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**DAVID  
THORBURN:**

There are various kinds of neorealisms, flavors of neorealism-- an Italian flavor, a French flavor. There is a kind of tonal difference that's worth paying attention to. And I maybe I can capture it over-simply in two short clips for you. So the first clip I want to show you is from an Italian neorealist film, the last really powerful fully neorealist film that De Sica himself directed, a film called *Umberto D*, made in 1952.

[VIDEO PLAYBACK]

-[SPEAKING ITALIAN]

**DAVID  
THORBURN:**

And this is our hero, of course.

-[SPEAKING ITALIAN]

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[MUSIC PLAYING]

**DAVID  
THORBURN:**

And compare this-- think about this scene and then compare t-- to the opening scene of *The 400 Blows* and you'll feel a difference in mood, I think. Even the music is a part of it. So he's in great despair here, and we in the audience know that.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

-[SPEAKING ITALIAN]

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**DAVID** Random dialogue-- we don't even know who said that.

**THORBURN:**

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Did you see how Umberto looked at the man who sat down next to him? I think the purpose of that close look was to make the audience look at him too, pay attention to him, even though he never says a word.

It's possible that these scenes might make some members of the audience think that he's thinking about jumping off a building.

All right, freeze it, James. Back it up two seconds. This is the last moment in the scene that I want you to see. Look what happened here.

Why are you smiling?

**AUDIENCE:** It's because he was facing--

**DAVID** Speak up so everyone can hear.

**THORBURN:**

**AUDIENCE:** It's because he was facing towards the middle of the bus. And then, Umberto, he got up--

[END PLAYBACK]

--and he turned right forward.

**DAVID** Yes, as if he had more space.

**THORBURN:**

**AUDIENCE:** Yes.

**DAVID** But then what else? What about the gesture? What do we feel about this man? Never says a

**THORBURN:**

word. Sits down next to him Umberto. When he goes like this, what do we feel about him? He has some horrible story too. He maybe is in much despair as Umberto.

The point, of course, is remember I talked quite a bit in earlier lectures about what I called the retarding impulse in certain neorealist films and also in certain films of Renoir-- the extent to which what suddenly happens, as the camera is looking at the world, it finds a locus of interest that may be distracting in some sense. Now it doesn't truly distract in the sense that it takes you off completely on a digressive course.

But what it reminds you of is the complexity of the world. What it reminds you of-- this particular scene especially-- is there's plenty of despair to go around. What it reminds you of is that the story that has not been told about this man-- this silent, suffering, working man who sat down next to old Umberto-- probably has a story, just as poignant, just as terrible as Umberto himself. And it's one of the ways that the film has of enlarging the implications of the individuated story that it tells.

But the most significant thing about this moment-- so it's a moment in which the camera doesn't actually swerve, but even though our hero, the protagonist, moves off the bus, the camera stays briefly on that man with the hat. Can we watch it-- just the very end, James-- one more time, just to get another look at it?

[VIDEO PLAYBACK]

See, that's a gesture of, what, despair?

[END PLAYBACK]

Misery? Sadness? Sorrow? Reflection over what terrible things are about to happen?

And the idea that that story has not been told is as significant for our understanding of the film as the story that is told.

So there's a similar-- I don't want to call it a digressive impulse, but let's call it an impulse toward noticing what is not at the center of the story. We might call it an impulse toward a partial kind of abstraction, an attentiveness to the world that is always threatened or challenged by new options that it might want to look at. And not all of these impulses lead to misery or despair, even in the neorealist tradition. But the point I want to make is that I think the neorealist tradition lays more emphasis on social problems. Its stories are often parables

of impoverishment or parables about disempowerment.

Now the film you're going to see tonight, *The 400 Blows*, could in many ways be said to fit that description. But there's a lightness, a lyricism in it, that doesn't sustain the heavy mood, the mood of disturbance, the mood of-- if not tragedy-- of misery, or at least of very alert social awareness that permeates neorealist films. So here's a moment from the film you're going to see tonight.

But it's a very distracting moment. You won't forget it, when you see it. And I'm doing a little harm to your experience of the film by calling your attention to it, because it's such a strange moment in the film.

The hero is one of these two boys, the boy on the left. And the guy on the right-- if you're facing the film-- to your left is the hero, the protagonist. And the boy on the right is his best friend. The girl in the middle is a sister. And they're accompanying this girl-- this is in the middle of the film. We're not even told where they're going when it happens, but they're going to the park to watch a puppet show. And watch what happens.

We're in the middle of the film. We already know a lot about the boys. The boys have played hooky, neither of them get along very well with their parents.

[VIDEO PLAYBACK]

[MUSIC PLAYING]

-[SPEAKING FRENCH]

[YELLING]

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**DAVID** Freeze it second. They're talking about stealing a typewriter to get money, right. So all right,  
**THORBURN:** continue.

-[SPEAKING FRENCH]

[YELLING]

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[YELLING]

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[END PLAYBACK]

**DAVID** One thing I should say immediately is that it is that this scene alone would give you a very  
**THORBURN:** false sense of the film, if this was all you ever saw of the film. And the fact is it comes as a tremendous shock when you're watching it. Although you enjoy it when you're watching it, you're wondering, why has Truffaut spent so much time on these faces, so much time on these children? We never go back to such a scene. None of the little children's faces that we see there do we ever see again in the film. Something happens to the movie here. It's almost as if it gets sidetracked. It's interested in the boy and in his friend.

And when we're watching this scene, it certainly occurs to us in the film, my goodness, the scene might be useful, but why has it gone on so long. And I think the simple answer is that Truffaut, the camera, became preoccupied by the astonishing variety and vivid individuating complexity of those children's faces, that the drama of that became so interesting to the camera, to the filmmaker, that he couldn't quite desert it without giving it its just due, even though from a narrative standpoint it doesn't really advance the story very well.

But that moment, when we do cut back to the two older boys sitting in the back, talking about stealing something, does justify this scene. Why? What does it show? That they're separated from innocence. That they're too old for this. They're sitting there, everybody else in the audience is absolutely rapt. Now they're a little younger. The implication is these boys can't participate in the joy of innocence any longer, that they're already too old for it in some sense, and almost because of their own behavior, the choices they've made.

So the scene does further a central element in the film, clarifying our sense that especially the protagonist of the film is being wrenched too quickly out of childhood, is being forced out of childlike circumstances into circumstances that no child should have to face. So it does in some sense dramatize that. But it dramatizes that in a very imperfect way if that were its primary purpose.

And what we have to say is, no, that's not its only purpose. The film is stopping here and watching this joy in these children for the same reason that Jean Renoir stopped to watch Boudu do his tricks in the water-- not because it was furthering any plot, but because the spectacle of Boudu's pleasure became what was interesting that the film, to the filmmaker, and to the camera.

And so one way to understand the difference between these forms of new realism, these kinds of neorealism-- the Italian and the French-- is to say that the French is more open to this lyrical joy, that there's a lighter tone, that the social and political dimensions of the story are not obliterated in Nouvelle Vague films. But they play a lesser role, they're less central. There is no programmatic social message in most of the Nouvelle Vague films, even though there is by implication-- as you'll see in *The 400 Blows*-- certainly a powerful critique of adult society and the ways in which disempowered creatures like children are treated in modern society. And that theme is there, it's at the center of it, and there's no question that it's significant. But it is surrounded by other complicating attitudes and things that make the version of new realism that the French develop in the decade beginning around 1959 different in tone from its origins.

Well, let me very quickly say a little bit about the origins of the Nouvelle Vague. You're prepared for this. And if I showed you this film without any background, and I said, where does this come from, my hope is that most of you would say, oh, I can see Italian neorealist elements here, I can see Renoirish elements here.

A really acute and perceptive student might even see that this line goes back to Chaplin. And

Chaplin's films are committed to forms of realistic representation that is in a line, I think, with these later, more complex films, more visually complex films. And in fact, there's an allusion to Chaplin in tonight's film. I hope you'll watch for it. One of the teachers actually plays a Chaplin-like role at a certain point. And there's no question that the film intends to invoke the joy and pleasure of the Chaplin character in the memory of its audience when those allusions occur.

So the origins of the Nouvelle Vague-- first in Jean Vigo and in French poetic realism, in the practices that are developed by John Renoir and other directors of the time, that kind of lyrical, improvisatory open camera of Renoir, and then the way in which those are adapted by the Italians, very much influenced by the French. So those traditions are at the center of the Nouvelle Vague. And the primary practitioners of the Nouvelle Vague, directors like Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard, and Alain Resnais, and Jacques Rivette, and a number of other directors-- Louis Malle, a little older, one who would make magnificent films. It's a wonderful, wonderful group of really significant directors. Most of them still alive, but in their dotage now-- even older than I am, if you can believe that-- and with magnificent careers behind them, all starting in this moment of the late '50s when French film took a new energy from the critical discourses of the critics who were working for *Cahiers du Cinema*, which I'll talk about in a second.

So one central source for the Nouvelle Vague are these earlier film traditions. And the directors who made the Nouvelle Vague were quite self-conscious about this-- many of them had spent a decade before they became directors writing for *Cahiers du Cinema*, the great magazine founded in 1951 by Andre Bazin, the critic I've talked about earlier in the course. And probably Truffaut was the most well-known of the critics who worked for the magazine. Truffaut spent at least seven or eight years working for *Cahiers du Cinema* before he made his first film.

And in their time working for *Cahiers du Cinema*, they actually articulated certain theories of movie making. One of the theories that they articulated, or an aspect of their overriding theory, was articulated in an article-- a very famous article-- written by Truffaut himself before he became a director, before he became an actual director. And the title translated went something like this-- A Certain Tendency of French Cinema. He published this essay in *Cahiers du Cinema* in 1954. And it was an attack on what he called the tradition of quality, in quotes the "tradition of quality" in French movies. It attacked contemporary French movies for being stiff, for being too literary, for being too much of the establishment.

And the other thing that article, and many other articles in *Cahiers du Cinema* did, was they began to write very favorably about American studio directors, the directors who worked under the Hollywood system most effectively, among them especially Hitchcock. And in fact Truffaut did a series of interviews with Hitchcock later published as a book, Truffaut on Hitchcock, or Truffaut/Hitchcock. I forgot the exact title in English. It has a different title in French.

It's a very interesting series of interviews. And those of you who are interested in this might want to look at it. Because one of the comical things that happens in the interviews is you constantly see Truffaut, who's much more articulate and theoretically subtle than Hitchcock is-- abstractly, I don't mean Hitchcock's not a great theorist, but he's a practicing theorist-- and you constantly see Truffaut trying to turn Hitchcock into an intellectual and Hitchcock refusing, Hitchcock saying, no, no. It's almost as if Truffaut is disappointed that Hitchcock can't articulate the theories that Truffaut wants him to articulate. So Truffaut is constantly trying to make Hitchcock into a great director, and Hitchcock is often in the interview saying, I make genre movies, leave me alone, I just want to entertain people. So it's comical.

And in fact I do think that the French inflated-- Truffaut especially-- inflated Hitchcock's reputation, maybe even beyond what it actually deserved. But in any case, it was subversive of the *Cahiers du Cinema* critics to write about American directors, studio directors-- because the American studios were held to be the essence of commercial popular art, nothing artistic in it at all. And in fact it was these French critics who first began to write about American directors in a way that showed respect, recognized their complexity. It's a great irony that the French recognized the artistic value of American movies before the Americans did.

And at the very time that the Americans were swooning over European art cinema, this is the period when the Nouvelle Vague appears, when I was in college-- in the late '50s and early '60s. And it was an extraordinarily exciting time in the United States for people interested in movies, not because of the American movies that were being made, but because there was this astonishing-- what seemed like an astonishing-- flower of European and Asian cinema. It's also the moment of Kurasawa, as I'll mention next week when we talk about *Rashomon*, and Kurosawa's intervention in world cinema occurring earlier in the 1950s, at the same time as the Italian neorealists.

So it was an incredibly exciting time. And educated Americans for the first time began to realize that the movies weren't just popular entertainment, but were serious works of art. The irony is they recognized this about European films but not about their own films. And it took

another generation really before a serious attention to American movies was paid by American scholars and American critics. Interesting irony.

A further articulation of some of the theoretical underpinnings of the Nouvelle Vague came from the director and theorist Alexandre Astruc, born in 1923. He was good director, admired director. But he's most well-known as a critic, a theorist. And his central theory, then elaborated and embraced by generations later including Bazin and the writers for *Cahiers du Cinema*, was focused on the term camera-stylo, camera-style, camera hyphen pen, as if what he imagined was that the camera should be wielded by the director with the same subtlety as the writer wields his pen. And it was an idea that the visual style of a film could have the suggestiveness and subtlety of a literary work. And when Astruc articulated this, it was rather a revolutionary idea. And it was elaborated, further picked up.

And the directors of *Cahiers du Cinema* were very powerfully in favor of what came to be called the auteur theory-- author, that's French for author. And the auteur theory essentially is that the director of the film is an author who leaves his signature in every frame of the film. It's a radical over-simplification of course, because films are such collaborative enterprises. But it is still nonetheless true that it grants to the director a kind of respected authority that is certainly justified in the case of many, many films, where the director is the dominant and central creative energy. And this of course has been especially true in Europe, and even more especially true in France, perhaps, than in any other society.

So auteur was a very important underpinning, encouragement to the Nouvelle Vague. So when these critics-turned-movie makers began to make movies, they had already made theory for why they were doing what they were doing. They were hostile to certain forms of pretentiousness in contemporary French films, they wanted some of the energy and power to entertain that they associated with the most gifted American directors, but they also wanted films that expressed a signature individuality. They thought films ought to be and were the expression of the sensibility of their director. And the film you're going to see tonight certainly embodies those values.

One way to think about the moment at which the Nouvelle Vague emerges in both French and in global culture is to think of the year 1955-60-- I used to say just '59, but there's some dispute about when Jean-Luc Godard's film actually first appeared, whether it was '59 or '60, so I've added 1960. But these three films appeared within a very short time of each other in 1959-60. And all three of them are thought to be sort of the origins of the Nouvelle Vague, the

moment when the Nouvelle Vague declared itself as a major film movement.

But *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* was a dramatically important film when it first appeared. In the foreground of the film is a story of a love affair between a Japanese architect and a French woman. And the love affair is in the foreground. But in the background is Hiroshima and the dropping of the bomb on Hiroshima. And the story of the lovers-- I don't mean that it takes place while Hiroshima is going on. Hiroshima is remembered and invoked in the course of the film. So the foreground of the film are the lovers. The background of the film is this horrific event, the atomic bombing of Hiroshima.

And the film plays with our sense of time. Its sense of the passage of time is confused in some sense. It's not linear in the traditional sense of an ordinary well-made film. And there's not exactly a surreal quality in it, but there's a quality in it that we might say that one of the things that happens is that time is sometimes treated subjectively rather than objectively in the film. And so the time frames you're in are often mixed or unclear in the film.

The film was also much more explicit with its nudity than American audiences were used to, and it caused quite a scandal when it came to the United States. I remember the people who were in college with me at the time were very excited to see it, partly for that reason. Nudity was much rarer in the popular culture when I was your age than it is today.

An even more dramatic and radical movie was Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless*, which tells the story of a third-rate criminal played with astonishing panache by Jean-Paul Belmondo with a cigarette stuck in his lips through most of the film. And there's one moment in the film where Belmondo walks up to a movie marquee, I think, outside a movie theater. And he sees a poster advertising a film with Humphrey Bogart. And he looks at the film and he tries to imitate a Bogart move-- he goes like goes, puts his arm, Bogart had a move like this. And he says something like this, Bogie he says in his French accent. And you can see in a certain way that he's patterning himself on Bogart, the Bogart who played ambiguous, sometimes criminal, characters in the movies.

And it's one of the earliest examples of something that becomes really common in America, for example in the great television series *The Sopranos*, where all the gangsters are constantly invoking *The Godfather* and other fictional gangsters, and modeling themselves on them, or quoting scenes from them. Well, Belmondo's character in *Breathless* is one of the first gangsters to pattern himself on gangsters out of popular culture, instead of being a real

gangster.

And there's a moral ambiguity in the film that is never fully resolved, because the protagonist of the film is this-- we're not going to show that, James, we don't have time for it. I was going to show you a clip, but there's no time. It's quite a remarkable film. Some of you might want to look at it-- it's available from the film office.

And the central ambiguity is that we identify in some degree with the protagonist-- we follow him all the way through the film. Very early in the film he actually commits a murder-- it's an accident, he doesn't intend it, it just sort of happens. But he still is a murderer. He steals a car in the very opening scene. And then he ends up murdering someone. He's on the run-- and for the rest of the film, he's on the run. He takes up with an American girl played by Jean Seberg who ends up betraying him to the cops. And in the very final scene in the film, he's shot down by the police. And we see him running down a street with a wound in his back, finally falling in a very dramatic way with his girlfriend coming and looking over him.

And the ending of the ending of the film is very strange, because it leaves the audience uncertain about what its attitudes toward what has happened ought to be. Should we resent this betraying girlfriend as an evil character because she's sold her boyfriend out to the cop? On the other hand, her boyfriend is an amoral murderer and thief who doesn't seem to care about anyone, much less her. And yet there's a kind of charm and an erotic energy about the Belmondo character. So the film's moral and psychological grounding is unclear. And so it was very powerful and significant for that reason.

And then finally *The 400 Blows*, even more successful film in a popular sense than either of those two, appears in the same time frame. And it won the best director's prize at the Cannes Film Festival in 1960. And it put Truffaut on the map. It made Truffaut a famous director. And he never really looked back after that. He went on to have quite a remarkable career.

Let me say a couple of things about the style and tone of the Nouvelle Vague. Most of it applies to what we've already said about neorealism and about French poetic realism. So there's no reason to go through a lot of it. But let's jump to the bottom, to the items at the end of the list.

First, the improvisatory aspect of, let's say, Renoir's practice becomes even more pointed and central in many of the Nouvelle Vague films. And there really is a sense in which they often would begin filming without having a full script, letting the story itself play out, discover itself as

they were filming. Tremendous amount of collaboration between performer and director. So both plot and dialogue are often the result of a kind of inspired improvisation.

Even more significant is the commitment in the Nouvelle Vague-- even more powerful, much more powerfully than in the earlier realisms-- toward use of a style we might call a discontinuous style, a jumpy style, an edgy style. What's a jump cut? A jump cut is an edit that takes place in the middle of an action.

A normal cut, or what we might call a classic cut. If a character is speaking and making a gesture-- say the camera's on me-- and he says, I insist on this idea more powerfully than any other-- like this, right. Well in a classic sense, you would wait until my fist came down before you cut. But if you did a jump cut, it would say something like, I insist on this idea more than any other. Or maybe not even let me get the word "other" out and it would cut to another scene. It creates a sense of discontinuity or of jaggedness that reminds you that life itself is not so smooth.

And the other thing that the jump cut reminds you of is something else-- it reminds you of the presence of the editor. It reminds you that you are watching a film. It's a very quiet way of doing this, And these films have other, more explicit, ways of reminding you that you're watching a film.

But there is in these films not only the use of discontinuous editing and what David Cook in his *A History of Narrative Film* calls elliptical editing, in which things are much more compressed, much more elliptical. Things are not always perfectly worked out. Remember I've talked about this earlier, how in classical Hollywood style if I were walking toward the door they would show me walking. When I got here, they might cut it, and then they might pick up the scene as I reached the door. But in a Nouvelle Vague film, they might show me going like this, and the next cut I'd be in the next room or in bed with my girlfriend. They wouldn't bother to show-- in my case, it would be my wife, please, important. But they wouldn't bother to show that progress, because it's silly, it's unnecessary. That's what is meant by elliptical editing.

And it makes a greater demand on the audience. But it also has the effect of creating a continuous, quiet sense of what I call self-reflexiveness or self-awareness in the film. That is to say, you are aware at almost every moment of these Nouvelle Vague films that it is an artifact, that the film has been made by human hands, that various strategies and gestures have created these effects. And that distances you from the material in some sense. But it opens

out a new topic.

And that new topic is film itself. And many of the Nouvelle Vague films-- and especially the films that come after the Nouvelle Vague, but influenced by it-- turn out to be films that one of their topics is the making of movies themselves, films about film. And there are a couple of wonderful examples of this in Truffaut's own corpus of work, including a very lovely, gentle film called-- a light film, not as profound as his most powerful films, but a beautiful, beautiful film-- the French title is *La Nuit Americaine*. But it was translated in the English-speaking world as *Day for Night*.

If you want to create the illusion that you're filming at night, you can put a filter on the camera. And even though you're filming during the day, it will look nighty, it will look dark. It's a strategy of directors of photography. And it's an allusion to that. It's called *The American Night* because this was a strategy that was especially associated with American movies, thought by the French-- especially by the Nouvelle Vague directors-- to be shocking and ridiculous, because you should film on location. You should minimize the falsity that is involved in setting up filters for your film-- faking that it's night when it's really not, or faking that it's day when it's right, that kind of thing.

But the film, *La Nuit Americaine* is about the making of a film. And in it Truffaut himself I think appears. He plays the director who is having trouble making a film. And the film is interesting about character. It studies the psychological circumstances of its central characters with great subtlety and interest. It says powerful and interesting things about the erotic and personal connections among serious adults. And it also says something about what is involved in the making of a film. It's about making movies. Its subject matter is the making of a film. That level of self-reflexiveness or self-consciousness is always present in at least some degree in these films. And sometimes it can become an explicit central topic.

These films, as I've already indicated, are full of allusions and references to earlier films. And I mentioned the references to Chaplin-- you'll see other references like this, I think, in the film. And one thing that happens in this film, for example, is that the characters go to the movies. There's a moment when the family goes to the movies. And the film that's playing is the title of a film by a friend of Truffaut's, Jacques Rivette, a film called *Paris Belongs to Us*. And it's a real film. So it's a kind of allusion in a way, to another film, to a friend. But again, there's a level of self-reflexiveness in which that sequence in the film is also a meditation on the role of movies in social life. I'll come back to that in a second when I talk a little bit about *The 400*

*Blows* itself.

So let me say a word about Francois Truffaut. I hope you'll read more deeply about him in Wikipedia and in other places. His biography is very rich and interesting. One decisive thing to say about it is that in some sense *The 400 Blows* is a deeply autobiographical film.

That is to say, Truffaut himself was born out-of-wedlock, lived with his grandmother. Not all the details are exactly the same in the film, but these details I'm giving you will show you how closely the film mirrors the reality of Truffaut's own life. He was raised by his grandmother until he was eight years old. Then he lived with his mother and his stepfather, who gave him his name. And you'll see that that's an issue in this film too. The father of Antoine Doinel, the central character, is his stepfather, not his real father.

Lived with his mother and his stepfather until he was 14. Was constantly truant from school. His father ended up turning him in, and he spent time in a reformatory. To escape his parents and other miseries, he joined the army at the age of 18, but he hated the army. He was constantly looking for a chance to desert. He finally did desert the army, and he was arrested. He spent time in prison for desertion. And he was really in big trouble.

But he had always loved film, even as a kid. And as a 14-year-old in Paris, he had found his way. You'll see that this is replicated in *The 400 Blows*, because the attraction of Parisian movies is one of the great escapes for this boy and his friend. So in his real life he loved movies, and he went to the French bibliotheque to watch films. And there he met Andre Bazin, who was already an eminent critic and was the co-founder of *Cahiers du Cinema*.

Bazin intervened in his case, apparently used his influence to get him either released from prisoner or have his sentence reduced-- I don't know the exact details. He went to work for *Cahiers du Cinema*. And the rest is history. He worked for something like eight years as a critic for *Cahiers du Cinema* and then began to make his own films.

And one of the most significant things about his life as a critic is that he was famous for being a nasty, incredibly unsympathetic critic. He was famous for the viciousness and unforgiving quality of his reviews. And think what it means that such a person should then, after eight years of doing this and making enemies all over the French film world, should take the risk of beginning to make a film on his own. In many ways very bold of him.

But it's also true that the *Cahiers du Cinema* crew, as we might call it, including the great

eminence of Bazin himself and a whole bunch of other ambitious young critics would-be directors, they constituted a kind of critical mass of folks with shared ambitions. So I don't want to make it appear that what Truffaut was doing was shockingly brave, or courageous, or self-destructive. But it was a dangerous thing, because he was certainly opening himself to revenge reviews by other people. And he was really infamous for being nasty to other directors, especially to French directors.

You'll see on the outline that I've listed some of his most significant films. And the films that have asterisks next to them, those five films, are all about the same character that you're going to see in tonight's film. They're all about Antoine Doinel. And it's a unique film record. It's a series of autobiographical films, played by the same actor, who is a kind of Truffaut stand-in.

And the second film that I have on the list, or rather the third film, *Antoine and Colette*, I have it in quotations because it's not a feature-length film. It's an episode from an anthology film that appeared in 1962 called *Love at Twenty*. It was a very flattering thing for the young director to be asked to contribute to that. And so that's another installment of the story of Antoine Doinel. And then the next one takes place in 1968, *Stolen Kisses*, again in 1970-- *Bread and Board*. And then finally, nine years later, the final Doinel film, *Love on the Run*.

It ends in an ambiguous way, like all of the films. And one of the wonderful things, Jean-Pierre Leaud-- L-E-A-U-D, I don't know how to say it, Leaud, Leaud-- who plays Doinel, you can see him aging through these films. It's a wonderful sequence. And if you like *The 400 Blows*, you might want to watch the other films. *The 400 Blows* is probably the best of all of them, but they're beautiful films.

And what they show is, in some sense, Truffaut returning to this autobiographical theme at different stages in his life. There are even some scholars who have suggested that there's a kind of analogy, or a mirror relationship, between the young Jean-Pierre Leaud, the 14-year-old who plays the central character in *The 400 Blows*, that there's an analogy between his relationship to Truffaut and Truffaut's relationship to Bazin, as if what's happened is that Truffaut with his new young actor is re-enacting-- but now on the other side-- the mentor-mentee relationship that Bazin and Truffaut apparently enjoyed as well.

I don't have time to talk about this remarkable list of films. The only film on this list that isn't wonderful, I think-- certainly worth looking at closely, maybe two that are not absolutely first-rate-- is the one in 1966, *Fahrenheit 451*. I mention it to you because it's such an interesting

example. Based on the Ray Bradbury. And it is his worst film. It's his first film in English, he didn't know English very well when he made it. It's an oddly heavy-handed and wooden film. But I still have some kind of affection for it, even though it's not a very good adaptation. Because he was attentive to Ray Bradbury, attentive to the ambitions. It's a film that's theoretically much more interesting than it is in practice. But all the other films are very remarkable films and among the most significant films of their day.

And let me just say one final word about the last film I've listed there, *The Last Metro*, which starred Catherine Deneuve and Gerard Depardieu. In a way it's a World War II film. It tells the story of a Jewish director who has to hide in the hidden basement of his theater while his wife, who is not Jewish, is able to run the theater above ground. And it tells the story of the importance of theater even during the war years, when Paris was occupied by the Germans. It's a very powerful and moving love story, as well as a story that celebrates the power of theater and the power of art in hard times. And it's a lovely, poignant, powerful film. I want to say a few words about the film itself. It's fairly straightforward, and I think you'll absolutely enjoy it.

First the title, weird title, *The 400 Blows*. It comes from a French idiom. And the idiom means something like to sow your wild oats, to raise hell. [SPEAKING FRENCH]. To do or to make the 400 blows means essentially to raise hell, to do a walkabout, something that young people do. And of course the title is very resonant. You end without any certainty about what the resolution of this wild behavior is going to be.

The second important thing to say about the film, something I've implied earlier, is that it's a film that loves Paris. And in a certain sense the boy's odyssey through the film is an exploration of Paris and of Parisian delights. And again, think of what it says about the city, about this great city, in the time that the film was made, that boys of this age could wander around so safely and engage in so many remarkable adventures in the course of an ordinary day in Paris. So the film is attentive to the feel, the texture, of Paris, in something of the way that some of the Italian neorealist films were attentive to the physical texture of Rome, or of other Italian environments.

The family romance at the heart of this film is one of Truffaut's subtlest achievements. And I just want to call your attention to how subtle it actually is. Watch how the story unfolds, and how in a very brief and elliptical way we come to understand the motivations and the unhappinesses of each of the major characters-- the mother, the father, and the son. What we

discover fairly early is that the mother isn't that happy with her husband. She feels that she's losing her beauty, she feels trapped in an unhappy marriage. The husband is to her a kind of boring character. He's the boy's stepfather.

Early in the film, we get a wonderful sequence. Remember, watch for the principle of multiplicity there, because so many things are going on simultaneously. The physical, and social, and economic environment within which the family lives is dramatized in those opening scenes. The boy's relation to his family is dramatized in those opening scenes. And the father's relation to the mother is dramatized in those opening scenes as well.

And what we discover, of course, is that the father is actually-- even though he's the stepfather-- actually feels great affection for the boy. And they get along very well, much better than the boy gets along with his mother, who is actually his blood relative. And the mother's resentment partly has to do with the fact that she must feel that the boy has trapped her. And she's entering middle age, she thinks she's losing her beauty, she thinks she's chained to a child and to a marriage. And you can feel this.

And there are certain moments in the film when the mother, for various reasons, is embarrassed over the fact that she seems to have been a bad mother. And she uses various strategies to reach out to her son. And some of them are kind of creepy, as you'll discover. She's a very complex character, and the least sympathetic character in the film, because she behaves in many ways so shockingly toward her son. But even she, the least sympathetic character in the film, is treated in the film with a kind of complexity that we expect from adults. In other words, we don't think that she's an evil villainess who would like to suck the blood of her child. Not at all, not at all. What you feel is that she's driven to her hostilities and her unhappinesses by the confined and unhappy circumstances of her life. Not that she's totally forgiven, but she's understood by the film.

Something of the same kind of thing is true for the husband, who loves his wife and knows that his wife is probably dissatisfied with him, may be unfaithful to him. And that colors his relation to his son, with whom he often feels a great connection. So there's a great poignant sense that this dysfunctional family is less happy than it needs to be, if only it could understand its circumstances.

There's one wonderful moment in the film where some of the hostility disappears. And it comes at a moment that I mentioned earlier where the husband and the wife go off to the

movies together, taking their son with them. It's like a family outing. That's when they go to see the Jacques Rivette film. And it's the one moment in the film where all three of the central characters in the film are happy together.

And you might ask, why? Well, the father is happy because the wife is paying attention to him and is doing something with the family. And the boy is happy because the family, the father and mother, aren't squabbling with each other and they're including him. And the mother is at least partly happy because she can see both of the men are delighted by what's going on and because she likes movies too.

So one of the things that the film dramatizes is the importance of film in human life, is how film is a kind of escape or a respite from misery in certain ways. And so it's a kind of commentary on the centrality of the movies as a source of information, insight, and consolation.

Pay attention to the way the film is structured. It's not unlike what I've said about the organic form of certain earlier Italian and French movies. The structure unfolds in a natural way. We don't feel that plot is driving the story, we feel that what happens in the film happens out of a kind of natural unfolding that is a function of both the environment and the characters.

There's so much that I've left out here that I feel guilty about not having mentioned. I should mention one parenthetical remark, just because it's such a vivid detail. The film was made for a relatively small amount of money, even in those days. It cost \$75,000 to make this movie. And in the United States alone it earned over \$500,000, a gigantic amount of money in those days. So it was an astonishing success in that way.

Let me end by saying one final word about the astonishing conclusion of the movie. The ending is beautiful in its own right. I mean there's a kind of visual beauty that's constantly competing for your attention as you watch. The boy, as you'll see in the story, ends up in a kind of reform school. His crimes are so modest and that's part of what makes the film so poignant.

He's actually caught stealing-- not stealing-- the typewriter that he was talking about stealing in that scene you saw. He's caught when he's trying to return the typewriter. He has an attack of conscience, and he thinks I shouldn't do this. And he's caught returning the typewriter, and that's his big crime. And you'll see, one of the things that happens to him when he's kicked out-- he runs away from his family at one point-- he spends nights in Paris on his own, this 14-year-old child, boy. Very interesting again, about the way the film celebrates the city of Paris

as a nurturing, adventurous, exciting, not really dangerous place.

But let me say one final word about the ending. At the end very end of the movie, he kind of escapes. He makes a kind of escape from this reform school that he's in. And it's an immensely beautiful sequence, in which we see him running through a countryside. And it's a tracking shot, an immense long tracking shot. And the camera follows him as he's running-- running, running, running. And it goes on, in some sense, something like the scene that I showed you, where the puppet show seems to be going on forever. When you're watching the film, you'll see that it's strange, because the puppet show intervenes in the movie without explanation and disappears from the movie without explanation. Something of the same kind of thing is true here, where the beauty of the countryside starts to compete for your attention.

But in any case, finally at the end of his run he comes he comes to a verge, to an end. He comes to the water, he comes to the sea. He always said he wanted to see the sea, but this is a very disappointing version of the sea. And he runs up against it. Watch how the music works. There's a beautiful use of a stringed instrumen-- I'm not sure what instrument, maybe a guitar. But anyway, a beautiful stringed instrument plays a melody that you've heard earlier in the film. And we see him running up to this verge.

And then there's an astonishing moment in which he comes to a stop. And he's looking at the water. And the camera freezes on him. There's a freeze frame at the very end. It's the most famous freeze frame in the history of movies.

And after this film, the freeze frame became a cheapo trick. You began to find it in television commercials. But at the time that he used this frieze frame, it was an immensely dramatic effect. I don't mean nobody had ever used such strategies before. But it is one of the subtlest uses of a freeze frame in the history of movies.

And one of the reasons I want you to watch for it and pay attention to it, is listen to the music as it's going on. Because the tune is finally unfinished at the end. In other words, where one final note that isn't played. But you've heard the note before, so you keep expecting it. And that's part of the power of that freeze frame at the end.

I think he's looking at us when the freeze frame occurred. But the point is, where is he going, what comes next? The film doesn't really have an answer. We don't know where the film is going. We don't know what's going to happen to this boy. So it ends on a note of open-endedness and ambiguity that's powerful and profound.

But what we also know is that this has not been an apocalyptic ending. It's not a catastrophic ending. The boy is isolated, the boy is alone, he doesn't know what's going to happen to him, he doesn't know whether he'll be recaptured, he doesn't know where he's going to go. But I don't think we have any sense that he's going to die. We don't have any sense that this is the end of his life. We have a sense, maybe, that this is the beginning of his life. So that there's a profound uncertainty, a kind of beautiful uncertainty, a beautiful ambiguity at the end of the movie, that is partly captured in the complex relation between sound and image at the end of this movie.

Those of you who have never seen *The 400 Blows* are in for a really great treat. The final films in this course are among the greatest films ever made. I hope you enjoy it as much as I did. I still remember the place in which I saw this film and the exhilaration I felt when I came out of watching it, with the recognition that movies could be what great novels had been.