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Douglas Morrey, *The Legacy of the New Wave in French Cinema*. New York and London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020. 263 pp. Figures, table, notes, bibliography, and index. \$120.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9781501311949; \$34.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 9781501311932; \$34.95 U.S. (eb) ISBN 9781501311918.

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As Douglas Morrey points out, the French New Wave had a revolutionary influence on subsequent filmmaking and film theory. In *The Legacy of the New Wave in French Cinema* Morrey emphasizes the legacy of the New Wave's auteurist choices in *mise-en-scène*, and unconventional storytelling and production strategies, as well as the engaging cinematic rhythms that resulted. The French New Wave was launched by a new generation of filmmakers working to revitalize cinematic storytelling during the late-1950s into the mid-1960s. Their stories tended to be casual, contemporary, and personal, while their low-budget stylistic choices included location shooting, meandering cameras, and editing that violated classical rules. The five chapters of *The Legacy of the New Wave in French Cinema* each address a different decade via a focus group of three test-case directors, investigating how trends over time depend upon aesthetic and ideological remnants of the New Wave, sometimes in movies that seem far removed from the movement's canonical traits. This study offers an insightful assessment of how the New Wave's legacy became entwined with key aspects of French cinema over the past sixty years.

The book is organized around three general questions: how various filmmakers "situate themselves in relations to the New Wave in their own discourse," how French critics "refer to the New Wave in the reception of these films," and, most importantly perhaps, what influences from the New Wave "can be detected in the narrative, thematic or formal material of the films themselves" (p. 7). The overall project is clearly outlined within the introduction, which is as readable and inviting in tone as the book as a whole. The introduction also establishes Morrey's penchant for citing precise references, with eighty endnotes for the first eight pages alone. *The Legacy of the New Wave in French Cinema* is an attractive volume, though more illustrations would be helpful and quite a few scholars and even actors mentioned in the book do not appear in the index.

For the first chapter, "The Post-New Wave of the 1970s," Morrey concentrates on three directors who were "overwhelmingly influenced" by the New Wave's ideals and the political turmoil of May 1968. Jean Eustache's *La Maman et la putain* (*The Mother and the Whore*, 1973) demonstrates a complex debt to previous film style and recent political upheavals. Eustache's film, which stars New Wave actors Jean-Pierre Léaud and Bernadette Lafont, allows Morrey to confront the shifts

in representation of sexual relations and gender politics. The other two directors in this section are Jacques Doillon, *Les Doigts dans la tête* (*Touched in the Head*, 1974) and Philippe Garrel, *Elle a passé tant d'heures sous les sunlights* (*She Spend so Many Hours Under the Sun Lamps*, 1985). Morrey is intrigued with Doillon's casual, "unadorned" style, and his analysis of the lives of young people (p. 26). However, the sexual politics of the film could be explored and critiqued further. Similarly, Morrey's obvious respect for Philippe Garrel, for whom "poverty becomes a kind of ethical stance" (p. 28), sidesteps many ethical issues of gender and sexual exploitation. Garrel's films are shaped by May 1968 and provide near eyewitness accounts of his era. *Elle a passé tant d'heures sous les sunlights*, from the 1980s, and its "half buried" narrative, offer a self-referential lesson learned from Jean-Luc Godard and the New Wave. Yet Morrey never really justifies how these three directors reveal the New Wave's legacy or the shifting representations of sexuality more than other auteurs of the era, such as Bertrand Blier or Diane Kurys, to say nothing of 1970s-era Chabrol, Rohmer, or Truffaut.

After a chapter on three somewhat marginalized directors, Morrey is sure to surprise of some readers with his choice of Jean-Jacques Beineix, Luc Besson, and Leo Carax of the popular *cinéma du look* in the 1980s for chapter two. This cohort concentrates on youthful protagonists, reworks genres, and provides personal narrative structures, like the New Wave, even if their stylized design choices and rejection of spontaneity and social realism defy the look and norms of New Wave filmmaking. With *Diva* (1981), Beineix shook up the French cinema world and Morrey cites praise for its references to historic icons and auteur touches. Similarly, Besson's *Subway* (1985) combines genre references and concentrates on youthful subject matter. Morrey also compares the uneven press reviews of the "look" trend with the New Wave's reception. However, he admits the *cinéma du look* has a completely different sort of cinematic rhythm than the films of Truffaut, Varda, or Godard. Yet this chapter would benefit from more engagement with key sources on the *look* and its era, including Phil Powrie and Susan Hayward, among others.[1] With Leo Carax's *Boy Meets Girl* (1984) and *Mauvais sang* (*Bad Blood*, 1986) there is clearer influence from the New Wave, especially Godard. However, an unsettling issue arises when Morrey points out that Carax, like Garrel, got into filmmaking, in part, to meet women and document relationships. He compares their situation, uncritically, to Godard, Truffaut, and Chabrol pursuing their actresses. For a book that partly addresses changes in representing sexual relations, gender politics remains underexamined and should tie in directly to Geneviève Sellier's arguments from *Masculine Singular: The French New Wave Cinema*, as well as other studies of gender in French cinema.[2] Morrey does vary his chapter structure here by adding sections on urban space and rhythm in the *cinéma du look*, inserting observations on the changing post-industrial geography of Paris and the resulting standardized cinematic rhythm. *Diva* is said to be surprisingly slow, and *Subway* has long sections on the idle life underground. Only *Boy Meets Girl* has a "nervous edge" to it (p. 79). The conclusion, complaining about the lamentable "leaden rhythm" of the *cinéma du look* (p. 81), raised anew my question: Are these the most vital films for examining the New Wave's influences in the 1980s?

Chapter three on "The *jeune cinéma français* of the 1990s" concentrates on this youthful subset of *jeune* French film practice, which Morrey describes as the most significant movement since the New Wave. A great many new directors made *début* features during an era of increased television sponsorship and the prestigious national La Fémis school's homogenizing effects. He concentrates on directors who capture the spirit of their age: Arnaud Desplechin and *Comment je me suis disputé (ma vie sexuelle)* (*My Sex Life*, 1996), Noémie Lvovsky with *Oublie-moi* (*Forget Me*, 1994), and Bruno Dumont's *La vie de Jésus* (*The Life of Jesus*, 1997) and *L'Humanité* (1999). The

section on Desplechin emphasizes his subtle social portraits that avoid character psychology and back stories. Next, Morrey argues that Lvovsky offers a more driving rhythm and a memorable “breathless” performance by Valeria Bruni Tedeschi that rivals the portrayal of women during the New Wave (p. 110). By contrast, Dumont’s cinema employs a brutal realism and is part of the “bodily turn” in 1990s French cinema (p. 112), though Morrey finds a “humility” to the *mise-en-scène*, despite its shocking tactics (p. 113). Morrey’s focus on these three directors shuts out more culturally significant events of the decade, including the remarkable rise in women auteurs and the banlieue cinema. Morrey includes a footnote mentioning banlieue films, but dismisses them as responding to “a rather different set of social and aesthetic conditions and criteria” (note 1, p. 121).

With chapter four, “The Old New Wave,” Morrey addresses the work of Jean-Luc Godard’s *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1998), Eric Rohmer’s *L’Anglaise et le duc* (*The Lady and the Duke*, 2001), and Agnès Varda’s *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* (*The Gleaners and I*, 2000), all of which involve digital technology even as they deal with memory and cultural history. Not all readers will agree with Morrey’s claim that these three titles are now the most discussed of any films in these auteurs’ oeuvres. Godard’s project, which weaves personal and cinematic history via dense texts and montages, condenses the New Wave itself, but generates a new sort of cinéphilie. Rohmer ventures into new territory with this costume drama and its artificial painted backgrounds. Nonetheless, Rohmer’s study of Lady Elliott can be tied to his very early articles on space and art via a *mise-en-scène* that traps these characters within a classical film grammar. For her part, Varda’s documentary *Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse* connects the past representations of gleaning to environmental and economic issues today. Varda, much like Godard and Rohmer, experiments with new techniques to blur the lines between fact and fiction, present and the past. Memory and nostalgia figure prominently in the work of these aging directors as they explore digital video formats.

Chapter five’s “Contemporary Auteur Directors in France” tries to bring the project full circle with three directors who are said to be fully indebted to the New Wave and among “the most prolific and successful French directors currently recognized on the global stage” (p. 185), Olivier Assayas, François Ozon, and Christophe Honoré. The selection of three male directors to represent contemporary French auteur cinema may seem ill-advised to many readers, especially in an era that owes so much to globally successful women filmmakers. *Irma Vep* (1996) and *Clouds of Sils Maria* (2014) reveal how Olivier Assayas works with spontaneity and a light touch, straddling French and global cultural contexts, while respecting the New Wave, its historical significance and personal modes of production. Similarly, François Ozon mixes genres and traditions. Films like *Swimming Pool* (2003) and *Dans la maison* (*In the House*, 2012) seem far from New Wave norms in some ways, but Morrey illustrates how echoes of Chabrol and Rivette pop into narratives. Here too, issues of sexist voyeurism and point of view are raised, but just how Ozon’s Bunuelian cinema provides the best window onto the New Wave’s influence is unclear. Morrey ends with Honoré, whose films from *Dans Paris* (2006) to *Les Biens-aimés* (*Beloved*, 2011) function like extended tributes to the New Wave. Honoré offers a new sexual fluidity, but he also overtly frames his films in relation to Godard and Truffaut. Morrey underlines that while these directors share little in common, all three are well aware of their place in film history and practice, and refer in varying measure to the New Wave. He also praises Assayas, Ozon, and Honoré for “creating rich and rewarding roles on screen for women in middle age or older” (p. 220), as their films explore varieties of desire, including queer desire, and expand on past conventions. Morrey concludes the book with reference to Michel Hazanavicius’s *Le Redoutable* (*Godard mon amour*,

2017), the parodic homage to Godard and Anne Wiazemsky's relationship, as a symptom that the New Wave's legacy may be nearing its end owing in part to the loss of faith in political renewal as well as today's fragmented media landscape.

Readers of *The Legacy of the New Wave in French Cinema* will surely begin rethinking their own perceptions of the New Wave and its uneven influence on subsequent French film practice. Morrey's project is intriguing but also frustrating in its rather subjective choice of case studies and cinematic contexts. Several of his exemplary auteurs, I fear, already have feeble legacies, a reality which Morrey could use to reinforce his point that the New Wave's resonance may indeed be waning. Nonetheless, a large part of the impetus behind *The Legacy of the New Wave in French Cinema* is to chart how the New Wave's importance does live on. It would be rewarding to hear more about other auteurs who seem to share economic, narrative, and gender tendencies with the New Wave, including the banlieue films or individual auteurs such as Diane Kurys, Robert Guédigian, and Abdellatif Kechiche, as well as Claire Denis or Céline Sciamma, to name just a few possibilities. But admittedly, many of us are still trying to assess and define the New Wave itself. Tracing out some of its varied paths and influences should indeed be controversial, challenging, and daunting, as well as productive. Morrey does a laudable job of helping map out and reconsider French film practice of the past fifty years in light of the New Wave and its own complex history.

#### NOTES

[1] See Susan Hayward, *Luc Besson* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); Susan Hayward and Phil Powrie, eds., *The Films of Luc Besson: Master of Spectacle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006); Phil Powrie, *French Cinema of the 1980s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); and Phil Powrie, *Jean-Jacques Beineix* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).

[2] Geneviève Sellier, *Masculine Singular: French New Wave Cinema*, trans. Kristin Ross (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

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