

Ciné-club

À bout de souffle, by Jean-Luc Godard (1959)

The beginning of the story

On his way back from Italy, Michel Poiccard, a casual delinquent, is passing through Marseille. In order to return to Paris and get back money that is owed to him, the young man steals a motor car. On the road to Paris, he is stopped for a minor driving offence and kills a policeman using a weapon found in the vehicle. Left penniless, he finds shelter with Patricia, a young American living in Paris, and who used to be his mistress. The police soon identify him, and Michel must go into hiding. In the meantime, Patricia suspects that she is pregnant by Michel, but is reluctant to sacrifice her independence. Michel criticizes her cowardice. Patricia is then spotted by the police, who threaten to confiscate her passport if she does not reveal Michel's hiding place. What will she do?

Specifications

Director : Jean-Luc Godard

Screenplay : François Truffaut

Producer : Georges de Beauregard

Chief operator : Raoul Coutard

Music: Martial Solal

Starring :

Jean Seberg	Patricia Franchini
Jean-Paul Belmondo	Michel Poiccard
Daniel Boulanger	Inspector Vital
Jean-Pierre Melville	The novelist, Pavulesco
Jean-Luc Godard	The sneak

Jean-Luc Godard

Born in Paris in 1930, Jean-Luc Godard grew up in Switzerland, surrounded by his conservative, protestant family composed doctors and bankers. He attended the lycée Buffon in Paris before studying ethnology at the Sorbonne. Neglecting his studies, he spent his nights in Éric Rohmer's ciné-club in the Latin Quarter. He paid constant visits to the French Cinémathèque, where he met the director, Henri Langlois. This man, who was to have a huge impact on the history of modern cinema, became Godard's mentor. During this period, he also met François Truffaut, Claude Chabrol and Jacques Rivette, all of whom were critics at the *Cahiers du cinéma*, a defiant review that frequently cast doubt upon traditional French cinema. Article after article, they pronounced their wishes for new forms of cinema, and all become film directors in the near future. Godard formed a bond with the *Cahiers* team and also produced a few texts, even though his critical output only really began in 1956, published in the *Cahiers* and the *Arts*, another avant-garde review. Just before this period, Godard had returned to Switzerland to do manual work building a dam. The money he earned enabled him to direct his first short film (20 minutes): *Opération béton* (1955). After writing some more essays, Godard directed his first full-length film, based on a screenplay of only a few pages, written by Truffaut. Shot in four weeks in 1959, *À bout de souffle* was released in January 1960. After the success of Truffaut's *Quatre cents coups* and Resnais's *Hiroshima mon amour* – both of which had come out a few months earlier – *À bout de souffle* caused immediate global repercussions. This extraordinary film crushed the established rules of the 'grammar' of film-making. From this moment on, Godard had a wide-ranging career. From 1960 to 2004, he shot nearly sixty films, which can be divided into five distinct periods: the first New Wave (1960 to 1969), the leftist activism during which he joined Dziga Vertov's group (from 1969 to 1975), the experimentation with television (1975 to 1980), his return to art-house films (from 1980 to 1995), and, from 1995 on, his reflections on cinema,. Today, living a life of recluse on the shores of Lake Léman, Godard appears increasingly as both the riddle and the sphinx of cinema. Lyrical, stinging, brilliant, insatiable, often shocking, always sincere, eternally experimental, presenting qualities and faults of untainted cheek, Godard has become the hero of some (God/Art = the God of cinema) and villain of others (Godard = intellectual who never worked with real cinema, but simply showed off and created « his own cinema »).