁹ Jean Delannoy (1908-2008), director of *L'Eternel Retour*, *La Symphonie Pastorale*, etc.

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fundamental -- comes from the fact that the first shows only his characters in interesting moments, whereas with the second it's the opposite.

Does Belmondo play a character very much like you?

I was inspired by a friend who traveled a lot and was always suspected of smuggling. He also thought constantly about death. Socially, I'm quite distant from Belmondo's character. Morally, he resembles me a lot. He's a bit of an anarchist.

What was your working method? Did you improvise?

I improvised nothing. I took a great many unorganized notes and then wrote the scenes and the dialogue. Before beginning the film, I sorted these notes and came up with a general plan. This framework allowed me later to rework -- every morning -- the eight pages corresponding to the sequence I was supposed to shoot that afternoon. Except for certain scenes that were already thoroughly worked out, I stuck with this working method and wrote my few minutes of film every day. Raoul Coutard shot without artificial light in natural settings, and with the camera on his shoulder. Shooting took four weeks. How do I direct actors? I give lots of little instructions and I try to find just the essential gestures. This film is really a documentary on Jean Seberg and Jean-Paul Belmondo.

Interview with Yvonne Baby from *Le Monde*, March 18, 1960, translated by Dudley Andrew and re-published in *Breathless*, ed. Andrew (Rutgers Univ. Press, 1998)

FRANÇOIS TRUFFAUT ON *BREATHLESS*

Jean-Luc was vaguely connected with a film produced by Beauregard¹⁰, *Ramuntcho* or *Pêcheur d'Islande*¹¹, and a month after the premiere of *The 400 Blows*¹², he asked me to lend him the scenario of *Breathless* so he could give it to Beauregard to read. It was a story I had written several years earlier. I had been following an incident that took place over one weekend and made a deep impression on me.

A young boy had stolen a car from the diplomatic corps one evening near the Saint-Lazare station. He set out along the route to Le Havre and was stopped by a motorcycle cop for a stupid reason of signaling and lights. He killed the cop. So

¹⁰ Producer Georges De Beauregard (1920-1984) backed many of the early films of the New Wave. In addition to *Breathless*, his credits include Demy's *Lola*, Varda's *Cléo de 5 à 7*, Melville's *Léon Morin, Prêtre* and *Le Doulos*, Rivette's *La Religieuse*, and Rohmer's *La Collectionneuse*. He produced most of Godard's films through *Made in U.S.A.*

¹¹ *Ramuntcho* and *Pêcheur d'Islande* (1959), two films directed by Pierre Schoendoerffer and produced by Beauregard in 1959.

¹² Truffaut's debut feature of the previous year was the first smash hit of the French New Wave.

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the boy was immediately sought by every policeman in France. Saturday evening, there were raids in Pigalle and in all the moviehouses. I was there. The progression of this incident, hour by hour, was very interesting...I had constructed a scenario from this story more or less in keeping with the facts; my gangster character was pretty antipathetic. More like *Scarface* than *Bob Le Flambeur*.

Jean-Luc worked completely alone on this scenario for some time before the shooting and particularly during the shooting. He completely modified the ending. In my script, the film ends with the boy walking along the street as more and more people turn and stare after him, because his photo's on the front of all the newspapers... Jean-Luc chose a violent end because... he was in the depths of despair when he made the picture. He needed to film death, and he needed that particular ending. I asked him to cut only one absolutely horrible phrase. At the end, when the police are shooting at him, one of them says, "Quick, in the spine!" I told him, "You can't leave that in." I was vehement about it. He deleted the phrase. I like his ending very much as it now stands.

Do I recall anything about the making of that film? I saw the rushes. Jean-Luc had asked me to come because things weren't going very well: Jean Seberg lacked confidence and Beauregard was also very nervous. He didn't understand Jean-Luc's methods and was totally unable to form a judgment on the basis of what he had seen. The crew's spirits were pretty low at the beginning... Belmondo, on the other hand, was full of confidence, because he is very intelligent and because he was getting to know Jean-Luc very well. I was astonished by the rushes and I particularly remember the scene beneath the sheets. They were marvelous rushes, full of unexpected and visual ideas.

Another time, I was driving back from the Midi, and on the road I ran across a small crew in the midst of filming: it was Coutard and Godard and Belmondo. They were shooting the scenes of the car in the beginning of the film. I stopped. It was the end of shooting. We had a wonderful time together.

Every stage of the film's development seemed exciting to me; from the dubbing, though the rushes; to the very end of editing.

Of all Jean-Luc's films, *Breathless* is my favorite. It's the saddest. There is deep unhappiness; even, as Aragon says, "deep, deep, deep" unhappiness.

Breathless won the Prix Vigo¹³. In effect, *Breathless* is an heir to *L'Atalante*. Vigo's film ends with Jean Dasté and Dita Parlo locked in an embrace on the bed.

¹³ *Prix Jean Vigo*: Prestigious award given annually since 1951 to a French director whose work shows an innovative spirit and promise of future achievement. Named for Jean Vigo (1905-1934), director of *L'Atalante* and *Zéro de conduite*, who was lionized by the New Wave critics. He died at age 29.

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That night, they surely conceived a child, and that child is the Belmondo of *Breathless*.

Excerpted from *Jean-Luc Godard, An Investigation into His Films and Philosophy* by Jean Collet (Crown Publishers, 1970)

RAOUL COUTARD ON *BREATHLESS*

Godard is even more incisive when deciding matters of film stock and laboratory techniques. The stock and the laboratory are 80 percent of the film image – its finesse and subtlety, its effect or lack of effect, its punch and emotion. These, however, are points of which the public is never aware.

Godard knows this... That first time, on *Breathless*, he said to me, “No more confectionary. We’re going to shoot in real light... Which stock do you prefer?” I told him I like to work with Ilford H.P.S. Godard then had me take photographs on this stock. He compared them with others, and we did some tests. Finally he said, “That’s exactly what I want.”

We called the Ilford works in England, and they told us that were very sorry, but their H.P.S. was made only for still photographs: we’d have to give up. But Godard doesn’t give up. For still camera spools, Ilford made the stock in reels of 17.5 meters, the perforations weren’t the same as for cinema cameras. Godard decided to stick together as many 17.5 meter reels as he would need to make up a reel of motion picture film, and to use a camera with sprocket holes corresponding most closely with that of a Leica – luckily, the Cameflex. The professionals were horrified.

But that wasn’t the end of it. One photo developer got particularly good results with H.P.S. stock, and that was Phenidone. With Godard and a chemist from the G.T.C. laboratories, we ran several series of tests. We ended up by doubling the speed of the emulsion, which gave us a very good result. Godard asked the laboratory to use a Phenidone bath in developing the film. But the laboratory refused. The machines of the G.T.C. and L.T.C. labs handle 3,000 meters of film stock an hour, with everything going through the same developing process... A laboratory could not effectively take one machine out of the circuit to process film for M. Jean-Luc Godard, who at the very most would probably want no more than some 1,000 meters a day.

On *Breathless*, however, we had a stroke of luck. Tucked away in a corner, the G.T.C. laboratories had a little supplementary machine, which they used for running tests. They allowed us to borrow the little machine so we could develop our stuck-together Ilford film in a solution of our own making and at whatever rate we chose... The fantastic success of *Breathless*, and the turning point that the film marked in cinema history, was clearly due mainly to Godard’s imagination and

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especially to its sense of living in the moment. But it also had to do with the fact that he stuck together these bits of Ilford stock, against everyone's advice, and miraculously obtained the use of this machine at the G.T.C. laboratories.

Excerpted from "Light of Day" by Raoul Coutard from *Jean-Luc Godard*, ed. Toby Mussman (Dutton, 1968); first published in *Sight and Sound*, Winter 1965-66

Though Coutard's real ambition lay in photojournalism, he ended up as a cameraman on feature documentaries directed by Pierre Schoendoerffer, an old friend from his Vietnam days. Coutard soon mastered Eclair's Cameflex 35mm camera, which, though very noisy, was superb for handheld work.... But Coutard's big break arrived when his documentary producer, Georges de Beauregard, proposed him as the cinematographer on Godard's feature debut, *Breathless*.

Beauregard issued a few conditions to the novice director: his friend Truffaut would have to write the picture, and his pal Chabrol would have to agree to be a technical consultant. Both of Godard's colleagues had recently finished their first films -- *The 400 Blows* and *Le Beau Serge*, respectively -- and gladly lent their talents to help Beauregard finance Godard's debut. The producer then demanded that Coutard be the cinematographer, a decision that initially irked Godard, who had some unconventional ideas for *Breathless*.

"Jean-Luc said that we would do a *reportage* [documentary], which meant shooting the whole film handheld [with the Eclair Cameflex] without using any lighting. The big idea was to do more realistic photography. No one had ever proposed shooting an entire fiction film handheld. Of course, we must not forget that there was no budget for the film, and it was considerably cheaper to shoot handheld, on location and without lighting."

Coutard asserts that he accepted Godard's challenge out of ignorance. "I had no ideas about what cinema was. If I had known what was involved in shooting a handheld film without lighting, I would not have done it, because I would never have believed that I could do it correctly."

Additionally... the entire film had to be dubbed in postproduction. "If you look at the film closely," Coutard points out, "you'll notice that the rhythm of the actors' speech is peculiar, and there's a pause between lines. That's because all of the dialogue was spoken by Jean-Luc during each shot, and the actor would then repeat each of his phrases."

Breathless was shot sequentially, in the order of the finished film, yet still retained Godard's unusual spontaneity. According to Coutard, the director wrote each day's shooting script on the previous evening. "You never knew what you were going to shoot the following day. He would arrive in the morning with the scene written, to which no one was privy. If we did everything he had written in the notebook, then

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he stopped shooting for the day and sent us home early, which really upset the producer."

As per Godard's instructions, Coutard did not employ artificial illumination in the film, save for two instances: in the hotel bathroom scene, a Photoflood was exchanged for a dim ceiling bulb; and the darkened newspaper office featured a few specially placed fixtures. Ironically, Coutard's initial contribution to the cinematographic look of the nouvelle vague can only be characterized as "anti-lighting," in combination with his free-flowing camerawork.

"[Godard] was the only director whom I could take risks with," Coutard adds. "If we tried something difficult, I would warn him that there might be a problem, and he would say, 'Fine, let's try it anyway.' I could be sure that if the result wasn't any good, we'd shoot it again. This allowed me to try things that I wouldn't have with other directors. Reshoots were impossible with other directors, because they were tied to their shooting schedules."

Excerpted from *Raoul Coutard: Revolutionary of the Nouvelle Vague* by Benjamin Bergery (American Cinematographer, March 1997).

BREATHLESS: A KEY TO REFERENCES

Following is an attempt to identify the myriad literary, cinematic, and other references in Breathless:

CINEMA REFERENCES

Humphrey Bogart (1899-1957) died in February 1957, only a few years before *Breathless* was shot. Among the Bogart references in *Breathless*:

- Michel models himself after Bogart, rubbing his thumb over his lip in Bogart's familiar style and at one point looking at a photo of Bogart outside a cinema (see below) and muttering "Bogey" to himself.
- ***The Harder They Fall***: Michel gazes at a poster and stills from the 1956 boxing picture, which would be Bogart's final film. Belmondo was a former boxer, who demonstrates his technique in two later scenes. (see "Cinemas," below)
- Michel tells Patricia "I always fall for the wrong dames," a line from John Huston's ***The Maltese Falcon*** (1941), starring Bogart as Sam Spade.
- ***High Sierra***: The ending of *Breathless* is reminiscent of the end of Raoul Walsh's *High Sierra*, with Bogart (in his first major starring role) as Roy "Mad Dog" Earle. After Bogart is shot off the mountain by police, Ida Lupino, crying over his

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dead body, asks a reporter, “Mister, what does it mean...when a man “crashes out””? (Seberg asks a stranger the meaning of “dégueulasse.”)

• **The Enforcer:** The scene in which Michel knocks a guy out in the men’s room recalls a similar incident in *The Enforcer*, a 1951 Bogart picture.

Cahiers du Cinéma: The magazine is being sold on the street by a young girl, who asks Michel, “Got anything against youth?” At the time, Godard was still on its editorial board.

Cinemas: Michel gazes at the Bogart poster and stills in front of the **Normandie**, 116 Champs Elysées. Patricia ducks into the renowned *cinéma d’essai* **MacMahon** at 5, avenue MacMahon, off the Etoile (still in business). At the time of the *Breathless* shooting, the MacMahon functioned as a kind of club for a group of young cinephiles dubbed “Les MacMahonistes,” including *Breathless* AD Pierre Rissient. Michel and Patricia see Boetticher’s *Westbound* at the **Napoléon**.

Forty Guns: The scene in the bedroom where Patricia looks at Michel through a rolled up poster, then cuts to a close up of them kissing, mimics a shot from Samuel Fuller’s *Forty Guns* (1957). Godard described the scene in detail in his review of the film (see *Godard on Godard*, p. 62).

Godard makes a Hitchcockian cameo as the man who informs on Michel.

André S. Labarthe: The journalist who asks Parvulesco whether he thinks there is a difference between eroticism and love is played by Labarthe, a young critic and TV documentarian (notably the *Cinéastes de notre temps* series). He would also play a major role in Godard’s *Vivre sa vie* (1961).

László Kovács (1933-2007) was a Hungarian-born cinematographer who would eventually move to America, where he shot such Hollywood movies as *Paper Moon*, *Shampoo*, and *Ghost Busters*. At the time of *Breathless*, he was a young cinéophile living in Paris. Godard adopted his name for this and several other movies. (Not to be confused with frequent Godard player **László Szabo**.)

“Live Dangerously To The End”: Advertising “sell line” seen on a poster for Robert Aldrich’s *Ten Seconds To Hell* (1959). A few years later, Jack Palance, its star, would appear in Godard’s *Contempt*.

Jean-Pierre Melville (1917-1973) is considered one of the fathers of the New Wave. When Michel’s friend Tolmatchoff tells him that their pal “Bob Montagné” is in jail, it’s a reference to the title character of Melville’s *Bob Le Flambeur*. Melville himself plays the pretentious novelist Parvulesco.

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Monika (*Summer with Monika*): 1953 Ingmar Bergman film starring Harriet Andersson in the title role. According to the documentary *Two in the Wave*, the final shot of Seberg looking into the camera was inspired by it (as was the final shot of Truffaut's *The 400 Blows*).

Monogram Pictures: see footnote 1.

Jacques Rivette (born 1928), one of Godard's fellow Cahiers critics (and already a director of shorts), is seen as the man killed in a car accident.

Testament of Orpheus: Parvulesco (Melville) responds to a question by referring to Jean Cocteau's *Testament of Orpheus*. Cocteau was in the midst of this film, his final one, which was released a month before *Breathless*. Godard had dedicated his first short film to Cocteau.

Westbound: The film that Michel and Patricia go to see at the Napoléon is *Westbound*, a 1958 Randolph Scott Western directed by Budd Boetticher.

Whirlpool: The dialogue heard at the MacMahon is from *Whirlpool*, a 1949 Preminger film starring Gene Tierney and Richard Conte. José Ferrer's villainous character Dr. Korvo would later become the name of one of the characters in *Made in U.S.A.*

LITERARY REFERENCES

Apollinaire and Aragon: When Michel and Patricia go to see the Western at the Napoléon cinema, the dialogue from the screen is actually the recitation of two poems. The first, recited by Godard himself, is a stanza of "Elsa, Je t'aime" by Louis Aragon (1897-1939). The second is a stanza from "Cours de chasse" from the collection *Alcools* by Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918).

William Faulkner (1897-1962): The book Van Doude gives Patricia is most likely Faulkner's *The Wild Palms* (1939), for it is indeed about a woman who dies after an abortion as Van Doude mentions to Patricia. Patricia later quotes from *The Wild Palms* ("Between grief and nothing I will take grief").

Dashiell Hammett (1894-1961): Berruti tells Michel not to wear silk socks with a tweed jacket, a reference to a line from Hammett's *The Glass Key*. Hammett is also referenced in the line from *The Maltese Falcon* (see above).

Portrait of The Artist as a Young Dog: Patricia asked Michel if she knows the book, *Portrait of The Artist as a Young Dog*, a reference to Dylan Thomas's posthumously published (1955) autobiography.

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Parvulesco refers to the Bohemian-Austrian poet **Rainier Maria Rilke** (1875-1926).

In the Swedish model's apartment, *Abracadabra*, a book by French writer **Maurice Sachs** (1906-1944) is glimpsed. The publicity band on the book quotes Lenin: "Nous sommes des morts en permission" ("We are dead men on leave").

Françoise Sagan (1935-2004): Michel asks Patricia when she'll know if she's loves him: "In a month, in a year?" -- the title of a 1957 Sagan novel. "Do you like Brahms?" is a question posed to Parvulesco. *Aimez-vous Brahms?* was the title of the then-most recent (1959) Sagan novel. Seberg had recently appeared in Preminger's *Bonjour Tristesse* (1958), an adaptation of another Sagan novel. Godard claimed that Patricia was a continuation of the same character.

ART REFERENCES

Picasso: After Patricia says she wishes she and Michel were like Romeo and Juliet, the camera cuts away to a poster of a Picasso painting on the wall: *The Lovers*, 1923. Later in the scene, the camera rests on a reproduction of a Picasso engraving.

Renoir: In the scene where Patricia puts her face up against a poster of a Renoir painting and says that "Renoir's a really great painter", the painting in the poster is *Head of Young Girl*, 1894.

Klee: A postcard-sized reproduction of a Paul Klee painting (*The Timid Brute*, 1938) can be seen in the bedroom scene.

MISCELLANEOUS

Cafés: The Pergola was a café near Boulevard Saint Germain. The Royal refers to the well-known Royal Saint Germain Café, at the intersection of Blvd. Saint Germain and the rue de Rennes until it was replaced by the Drugstore Saint-Germain. It is now an Armani store.

Champs Elysées: The parade on the Champs Elysées was on the occasion of a joint visit by DeGaulle and Eisenhower to the tomb of the unknown soldier at the Arc de Triomphe. A shot showing the two leaders was removed by the censors.

Christian Dior: This discussion of making calls from the Dior store does in fact occur in front of Dior's elegant store on Avenue Montaigne.

The Heart of Juliet Jones: comic strip created by Stan Drake in 1953, seen (as "Juliette de Mon Coeur") when Michel holds up a newspaper.

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Lenin: see entry for **Maurice Sachs** above.

Dean Martin: In the bedroom scene, a copy of *Silver Screen* magazine is visible with Dino on the cover.

Rue Campagne Première, where Patricia and Michel hide out at the end and where Michel is shot by the police, is in the fourteenth arrondissement, near Montparnasse.

Switzerland: There are several references to Godard's Swiss background. "Elysées 99- 84": Michel uses the Swiss way of saying these numbers: "nonante-neuf, huitante-quatre". Michel says that the only cities where the girls rate an 8 on a 10 scale aren't in Rome or Paris or Rio but Lausanne or Geneva. Patricia admires Michel's ashtray, which he says is Swiss. Klee (see above) may also be an homage to his Swiss background.

WORLD DIRECTORS ON *BREATHLESS*

Few films have inspired more filmmakers than Godard's debut feature – and its influence continues to this day. On the occasion of its 50th anniversary, famous directors from around the world were asked their thoughts on this groundbreaking film.

"There are precious few titles in the history of cinema that can truly be called 'revolutionary,' and Godard's *Breathless* is one of those few – it gave us a new way of making movies and a new way of thinking about them, a new rhythm of life, a new way of looking at ourselves. And, like all great pictures, it seems as fresh and startling today as it did 50 years ago." -- **Martin Scorsese**

"One of those films you return to as a director again and again and again....as inspiring, innovative, spare, jagged and cool today as it was the day I first saw it thirty years ago." -- **Paul Greengrass**

"I still remember how knocked out I was when I first saw *Breathless* as a young man. I've seen it fairly recently and it is still every bit as exciting." – **Woody Allen**

"There is a before and after Godard's *Breathless* as there was a before and after *Potemkin* or the arrival of Cubism. The film had an extraordinarily liberating effect, freeing generations of filmmakers from the weight of academicism. More than anything else, it's timeless. The younger audiences who'll discover *Breathless* today will be impacted by how utterly original and contemporary the film is." – **Walter Salles**

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“50 years later, Godard’s first is still breathtaking, and Belmondo and Seberg are younger than they ever were.” -- **Wim Wenders**

“*Breathless* was one of the most important movies of the 20th century, certainly one of the most influential movies of all time. It heralded a new age in cinema and the arrival on the scene of one of the greatest artists of the last century.” -- **Robert Benton**

“To see *Breathless* when it was first shown was exhilarating, principally because of Godard’s editing style.” -- **Ken Loach**

“The most inspiring aspects of *Breathless* are not the flourishes of the long handheld tracks, the flashcuts, or the myriad of other devices which Godard and his team introduced fifty years ago. The most audacious decision – the scene which still blazes its way into history – are the 25 minutes spent in Patricia’s bedroom as the young couple flirt, make love, then get ready to leave. There is nothing static or boring about this extended sequence. A kinetic nervous energy keeps it alive. What is finally so groundbreaking about *Breathless* is the freedom of the actors, and the way Godard watches them with a beautifully harnessed combination of casual disregard and absolute reverence. Yes, I love the way this film captures the youthful thrill of cinephilia in 1960 (the young woman who offers Belmondo a copy of *Cahiers du Cinéma* on the street, the cinema showing a first run of *Hiroshima Mon Amour...*), but it is this one bravura scene – the sheer ingenuity and reckless energy of every shot and gesture in that tiny Parisian apartment – which remains so mysterious and fascinating.” -- **Atom Egoyan**

“When I first saw *Breathless*, it was 1984 and I was a sophomore in college, and my knowledge of cinema really only ranged from *Jaws* to *Pippi Longstocking*. So I couldn’t quite describe what was so different about the movie, but I knew that it was something I’d never seen before. And I do remember the first thing that struck me about it was that it even though it came out in 1960 (before I was born), it was inescapably, undeniably *cool*... and in particular one scene midway through the movie that made my jaw drop. Belmondo comes up to some friends on the street in Paris, and they all *high-five each other!* Now, at the time, the low-slapping “gimme five’s” of the 70s had just started to give way in the 80s to top athletes introducing the up-top-slapping high-five. So to see a movie that was made more than 20 years earlier where the lead character is casually doing it, well, needless to say it caught my attention. Years later, as I studied film in earnest, I of course came to appreciate Godard’s innovation with film form and groundbreaking disruption of traditional narrative, but even as a young neophyte, I knew in my bones that this movie was something *special*.” -- **Mark Waters**

“Godard’s bebop camera scheme and jump cuts [set] the table for his not-yet-born cinematic offspring – America’s own New Wave of single-minded filmmakers. Truffaut’s script tailored Belmondo’s Michel to pay homage to Bogie, and in the

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process created a sub genre we now all take for granted: film characters who style themselves after movie stars. But all of that is hindsight and academic. I imagine my reaction to seeing the film in 1986 was not all that different than that of my 1960 counterpart experiencing *Breathless* for the first time. And that is, simply falling madly in love with Jean Seberg.” -- **Todd Field**

“Belmondo’s performance in the film seemed so by and large unenthusiastic. More than anything, that was the biggest shock to me. He was the only one so unenthusiastic in this world of cinema where everyone just tries to be all serious and put all their energy into the most earnest performance they can manage. From time to time, I had come across relaxed, careless, languid performances in other films, but having seen *Breathless*, I realized they were all fake. They were all being serious and putting all their energy into the most relaxed, careless, languid performances they could manage. But reaching the end of the film, Michel, shot by a gun, runs. Camera follows in a long tracking shot. Having run so well, with one hand on his waist to stop the gushing blood, Michel tumbles in the end. The moment his stomach hits the street as he falls forward, his arms and legs are flung up in the air, then they drop. That falling performance was so enthusiastic that it was unavoidably moving. It’s ‘dying with fervor after living a sloppy life.’”

-- **Park Chan Wook**

“I would be hazarding a guess, but I bet most of the strict critics at that time couldn’t conceal their perplexity when *Breathless* was released for the first time. Handheld cameras and jump cuts are techniques that are commonly used in modern films, but the bewildering conversations that are hard to follow, incomprehensible facial expressions and gestures, acting that seems to be almost apathetic, pedestrians popping in here and there in an unrestricted set when filming on location, lines that are less like conversations and more a recitation of satirical poems are still shockingly unconventional. This rootless film that instantly made all the films preceding it ancient must have been comparable to an alien invasion for conservative filmmakers and a messiah to those young film aficionados thirsty for new cinema. The aloofness of the anarchic coolness Michel and Patricia display illustrates some kind of great transcendence to this day, half a century later. It’s simply beautiful. The fact that this ‘coolness’ is one that accompanies an inner despair and hatred even makes my heart ache. What other films can express emotional abyss as something impulsive and superficial?”

-- **Kim Ji-Woon**

“*Breathless* was the first foreign language film that really felt dangerous. Watching Godard’s masterpiece for the first time really made me feel like I was in the hands of an unstable narrator: anything could happen at any moment. There were no rules. It felt like cinematic punk rock. *Breathless* shattered all the conventions I had been raised to believe were a necessary ingredient to foreign language cinema, and 50 years later the film has not lost an ounce of its potency. The hotel sequence for me is still the most accurate reflection I have ever seen on screen of

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what it is like to be part of a couple. The film oozes with style, from Belmondo's dangling ashy cigarette to Seberg's closely cropped hairdo, to music and the jump-cut editorial style.” -- **Eli Roth**

JEAN-LUC GODARD (Director/Writer)

Born December 3, 1930 in Paris, the son of a doctor and a banker's daughter, Godard had his elementary and high school education in Switzerland and in Paris, then enrolled at the Sorbonne, ostensibly to study ethnology. During his university days, he developed a passionate devotion to the cinema, spending endless hours at Left Bank cinema clubs and at the Cinémathèque Française, where in 1950 he met the critic André Bazin and future filmmakers François Truffaut, Jacques Rivette, Eric Rohmer, and Claude Chabrol, with whom he would later form the nucleus of the French New Wave. Godard began contributing articles and film criticism for *La Gazette du Cinéma*, then *Cahiers du Cinéma*.

In 1951, Godard toured North and South America. Supporting himself with a variety of odd jobs, he continued watching films at a fanatical rate, and his articles for *Cahiers* began reflecting an enthusiastic admiration for little-known American directors of action films and at the same time a deep contempt for the traditional cinema, especially the commercial French film. In 1954, Godard returned to Switzerland and remained there to work as a laborer on a dam project. With his earnings he bought himself a 35mm camera and made his first film, *Opération Béton*, a 20-minute short about the construction of the dam.

Following four more shorts, Godard stunned the world with his first feature film, *Breathless*, released in March 1960. The film marked a significant break from orthodox cinema techniques, reshaping the traditional film syntax with its astonishing jump cuts and unsteady hand-held moving shots. It was a spontaneous, impulsive, vibrant, and totally original film that reflected the director's enchantment with the immediacy of the American gangster movie. It immediately established Godard as a leading spokesman of the Nouvelle Vague.

Godard's next film, *Le Petit Soldat*, was a savage exposition of the Algerian conflict and also the first of seven features to star his future wife Anna Karina. Karina next played a stripper in his *A Woman Is a Woman* (1961, re-released by Rialto Pictures in 2003) and a Paris prostitute in *My Life to Live* (1962). *Les Carabiniers* (1963) was an anti-war allegory that provoked violently hostile reaction from audiences. Its grainy dreariness stood in sharp contrast to the widescreen color cinematography of *Contempt*, which starred Brigitte Bardot and Michel Piccoli.

With *Band of Outsiders* (1964, re-released by Rialto in 2001), Godard returned to the world of the gangster. *A Married Woman* (1964) was the study of an alienated

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Parisian woman. *Alphaville* (1965), Godard's only excursion into science fiction, was followed in the same year by *Pierrot le Fou*.

Godard's impact on the cinema of the 60s was monumental and sweeping. He used the camera inventively, re-writing the syntax of films along the way. *Masculine Feminine* (1966, re-released by Rialto in 2005) was a free-form study of the mores of Parisian youth. *Made in USA* (1966, released in the U.S. for the first time by Rialto in 2009) was based on an American potboiler. *Two or Three Things I Know About Her* (1967, re-released by Rialto in 2006) told the story of a Paris housewife who moonlights as a prostitute. *La Chinoise* (1967) featured in the leading role actress Anne Wiazemsky, who became Godard's second wife.

After *Week End* (1967), a new Godard surfaced, a revolutionary, didactic filmmaker who became obsessed with the spoken word and increasingly apathetic to cinema as a visual medium. He dedicated himself to making "revolutionary films for revolutionary audiences."

In the late 70s Godard underwent yet another metamorphosis, rediscovering himself and his love of film. He refocused his sights on themes of universal humanistic concern in *Every Man for Himself* (1980), *Passion* (1982), and *First Name: Carmen* (1983). He even paid a renewed homage to American cinema in *Déetective* (1985), but caused massive controversy with his *Hail Mary!* (1985).

King Lear (1987) was an unsuccessful attempt to film Shakespeare. *Soigne ta droite* (1987), *Nouvelle Vague* (1990) and *Hélas pour moi* (1994) all featured top stars, but his *For Ever Mozart* (1997), with its typically Godardian disquisition on art and war, was the best received of the four.

In 1998, Godard completed his long-gestating *Histoire(s) du Cinéma*, a highly personal meditation on 100 years of cinema. Other works of the 90s include *Germany Year 90 Nine Zero* and the self-portrait *JLG/JLG* (1995).

In 2003, he made *In Praise of Love*, a surprisingly moving study of art, history, madness and exploitation and, in 2004, *Notre Musique*, shot on location in Sarajevo. *Morceaux choisis* (literally, "choice bits"), a 90-minute re-edit of his *Histoire(s) du Cinéma*, was shown in 2005 at the Pompidou Center in Paris and was the opening night film of the re-opened Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Among his many prizes and honors, Godard won the Best Director award at the Berlin Festival for *Breathless*, a Berlin Jury Prize for *A Woman Is a Woman*, and Venice's Golden Lion (Best Film) for *First Name: Carmen*. In 1986, he was honored with a Special French César Award for Lifetime Achievement.

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Godard's latest film, *Film Socialisme*, has been selected for the "Un Certain Regard" section of this year's Cannes Film Festival. Godard will turn 80 in December 2010.

--Adapted from Ephraim Katz's *Film Encyclopedia*; updated by Lenny Borger

JEAN SEBERG (Patricia Franchini)

Born in 1938 in Marshalltown, Iowa, Seberg was determined to become an actress at age 12 after seeing Marlon Brando in his first film, *The Men*. (Hearing that he craved peace and quiet, she sent him a letter offering her home in Iowa as a haven. He didn't reply. Years later in Hollywood, they met and he told that if she wrote again he'd come.) She began acting in school productions of *Our Town*, *Picnic*, and other plays.

When Otto Preminger announced his nationwide talent search for his version of Shaw's *Saint Joan*, Jean's drama teacher sent in her name. She was selected from 18,000 applicants – Preminger reportedly actually saw 3,000 -- and, playing opposite a star-packed cast, she exposed her amateurishness painfully; or displayed a realness opposite expert theatricality, depending on your point of view. She was roasted critically and the film flopped. In what may be seen as a defiant gesture (to prove he was right all along about Seberg), Preminger cast her in one of three leading roles – along with David Niven and Deborah Kerr -- in Preminger's *Bonjour Tristesse*, based on the bestseller by French teenager Françoise Sagan. It too flopped, but it was a hit and well received critically in France. After being dumped in a nothing role in *The Mouse that Roared*, her career was dormant and she accepted a role in a low-budget film made by a debuting French critic. (She was already living in Paris, having married a French lawyer.) This was *Breathless* and she was world famous again.

From then on, she alternated between European films usually in French, and Hollywood films in English, mostly made in Europe, notably *The Five Day Lover* for Philippe de Broca; *In the French Style* opposite Stanley Baker; *Lilith* for Robert Rossen – perhaps her best performance; *Moment to Moment*, Mervyn LeRoy's last film; *A Fine Madness*, opposite Sean Connery; and two for Claude Chabrol: *The Line of Demarcation*, outstanding in a sadly unsung Resistance story; and *The Road to Corinth*, a potboiling thriller.

While a star in Europe, she had never hit it big in the U.S. She then did two big budget Hollywood films: *Paint Your Wagon*, a gigantic flop, and *Airport*, a gigantic hit – but neither did anything for her career.

By then her personal and professional life was already being affected by the FBI disinformation campaign against her. She had always been politically active,

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vocally supporting the NAACP, Native-American groups, and the Black Panther party. Now the FBI spread the rumor that her 1970 pregnancy was the result of an affair with a Black Panther, even as she was married to French novelist Romain Gary. (The baby girl, who died after two days, was white, but not Gary's child.) She had married Gary, 24 years her senior, after their affair had ended her first marriage. Her affair with Clint Eastwood on *Paint Your Wagon* ended her marriage with Gary. In 1972, she married director Dennis Berry, but later became involved with an Algerian who reportedly stole her money and abused her. She had already become somewhat dependent on alcohol and prescription drugs.

In 1979, she had been missing for eleven days when she was found dead in her car, parked near her apartment, after a massive overdose of alcohol and barbiturates. Her suicide note read, "Forgive me. I can no longer live with my nerves."

JEAN-PAUL BELMONDO (Michel Poiccard)

Born in Neuilly in 1933, the son of sculptor Paul Belmondo, Jean-Paul Belmondo studied acting at the Paris Conservatory and became a star overnight in Godard's *Breathless* (1960). The quintessential New Wave actor, Belmondo went on to work with most of the major directors of the 60s and 70s. He climaxed his Godardian phase with *Pierrot le fou* (1965), swashbuckled and globe-trotted in Philippe de Broca's *Cartouche* (1962) and *That Man from Rio* (1964), wore a cassock and a trenchcoat for Melville's *Léon Morin, Priest* and *Le Doulos* (both 1961 and Rialto Pictures re-releases), romanced Catherine Deneuve in Truffaut's *Mississippi Mermaid* (1969), stood up to screen veterans Jean Gabin and Charles Vanel in Henri Verneuil's *Un Singe en hiver* (1962) and Melville's *L'Ainé des Ferchaux* (1963), and embodied one of the 20th century's most daring swindlers in Alain Resnais's *Stavisky* (1974).

By the late 1970s, Belmondo had abandoned arthouse films for action vehicles, which shifted the dramatic emphasis from acting talent to acrobatic prowess. By the mid-80s, his popularity was on the wane, though he made a comeback of sorts in Claude Lelouch's *Itinéraire d'un enfant gâté* (1988) and *Les Misérables* (1995). His other recent credits include Patrice Leconte's *Half a Chance* (1998), Cedric Klapisch's *Peut-être* (1999), and Bernard Stora's made-for-television remake of *L'Ainé des Ferchaux* (2001), in which Belmondo reprised the role played by Charles Vanel in the 1963 version.

Owner of the prestigious Théâtre des Variétés in Paris, Belmondo made his stage comeback in 1987 and has portrayed Edmund Kean, Cyrano and Frédérick Lemaître (the brilliant ham actor of *Children of Paradise* fame). In 1999 and 2001, a series of strokes forced him into retirement. In 2008, he made a poignant comeback in *A Man and His Dog*, a remake of de Sica's *Umberto D*. Earlier this

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year, Belmondo received a Career Achievement Award from the Los Angeles Film Critics Association. He returned to L.A. in April to be present at the U.S. premiere of the restored *Breathless* at the TCM Classic Film Festival.

RAOUL COUTARD (Cinematographer)

"My friend Raoul Coutard, France's most brilliant cinematographer," says the hero of Godard's *Le Petit Soldat*. Between 1959 and 1967, Godard's friend shot all but one of his first 15 features and returned to shoot *Passion* and *Prénom Carmen* in the early 80s. The definitive New Wave cinematographer, Coutard began his career in photojournalism, first as part of his military service, then for such magazines as *Paris Match* and *Life*. This experience and his early work in documentaries fed directly into his innovative use of hand-held camera and natural lighting techniques. He shot most of Truffaut's 60s classics, beginning with *Shoot the Piano Player* and *Jules and Jim*, along with Jacques Demy's debut feature, *Lola* (1960). With Pierre Schoendoerffer, he made the Indochinese War fiction feature, *La 317e Section* (1964) and *Le Crabe-tambour*, for which he won a César in 1977. Other major credits include Jean Rouch's cinema vérité-style *Chronique d'un Été* (1961) and Costa-Gavras's *Z* (1969), in which he also makes a cameo acting appearance. Coutard personally directed three films: *Hoa Binh* (1970), an evocation of the Indochina War, *La Légion saute sur Kolwezi* (1979), a recreation of a true paramilitary operation in Africa, and *S.A..S à San Salvador* (1982). Coutard collaborated on the 50th anniversary restoration of *Breathless*.

MARTIAL SOLAL (Music)

Born 1927 in Algiers, Solal began piano studies at the age of six, taught by his mother, an opera singer. Moving to Paris in 1950 he began working with the legendary Django Reinhardt and U.S. expatriates Sidney Bechet and Don Byas, first recording in 1953, and forming his own quartet in the late 50s. In 1963 he made his first acclaimed appearance at the Newport Jazz Festival. Solal wrote his first film score in 1959 for Melville's *Two Men in Manhattan* and, over the next eighteen years, would write music for sixteen more movies, including Cocteau's *Testament of Orpheus*, Melville's *Léon Morin, Priest*, and Marcel Carné's *Trois chambres à Manhattan*. But the most iconic of Solal's scores is undoubtedly the seemingly improvised jazz music he wrote for Godard's *Breathless*. Curiously, he has written only two more film scores since 1967: *Ballade à blanc* (1983) and *Les acteurs* (2000).

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LENNY BORGER (Subtitles)

Breathless is translator/subtitled Lenny Borger's 34th collaboration with Rialto Pictures, which began with the 1999 re-release of *Grand Illusion*. A former Paris *Variety* correspondent, the Brooklyn-born expatriate has also subtitled recent films by Bertrand Tavernier, Jean-Luc Godard and Claude Chabrol and has written new titles for such classics as *Rififi*, *Touchez pas au Grisbi*, *Contempt*, *The Battle of Algiers*, *Casque d'or*, *Le Corbeau*, *Rules of the Game*, *Les Demoiselles de Rochefort*, *Children of Paradise*, Raymond Bernard's *Les Misérables*, five Jean-Pierre Melville films released by Rialto (including *Army of Shadows*), and nine other Godard films. Borger collaborated with Godard himself on the translation and subtitles for *In Praise of Love* and *Notre Musique*. Borger has just finished working with Godard on the subtitles for his latest film, *Film Socialisme*.

RIALTO PICTURES

Described as “the gold standard of reissue distributors” by Los Angeles Times/NPR film critic Kenneth Turan, Rialto Pictures was founded in 1997 by Bruce Goldstein. A year later, Adrienne Halpern joined him as partner. In 2002, Eric Di Bernardo became the company's National Sales Director.

Rialto's past releases have included Renoir's *Grand Illusion*; Carol Reed's *The Third Man*; Fellini's *Nights of Cabiria*; Jules Dassin's *Rififi*; De Sica's *Umberto D*; Godard's *Contempt*, *Band of Outsiders*, *Masculine Feminine* and *A Woman is a Woman*; Julien Duvivier's *Pépé le Moko*; Buñuel's *Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, *Diary of a Chambermaid*, *The Phantom of Liberty*, *The Milky Way* and *That Obscure Object of Desire*; John Schlesinger's *Billy Liar*; Clouzot's *Quai des Orfèvres*; Mike Nichols' *The Graduate*; The Maysles' *Grey Gardens*; Mel Brooks' *The Producers*; Jacques Becker's *Touchez Pas Au Grisbi*; Bresson's *Au Hasard Balthazar*; Franju's *Eyes Without A Face*; and Jean-Pierre Melville's *Bob le Flambeur* and *Le Cercle Rouge*, for the first time in its uncut European version.

In 2002, the company released the critically acclaimed first-run film *Murderous Maids*, the chilling true story of two homicidal sisters, starring Sylvie Testud. Rialto celebrated a record-breaking 2004 with the previously unreleased, original 1954 Japanese version of *Godzilla* and Gillo Pontecorvo's groundbreaking *The Battle of Algiers*, which became one of the year's top grossing foreign films.

In 2006, Rialto released Melville's 1969 epic masterpiece *Army of Shadows* for the very first time in the U.S. *Army of Shadows* became the most critically acclaimed film of the year, topping many Ten Best lists, including those in *The New York Times* and *Premiere*, and was named Best Foreign Film of 2006 by the New York Film Critics' Circle, in addition to receiving special awards from both the Los Angeles and National Society of Film Critics. Rialto's re-release of Alberto Lattuada's *Mafioso*, a dark comedy starring Alberto Sordi, was the unqualified

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highlight of the 2006 New York Film Festival. 2007 re-releases included Melville's *Le Doulos*, starring Jean-Paul Belmondo, and Jean-Jacques Beineix's "second wave" thriller *Diva*.

In 2008, the company had phenomenal success with Alain Resnais's 1962 arthouse classic *Last Year at Marienbad*. Rialto also released Robert Hamer's rediscovered masterwork of "Brit Noir," *It Always Rains on Sunday*, and undertook their second hit reissue of Godard's *Contempt*. Another successful re-release was Max Ophuls' legendary film *Lola Montès* in a definitive new 35mm restoration, which was showcased to enormous acclaim at the Cannes and Telluride Film Festivals and was the spotlight retrospective of the 2008 New York Film Festival.

Rialto's most recent releases have been the U.S. premiere of Godard's *Made in U.S.A.*, the 40th anniversary re-release of Costa-Gavras' Academy Award-winning political thriller *Z*, starring Yves Montand and Jean-Louis Trintignant, Jean-Pierre Melville's legendary wartime drama *Léon Morin, Priest*, starring Jean-Paul Belmondo, and John Boulting's Noir classic *Brighton Rock*, adapted from Graham Greene's novel of the same name and starring Richard Attenborough.

Rialto began 2010 with the 25th anniversary release of *Ran* in celebration of the centennial of Akira Kurosawa and is following it with the release of the 50th anniversary restoration of *Breathless*.

In 1999, Rialto received a special Heritage Award from the National Society of Film Critics, and in 2000 received a special award from the New York Film Critic's Circle, presented to Goldstein and Halpern by Jeanne Moreau. The two co-presidents have each received the French Order of Chevalier of Arts and Letters.

2007 marked Rialto's tenth anniversary, a milestone that was celebrated with a retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Similar tributes were held at George Eastman House in Rochester, New York; the AFI Silver Theater in Washington, D.C.; and the SIFF Theater in Seattle.

In honor of the company's anniversary, The Criterion Collection issued a special gift box set, *10 Years of Rialto Pictures*, containing ten films displaying the breadth of Rialto's collection.

In May 2009, the San Francisco International Film Festival presented Goldstein with its prestigious Mel Novikoff Award.

Breathless is the company's 50th release since its founding.

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RIALTO PICTURES RELEASES

- 2010 RAN
BREATHLESS
- 2009 MADE IN USA (U.S. premiere)
Z
LEON MORIN, PRIEST
BRIGHTON ROCK
THE THIRD MAN (60th Anniversary)
- 2008 LAST YEAR AT MARIENBAD
IT ALWAYS RAINS ON SUNDAY
CONTEMPT
LOLA MONTES
- 2007 MAFIOSO
LE DOULOS
DIVA
- 2006 ARMY OF SHADOWS
THE FALLEN IDOL
FANFAN LA TULIPE
TWO OR THREE THINGS I KNOW ABOUT HER
- 2005 MASCULINE FEMININE
ELEVATOR TO THE GALLOWS
THE TWO OF US
CLASSE TOUS RISQUES
MOUCHETTE
- 2004 THE BATTLE OF ALGIERS
GODZILLA (U.S. premiere of uncut Japanese version)
HEARTS AND MINDS
- 2003 LE CERCLE ROUGE (U.S. premiere of uncut version)
A WOMAN IS A WOMAN
TOUCHEZ PAS AU GRISBI
AU HASARD BALTHAZAR
EYES WITHOUT A FACE
THE MILKY WAY
- 2002 PEPE LE MOKO
MURDEROUS MAIDS
QUAI DES ORFEVRES

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UMBERTO D.
THE PRODUCERS
THE PHANTOM OF LIBERTY

2001

BAND OF OUTSIDERS
BOB LE FLAMBEUR
THAT OBSCURE OBJECT OF DESIRE
JULIET OF THE SPIRITS

2000

RIFI
THE DISCREET CHARM OF THE BOURGEOISIE
DIARY OF A CHAMBERMAID
BILLY LIAR

1999

THE THIRD MAN
GRAND ILLUSION
PEEPING TOM

1998

NIGHTS OF CABIRIA
GREY GARDENS

1997

CONTEMPT
THE GRADUATE

Pressbook edited & annotated by Bruce Goldstein and Adrienne Halpern
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