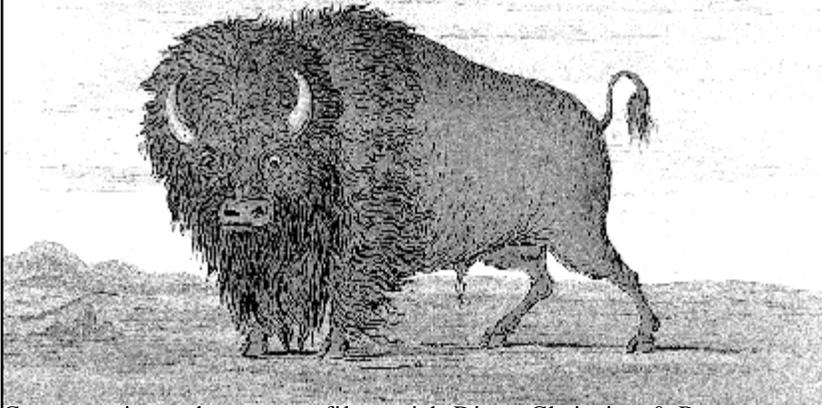


The Buffalo Film Seminars



Conversations about great films with Diane Christian & Bruce Jackson

François Truffaut (6 February 1932, Paris—21 October 1984, Paris, brain tumor) entered the film world as a writer—first as a critic, then of stories (he did the story for *Breathless/A bout du souffle* 1960 and then he wrote or co-wrote the scripts for all his films. He occasionally acted: he had small roles in several of his films and one of the leads in this one, and he played Claude Lacombe in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977). And he was a director. He directed only 19 features, but nearly all of them are interesting and several of them are classics: *Vivement dimanche!/Confidentially Yours* (1983), *La Femme d'à côté/The Woman Next Door*, (1981), *Le Dernier métro/The Last Metro* (1980), *L'Amour en fuite/Love on the Run* (1979), *La Chambre verte/The Green Room* (1978), *L'Homme qui aimait les femmes/The Man Who Loved Women* (1977), *L'Argent de poche/Small Change* (1976), *L'Histoire d'Adèle H./The Story of Adele H* (1975), *Une belle fille comme moi/A Gorgeous Bird Like Me* (1972), *Les Deux anglaises et le continent/Two English Girls* (1971), *Domicile conjugal/Bed & Board* (1970), *L'Enfant sauvage/The Wild Child* (1969), *La Sirène du Mississippi/Mississippi Mermaid* (1969), *Baisers volés/Stolen Kisses* (1968), *La Mariée était en noir (1967)/The Bride Wore Black* (1968), *Fahrenheit 451* (1966), *La Peau douce/Silken Skin* (1964), *Jules et Jim* (1961), *Tire au flanc/The Army Game* (1961), *Tirez sur le pianiste/ Shoot the Piano Player* (1960), *Les Quatre cents coups/The 400 Blows* (Best director, Cannes 1959). National Board of Review, USA. His 1954 book, *Une certaine tendance du cinéma Française* was the first important assertion of what became known as the "auteur theory" of filmmaking. His book on Alfred Hitchcock, *Hitchcock-Truffaut* (1967) established Hitchcock's critical reputation as nothing before had. His critical essays were collected in *Les films de ma Vie* (1975). His collected letters, *Correspondence*, were published in 1990.

JACQUELINE BISSET (Winnifred Jacqueline Fraser-Bisset, 13 September 1944, Weybridge, Surrey, England) first appeared in film as an extra in *The Knack* (1965). She had a few other minor roles, then was Miss Goodthighs *Casino Royale* (1967) and Steve McQueen's snooty girlfriend in *Bullitt* (1968). She's been in about 55 other theatrical and made-for-tv films, the most recent being *Fascination* (2002). Some of her more interesting (for various reasons) films are *Under the Volcano* (1984), *Class* (1983), *Rich and Famous* (1981), *Who Is Killing the Great Chefs of Europe?* (1978), *The Greek Tycoon* (1978), *The Deep* (1977), *Murder on the Orient Express* (1974), *The Life and Times of Judge Roy Bean* (1972), *The Mephisto Waltz* (1971) and *Airport* (1970).

JEAN-PIERRE AUMONT (Jean-Pierre Salomons, 5 January 1911, Paris—30 January 2001, Saint-Tropez, France, heart attack) worked until only a few years before he died at the age of 89. He was in nearly 120 made-for-tv and theatrical films, the last a tv miniseries, *"Le Comte de Monte Cristo"* (1998) and the first *Échec et mat* (1931). He also did a lot of tv episode work on such series as *"The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles"*, *"Simon & Simon"*, *"Hart to Hart"*, *"The Love Boat"*, *"Starsky and Hutch"* (1975) playing "Capt.



LA NUIT AMÉRICAINNE/DAY FOR NIGHT (1973) 115 minutes

Directed by François Truffaut
Writing credits Jean-Louis Richard, Suzanne Schiffman, François Truffaut
Produced by Marcel Berbert
Original music by Georges Delerue
Cinematography by Pierre-William Glenn
Film Editing by Martine Barraqué, Yann Dedet

Jacqueline Bisset....Julie
Valentina Cortese....Severine
Dani....Liliane
Alexandra Stewart....Stacey
Jean-Pierre Aumont....Alexandre
Jean Champion....Bertrand
Jean-Pierre Léaud....Alphonse
François Truffaut....director Ferrand
Nike Arrighi....Odile
Nathalie Baye....Joelle
Maurice Seveno....TV Reporter
David Markham....Doctor Nelson
Bernard Menez....Bernard the Prop Man
Gaston Joly....Lajoie
Zenaide Rossi....Madame Lajoie
Graham Greene....English Insurance Broker (as Henry Graham)
Oscar for Best Foreign Film, nominations for Best Actress in a Supporting Role (Valentina Cortese) and Best Writing, Original Screenplay (Richard, Schiffman, Truffaut). National Society of Film Critics Awards, USA, Best Director, François Truffaut, Best Film, Best Supporting Actress (Cortese)

La Rue" in episode: "Murder at Sea", "The Nurses", "The United States Steel Hour," and "Playhouse 90.

JEAN-PIERRE LÉAUD (5 May 1944, Paris) was in one film before he appeared in Truffaut's 400 Blows in 1959 and many films after Truffaut died in 1984—78 films in all—but he's best known for the six features he did with Truffaut: *Love on the Run*, *Stolen Kisses*, *Two English Girls*, *Bed and Board*, *Day for Night* and *400 Blows* and the ten he did with Jean-Luc Godard: *Alphaville* (1965), *La Chinoise* (1967), *Défective* (1985), *Le Gai savoir/The Joy of Knowledge* (1968), *Made in U.S.A.* (1966), *Masculin, féminin* (1966), *Pierrot le fou* (1965), *Le Plus vieux métier du monde/The Oldest Profession* (1967), and *Week End* (1967). He also played the schoolboy in Cocteau's *Le Testament d'Orphée* (1960).

Roger Ebert:

Francois Truffaut (1932-1984) was one of the most beloved of filmmakers, a man whose own love of film was obvious in such details as the old-fashioned iris shots he borrowed from silent films. (That's a shot where the screen seems to screw down to circle one detail, before going to black). "The most beautiful thing I have seen in a movie theater," he once said, "is to go down to the front, and turn around, and look at all the uplifted faces, the light from the screen reflected upon them."

Movie Diva (2000):

"I've been asked a hundred times this year: 'Aren't you afraid of ruining the mystery of a craft you're so fond of?' and each time I've replied that an aviator can explain everything he knows about piloting a plane, but he will never succeed in demystifying the intoxication of flight."

...Jean-Pierre Léaud had been Truffaut's alter-ego since *The 400 Blows*. In the early 70s Truffaut had encouraged him to work with other directors, like Bernardo Bertolucci in *Last Tango in Paris*. Léaud's character in *Day for Night* is written to be as vulnerable as he was in his life at the time, and his relationship with Meet Pamela's director is modeled on his with Truffaut.

from World Film Directors, V II. Ed. John Wakeman, H.W. Wilson Co., NY, 1988. "Truffaut" by Miriam Rosen

Ultimately it was not so much his style as his ideological stance that gained Truffaut notoriety as a film critic, and this was principally as a result of one incendiary article that he published in *Cahiers* in January 1954. Despite its seemingly casual title, "A Certain Tendency in French Cinema" was a thirteen-page diatribe against the "tradition of quality" associated with filmmakers like Claude Autant-Lara, Jean Delannoy, Yves Allegret, René Clement, Marcel Carné, and Marcel Pagliaro As an alternative to this cinema "made by the bourgeoisie for the bourgeoisie," he presented the "true men of the cinema"—then marginal figures like Jean Renoir, Max Ophuls, and Jean Cocteau; older filmmakers like Jacques Tati and Robert Bresson; and directors on the American Truffaut clearly espoused the principles he and his friends were putting into practice. "It is necessary to film other things with another spirit," he wrote in *Arts* in 1958, calling on young directors to abandon costly studio productions, to "invade" the sunny beaches where most filmmakers didn't dare to set up their cameras. "The sun [as he knew well from Nice] costs less than projectors and generators. It's necessary to film in the streets and even [as he had already done] in real apartments. . . . If the young filmmaker needs to direct a love scene, instead of having his actors recite the stupid dialogues of Charles Spaak, he should remember the conversation he had with his wife the night before or—why not!—let his actors find the words they're used to for themselves."

Breathless [from an original treatment by Truffaut] was Godard's breakthrough film, a milestone in the history of the New Wave and a classic for years to come, but it was hardly a missed opportunity for Truffaut, who was able to achieve no less of a breakthrough, as well as the ensuing renown and classic status, with his own first feature, *Les Quatre Cent*

Jacqueline Bisset was a girl of the moment, having played decoratively in films like *Bullitt* with Steve McQueen. She was nervous about speaking French in the film, but Truffaut assured her that her uncertainty was important to her character. Bisset's usual salary in 1972 was equivalent to the entire budget of *Day for Night*. Truffaut's difficulty in separating his life from his art often led him into affairs with his leading ladies. His liaison with Bisset began during the filming, lasted through Bisset's next film in France, and continued when she returned to Los Angeles, where Truffaut often visited one of his idols, director Jean Renoir.

"There are directors who boast of never going to the movies, but myself, I go all the time. And I am forever marked by the films I discovered before becoming a filmmaker, when I could take them in more fully. If, for example, in the course of *Day for Night* I pay special homage to *Citizen Kane*, it is because that film, released in Paris in July 1946, changed both the cinema and my own life. Through the young actor played by Jean-Pierre Léaud, I am always coming back to the question that has tormented me for thirty years now: is cinema more important than life?"

commercial scene like Howard Hawks, John Ford, Orson Welles, and Alfred Hitchcock—all of whose work was infused with their personal styles.

Between 1956 and 1958, he did work as a research assistant on three Rossellini films that were never made, and played a small role in Jacques Rivette's first 35mm film.

In the freewheeling (and far-sighted) spirit of the New Wave he set up his own production company, Les Films du Carrosse (a name that paid homage to Jean Renoir's 1953 *Le Carrosse d'or* [*The Golden Coach*]).

Coups (*Four Hundred Blows*, 1959—the French title means "an escapade" or "a night on the town").

David Robinson, an English critic who spent time on the set [of *Fahrenheit 451*] at Pinewood Studios, was thoroughly impressed with Truffaut's directing: "Truffaut is fascinating to watch at work," he wrote, "even when he is doing the most routine . . . scenes, simply because he betrays, as few other directors do, an entirely fresh, unhampered pleasure in his work." But as Truffaut's journal illustrates in detail, the filming was far from smooth. Truffaut could not adapt to London, much less the studio system and the English language. "I don't have an international spirit. I'm terribly French," he explained. "Abnormally, morbidly French, Parisian. In London I always had the feeling I was on an island. I wasn't at all integrated into the sixty English crew members, even though they were very nice. I didn't feel at home. I was sick."

La Nuit américaine (*Day for Night*, 1973) approached

autobiography from yet another angle, with Truffaut himself playing the part of a movie director, Ferrand, and Jean-Pierre Léaud in the role of his male lead. The title refers to an illusionistic technique for shooting night scenes in daylight, and the film itself involves a constant play on illusion and reality. “I made *Day for Night* like a documentary,” Truffaut explained, and there is very little difference between the shoot that I show and that of my films. . . . To evoke the making of *Meet Pamela*—the film within the film—I wanted to enumerate in a rather systematic but plausible fashion all the pitfalls that can hamper or threaten the outcome of the project.”

After seeing him in *The Wild Child* and *Day for Night*, Stephen Spielberg invited him to play the role of the French scientist Claude Lacombe in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977). “I needed a man with the soul of a child,” recalled Spielberg, “someone kind, warm, who could totally accept the extraordinary, the irrational. And that’s how I see Truffaut, how I see his films.” . . . Truffaut had acted in the films of his friends Rivette and de Givray, but he clearly saw *Close Encounters* as a different kind of venture, and one that he described with the same childlike innocence that drew Spielberg to him in the first place: “I never had the impression of playing a role, simply that of lending my physical presence . . . I wanted to be the ideal actor, the one who never asked any questions. . . . “And, indeed, when Spielberg recalled their collaboration after Truffaut’s death, he wrote that “he was the perfect actor. He didn’t ask any questions. He was very proud of that.”

Since the 1960s Truffaut had been making twice yearly visits to California to see Jean Renoir (“the man I most admire in the cinema”), a practice he continued until Renoir’s death in 1979. But he was quite clear that Hollywood superproductions had **from Film Notes. Scott Kamen. D.W. Griffith Film Center, Louisville Ky., 1979. Day for Night** The most pervasive influence must be that of Truffaut’s idol, Jean Renoir whose masterwork “The Rules of the Game” (1939) is echoed throughout the film. As Renoir took a pivotal role in his film, Truffaut appears in front of his cameras to offer a bit of self-portraiture and a demonstration of Renoir’s maxim that “the film director is not a creator but a midwife. His business is to deliver the actor of a child that he did not know he had inside him.”

Briefly appearing as an insurance agent is Graham Greene, once a perceptive practitioner of Truffaut’s first metier, film criticism, and author of the scripts for such notable films as “The Fallen Idol” (1948) and “The Third Man” (1949) with Orson Welles. Truffaut pays homage also to Welles in a dream

from François Truffaut. Annette Insdorf. Wm. Morrow & Co., NY, 1979

Truffaut’s work *Day for Night*, attests to the deep influence of *Rules of the Game*. His first critical article, published in 1950 in the *Bulletin du Ciné-Club du Quartier Latin*, concerned this film. About Renoir’s masterpiece, he later claimed, “Personally, I cannot think of another film maker who has put more of himself—and the best of himself—into a film than Jean Renoir has into *Rules of the Game*.” And he quotes the central line that Renoir, in the role of Octave speaks: “In this world there is one awful thing, and that is that everyone has his reasons”—a sentiment that permeates the work of both directors. While Hitchcock’s voyeuristic composition—through peepholes, rear windows, and high-angle shots—seems to whisper that “everyone has his secrets,” Renoir’s position is reinforced by an eye-level camera—an “egalitarian” perspective—with a great deal of panning and tracking to reveal more sides of a character or situation.

Since *Rules of the Game* was so significant to Truffaut, further discussion of it can shed light on the nature and degree of Renoir’s influence, especially in *Day for Night*. Both films are deeply personal documents in which we find many of their mutual concerns crystallized: the camera as narrator/participant; the role of art in the characters’ lives and consequent intersections of actors and parts; the multiplicity of characters and relationships; the attitude of the director towards his characters and the difficulties of loving. In addition a cinematic self-consciousness is heightened by the fact that each director plays a major role in his film. *Day for Night* brings together for Truffaut, as *Rules of the Game* did for Renoir, the thematic and stylistic preoccupations that had been developing through twelve years of filmmaking.

The provisional frame of both Renoir and Truffaut reflects the fluid nature of the relationships whether between men and women or

nothing to offer him technically, although “on the human level, I discovered the world of actors and the other side of the set that I had always suspected without really knowing. . . . During all that time I thought about *Day for Night*, which this experience certainly would have enriched.”

Roy Armes characterized Truffaut as “the finest storyteller to emerge from the New Wave.”

Truffaut himself has given some of the clearest evaluations of his own work. Three years before his death. He insisted, “I’m certainly not an innovator because I belong to the last group that believes in the notions of characters, situations, progression, digression, false tracks, in a word, representation.” Even thirteen years before, when he was ten films into his career and *The Four Hundred Blows* was one of the synonyms for New Wave modernism, he explained to Jean-Luc Comoli and Jean Narboni, his friends from *Cahiers du Cinéma*, I love the cinema because it’s prosaic, an indirect, unacknowledged art. It hides as much as it shows. The filmmakers I love all share a reticence that makes them resemble each other, at least on this point: Buñuel who refuses to do two takes, Welles who cuts the beautiful shots until they become unreadable, Bergman and Godard who work as fast as possible to take away the importance, Rohmer who imitates the documentary, Hitchcock so emotional that he seems to be thinking of nothing but money, Renoir who pretends to leave everything to chance—all of them instinctively refuse the poetic attitude. . . . I don’t know if I’m reactionary or not, but I’ve decided to continue with the same cinema that consists of telling a story or pretending to tell a story. It’s the same thing. Deep down inside, I’m not modern, and if I pretended to be, that would be artificial. In any case, I wouldn’t be happy, and that’s a good enough reason not to do it.”

sequence in which, as a child, he steals pictures from “Citizen Kane.”

Truffaut had begun his career as a bitter critic of studio artifice but, after a decade and a half of fiercely original work, he seems to offer an olive branch to the industry he had censored. He suggests that the making of a film, even a completely conventional one, is a charmed conjunction of strangers who, for a short and precious time, can become a family. Yet if he had written a love song to traditional films, he had also warned that their era had passed and “from now on, films will be made in the streets.” Perhaps the ultimate irony is that no more vital example of the new kind of filmmaking exists than this affectionate tribute to the old kind.

between “art” and “life.” The movement between the latter terms is signaled by the title: day for night refers to the filter by which night scenes can be filmed during the day, the artifice responsible for the illusion of reality.

from *Correspondence 1945-1984*. Francois Truffaut. Eds. Jacob and de Givray. Noonday/Farrar Strauss & Giroux. NY, 1988
letter to Annette Insdorf 8 January 1981

In the presentation text that I wrote for the opening of *La Nuit américaine*, I did not conceal the sources of my inspiration: *Singin' in the Rain*, *8 ½*, *Le Schpountz* [by Marcel Pagnol 1938], and *The Bad and the Beautiful*, though inspiration isn't the correct word as (except in the case of *Singin' in the Rain*) my intent was to contradict (or to complement) the above-mentioned films.

In your marvelous study of the film, you were right to mention *La Règle du jeu* as a latent influence, since I grew up with that film as with *Citizen Kane*.

Join us next week, Tuesday, December 3, for the final film in the fall 2002 Buffalo Film Seminars, December 3

Terry Gilliam's and Terry Jones', **MONTY PYTHON AND THE HOLY GRAIL**, 1975. If you know the Pythons, then no words are necessary here; if you don't, words will not suffice. I can tell you this: in no other film will you learn all you need to know about The Holy Hand Grenade of Antioch, see a cow used as a defensive weapon, or see a peasant whom a witch turned into a newt but who got better. No film will better prepare you for the rigors of the December holiday season.

Check out the other films, past films, and all the goldenrod handouts at <http://buffalofilmseminars.com>.

Write Diane at engdc@acsu.buffalo.edu. Write Bruce at bjackson@buffalo.edu.

Check out Buffalo's only free and independent news magazine at <http://buffaloreport.com>.