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Introduction

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Abstract

This chapter defines the scope of the *Eric Rohmer's Film Theory* monograph. It analyses the writings published by Eric Rohmer as a film critic (particularly, but not exclusively, between 1948 and 1953), as well as a smaller selection of reviews (primarily from the same period) by fellow critics, who would eventually establish the *politique des auteurs* with him in 1954 – Claude Chabrol, Jean-Luc Godard, Jacques Rivette, François Truffaut. The book sets out to illustrate how Rohmer's influence on his younger colleagues and, more precisely, Rohmer's rejection of Sartre's teaching in favour of older philosophies and aesthetics (specifically Kant's) in 1950, were key factors in the eventual formation of the *politique des auteurs*.

Keywords: Rohmer, politique, auteurs, école

'Naturally, I see what is hidden behind such exaggerated praise as the Schérer School recently demonstrated with Hitchcock, through pleasantly hypocritical and youthfully paradoxical manners. Such praises, however, can only be accused of slight abundance.'¹

In these lines, taken from a 1952 article that Pierre Kast published in the *Cahiers du Cinéma* (CC), the expression *école Schérer* or 'Schérer school' (ÉS) appeared for the first time. Thus, Kast designated a group of young Parisian film critics in the late 1940s and early 1950s, sharing significant common ground regarding cinematic tastes and biases.² Most typically, for

¹ Kast, 'Fiançailles avec le notaire. Notes sur Conrad et le cinéma', p. 22. Originally: 'Je vois bien, naturellement, ce que cache l'éloge outrancier, sympathiquement hypocrite ou juvénilement paradoxal, de la manière récente de Hitchcock par l'école Schérer, éloges qui n'ont contre eux que leur légère abondance.' Unless otherwise indicated, translations from French into English throughout this book are by Zahra Tavassoli Zea.

² For the most part, the historical background outlined in this chapter is taken from the standard biographical sources about the ÉS members: De Baecque and Herpe, *Eric Rohmer*; De Baecque and Toubiana, *Truffaut: A Biography*; De Baecque, *Godard*; Brody, *Everything is Cinema*.

instance, they all deeply loved and admired (among others) the cinema of Alfred Hitchcock, a filmmaker who, at that time, was generally deemed to be little more than a particularly skilled movie artisan, and whom these cinephiles regarded as no less profound and thought-provoking than the best novelists of their time. It is safe to argue that the puzzlement that their ideas raised (not least in Kast himself) made it easier to single them out as a consistent, slightly eccentric clique. Its main members were all film critics for the French movie journal *CC* in the 1950s, and film directors from the 1960s onwards: Claude Chabrol (1930-2010), Jean-Luc Godard (1930-), Jacques Rivette (1928-2016), François Truffaut (1932-1984). Their unofficial leader was Maurice Schérer, better-known by his pen name Eric Rohmer (1920-2010). The latter unambiguously stood out as the oldest (he was approaching thirty years old while the others were all between eight and 12 years younger) and most influential member of the bunch. At the time when Chabrol, Godard, Rivette and Truffaut began to regularly gather at the *Ciné-Club Quartier Latin*, run by Rohmer together with Frédéric Froeschel (around 1949-1950), he was already a relatively established intellectual, teaching in a Parisian private high school, while his younger fellows were hitherto completely unknown. Moreover, in 1946, France's most prestigious publishing house, Gallimard, released his first novel, *Elizabeth*. His reputation (and age) thus bestowed a certain authority upon him; as a result, the personal conceptions of cinema that Chabrol, Godard, Rivette and Truffaut were all developing during those early, formative years were inevitably deeply affected by Rohmer's.

In fact, the *éS* was rarely if ever mentioned, after Kast's 1952 'baptism' – even though a few months later Rohmer acknowledged that 'Pierre Kast formerly did me the honour of appointing me head of a *school*'.³ To a certain degree, the *éS* never really existed: it never established itself as an official group, and Rohmer's leadership was never official in any way. Indeed, it was all very informal, little more than some like-minded movie lovers hanging out together, sharing some cinematic inclinations and writing for the same journals.

Why, then, should a whole book, indeed, this present volume, be dedicated to this 'non-entity' (or 'quasi-entity' at best)? One of the reasons why this endeavour is worth undertaking is that it was precisely this circle of critics that eventually brought forth the *politique des auteurs* (*pda*). As is well known, '*pda*' designates the group of young film critics from the French film journal *CC* in the 1950s (Chabrol, Godard, Rivette, Rohmer, Truffaut),

3 Rohmer, 'Of Three Films and a Certain School', p. 63. See also, De Baecque, *Les cahiers du cinéma: histoire d'une revue*, p. 107.

advocating the importance of the movie director as the main agent responsible for the artistic value of a film. For them, so the story goes, cinema is worth every attention especially whenever an author (including those Hollywood directors, like, for instance, Howard Hawks, who, at the time, were deemed nothing more than impersonal film artisans, uninterested in conveying a personal poetics) enriches his films with a vision of the world and, simultaneously, a vision of the cinema, through *mise en scene* (the art of staging bodies and objects in front of the camera). A true author is someone who expresses him/herself visually through *mise en scene*, rather than by employing literary, writerly tricks and gimmicks (to a well-crafted screenplay); the author's personal poetics are gradually disclosed film after film, so the critic must faithfully follow everything a valuable director makes (even patently bad films) in order to patiently discover and follow that thread as it unravels through the author's filmography.

Although the *ÉS* morphed fluidly and without any significant discontinuity into the *pda*, and although the collective name *politique des auteurs* appeared on paper only a few months thereafter,⁴ the *pda* can be said to have really begun in early 1954, viz. when François Truffaut published his famous, much-discussed pamphlet 'Une certaine tendance du cinéma français' (A Certain Tendency of French Cinema⁵). The buzz created by this virulent, irreverent essay tremendously increased the popularity of the *pda*'s insights, after they had been brewing at length during the *ÉS* years. Moreover, shortly after its release, and precisely in the wake of the aforementioned buzz, Truffaut was hired by *Arts*, a cultural weekly magazine whose diffusion was much larger than the *CC*'s at that time. Indeed, the periodical ended up employing all the other 'young Turks' (the customary nickname for members of the *pda*) in the second half of the 1950s. This, too, boosted the fame of the *pda*.

The *pda* was massively successful on many levels. In the 1960s, Chabrol, Godard, Rivette, Rohmer and Truffaut turned filmmaker and gave birth to *Nouvelle Vague* (the French New Wave), i.e. one of the most important phenomena in movie history, regarded by many as the catalyst for cinematic modernity. Their ideas contributed immeasurably to a serious, systematic appreciation of cinema as art. Andrew Sarris exported them to the States, where they became the 'Auteur theory', a revolutionary, extremely fruitful and influential new approach to American cinema. In the United Kingdom, film journal *Movie* appropriated the *pda*'s ideas to promote an idiosyncratic

4 Truffaut, 'Ali Baba et la "Politique des auteurs"'.

5 *Idem*, 'Une certaine tendance du cinéma français'.

auteurism. Countless film journals and several national film cultures all over the world were strongly affected by the pda's *auteur*-centrism. Not uncoincidentally, authorship became one of the most rewarding and widespread marketing strategies ('A film by...').

Rivers of ink were spilt arguing about authorship – a theoretical debate that was primarily triggered by the pda. Much fuel was added to this fire by structuralism and post-structuralism, all the rage in the 1960s and beyond, and which gave rise to several structuralism-biased attempts to affirm (Peter Wollen⁶) or dismiss (*Screen* journal in the 1960s and 1970s) the relevance of a pda (possibly with the post-1950s CC indecisively shuttling between the two extremes). To some extent, critical discussions on the subject continue today: authorship still attracts much scholarly attention in film studies, and is variously tackled in media theory.

In short, the importance of the pda in the history of film and in the history of film criticism cannot be overestimated. However, the scope of scholarly research on this topic has, hitherto, been surprisingly narrow. In other words, there is an ostensible gap between the enormous importance of the pda and the fairly limited scholarly attention it has received to date. It is true that there is no shortage of excellent historical accounts on the pda.⁷ On the other hand, no serious attempt has yet been made to study its *aesthetic* and *theoretical* aspects. This lack is likely related to another fact: as a rule, scholarly accounts, of whatever kind, concerning the pda rely on a very limited number of writings by these critics (despite occasional, commendable efforts to enlarge this scope, such as the collection edited by Jim Hillier),⁸ in the face of an overwhelming abundance of articles and reviews which they wrote during the 1950s (amounting to several hundred). As a result, the pda has often been outlined in a simplistic way, and reduced to a reactionary nostalgia for the aesthetic preponderance of the subjective vision of the artist. In fact, by drawing upon these hundreds of little-read articles, it is easy to realize that a much more complex and interesting theory and aesthetics of cinema lies at the core of their *auteurism*.

There is plenty of evidence that the exaltation of those directors who managed to turn mainstream films (typically, the outcomes of a highly impersonal and standardized productive context) into a personal creation

6 Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*.

7 Primarily, the two official histories of the CC: De Baecque, *Les cahiers du cinéma: histoire d'une revue*, and Bickerton, *A Short History of Cahiers du Cinéma*.

8 Hillier (ed.), *Cahiers du Cinéma. The 1950s*.

simply cannot be the pda's original, distinctive trait. To regard openly impersonal American directors as *auteurs* – as individuals expressing a personal vision using, in particular, *mise en scene*, and taking into account the way the visual dimension of their films is handled – was nothing new in post-war France. In the 1920s, the first golden age of French film criticism (whose cohort included Louis Delluc, Jean Epstein *et al.*) already envisaged authorship in a fairly similar way – as did a considerable number of the wealth of movie magazines circulating in France after the war: not only those journals that played a more or less direct role in the creation of *CC*, like *L'Ecran français*, or Jean-George Auriol's short-lived (1946-1949) second series *La Revue du cinéma*,⁹ but also those that, like *L'Âge du cinéma*,¹⁰ partly foreshadowed the line of *Positif* (*CC*'s main competitor). As for the *CC* themselves, monographic studies on Edward Dmytryk, Cecil B. DeMille and Joseph Mankiewicz had already appeared in the first five issues, and *none* of them was written by Chabrol, Godard, Rivette, Rohmer or Truffaut. Therefore, the true originality and relevance of the pda must lie elsewhere. It is by no means in the auteurist claim or cult per se, but rather in the whole spectrum of theoretical, philosophical and aesthetic *premises* underpinning it. The young Turks did not praise the genius of the *auteurs* purely on the basis of their idiosyncratic, arbitrary, tyrannical tastes,¹¹ but rather based on theoretical, philosophical and aesthetic premises that must be clearly singled out in order to properly understand what the pda was really about. The *auteurs* they praised were not selected randomly; rather, directors as

9 For instance, Auriol's six-part pompous, unfocused, maladroit, theoretically confusing manifesto, foreshadowing various aspects that *CC* would develop more thoroughly, such as the connection between auteurism and a certain Catholic mysticism, ended with the capital-lettered plea 'PREPARONS-NOUS A FAIRE NOS FILMS NOUS-MEMES' ('let's prepare to make our films ourselves'); see Auriol, 'Faire des films. Les origines de la mise en scène; 'D'abord les écrire'; 'Avec la technique et du génie'; 'Pour qui?'; 'Avec qui?'; 'Comment?'. Hollywood director Irving Pichel signed an article called 'La création doit être l'ouvrage d'un seul' (Creation Must be the Work of One Person); monographic studies on Ernst Lubitsch, Alfred Hitchcock, John Ford, Georges Rouquier and Jean Grémillon were regularly included in the tables of contents.

10 Here is what the editorial board has to say in the very first (collective) article of its very first issue ('A la recherche d'une avant-garde'), in 1951: 'We welcome, on the other hand, an era of a total freedom of expression: technical means are tamed, the very financial means can be tackled by Cinema in a reduced format. Masters of their own writing, filmmakers no longer have any reason to make mediocre films' (p. 2). Originally: 'Nous saluons, par contre, celle [l'ère] d'une liberté totale d'expression: les moyens techniques sont domptés, les moyens financiers eux-mêmes peuvent être contournés, par le Cinéma en format réduit. Maîtres de leur écriture, les cinéastes n'ont plus aucune raison de réaliser des films médiocres.'

11 Antoine de Baecque, for instance, often claims that they relied exclusively on the capricious arbitrariness of their tastes. See, for instance, De Baecque, *La Cinéphilie*, p. 21.

different as Alfred Hitchcock, Fritz Lang, Otto Preminger, Anthony Mann, Roberto Rossellini, Jean Renoir, Max Ophuls and the others were given the rank of *auteurs insofar as their cinemas complied with the implicit, but nonetheless strongly underlying aesthetics that the pda subscribed to*. To overlook this background means to fail to properly understand the pda, its ideas and its inclinations.

The present volume is the outcome of a research project that, in its very early phases, never intended to tackle the *ÉS* per se. Thanks to a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship (undertaken at the University of Kent between 2012 and 2015), I conducted an extensive study of the pda in order to provide a new, more accurate view of what these critics really advocated. By taking a closer look at their entire written production,¹² I attempted a radical revision of the received idea of the pda. This meant going back to basics, i.e. to the several hundred articles written by Chabrol, Godard, Rivette, Rohmer and Truffaut from the late 1940s to the early 1960s, in order to reconstruct the theoretical, philosophical and aesthetic background against which the pda could assert and articulate their *auteurism*. However, it soon became clear that such a reconstruction required a 'spacing' of the *ÉS* years, i.e. the early 'incubation phase' of the pda. Only by dealing *separately* with the timespan that preceded the advent proper of the pda, and by studying it in its own terms, can those theoretical, philosophical and aesthetic premises be laid bare effectively, because that is when they were most decisively moulded, particularly under the impulse of Eric Rohmer, who, at that time, was certainly the most influential member of that group. I thus decided to devote one book to so-called *ÉS*, and one to the pda. The former (*viz.* the present volume) covers roughly the written production by Rohmer between 1948 (i.e. when he started to publish his first articles) and 1960 in *La Revue du cinéma*, *La Gazette du cinéma*, *CC*, *Arts* and other minor publications, as well as the written production by Godard, Rivette and Truffaut up until the end of 1953, on the eve of 'A Certain Tendency of French Cinema' (Chabrol only

12 This long-due exploration has taken place in the wake of the rediscovery of the integral corpus of writings by another major player of the 1950s *CC*: André Bazin (who published nearly 2,600 articles between 1943 and 1958, mostly in newspapers, reviews and film magazines, only six per cent of which have been republished in anthologies or edited essay collections). Thanks to this rediscovery (carried out in recent times by, among others, Dudley Andrew and Hervé Joubert-Laurencin), descriptions of Bazin's film critical practice could emerge that are somewhat more accurate than the clichéd image scholarly accounts have often provided (according to which the critic was a naïve realist, blindly convinced of the camera's power to reproduce empirical reality). Partly encouraged by these reappraisals, the republication (set for 2018) of every single article by Bazin has been finally set in motion by Joubert-Laurencin and by French publishing house Macula.

began to write in 1953, and therefore remains almost completely outside of the scope of this book). In the second volume, this proportion will basically be reversed: Rohmer will be a somewhat inconspicuous presence, while the main focus will be on what Chabrol, Godard, Rivette and Truffaut wrote from early 1954 (when Truffaut's milestone article was published, thereby, in effect, inaugurating the pda) until they all quit film criticism.

Clearly, a few words should be expended on this apparently odd methodological choice. In principle, while the first book describes the Rohmer-led process of formation of the set of implicit assumptions underpinning the pda (approximately between 1948 and 1953), the second will closely examine and analyse the pda (approximately between 1954 and the advent of the French New Wave) in the light of these assumptions. That said, why does the first book examine Rohmer's articles until the end of the 1950s (and even slightly beyond),¹³ while the other articles examined stop in 1953? The point is that Rohmer's ideas on cinema 'freeze' after his 1950 conversion (to be discussed in more detail later) and remain singularly steadfast and unchanged throughout the following decade. Put differently, for the other critics, the *ÉS* wraps up somewhere around 1953, i.e. when they all started to gain some autonomy and to stand in their own right as personal, original, individual voices, while for Rohmer *it never finished*, because, unlike the others, Rohmer thought and wrote fundamentally the same things throughout the 1950s. Hence it is no contradiction to make use of texts written by Rohmer after 1953, in order to illustrate the phase (the *ÉS*) that he used to lead and that ended around 1953. Post-1953 writings by Rohmer are a persistent reminder of the initial spark that brought the group together.

All things considered, there is no real discontinuity between the *ÉS* and the pda. There is no such thing as an incubation period, neatly distinguished from a subsequent mature phase. The individual differences among their members notwithstanding, both '*ÉS*' and '*pda*' fundamentally designate the same thing, the same group of people, the same ideas spanning, approximately, a dozen years. That distinction is, as it were, nothing but a 'heuristic abstraction': the *ÉS* phase has been singled out in a fairly arbitrary way in order to highlight a period of intense and decisive brewing, which would otherwise remain obscure and shadowy, but which should not be overlooked if one is to understand what the pda was really about. Nevertheless, the *ÉS*

13 To say nothing of the rather frequent recourse to a treatise about music (*De Mozart en Beethoven*) through the lens of Kantian philosophy, which Rohmer published in 1998, and which also encompassed a lengthy and very useful recapitulation/systematization of his early insights about cinema.

and the pda are fundamentally the same phenomenon, the same way of looking at films. Their cinematic assessments were based on the same set of implicit assumptions; periodization into two distinct phases is only meant to suggest that the pda did not come out of the blue in the mid-1950s, and before it caught significant public attention it underwent some elaboration during the handful of years prior to 'A Certain Tendency of French Cinema'. There has been an evolution on the surface over the years, but the inner core of their conception of cinema remained substantially unchanged throughout the *és* and the pda phases, without any significant mutation or disruption. For this reason, the present volume, its focus on 1948-1953 (with the exception of Rohmer, as outlined above) notwithstanding, occasionally stretches out to some later articles: the matter at stake is fundamentally the same, before as well as after the 1953-1954 divide. There, then, no incoherence in these allegedly inappropriate 'flash-forwards', or in using them to illustrate the earlier 'incubation' phase (the *és*).

On the other hand, there is at least one significant difference between the *és* and the pda: the *és* is characterized by Rohmer's predominance, whereas in the later, pda era in particular Rivette and Truffaut, but also Chabrol and Godard increasingly developed a personal, original approach of their own. In the few years that followed 1948, Rohmer was unquestionably the most prolific, while the less frequent writings by the others often bore conspicuous traces of Rohmer's ideas and biases. As time went by, though, his younger fellows gradually gained autonomy and independence (while still having a lot in common with one another). Hence, the present volume deals almost exclusively with Rohmer: at that time, he was the one who led the way, while the others mostly followed, so their writings will only occasionally be referred to here. In most cases, they will only be quoted in order to support and expand on some Rohmerian point, since most of them cannot be said to be much more than ancillary to Rohmer's vision of cinema.

It should be made clear immediately that this book *is not a history* of the *és*. Other works, such as the histories of the *CC* compiled by Antoine de Baecque or Emily Bickerton, already provide all of the (actually rather scant) historical coordinates framing the phenomenon at stake. My book will skip many of the historical circumstances related to the emergence and the development of the *és*/pda: in most cases, it will take such knowledge for granted. This book wishes to *integrate* already existing histories of the *és*/pda by providing an in-depth overview of the content of the entire written production by these critics during the early *és* years (and, to a lesser extent, afterwards, with, as explained, the exception of Rohmer); thus, ideally, it is

aimed at readers who are already familiar (even if only in broad brushstrokes) with the history of the *és/pda* (possible gaps can be filled by referring to, among others, De Baecque's and Bickerton's reconstructions).

It is nonetheless useful to recall the main stages of the group's establishment, by means of a concise timeline:

1948. Rohmer publishes his first article ('Cinema, an Art of Space') in *La revue du cinéma* movie journal.¹⁴ In December, he founded the *Ciné-Club du Quartier Latin* along with Frédéric Froeschel, one of the students at the high school he used to teach at.

1949. Rivette moves to Paris. He meets Rohmer (whose 'Cinema, an Art of Space' deeply impressed him)¹⁵ on the very day of his arrival, at the *Ciné-Club du Quartier Latin*. Along with Claude Chabrol (another aficionado of this *Ciné-Club*), the two attend the *Festival du Film Maudit* in Biarritz, organized by *Objectif 49*, a film society that included among

14 *La Revue du cinéma* was founded by Jean-George Auriol in 1928, but lasted only three years (Plot, *Un manifeste pour le cinema*). The same man tried to revive the review in 1946, but it had to come to a halt again by 1949 due to financial hardship. Auriol's death in a car accident, in 1950, pushed several of his friends to put together yet another journal, in order to continue what *La Revue du cinéma* had stood for. This new, monthly magazine would eventually be called *CC*. The fact that the publication given a second life in 1946 had exactly the same name as its forerunner, *La Revue du cinéma*, indicates that Auriol and the others were, to a degree, still looking at the Twenties, the decade of the first golden age of French film criticism and theory; hence, a certain sense of outdatedness emanates from its pages, even at that time. Jean-Pierre Jeancolas ('De 1944 à 1958', pp. 61-64) pointed out that, in the second half of the Forties, while French film criticism was faced with practical (means were scarce, but the State decided to actively support the rebirth of film criticism as a pedagogical instrument for the sake of the masses), social/historical (the *épuration*, the wave of official trials against former collaborationists, variously involving people from the film world as well, like Henri-Georges Clouzot) and political (for and against American cinema, for and against *Citizen Kane* and other topics clearly echoing impending Cold War) issues, *La Revue du cinéma* maintained a singularly detached attitude of pure aestheticism, far more in touch with interwar film-critical agenda than with a post-Liberation one. (It should also be noted that such an apolitical stance is not the only feature that would eventually be shared with *CC*.) Crucially, much like in the Twenties, cinema was seen by many contributors as a potential art form, insofar as it was a *temporal* art, i.e. because of the rhythmic values moving images could assume, and of the temporal patterns editing could construct. Jacques Bourgeois is a good case in point. A music critic interested in motion-painting-like experimentations, as well as in abstract and animated films, Bourgeois longed for a 'Proustian' cinema venturing into the irregular meanders of Time (see, for instance, Jacques Bourgeois, 'La peinture animée'; 'Le cinéma à la recherche du temps perdu'). In such a context, to call cinema 'an art of space', as Rohmer did, was a rather original and disruptive idea, one naturally destined to open new paths and to reverse trends – as well as to put the author of that article under the spotlight, which, of course, largely contributed to the coming together of the *és*.

15 Frappat, *Jacques Rivette: Secret compris*, p. 60.

its members Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, André Bazin, Jacques Cocteau, René Clément, Robert Bresson, Pierre Kast and Alexandre Astruc. There, they meet Truffaut. The four of them start to hang out regularly at the *Ciné-Club du Quartier Latin*, where they meet Godard shortly thereafter. Meanwhile, Rohmer is kicked out off the prestigious journal *Les Temps modernes* (run by Jean-Paul Sartre).

1950. In May, Rohmer launches *La Gazette du cinéma*, a short-lived movie journal that only published five issues, until November of that same year. Godard and Rivette also contribute to the journal. Truffaut instead starts to publish his first film reviews in *Elle*, *Ciné-Digest*, *Lettres du monde* and *France-Dimanche*. In the summer, Rivette publishes an article in *Gazette* violently attacking *Objectif 49* and its *Festival du Film Maudit*, whose second edition is attended by the whole of the *és* – this time as a much more close-knit and exclusive group. In September, Rohmer sees *Stromboli* (1949) by Roberto Rossellini; the film shocks him so much that he eventually declared that during that screening he underwent a veritable *conversion*, which, among other things, led him to reject the influence of Jean-Paul Sartre. He also quits the direction of the *Ciné-Club du Quartier Latin*. A few weeks later, Truffaut joins the Army.

1951. In April, the first issue of the *CC* sees the light. The yellow-covered movie journal is run by André Bazin, Jacques Doniol-Valcroze and Joseph-Marie Lo Duca (who abandons the project shortly thereafter). It is not long before all of the *és* is regularly writing for *CC*.

1952. In February, after some very troubled months (partially spent in jail), Truffaut quits the Army and settles in Bazin's apartment, where he would stay for a couple of years. Godard temporarily quits film criticism and Paris; he would only write about films again from 1956. Other *és* members continue to watch films and write about them, mainly in *CC*. They also dabble in filmmaking from time to time (particularly Rohmer).

The rest of this book will provide extensive proof of Rohmer's influence over the rest of this circle. While this impact should be reiterated, it should also be accompanied by an important clarification. On the one hand, even Dudley Andrew, who has frequently (and rightly) insisted on the substantial influence André Bazin (1918-1958) exerted over François Truffaut, acknowledged that

Truffaut always honoured teachers above parents, calling them adult protectors whom you could choose to follow. Bazin stood somewhere between parent and teacher. If there were a serious teacher in Truffaut's life, it would have to be Rohmer who seems to have played that role for

many at *La Gazette du Cinéma*. In fact, Rohmer actually was a teacher by profession, and he commanded respect as teachers can. His tastes in films were notoriously rigorous; he prided himself on high standards; and his younger acolytes weighed everything he said, accepting much of it.¹⁶

As we shall see, Rohmerian undertones are also extremely recurrent in Godard's writings prior to 1952 (that is, before he quit reviewing films for about four years), as well as in those by Chabrol.¹⁷ As for Rivette, he had known about 'Cinema, an Art of Space' and its author even before he moved to Paris, when he was living in Rouen. A recognizable influence on Rivette's articles for the *Gazette du cinéma*, Rohmer also introduced his younger colleague to the oeuvre of Honoré de Balzac, famously one of the richest sources of inspiration for his subsequent career as a filmmaker.¹⁸

On the other hand, one must hasten to add that Rivette himself soon started to be fairly influential. In those early days, he was seen, as Godard once declared, as a sort of ultimate holder of Cinematic Truth, and if Godard liked a film that happened to be despised by Rivette, he would immediately reverse his judgement.¹⁹ Truffaut's 'best friend and [...] true movie-loving companion,'²⁰ Rivette even taught him what *mise en scène* (the art of staging) was really about, according to the director of *The 400 Blows* himself.²¹ Even Rohmer acknowledged that "There is an extraordinary influence in Rivette. He was often called *eminence grise*. In fact, he was "the *eminence grise* of the New Wave" because he hid in the shadow a bit, and didn't write much. But each article he wrote really had a great impact."²²

Initially, the *éS* was principally inspired by Rohmer's views, but after a while Rivette slowly started to add his own influence to that of his older pal, first at the informal, scarcely documentable level of personal, intra-group

16 Andrew, 'Every Teacher Needs a Truant', p. 226.

17 For instance, the heavily moralistic undertones, the championing of good taste as opposed to vulgarity, and the neoclassical optimism that can be discerned in 'Que ma joie demeure', his first article for the *CC*, almost appear as cheap caricatures of the similar biases characterizing most writings by Rohmer.

18 Dosi, *Trajectoires balzacienne dans le cinéma de Jacques Rivette*, p. 57.

19 Godard, 'L'art à partir de la vie [Interview with Alain Bergala]', p. 10.

20 De Baeque and Toubiana, *Truffaut*, p. 78.

21 Esdraffo, 'Rivette, Jacques', p. 338.

22 Declaration by Eric Rohmer quoted in Michimoto, *The History, Formation and Criticism of the Nouvelle Vague*, p. 86. Originally: 'En Rivette il y a une influence extraordinaire. Enfin on l'a appelé beaucoup "l'eminence grise", d'ailleurs, "l'eminence grise de la Nouvelle Vague" parce qu'il se cachait un peu en l'ombre et il a peu écrit. Mais chaque article qu'il a écrit a vraiment marqué extrêmement'.

relationships, and then, from around 1953, by publishing articles in *CC* that eventually proved to be nothing short of seminal. The first review he wrote for that journal²³ went relatively unnoticed, but the second one, about Howard Hawks,²⁴ left a durable mark, not only on the *és/pda*, but also on (at least French) film culture in general.²⁵ In other words, Rivette's influence was little more than *subterranean* in the *és* years, started to gain prominence during the transition phase between the *és* and the *pda*, and, subsequently, became increasingly apparent, particularly as he and Truffaut (whose writings were thoroughly influenced by Rivette) began to emerge as original, individual, recognizably idiosyncratic critical voices.

These aspects will be tackled in our follow-up book about the *pda*: as Rivette's influence is likely to have occurred at a personal level, but is not *yet* discernible in the texts by the *és* between 1948 and 1953, it falls out of the scope of the present, Rohmer-focused volume. For the time being, it is worth noting that Rivette's approach is, of course, distinct from Rohmer's but not necessarily incompatible. Indeed, both peacefully coexisted not only in the *és* years, but also throughout the 1950s. Then, in 1958, Bazin died, and the two critics engaged in a long-lasting fight for succession in order to take control of the *CC*. This inevitably exacerbated their mutual differences (roughly put: the elder was a classicist, while the younger tended to regard cinema in modern/modernist terms); but, in the *és* years, their differences were still contingent, and very far from being relevant enough to undermine their substantial affinity.

As mentioned earlier, this book is not a history of the *és*. Its approach is mostly *synchronic*: it aims to re-read very closely all the articles these critics wrote between 1948 and 1953 (as well as a number of later ones), side-by-side as it were, in search of significant patterns, parallelisms and regularities that infer the existence of a set of implicit assumptions behind their choices and opinions. In fact, these assumptions were mostly of an aesthetic, theoretical and philosophical kind,²⁶ and significantly matched

23 Rivette, 'Un nouveau visage de la pudeur'.

24 *Idem*, 'Génie de Howard Hawks'.

25 Tellingly, it has been celebrated by even a critic as diffident towards the New Wave and towards the film critical environment from which it stemmed as Jacques Lourcelles, who labelled (in his *Dictionnaire des films*, pp. 272 and 1587) that article as none other than 'the birth of modern film criticism.'

26 Social, political and historical issues in the strict sense are left completely aside: while scholars have often highlighted the *pda*'s overtly apolitical nature; it must be added that the *és* is certainly no less so.

Rohmer's own aesthetic, theoretical and philosophical preferences at that time, as attested by most biographical sources. As Antoine de Baecque rightly pointed out, 'Sartre, Malraux: so, at the origin of the young critique's aesthetics, we have philosophers and not other, more ancient, critics like Delluc, Moussinac, or Richter. This is important because it instantly reveals that the cinephile thought developed towards the philosophical and literary path.'²⁷ True, Sartre's books had a tremendous impact on young Rohmer, but another philosophical influence proved even more decisive: Immanuel Kant. An unusually large part of the present volume is dedicated to sketchily summarizing Sartre's and Kant's philosophies. This might seem inappropriate in a book principally dealing with film criticism, but the paramount role played by these two philosophers in Rohmer's cinematic thought makes tackling them at length unavoidable.

This preponderance of synchrony over diachrony, however, should be questioned, bracketed, redefined and reformulated. It would be inaccurate to assume that this volume will only inspect the *ÉS*'s texts closely and 'horizontally', pretending that no significant discontinuity took place between 1948-1953. In fact, the entire book is structured around *one* single fracture, the importance of which, as far as the coming into focus of the *ÉS* is concerned, cannot be overestimated: Rohmer's 1950 conversion during a screening of *Stromboli*. The present study argues, among other things, that, crucially: 1) the *ÉS* was formed out of a sort of original 'big bang', namely Rohmer's rejection of Sartre's perspective in favour of a return to Kant's transcendental turn and to the philosophical idealism born in its aftermath; and 2) this U-turn is epitomized by *Stromboli*, particularly the way Rohmer saw it. Accordingly, the third chapter, which analyses *Stromboli* and Rohmer's reading of Rossellini's film, is the central pivot around which the entire structure of the volume revolves. Chapters one and two mainly focus on the pre-conversion period (1948-1950), while Chapters four, five and six cover the years after 1950. So, indeed, there is a (very basic) narrative going on here: in very broad terms, the story of the origins of the *ÉS* (hence of the *pda* too) is the story of Rohmer's rejection of Sartre's perspective, and of the reverberations of this rejection on his younger colleagues. The turning point of this story, as Rohmer himself admitted, was the screening of *Stromboli*. By that time, Rohmer had already come up with a rather anti-Sartrean theory of

27 De Baecque, *La cinéphilie*, p. 44. Originally: 'Sartre, Malraux: à l'origine de l'esthétique de la jeune critique, on trouve donc des écrivains philosophes et non d'autres critiques, plus anciens, comme Delluc, Moussinac, ou Richter. Cela est important, et témoigne d'emblée de l'orientation de la réflexion cinéphile vers la voie philosophique et littéraire.'

the relationships between cinema and literature; nevertheless, only during *Stromboli* did he decide to abandon Sartre's perspective for good. While he did admit that a conversion from Sartre's perspective took place (we shall see this at the beginning of Chapter three), he never clearly specified *to what* exactly he subsequently converted; yet, even though Rohmer never openly stated so, many elements in his own review of that film and in other writings by him ultimately suggest that Rossellini's masterpiece inadvertently pointed at a theoretical framework – Kant's – that could effectively replace that of Sartre. Of course, *Stromboli* is not directly about Kant, nor does it talk about Kant. However, as we shall see in Chapter three, many elements in that film can be read in a Kantian vein, particularly by a teacher, such as the 30-year-old Rohmer, with a sound academic curriculum.

Chapter one outlines Rohmer's ideas about the relationship between cinema and literature, particularly around 1948-1949. Those ideas were both still Sartrean, and already longing to overcome Sartre's perspective. In other words, at that time, Rohmer confusedly felt the need to abandon Existentialism, without clearly knowing where to go from there. The same conundrum manifests itself in two extremely influential 1948 articles by Alexandre Astruc (examined in Chapter two), which also seem to signal a way out of it. Chapter three describes the 1950 conversion, when that 'way out' was found in an anti-Sartrean return to Kant's transcendental turn, ultimately epitomized by *Stromboli*. Chapter four fleshes out this conversion and its manifold implications, while leaving to Chapter five specifically to the new notion of the interdependence between ethics and aesthetics ensuing from that conversion. Chapter six identifies the unorthodox classicism embraced by Rohmer in the wake of his conversion. Final conclusions (plus an important 'flash-forward' to the pda years) are drawn in Chapter seven.

'I've written very little theory, when I was a cinema critic I didn't make references to Kant or any other philosopher, well, hardly, but it underlay everything. What André Bazin called my theory of cinema is underpinned by what we could call transcendental idealism.²⁸ Such declarations are common in Rohmer's later interviews. This book tries, primarily, to reconstruct and bring to light the hidden, implicit transcendental idealism underpinning Rohmer's film criticism and, by extension, a major part of the written production by the young Turks in the pre-pda, éS years. More precisely, it attempts to retrace the shift from a conception of cinema loosely and precariously grounded on Husserlian/Heideggerian/Sartrean transcendental

28 Declaration by Eric Rohmer taken from Gérard Legrand and François Thomas, 'Interview with Eric Rohmer', p. 104.

idealism, to one more firmly grounded on Kant's transcendental idealism. In other words, it attempts to delineate the gradual coming into focus of Rohmer's need to react against Sartrean perspective by returning to the original roots of transcendental idealism (that is, Kant), as well as the way this U-turn profoundly affected and shaped the then-emerging film criticism of not only Rohmer himself, but also Chabrol, Godard, Rivette and Truffaut. Indeed, Rohmer's about-face, and the aesthetic of cinema more or less implicitly ensuing from it, was the background against which the pda could be developed.

It should be added, though, that by turning his back on twentieth-century phenomenology in favour of its Kantian sources, Rohmer chose to openly embrace not only Kant, but also other non-contemporary influences, such as Goethe, Aristotle, German idealism, Catholicism, Alain²⁹ *et al.* Dogmatically attached to the past as it may seem (and Rohmer never shied away from being regarded that way), his approach was also singularly eclectic. At any rate, the present volume does not try in any way to pursue a thorough reconstruction of every single influence that shaped Rohmer's view. Rather it focuses, almost exclusively, on Kant's influence, insofar as Rohmer's rejection of Sartre (the original spark that, ultimately, resulted in the pda) consisted primarily of a return to the original conception of Kant's 'transcendental turn, which Sartre tried to revise (indeed, it was the foundational gesture of his whole philosophical system). Most other influences on film critic Eric Rohmer, while no less important (particularly Aristotle and Goethe), are only touched upon in passing: they fall less directly under the scope of this study, as it mainly revolves around that particular element underpinning Rohmer's seminal 'U-turn'.

Then again, this 'narrative' should be taken with a grain of salt. Of course, things are always less clear-cut. In Rohmer's career as a film critic, there is no such thing as an initial 'Sartrean' phase followed by a 'Kantian' one after his conversion. The latter (arguably, once again, little more than a 'heuristic abstraction'), simply brought about a radicalization of those anti-Sartrean tendencies that had already been there from the very beginning. We should

29 The biography by De Baecque and Herpe reports Rohmer as stating more than once that French philosopher Alain (1868-1951), pseudonym of Emile-Auguste Chartier, was his most decisive philosophical influence ever. A very prolific writer, he authored both original philosophical works and accounts on other philosophers, among whom Descartes, Hegel and Kant. All things considered, Alain (who often affirmed that he contented himself with taking over from great thinkers from the past) seems to have influenced Rohmer less as an original thinker in his own terms than he did as a 'mediator' between his own epoch and a number of past philosophical legacies.

not think of his pre- and post-1950 phases as neatly distinct; rather, they are two different nuances of an approach that fundamentally remains the same. It can be argued that, after his conversion, Rohmer's film criticism just 'becomes itself', after having been only potentially so in the beginning – but it does not really undergo any drastic, traumatic change.

Four more caveats should be noted in order to correctly grasp the overall design of the present study.

First, we should not expect too much subtlety from the *és*'s appropriation of Sartre, Kant and other thinkers. Sometimes, their interpretations are debatable; fundamentally, the *és* only wanted to appropriate their basic tenets in order to put together an aesthetic of cinema, so there was no real reason for the *és* (Rohmer included) to explore them any further. In short, Rohmer and the others barely skimmed the surface of these philosophies, so our account will not delve very deeply into them either. More generally, a large part of the *és*'s discourse will probably sound obscure, unlikely, old-fashioned, preposterous, inane, hopelessly idealistic and pitifully out of touch with the latest developments of Film Studies in recent decades, so the reader may be reasonably struck by the almost complete absence of criticism of it. It should also be clear, however, that the absence of criticism does not necessarily entail an endorsement. The purpose of this book is different: it is not meant to establish whether these critics were right or wrong, but rather to bring to the fore the underlying logic behind what they wrote. Hence, condemnations and disapprovals will be deliberately omitted. The point is whether there *is* an internal coherence, a consistent logic, and what it is like, not whether this logic is to be endorsed or refuted. That said, first, one has to pick up the pieces and put them together until a clearer picture comes into view, something holding together the ideas of the *és* and making them exist as an identifiable, recognizable whole. Regardless of whether the *és* was right or wrong, it was the origin of the *pda*, and should be investigated as such. In order to properly understand the *pda* (an endeavour that will only be undertaken in the follow-up book to this present research), one must know its origins; this is why a close, mostly but not exclusively synchronic (in the sense outlined above) re-reading of the texts by the *és* in order to reconstruct its inner logic is mandatory. Only thus can a more rounded, more accurate definition of the *pda* come into view.

Secondly, as we have seen earlier in this Introduction, Rohmer has acknowledged the paramount role played by transcendental idealism in his film criticism, in spite of the complete absence of direct philosophical references in his texts. The question thus arises as to why these references

were never spelled out. To my knowledge, Rohmer never provided a clear-cut answer to this, but perhaps there is a clue in the fact that, for Rohmer, to turn one's back on Sartre and his Existentialism meant, primarily, to free cinema from the yoke of literature and an overload of intellectual references in his writings about cinema would have been easily counterproductive in that respect. Moreover, this reticence regarding philosophical references cannot but raise an important methodological issue, as it compels our investigation to 'connect the dots' in an inevitably inventive way, to such an extent that, sometimes, a dangerously thin line seems to separate research-based reconstruction of the object of inquiry from its *invention*. There is no doubt that this object (the aesthetic, theoretical, philosophical assumptions underlying the *és*) actually existed, as Rohmer himself acknowledged its weight; yet, its utterly unspoken status necessarily forces our study to formulate somewhat daring hypotheses. In other words, the present research supposes the *és* critics to have implied things that were stated only indirectly in their writings. This 'leap' beyond scholarly orthodoxy, however, is unavoidable if one is not to lose grip on the object of inquiry: because the *és/pda* always deliberately refused to conform to academic systematizations and categorizations, scholarly research finds itself obliged to adjust its methods accordingly.

Thirdly, this study focuses primarily on a 'horizontal', synchronic re-reading of the texts of the *és*, and privileges the reconstruction of the *és*'s underlying assumptions and inner logic over whatever external connection between the *és* and the 'outer world' can be posited. This means that not only contextualizations of a historical, social, political kind are left aside, but also the whole issue of 'authorship': This volume will not try to answer in any way such questions as 'what is the conception of authorship of the *és*?' or 'how and where would the *és* position itself in the broader debate about authorship that the *pda* triggered and that, to some extent, continues today?' Such questions will rather be tackled in the follow-up book, which will centre around the 'Hegelian twist' performed by Rivette upon the Kantian background laid by Rohmer, and the decisive effects that this 'twist' had on Truffaut's auteurism-oriented film criticism. Any kind of broader historical and theoretical framing (such as: the relationships between the *pda* and (post)structuralism-oriented theories of authorship), as well as most of the critical literature hitherto produced on the subject, are, for the most part, prudently left out the scope of the present volume, and are only touched upon on sporadic occasions (in all likelihood, less frequently than most academic research standards would prescribe). Nevertheless, I maintain that the risk of 'vacuum-sealing' the object of inquiry is worth

running, because the subject matter at stake is delicate enough to justify a close, in-depth study of it *in itself*, as a preliminary step for every sort of comparison, confrontation and connection to be *subsequently* established. Not that there is any shortage of elements that could lend themselves to such a purpose, if only for the surprisingly proto-Deleuzian undertones that can be occasionally glimpsed in some of the *és*'s positions.

Fourthly, readers might be legitimately struck by the almost complete absence of André Bazin from the present volume. Bazin is commonly regarded as a 'benevolent father' who fostered the emergence of the pda from within the *CC* he used to run at that time. However, Hervé Joubert-Laurencin has convincingly demonstrated³⁰ that it is highly arbitrary to suppose a fundamental continuity between the discourse of the pda and the discourse of Bazin. There is no doubt that Bazin entertained a complex relationship with the pda (a relationship I intend to tackle in a series of essays and papers beyond this book), but, argues Joubert-Laurencin, it was frequently a conflictual one. At the very least, one is compelled to acknowledge that Bazin and the pda followed their own paths; the two sometimes intersected, but their agendas were nonetheless distinct. They were two separate threads that should not be artificially knotted. The same applies, of course, to the *és*; all the more so, since between 1948 and 1953, the young Turks only rarely contributed to the 1951-founded *CC*. Joubert-Laurencin's demonstration, however, is only one of the two reasons why I do not think that my choice to leave Bazin out of this book's scope requires justification. The other is, quite simply, that previous claims about some allegedly substantial connection between the *és*/pda and Bazin were automatically taken for granted and left unjustified. Even one of the most convincing attempts to highlight an affinity between Bazin and Rohmer, by Tom Gunning, is obliged to dwell on a number of differences separating them: Bazin draws upon the indexical properties of the photographic image while Rohmer does not;³¹ Bazin's emphasis is on space while Rohmer's is on time and movement;³² even cinema's 'inhuman' and mechanical character is differently formulated in their two cases.³³ The only conspicuous similarity traced by Gunning is *the dialectical character* of both Bazin's and Rohmer's notions of realism;³⁴ however, such character is merely a *structural* property and, as such, is undetermined. That is to say,

30 Joubert-Laurencin, 'Bazin contre la politique des auteurs'.

31 Gunning, 'Eric Rohmer and the Legacy of Cinematic Realism', p. 27.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 28.

33 *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

34 *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

the fact that both notions of realism are dialectical does not mean that they necessarily coincide: they are, so Gunning seems to imply, *different* kinds of realism that, nonetheless, share a dialectical character.

Rohmer himself, in his eulogy to Bazin shortly after his death, wrote that his colleague knew perfectly well that 'Cinema's true nature is contradictory. One can enter his temple only by the door of paradox.'³⁵ And, in the last paragraph of the same piece (tellingly mentioning, in passing, that 'Sartre's influence was, as he said, a decisive factor in his career. We can admire the disciple's subsequent independence from his teacher'³⁶), he acknowledged the gulf that ultimately separated Bazin from the pda.

We, at *Cahiers*, who had almost daily colloquia with him, believed ourselves exempt from returning to his writings. If not for this, we might not have dared to restate what he had already definitively stated or to contradict him at times, forgetting that he had already answered our objections. Besides, we have all taken the lower road of polemics and frivolities, leaving him to tackle and answer the main question, What is cinema?³⁷

Indeed, Godard admitted that he only rarely had significant exchanges with Bazin.³⁸ Indeed, by reading his writings, one realizes that he started to refer to him in positive terms only after his death.³⁹ Prior to this, the editor-in-chief of *CC* was, for him, little more than a polemical target.⁴⁰ As for Truffaut, all biographical sources confirm a certain closeness between the two *at a personal level*, but any random selection from their writings would unquestionably confirm how different their styles, analytical methods and cinematic tastes were. More importantly, a precious indication on the distance between Bazin and the *ÉS/pda* is implicitly contained in Rohmer's aforementioned eulogy, insofar as the portrait he draws of Bazin is somewhat *Kantianized*. The German philosopher is famously said to have brought about a Copernican revolution in modern philosophy, and to have greatly fostered the rise of modern science by having clearly traced out the limits of metaphysics. Likewise, 'Bazin makes a Copernican revolution in cinema theory,⁴¹ in that he

35 Rohmer, 'André Bazin's *summa*', p. 100.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 97.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 105.

38 Godard, 'L'art à partir de la vie [Interview with Alain Bergala]', p. 10.

39 For instance, in Godard, 'Take Your Own Tours'.

40 For instance, in Godard, 'Montage, my Fine Care' and 'Bergmanorama'.

41 Rohmer, 'André Bazin's *summa*', p. 97.

is the first to conceive of cinema theory in scientific *and metaphysical* terms. What Rohmer most appreciates is 'the scientific aspect of his work,⁴² the fact that his method 'gives life to critical "entities", just as the mathematician gives life to numbers or theorems. So many categories were opened to our inspection, thanks to him, beginning with that of ontology (the concept, not the term) which was absolutely disregarded by theoreticians before 1940!⁴³ In other words, 'Bazin's work is centred on one idea, the affirmation of cinematic "objectivity", but it does so in the same way that geometry centres on the properties of the straight line.⁴⁴ In a Kantian vein, knowledge cannot be *only* empirical; knowledge is only possible on the basis of the limits of knowledge, and this is precisely where metaphysics enters the frame.

Before Bazin, the theory of cinema had used only a model drawn from the experimental sciences, and because it was unable to achieve the same precision, it remained empirical. It noted the existence of certain facts – especially the uses of language, close-ups, and editing – without being able to give us the reasons for them. Bazin introduced a new *metaphysical* dimension (we can use the word, as he did so himself, though at the same time he was careful not to play the philosopher) or, if one prefers, a *phenomenological* approach.⁴⁵

In other words, Rohmer commended Bazin's balance between the rigour with which he deduced everything from his central 'objectivity-axiom', and the attention he devoted to the empirical data and circumstances abundantly and factually supplied by films; not incidentally, Kant is reputed precisely to have reached the squaring of the circle with regard to the combination of a priori knowledge with empiricism. It is also telling that Rohmer not only highlighted the systematic character of Bazin's film criticism,⁴⁶ but also used *architectonic metaphors* to account for his systematicity.

Each time a new work came out – and recently there have been many – I noted with continual bitterness that however honest or intelligent

42 *Ibid.*, p. 95.

43 *Ibid.*

44 *Ibid.*

45 *Ibid.*, p. 97.

46 He claimed (p. 95) that the articles he gathered for his anthology 'were part of the development of a methodical outline that is now beginning apparent. And there is no doubt that they are part of an *outline* established beforehand and not of an argument assembled after the fact,' but there is no evidence whatsoever in support of his claim.

it was, that although it brought a new block to the building of cinema's theory, it was practically useless, as the framework was missing. The aisles and side chapels of an aesthetics under construction sat proudly in bookstore windows, while the blueprints for the nave were confined to the newspaper! [...] I am certain of one thing: they [the articles gathered in Bazin's anthology] are not collections of notes or outlines. Although it may not be crowned by a roof, this edifice has a solid foundation. Not only is the structure there, but also the walls are in place, some of them have been there for a long time.⁴⁷

Again, not incidentally, Kant's own philosophical system was, notoriously, conceived from the start by its own author as architectonic.

Even leaving aside other marginal, occasional Kantian undertones ('[...] the kind of primordiality that Bazin accorded the universe of ends over causes [...]'⁴⁸), all of the above goes a long way towards accounting for the fact that Rohmer's polestar was less Bazin than Kant. He only referred to him on a few occasions before his death, and even in his funerary eulogy he portrays a 'Kantian' Bazin that probably never existed: it is not necessary to read all of the 2,600 articles Bazin wrote between 1943 and 1958 to realize that he was far less a systematic thinker than Rohmer suggested. More generally, Bazin's influence over the *és/pda* cannot be said to be substantial, since a severe shortage of evidence undermines such a claim, while, as we shall see, Rohmer's influence over the *és* (as well as Kantian transcendental idealism's over Rohmer) is very much apparent.

In conclusion, I would like to briefly address the possible usefulness of studying the *és* in a contemporary context. I will only mention two reasons (which, of course, could be joined by several others): one is fairly obvious, while the other less so.

The first lies in the fact that in the mediascape we are all immersed in nowadays, the notion of authorship is undergoing a massive reconfiguration – think of, among others, User Generated Contents and fan fictions. As it is said, in order to seize the present, one has to understand the past; accordingly, in order to monitor this ongoing mutation, it might be helpful to reflect on the roots of the debate on cinematic authorship, namely, to the *pda*. However, the secret of the latter can only be disclosed via a correct comprehension of its 'incubation phase', i.e. the *és*.

47 Rohmer, 'André Bazin's *summa*', pp. 93-94.

48 *Ibid.*, p. 104.

The less obvious reason is, as it were, a historiographical one. As a rule, the pda appears in most scholarly accounts as a mere footnote in the linear march of history leading to the advent of modern cinema, viz. the French New Wave. Commonly regarded as little more than a preparatory phase for a different, more personal and individualistic cinema to emerge, the pda is usually denied an autonomous status, a relevance in and of itself. What this evolutionary view overlooks is the paradox of the pda's position, one that ultimately undermines the evolutionary framework itself. The pda has been an overtly *conservative*, if not downright reactionary, trend in film criticism, very much attached to the past, to nineteenth-century literature and to patently outmoded (in the twentieth century) aesthetic criteria, such as the Romantic genius. Ironically, its place in film history textbooks is as a catalyst for cinema's progress toward modernity. It is my contention that whenever we are delivered some *irony of History*, we should treasure it for what it is, hold its aberration in great regard, and cautiously, receptively investigate it, rather than try to linearize it at all costs or jump too hastily to conclusions, because these ironies can teach us much about the irregular, discontinuous, unpredictable workings of History. And clearly, the paradox of the pda – its having gone down in History as an agent of progressive change, of going forward, while it had been deliberately looking backwards all along – is all the more apparent when accompanied by an in-depth understanding of the éS years, the incubation phase when Rohmer's conservativeness was at its most influential. In the late 1940s and in the early 1950s, the young Turks received, mostly from Rohmer, a decisive imprint; in accordance with Rohmer's own biases, it was an ostensibly conservative one. By taking this aspect into account, the paradoxical nature of the pda's (as well as the New Wave's) historical role stands out all the more.

In 1949, Rohmer had himself expelled from the editorial staff of *Les Temps modernes*, the prestigious journal run by Jean-Paul Sartre, because he wrote a statement that, with hindsight, appears to encapsulate the whole of the pda's (as well as the New Wave's) eventual journey: 'Since it is agreed to swear only by History, let's say that at a certain period of the evolution of the arts, the values of conservation should perhaps take over those of revolution or progress.'⁴⁹

49 Rohmer, 'Le Festival du film maudit', p. 765. Originally: 'Puisqu'il est convenu de ne jurer que par l'Histoire, disons qu'à certains moments de l'évolution des arts, les valeurs de conservation méritent peut-être de prendre le pas sur celles de révolution ou de progrès.'

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Abbreviations

CC = *Cahiers du Cinéma*

éS = *école Schérer*

GoG = Tom Milne (ed. and trans.), *Godard on Godard*. London and New York: Da Capo, 1972.

pda = *politique des auteurs*

ToB = Jean Narboni and Eric Rohmer (eds), *The Taste of Beauty*, trans. by Carol Volk. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

