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Truffaut Un-Sutured: A Psychogeographical Reading of The 400 Blows

by

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(Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of
Master of Arts in English Language and Literature)


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2002

This work has not previously been submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature 

Date 12/8/02

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(title of dissertation)

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Rustum Kozain for introducing me to François Truffaut and for giving me, in addition, much personal and intellectual inspiration. I am also indebted to Peter Anderson for countless conversations about my work and for reminding me of my capabilities. Thank you also to my supervisor, John Higgins, for invaluable reading guidance. Finally, my greatest gratitude goes to my mother. Without her unfailing support this thesis simply would not have been possible.

I dedicate this work to her, and to my father, Uffe Hansen (1940-2000).

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Abstract

In its application to cinema, suturing denotes the process by which film narrative is rendered seamless. This enables the identification required for a spectator to become the subject of a film and also functions to conceal the film's ideological mechanisms. In a critical survey of existing criticism of François Truffaut's films in general, and The 400 Blows in particular, the dissertation argues that the majority of this scholarship colludes with the textual suturing process by neglecting to pose ideological questions of the films.

An application of the Situationist theory of psychogeography to The 400 Blows serves as a counter to this critical trend. The concept is not only thematically pertinent to the film, but also provides an analytical tool to un-suture the filmic text and thereby to situate The 400 Blows ideologically. By focusing on the interaction between individuals and a socially conditioned environment, a psychogeographical reading combines a psychoanalytical and materialist analysis of the film. This critical perspective departs from most existing scholarship by insisting on the film as a discursive response to a particular socio-historical context.

Based on a reading of the film's conclusion as signifying Truffaut's un-suturing of his own text, the dissertation argues that the director's discourse challenges hegemonic codes by asserting the desire for a self-determined situation. Contending that this is commensurate with a rejection of the passive subjecthood dictated by consumerist culture, it concludes that the film represents a form of discursive psychogeography. This supports the argument for situating Truffaut and the Situationists together in what Raymond Williams terms a structure of feeling, the shared ideological context that finally serves to validate a psychogeographical reading of The 400 Blows.

Beginnings: An Introduction

I sat through my first viewing of The 400 Blows (*Les Quatre Cents Coups*, 1959) unarmed with expectations. I had no prior knowledge of François Truffaut, nor of the “French New Wave” with which his name was associated in the film’s blurb. The one thing that particularly captivated me about the film was the friendship between the protagonist Antoine Doinel and his friend René. Something in the way they shake hands and seriously mutter “*Salut*”¹ on parting, with that peculiarly Gallic mixture of phonetics, pouted lips and shoulder-shrugging rendered these adolescent boys both comic and endearing in their determination to be older and other than they are. The film delivers countless confirmations of this desire: Antoine runs away from home and hides at René’s house, where they smoke cigars and drink port over backgammon; when they decide to return a stolen typewriter, Antoine enters his father’s office deeply disguised by a coat and hat, stumbling under the weight of a machine which is clearly too cumbersome for the chic-ness of his camouflage (which turns out, moreover, to be thoroughly ineffectual in concealing his identity).

There were naturally other elements that contributed to the initial impact of The 400 Blows. These included the opening shots of Paris by a remarkably mobile – at times cheeky – camera, and an emotive narrative, which, combined with the intriguingly infantile adulthood of Antoine and René, result in a really *good* film. But what does that mean? It is a judgement that can be, I grant, disparaging by virtue of the sheer ordinariness of the word “good”. But the word is not ordinary in my vocabulary, firstly because it represents the kind of value judgement that I try to avoid as a critic and secondly, because relative to production rates, very few good films exist, in my opinion.

So, my designation of The 400 Blows as a good film is an implication that it is *extraordinary*. And my delight was only heightened when I discovered that Truffaut continues the

narrative of Antoine in four further instalments that promised an extension of my immersion in his Parisian adventures: Antoine and Colette (*Antoine et Colette*, 1963), Stolen Kisses (*Baisers Volés*, 1969), Bed and Board (*Domicile Conjugal*, 1971) and Love on the Run (*L'Amour en Fuite*, 1979). But my newly developed expectations were somewhat thwarted when I finally watched these films. Whereas Antoine's character and story continued, my sense of immersion did not; every "sequel" represented a remove from rather than a continuation of the narrative that began with The 400 Blows. The subsequent films became, in other words, progressively ordinary. But I had yet to define precisely what set the first film apart; what accounted, that is, for that initial sense of *immersion*.

During the period that I was discovering Truffaut, I also watched Satyajit Ray's Apu trilogy (*Pather Panchali*, 1955; *Aparajito*, 1956; *Apur Sansar*, 1959). These films chronicle the childhood into adulthood of a young Hindi boy, and so provide a helpful point of comparison to the structurally similar *Bildungsroman* that is represented by the Antoine films. Ray's films are, I would suggest, more technically consistent than Truffaut's Antoine cycle, meaning that the director succeeds in maintaining a filmic as well as narrative continuity between the three films. This makes it easier to regard the Apu films as a series of sequels, in contrast to the Antoine cycle that I could now define as stylistically disparate despite a superficial narrative continuity. In other words, the strong formal and narrative continuity of Ray's trilogy helped to determine that, taken together, the Antoine films do not, in fact, constitute a filmic sequence and are, therefore, best treated in isolation. This accounts for the exclusive focus of this work on The 400 Blows.

After extensive viewing of both Truffaut and Ray, I was, however, only in a position to state my opinions more clearly. Ray was the more consistent of the two, and consequently delivers the entire story of Apu with more of what I would term directorial expertise than Truffaut does with Antoine. But not only did I prefer The 400 Blows to any of the subsequent

Antoine films, I also preferred it to the entire Apu trilogy. It was this partiality that finally spawned my *critical* interest in the film, for how does a critic account for preference? To be precise, my critical interest was motivated by the intimidation of not readily being able to identify how Truffaut succeeded in inclining me as a spectator to suspend my disbelief and be thoroughly taken in by this narrative, something of which the fewest of films are capable. What is it that renders the story so captivating in this film? In brief, how does The 400 Blows work?

The field of psychoanalytical film criticism provides a term which is helpful in answering this question. That term is “suture” and designates the process by which a spectator is made the subject of a film. Stephen Heath defines the suturing process by recourse to the word’s medical etymology:

[A] stitching or tying as in the surgical joining of the lips of a wound. In its movement, its framings, its cuts, its intermittences, the film ceaselessly poses an absence, a lack, which is ceaselessly recaptured for – one needs to be able to say ‘forin’ – the film, that process binding the spectator in the realization of the film’s space. (Heath, 1981b:52)

So, suturing functions to eliminate any potential threats to the spectator’s identification with the diegetic space in which the film’s narrative unfolds. It functions, that is, to facilitate and perpetuate the ideological comfort that classical narrative film promises and that finds its physical complement in the cushioned cinema seats that proclaim, “Sit back, relax, immerse yourself”. Needless to say, being sutured is not an ideal position for a film critic, because sinking into the seat, so to speak, is tantamount to lowering one’s critical guard. But if the suturing process is easily identifiable, this is the first step to resisting its mechanism. Mainstream films are a case in point, as they operate primarily on expectations: genre films

are comfortable to watch because we know what to expect, namely that chaos will always be replaced by order and that the unity of this order will disallow any narrative contradictions or inconsistencies. It is this knowledge that paradoxically allows the spectator complete and safe emotional involvement with the film, and (ideally) precludes the critic from that same level of involvement.

But for the film that is neither mainstream nor predictable, the suturing process – if it is there – is less discernible and therefore more disconcerting. It was this disconcerting position that I found myself in. My immersion in The 400 Blows meant that I had been sutured by Truffaut. And my first critical task had thus announced itself: to uncover the absences and lacks, the contradictions and inconsistencies – the wound – that my *spectator* engagement with the film had effectively concealed. The first signification of the un-sutured of the title of this work thus refers to my position as a critic, which must be distinguished from that of a spectator in terms of its resistance to the suturing process. And the consequence of this critical attention is that the ideological mechanisms of The 400 Blows be unveiled. Finally, given that the film is, to a large extent, a product of Truffaut's directorial agency, an analysis of his film will necessarily incur critical scrutiny of this agency. This means that Truffaut's position as director also becomes, through the analytical process of this work, un-sutured.

The secondary signification of this work's title refers to another un-suturing process that I locate in the filmic text itself. I identify three pivotal signifying systems in the film, of which the un-suturing mechanism is the third. In the first, established during the credit sequence, Truffaut uses a mobile camera to initiate Paris as the film's intra- and extradiegetic space and to define his own, as well as Antoine's and the spectator's imminent interaction with this space as essentially subversive. The second major signifying system is a suspense device which functions, in contrast to the seditiousness implied by the itinerant perspective of

the credit sequence, to consolidate the primacy of hegemonic structures by endorsing Antoine's capture by the "system". This conformism is, in turn, contradicted by the film's concluding freeze frame, a device that acts as an un-suturing mechanism by disengaging the spectator from the narrative of Antoine Doinel. This ending thus represents a remove from the classical film narrative that depends for its success on preserving the suture. Yet the freeze frame is, I reiterate, only one of the film's signifying mechanisms, meaning that its full implications can only emerge when regarded in relation to the rest of the filmic text. It is based on this relationship between seemingly incongruous systems of meaning that I identify the film's structuring principle as that of *desire*.

The specificity of this desire as informed by the conflicting impulses of mastery and defiance is essential to the psychogeographical reading of The 400 Blows that this work proposes. The concept of "psychogeography" is generally identified with the Situationist International movement that existed roughly from 1957 to 1972. But the term was first used in Guy Debord's "Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography" (1955), in which he proposes a correspondence between physical surroundings and specific psychological states:

Psychogeography could set for itself the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, whether consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals. The charmingly vague adjective psychogeographical can be applied to the findings arrived at by this type of investigation, to their influence on human feelings, and more generally to any situation or conduct that seems to reflect the same spirit of discovery. (Debord, 1955)²

The conditional tense of this formulation implies that psychogeography was not conceived of as a tool for simply describing the correlation between environment and behaviour. It was to be, more importantly, a political project that would enable individuals to govern their own psychological states, based on a precise understanding of the effects of various geographical

society dominated, in the eyes of the Situationists, by an ideology designed to produce and maintain a population of passive consumers. Psychogeography would challenge and correct the self-alienating and homogenising effect of capitalist structures. As Debord's biographer Andrew Hussey suggests, it was envisaged as 'a way of reinventing the city according to one's own personal mythology and experience' (Hussey, 2001:90). In short, the technique of psychogeography facilitates mastery of one's situation by physically defying hegemonic configurations.

The desire to construct a situation according to 'one's own personal mythology and experience' provides the thematic link between psychogeography and The 400 Blows, for it is precisely this impulse, I contend, that catalyses Antoine's narrative. That is, the boy's behaviour represents a form of psychogeography. For the purposes of clarity, in my discussion of the film I shall refer to this practice as psychogeographical situationism, as distinct from the first implied meaning of the term, namely psychogeography as a method of critique that invokes several of the main concerns of Situationism. This meaning is, however, equally important to the present discussion, as it is psychogeography as critique that provides the essential framework for undertaking an analysis that privileges the socio-historical determinants crucial to assessing the film's ideological mechanisms. Psychogeography, in other words, resists the suture. It is, in turn, precisely these socio-historical determinants, as well as the mechanisms that they reveal – how the film *works* – that support my argument for locating Truffaut and Situationism in a shared "structure of feeling", to borrow a term from Raymond Williams, who uses it to designate 'some element for which there is no external counterpart' (Williams, 1954:33) in a specific historical context. To summarise, then, my reading of The 400 Blows invokes psychogeography as both technique and critique: I identify psychogeographical situationism as one of the key themes of the film, and the application of

psychogeography as a critical tool also reveals important ideological consistencies between Truffaut and the Situationist movement.

The dissertation is divided into two parts. The first part, comprising Chapters 1-3, lays the theoretical foundation for the practical analysis of The 400 Blows that constitutes Part II. Chapter 1 delineates the way in which my proposed reading represents an important departure from previous criticism of The 400 Blows. The chapter begins by providing an account of Truffaut's career as a critic, and the key critical concepts propagated by himself and his colleagues at the *Cahiers du Cinéma* (*Cahiers*) journal. The most important of these is the *auteur* theory, which is revealed to be ideologically reactionary in its recuperation of the Romantic notion of the artist who is undetermined by a socio-historical context. In the survey of existing scholarship on Truffaut that follows, I argue that the conservatism of the *auteur* theory has acutely influenced the kind of criticism brought to Truffaut's own films by the next generation of critics. I identify three major trends in this criticism, the first of which persists in reading Truffaut's films autobiographically, thus privileging content over form. The second focuses on lauding Truffaut as an *auteur*, and yet, to this end, paradoxically resists any direct critical engagement with the films. The third trend isolates "realism" as central to the work and in so doing, colludes with the suturing process by ascribing a formal transparency to the films that denies Truffaut's directorial agency. These three tendencies share a disregard not only for socio-historical determinants of film, but also for the ideological choices involved in the representations that constitute the images on screen. I conclude by proposing psychogeography as a valuable tool to supplement the historical and ideological deficiencies of much existing criticism.

In Chapter 2, a historical survey expands the significance of psychogeography by charting its genesis and that of Situationism to the major influences of Lettrism, Henri Lefebvre and Karl Marx. Debord's critical career is discussed in some detail, as he was not

only pivotal to the Situationist International but also to the development of what are now known as key Situationist concepts. These include the *dérive*,³ *détournement*,⁴ the primacy of play, the construction of situations and, of course, psychogeography. The respective practices advocated by these concepts render them closely interrelated, insisting as they all do on wilful self-disorientation as a means of challenging the hegemonic implications of the new urban space that characterised post-war France. The link between Debord, Lefebvre and Marx is provided by the influence of Marx's discourse on the commodity on Lefebvre's insistence on the everyday as a means of investigating and demystifying dominant ideologies. This demystification process culminates, in turn, in Debord's critique of the spectacle⁵ as the prime hegemonic signifier in The Society of the Spectacle (1967). This mature work also invokes the concept of psychogeography through Debord's specification of the proletarian revolution as a seizure of space, that is, as an appropriation of hitherto subordinating geographical structures. Psychogeography is thus confirmed as a political project that not only undermines the spectacle, but in so doing, resuscitates the historical progress that Debord perceives as having been halted by the priority of illusion over reality in the spectacular society.

Chapter 3 begins by addressing the seeming incongruity between Debord's radical perspective and Truffaut's self-avowed and perceived conservatism. I argue that these opposing political stances do not preclude the existence of a shared structure of feeling. On the contrary, the superficial differences between Debord and Truffaut coupled with the strong consistencies between their respective works that my analysis reveals serve to consolidate, in my view, the presence of such a structure of feeling. This structure is expressed both implicitly and explicitly. Implicit links are first considered in a theoretical discussion that relies on Heath's contention that psychoanalysis and historical materialism – the principal tenets of psychogeography - are paramount to film criticism for raising ideological issues.

More explicit connections are then located in the thematic concern with the effect of the environment on the individual that is fundamental to both psychogeography and The 400 Blows, and also in the importance of youth and improvisation to Situationism and Truffaut's film. These connections substantiate my contention that psychogeography – as an expression of the ideas central to Situationism – facilitates a corrective reading of The 400 Blows. To demonstrate the merits of psychogeography as a methodological tool, the chapter concludes with an analysis of the credit sequence, in which the film's first signifying system is established.

Part II provides an analysis of key sequences of The 400 Blows in light of the theoretical concepts outlined in Part I. Chapters 4 and 5 trace Antoine's progression through and interaction with the social institutions of family, school and law. I identify the film's second system of meaning in Antoine's capture, a sequence that functions as a narrative device for rendering his character a charge of the State. Chapter 6 focuses on the film's concluding sequence, in which I locate the final signifying mechanism. The final part of that chapter addresses the discrepancy between the three signifying mechanisms by suggesting that they represent not textual contradictions but a dialectical structuring of the film. Within this structure, it is the interaction between three different systems of meaning that is productive of the film's ideological core. Chapter 7 extends this discussion by considering how the meaning generated by the freeze frame challenges, in addition, not only the conventional polarity of town versus country, but also filmic gender conventions. The result of this rejection of narrative conventions is, I conclude, a process whereby Truffaut privileges discourse over story. In spectacular semantics, this amounts to a disavowal of the primacy of illusion central to the society of the spectacle. Truffaut's endorsement of discursivity thus finally affirms the structure of feeling that validates reading The 400 Blows from a psychogeographical perspective.

1. François Truffaut and the French New Wave: A Critical Survey

This chapter provides an outline of François Truffaut's progression from critic to director, followed by a survey of the major trends in the voluminous criticism of his own films. I argue that the majority of this criticism remains deficient by neglecting to pose socio-historical questions of the work, thus ignoring the ideological mechanisms of the films. It is my contention that this deficiency is a direct result of the influence of the conservative Romanticism of the *auteur* theory propagated by Truffaut the critic. I propose, in conclusion, that existing scholarship be used as an index of the critical absences that need to be addressed in Truffaut's work, and finally suggest that psychogeography provides the analytical tool for a corrective reading of The 400 Blows.

Truffaut (1932-1984) first made a name for himself with the publication of his controversial article "A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema" (1954).¹ This piece remains important for several reasons, not least for representing, as Colin Crisp suggests, 'a turning-point in French critical writing, a visionary moment of breakthrough' (Crisp, 1997:235). It is also a valuable indicator of the nature of the French "Golden Age" as opposed to post-war cinema, and Truffaut's clear bias against the latter lays the historical foundation for the *auteur* theory, soon to become one of the major identifying features of the French New Wave movement.² It is a theory, moreover, that many will deem exemplified by Truffaut's direction of his first feature film, The 400 Blows (*Les Quatre Cents Coups*, 1959).

In his article, Truffaut confers the disparaging term "Tradition of Quality" onto then-contemporary French cinema. In technical terms, he defines it by such features as 'scholarly framing', 'complicated lighting effects' and "'polished" photography' (Truffaut, 1976:230). These serve as the first markers of the economic aspect of this "quality" cinema (also referred to, with equal irony, as *cinéma de papa*, "daddy's cinema"). They were typically high-budget

productions, funded primarily by State capital. This meant that the content of these films tended to be dictated by bureaucratic formulae, most of which insisted on grandiose literary adaptations: 'A film is no longer made in France that the authors do not believe that they are remaking Madame Bovary' (232). Truffaut's critical stance was thus in opposition to the highly formulaic film productions of leading French studios due to the economic and ideological constraints forced on them by the State.³ And he was clearly not alone in his judgments that contemporary filmmakers did nothing but deliver to the public its 'habitual dose of smut, non-conformity and facile audacity' (230). Over the next few years, this dissatisfaction would be reiterated by several of his colleagues at Cahiers. Examples include Pierre Kast's designation of the state French cinema as 'one of total mediocrity. It amounts to the manufacture of a product that is always the same' (Bazin *et al.*, 1985: 32),⁴ as well as Louis Marcorelles' claim that contemporary films have 'a tendency towards critical pedantry, dryness, the systematisation of judgments' (Marcorelles, 1958:191). While the fact that these critics were colleagues may suggest that this consensus is far from remarkable, this was not, in fact the case at Cahiers.⁵ On the contrary, much of the journal's vitality came precisely from dissent among its writers,⁶ who included, among others, its founder, André Bazin, a right-wing Catholic and Kast, who was a member of the Communist Party. Truffaut's article can thus be seen as the catalyst that initiated the debate about "quality" cinema, a debate that not only set its contributors apart from the producers of these films but also helped to awaken the critical sensibilities of the public. In retrospect, "A Certain Tendency" was, probably, an important preparatory step for the very favourable reception of the new generation of films that began appearing by the end of that decade.⁷

Yet Truffaut's denunciation of French cinema was not absolute, but confined to the historically specific post-war period. He was clearly partial towards several filmmakers working before this period, such as Jean Renoir, Robert Bresson and Jean Cocteau, who

belonged to the so-called “Golden Age” of French cinema.⁸ Truffaut admired these directors because they were ‘*auteurs* who often write their own dialogue and some of them themselves invent the stories that they direct’ (Truffaut, 1976:233). So, the personal control wielded by these directors accounted for the appeal of their films, and set the first criterion for the *auteur* theory: complete financial and creative authority over one’s film. It is thus the question of control that leads Truffaut to his conclusion that ‘I do not believe in the peaceful co-existence of the “Tradition of Quality” and an “*auteur’s*” cinema’ (234). This phrasing makes clear that the point of his article is not simply to describe the differences between two historical periods in French cinema, but more specifically, to advocate a future cinema based on what he admired about the Golden Age films. Susan Hayward accordingly specifies the simultaneous propagation of the *auteur* theory and a condemnation of the Tradition of Quality as fundamental to the New Wave movement: ‘This patricide of the author by the *auteur* is consonant with the New Wave’s ousting of the *cinéma de papa* which they accomplished first, through their writings in the *Cahiers du cinéma* and second, through their own films during the 1960s’ (Hayward, 1993:56).

In another piece written in 1957, Truffaut slightly modifies this conception of a future cinema to insist that the content of the film be thoroughly personal, conceivably as an expression of the financial and creative control enjoyed by an *auteur*:

The film of tomorrow appears to me as even more personal than an individual and autobiographical novel, like a confession or diary. The young filmmakers will express themselves in the first person and will relate what has happened to them.... The film of tomorrow will not be directed by civil servants of the camera, but by artists for whom shooting a film constitutes a wonderful and thrilling adventure. The film of tomorrow will resemble the person who made it and the number of spectators will be proportional to the number of friends the director has. The film of tomorrow will be an act of love. (Truffaut, 1978:19)

This definition goes some way to explain Bazin's contention that 'the *auteur* is a subject to himself; whatever the scenario, he always tells the same story.... Jacques Rivette has said that an *auteur* is someone who speaks in the first person. It's a good definition' (Bazin, 1985:255).⁹ So far then, we can characterise the theoretical beginnings of the New Wave as a rejection of "quality" cinema in favour of *auteurism*, that is, intensely personal films, the closest examples of which belonged to the Golden Age of French cinema.

But *auteurism* was also identified elsewhere: amongst the Hollywood films that began to flood France in 1946, after the ban on American films was revoked. The *Cahiers* critics were, naturally, as selective in their praise of American films as of their own cinema, but they nevertheless identified several directors who would be apotheosised to the growing canon of *auteurs*. These included Nicholas Ray, Orson Welles,¹⁰ and also Alfred Hitchcock, who became the subject of two books by New Wave directors.¹¹ In the context of the creative freedom advocated by the *auteur* theory, this admiration for American directors by the *Cahiers* team is somewhat paradoxical, given the necessarily *impersonal* configurations of large Hollywood studio productions. Yet it was exactly this restrictive character of the American film industry which heightened the New Wave admiration for specific films which still succeeded, in their view, in bearing the director's "stamp". Films that were, in other words, personal despite studio production. As Andrew Sarris, the American critic who was instrumental in spreading (and, to some extent, transforming) the *auteur* theory in the United States,¹² explains, 'Because so much of the American cinema is commissioned, a director is forced to express his personality through the visual treatment of material rather than through the literary content of the material' (Sarris, 1981a:64).¹³ Although an emphasis on the visual rather than the literary capacity of cinema is, in some measure, implied in the move from "quality" cinema espoused by Truffaut, Sarris here names an important feature not only of the American films admired by the *Cahiers* critics, but of many of the films soon to be

produced by these critics-turned-directors. Indeed, along with the *auteur* theory, Annette Insdorf names 'the renewed exploration of film as an essentially *visual* medium' one of the 'two major foundations of the New Wave' (Insdorf, 1994:21).

In this way, similarly to the praise of Golden Age directors, the admiration for American *auteurs* was as instrumental in identifying an existing directorial practice as it was in further developing the *auteur* theory as a practical aspiration for forthcoming directors. The simultaneous retrospective and forward-looking gaze of the *Cahiers* critics can thus be read as an example of what Raymond Williams terms 'convention as dramatic method'; the process by which an existing, or traditional, practice becomes the basis for a new method:

[B]ecause of the nature of convention, because of the dependence of any dramatic method upon this particular type of agreement, it is not possible in any age, to go very far from the segment which is that age's living tradition, or to begin from anywhere but within or on its borders. Thus we have the necessity of tradition – convention as tacit consent – and at times the equal necessity of experiment, from the development of new modes of feeling, and from the perception of new or rediscovered technical means – convention as dramatic method. (Williams, 1954:32)

In Williams' spectrum, then, the works of existing *auteurs* represented the conventions upon which New Wave directors moulded their experimental techniques. John Anzalone takes this necessity of turning to tradition one step further, and suggests that not only did future New Wave directors attempt to identify *auteurs* for practical and theoretical guidance, but in fact developed the *auteur* canon as a means of self-legitimation:

As they opportunistically sought to position themselves as future directors, they were also looking for godfathers. The canonical legitimacy they showered upon their models in the cinema would naturally pass down to them once they took their rightful place behind the camera. There was an attempt to establish through critical writing certain kind of affiliations, a genealogy that confirms the heirs by naming the ancestors. (Anzalone, 1998:51)

The implied narcissism of these directors in Anzalone's claim leads to several problematic aspects of *auteurism* which are paramount to a comprehensive understanding of the theory, its relation to the New Wave, and also the kind of critical writing that has, in later years, been produced about specific films and directors of this movement.

The most obvious of the pitfalls of this theory lies in the dissonance between its idealism and the feasible practicalities of its application. For while the idea of complete creative and financial control is certainly attractive, it is clearly not an easy position to construct, particularly for young critics who were, for the most part, far from wealthy. And on the creative side, the theory demands an exceptional range of talent – from scriptwriter to director to producer. It is the naivety of this expectation which underlies Roger Leenhardt's dismissal of the theory: 'The notion of the total *auteur* is a myth all the same, because the director's craft requires specific capabilities which are not the same as those of a writer' (Bazin *et al.*, 1985:38).¹⁴ Practically, then, *auteurism* as a theory is weakened by its idealism. It is a flaw that could conceivably have been avoided had its proponents, in their study of the "greats", paid attention to *all* aspects of a film and not simply the director. They would then have acknowledged, for instance, that photographer Gregg Toland and scriptwriter H.J. Mankiewicz were as vital to the creation of Citizen Kane as was that 'prodigy', Orson Welles.

The potential danger of neglecting important aspects of a film (or films) as a result of an exclusive focus on its director is the second major drawback to *auteurism*, and was

recognised by Bazin as early as 1957 when he cautioned that the theory could easily evolve into an 'aesthetic personality cult' (Bazin, 1985:257). Bazin's argument can be seen as the negative and more sober counterpoint to Sarris's somewhat sentimental contention that true *auteurs* are like 'a few brave spirits [who] had managed to overcome the gravitational pull of the mass of movies' (Sarris, 1981b:65), thus implying that they deserve the apotheosis that critics are willing to confer on them. It is this insistent singling out of the director that has earned Sarris – and, as we shall see, the theory as a whole, along with its original promoters – the label "Romantic". Edward Buscombe, for instance, locates Sarris in the Romantic tradition as defined by Williams in his *Culture and Society* (1958), namely the tradition that perceives the artist as 'essentially opposed to society' (Buscombe, 1981:28). The figurative removal of the artist (director, in this case) from society, and by implication, from a socio-historical framework, is the basis for one of the fundamental contradictions of the *auteur* theory. This is that it hails, on the one hand, from the *Cahiers* critics who took a clearly oppositional stance to contemporary culture,¹⁵ yet the Romantic configurations which this theory adopted meant that it was, ultimately, not radical but retrograde. As John Hess argued in 1974, the theory represented 'a justification ... of a culturally conservative, politically reactionary attempt to remove film from the realm of social and political concern, in which the progressive forces of the Resistance had placed all the arts in the years after the war' (cit. Caughie, 1981:37). This reading of *auteurism* as fundamentally conformist is reiterated by Diana Holmes and Robert Ingram in their uncompromising book on Truffaut: 'In some ways, the *politique des auteurs* merely perpetuated a long-established literary tradition, that of the individual creator, no more than another manifestation of the Platonic notion of the gifted few scattering pearls of wisdom to the many' (Holmes & Ingram, 1998:25). In this context, we can now return to Bazin who, as a preventative against the potential cult that he foresaw, concludes with the pertinent question, '*Auteur*, yes, but *what of?*' (Bazin, 1985:258), a

question that, by forcing a more careful consideration of a film's signifying mechanisms, would hopefully address the socio-historical deficiencies by which Hess characterises the theory.¹⁶

So, the *auteur* theory defines itself in opposition to hegemonic directorial methods, yet by virtue of the Romantic notion of the artist that it rehashes, its proponents paradoxically reinsert themselves in the very conservatism that they propose to counter. It is in this context that John Caughie is able to account for the ease with which the *auteur* theory lost its radical aspect and became naturalised, so to speak: 'The relation between *auteurism* and romanticism also helps to explain the process by which, after the initial scandal, *auteurism* was easily assimilated into the dominant aesthetic mode' (Caughie, 1981:11).¹⁷ We can take this argument further by considering Stephen Heath's explanation of the ideological hollowness of the *auteur* theory in terms of its disregard for subject construction:

The function of the author (the effect of the idea of authorship) is a function of unity; the use of the notion of the author involves the organisation of the film (as "work") and, in so doing, it avoids – this is indeed its function – the thinking of the articulation of the film text in relation to ideology. A theory of the subject represents precisely such an attempt, at one level, to grasp the constructions of the subject in ideology (the modes of subject-ivity); it thus allows at once the articulation of contradictions in the film text other than in relation to an englobing consciousness, in relation now, that is, to a specific historico-social process, and the recognition of a heterogeneity of structures, codes, languages at work in the film and of the particular positions of the subject they impose. (Heath, 1981a:217)

This formulation facilitates a summary of *auteurism* as a critical approach that eschews consideration of subjecthood, history and ideology. It represents, in other words, a hesitancy to engage in an analytical process that potentially problematises a film by paying attention,

precisely, to the ways in which narrative and textual contradictions may be expressions of the political tensions of a particular historical context. To reiterate the central contradiction of the New Wave, then, this means that although disparate in form and content from French “quality” cinema, the theory behind *auteurism* was, in fact, ideologically consistent with the cultural conformism of the latter.¹⁸

Before progressing to Truffaut’s The 400 Blows, which was hailed as one of the first New Wave films, it is, I believe, useful to emphasise that *auteurism* as discussed so far has been limited to its theoretical capacity. The extent to which we have seen it in practice is, to reiterate, as a critical tool, that is, a novel approach to film that allowed the *Cahiers* critics to identify existing *auteurs* and their methods, this in order specifically to develop and solidify their own directorial objectives. The *auteur* theory was primarily, to recall Anzalone’s contention, a search for godfathers as an act of self-authorisation. Once the canon had been established, then, the critics were ready to put their theories into practice; those, at least, who had the means to do so. Yet, the process of turning a critical tool into a practical strategy is not unproblematic. For while directors may be able to enjoy the financial and creative freedom required for an *auteurist* cinema, this is only the first step. The second, and most important step, is to be identified as an *auteur*. And this is where the problem lies. Canonisation is a passive act: no-one can enter a canon by volition, that is, without being *chosen* to do so. It is for this reason that I contend that the ideological conservatism of the *auteur* theory is recuperated not by the films produced by these directors, but by the critical appraisal of these films and their directors. To be more specific, I will argue that, in the case of Truffaut and The 400 Blows, critics have fallen into precisely the ‘aesthetic personality cult’ that Bazin cautioned against. So, to Jean-Pierre Oudart’s otherwise insightful assertion that, ‘What is most fetishized in *cinéma-vérité*, that is to say New Wave films taken as a whole, is the precise historical moment and the geographical locations used in the film: what

has to be seen in this case is ... the effect of a refusal to take into account the socio-historical exterior of these relations' (Oudart, 1981:268), I would propose the following addition: 'What is most fetishized *in criticism of New Wave films...*'. The problem with Oudart's phrasing is simply that it confers too much agency on the product that is a film, rather than focusing on the directorial choices that underlie that product, choices which come to light through the *reading* of a film. And it is, as we shall see, not The 400 Blows, but the majority of readings of The 400 Blows that, under the influence of the kind of criticism propagated by the *Cahiers* critics, refuse to problematise the film in any way by posing important questions of history, ideology and subjecthood. My intention is thus not to enter the debate as to whether Truffaut is, in fact, an *auteur* or not, but rather to demonstrate the ways in which the critical approach to his films in general and his first feature film in particular has been severely limited by the ideological deficiencies of the *auteur* theory.

Truffaut's transition from critic to director was initiated in 1957 when he was able to set up his own production company, *Les Films du Carosse*, and thereby direct and produce his first short film, The Mischief Makers (*Les Mistons*). It was also the year in which he got married, a personal event which, some argue, had much to do with his subsequent career, given that it was his father-in-law who provided the financial foundation for *Les Films du Carosse*.¹⁹ That debate aside, it was directing The 400 Blows under the auspices of Truffaut's own company that allowed him to fulfil the first criterion of the *auteur* theory and which, I suggest, although purely a practical criterion,²⁰ provided the impetus for the predominantly *auteurist* criticism of that film to follow.

Yet Truffaut clearly did not only distinguish himself from "quality" cinema by virtue of having his own company. Reviews at the time of the film's release testify to its noteworthy departure from the *cinéma de papa*, not least discernible in the fact that, contrary to the by-now familiar denunciations of the latter, reception of The 400 Blows was overwhelmingly

positive. While the majority of these reviews were, granted, written by Truffaut's friends and colleagues at *Cahiers*, the film was also quick to achieve international acclaim.²¹ Jean-Luc Godard, for instance, calls the film 'the proudest, stubbornest, most obstinate, in other words most free, film in the world' (Godard, 1985:51). Jacques Rivette designates it as a 'triumph of simplicity', and concludes by stating that 'we now have in our midst a man who is no longer a gifted and promising newcomer, but a real French director, equal to the greatest' (cit. Douchet, 1998:132). Another example is Fereydoun Hoveyda's review, which names the film 'better than a masterpiece. Together with *Hiroshima, mon amour*, it's one of the two most original films to have appeared in post-War France' (cit. Douchet, 1998: 131), the last phrase of which is a telling indicator of the perceived creative poverty of "quality". In another short piece, Hoveyda suggests that 'Antoine [the protagonist] is simultaneously Truffaut and Moussy, you and me.... To talk to us Truffaut has chosen to begin with the first person plural' (Hoveyda, 1985:56). The echo here of Truffaut's own vision of the 'film of tomorrow' as 'even more personal than an individual and autobiographical novel, like a confession or diary, [in which] the young filmmakers will express themselves in the first person' is clearly not incidental and means that Hoveyda confers the greatest praise on Truffaut: he has not only defined but has initiated the next generation of films.

Impressive and inspiring though this praise is, it has been, I believe, responsible for setting an unfortunate precedent for the next generation of critics. One way of accounting for this is as a general neglect on the part of these critics of the important difference between a review, in which unqualified praise is not altogether inappropriate, and criticism, which requires constant qualification. John Higgins provides a useful distinction between these two forms of film discussion when he likens the role of the film reviewer to that of the common viewer who seeks to understand the film's story, while the critic focuses on its discursive features: 'While the spectator [reviewer] reads the narrative of the film, the analyst reads its

narration, its address, its construction of that narrative which is entertained by and which entertains the spectator' (Higgins, 1991:112).²² In this context, the influence of a judgment like Hoveyda's - and, by extension, Truffaut's own - in the critical trend that insists on reading not only The 400 Blows, but several of Truffaut's films as pure autobiography suggests that these critics engage with the films as spectators rather than as analysts. Antoine De Baecque and Serge Toubiana, for instance, suggest that, 'When he described [Antoine] Doinel, Truffaut was clearly describing himself' (De Baecque & Toubiana, 2000:267). They also go to some length to make connections between the actual women in Truffaut's life and those in his films.²³ Annette Insdorf takes the same line when she suggests that,

The Man Who Loved Women (1977) affirms the continuities and the autobiographical nature of Truffaut's cinema. It centers on a male protagonist whose self-definition implicitly builds upon the first actions performed by Antoine Doinel in The 400 Blows. ... however, the evolution and implications of this connection can only be fully understood when we realize that Antoine as well as many other characters, themes, techniques, and structures are intimate reflection of François Truffaut. (Insdorf, 1994:173)

What underlies this trend is thus an emphasis on *content* as a reflection of Truffaut's life which, whether justified or not, necessarily ignores the broader historical structures that inform a particular film. Holmes and Ingram, on the other hand, are two critics who do not follow this trend, and accordingly advise against it:

To read the films as direct transpositions of Truffaut's life is neither accurate nor rewarding. The relevance of biography lies not in tracing all those names, places, situations and dialogues that Truffaut "borrowed" from life, but rather in recognising the relationship between his films and the social context of both creation and reception. (Holmes & Ingram, 1998:11)

We can now identify this first form of criticism as one that, in the first instance, equates the director with his film, and consequently prioritises content over form or, in structuralist terms, story over discourse.²⁴ This trend thereby aligns itself with *auteurist* criticism by ignoring the socio-historical determinants of a film.

Equally disturbing is another trend that exemplifies what Bazin hoped would *not* happen, that is 'the negation of the film to the benefit of the praise of the author' (Bazin, 1985:258). One such example is provided by Anne Gillain, who defends not attempting any form of analysis of Truffaut's work by suggesting that this is in keeping with the director's wishes: 'In order to appreciate his originality, it is easier to define his creative goals than to analyze directly his films as finished products. Indeed, they "resist" analysis and this resistance I believe to be the result of a deliberate effort on the director's part' (Gillain, 1985:108-9). This amounts to stating that intentions are more important than the final product, or, translated otherwise, to using Truffaut's status as an *auteur* (unqualified, by this critic) as a pretext for circumventing standard critical practice. One cannot help but wonder by what process, if not through his "analysis-resistant" films, Truffaut has been apotheosised by this critic to the extent that he becomes, indeed, *beyond* criticism. Gillain's critical timidity here also ironically counters the reputation as a merciless critic that Truffaut secured for himself through "A Certain Tendency". Another example of this deification of the director is evidenced in John Taylor's claim that 'Truffaut's films may vary in quality, but it seems unlikely that Truffaut himself will ever too severely disappoint us; he belongs to that select group of artists whose failures are far more exciting than most other men's successes' (Taylor, 1964:211). This position again begs the question of what criteria, if not his films, Truffaut is assessed by and what, moreover, constitutes a 'failure', but these questions remain unanswered by Taylor.

In his discussion of Hitchcock as an *auteur*, Buscombe stresses the importance of differentiating between a structure called “Hitchcock”, and Hitchcock the man and director (Buscombe, 1981:31). The outlined critical approaches typify this potential flaw in the *auteur* theory. For, if Truffaut is to be regarded as an *auteur*, it is, to my mind, precisely to an identifiable structure in his films that this must be attributed. Yet, as we have seen, the first trend equates the director with the content of his films, thus ignoring questions of form. The second tendency ignores the films altogether while lauding their director. What these approaches have in common, though, is that they both take for granted that Truffaut is an *auteur*. In the case of Insdorf, De Baecque and Toubiana, this is evident in the autobiographical readings of the films that indulge Truffaut’s own stipulation that an *auteur* film should be ‘like a confession or diary’. Gillain and Taylor, on the other hand, both deify Truffaut rather than analyse his films, meaning that they engage in exaltation rather than criticism. In other words, both trends pre-assign a status to the director that allows them to make unqualified and uncritical statements about his films. Thus, by depending on the *auteur* theory to validate their claims, these critics overturn the critical process, so to speak. They look to Truffaut the man to elucidate the films, rather than looking for a “Truffaut” structure *in* the films. As Peter Wollen rightly claims: ‘*Auteur* analysis does not consist in re-tracing a film to its origins, to its creative source. It consists of tracing a structure (not a message) within the work, which can then *post-factum* be assigned to an individual, the director, on empirical grounds’ (Wollen, 1996:168).²⁵

This is not to argue that a critical approach to Truffaut need focus on his films as examples of *auteurist* cinema, but rather to point out that this has been the dominant trend, and one that has, moreover, been remarkably deficient in the task it has set for itself. This deficiency is, finally, demonstrated in the ease with which Truffaut and his films have subsequently been reduced to epithets such as ‘nostalgic’, ‘classical’ (Insdorf, 1994:224) and

'romantic' (Taylor, 1964:206), adjectives which signal a primarily sentimental rather than critical engagement with the work. One could, of course, argue that this is the result of the very theory propagated by Truffaut and therefore represents a kind of theoretical miscarriage. But this argument would do nothing but perpetuate what I deem to be the misplaced gaze that has characterised these particular trends of criticism of Truffaut's films.

Having said this, it must also be stated that, given the sheer volume of literature on Truffaut, the two trends identified so far do naturally not exhaust Truffaut's critical repertoire. Another important tendency is the one which reads The 400 Blows as exemplary of the New Wave, not by ascribing *auteurism* to Truffaut, but by virtue of the generic boundaries between "fiction" and "reality" which the film is perceived as transcending. Ana Lopez, for instance, suggests that it 'remains a paradigmatic film for the history of that movement because it exemplifies a changing function and displacement onto fiction of a documentary ideal that is perhaps the central characteristic of the New Wave phenomenon' (Lopez, 1985:144). Lopez does not define what she means by 'documentary ideal', but it is presumably synonymous with what other critics term "realism". Graham Petrie, the author of one of the first books in English on Truffaut, uses the word repeatedly:

Truffaut's "realism" is of the kind that unobtrusively puts to rights our unbalanced and distorted perspective on human experience and places neglected human values back firmly where they belong.

Truffaut's "realism" is essential for the humanising effect which his films have: we are brought into close emotional involvement with the characters and cannot escape, for good or ill, our own affinity with them, while the style and framework of the films, by releasing us from conventional stereotyped reactions leads to a freedom normally beyond our grasp, an awareness of and a desire to take in the dimensions of life which we normally ignore. (Petrie, 1971:168,200)

Petrie thus anticipates Lopez by suggesting that there is a strong element in the films that functions to capture the spectator's attention by enabling a realistic identification with a fictional narrative and/or character. This curiously potent element is "realism", although Petrie does not explain in any technical terms precisely how this is achieved. Fortunately, we can turn to Roy Nelson, who provides some elucidation by explaining that the "realism" of The 400 Blows is effected through 'fidelity to its subject and subordination of the techniques of filmic art to the clarity of the story line and to the believability of the characters' (Nelson, 1985:137). The fact that filmic techniques are noted as being subordinate to narrative suggests that this particular line of criticism does pay attention to both form and content, yet there remains, in my view, a fundamental problem with the emphasis on "realism", or, in Lopez's terms, the 'documentary ideal'. By suggesting that this technique enables a heightened proximity to the narrative – an 'emotional' involvement with 'believable' characters – these critics ascribe a formal transparency to Truffaut's films, and thus recuperate the "naïve realist" or "reproduction" theory that unproblematically equates the documented with the real.

As early as 1947, Bazin underscored the naivety of a conviction in this form of realism by describing it as one of the essential myths of cinema:

The guiding myth ... inspiring the invention of cinema, is the accomplishment of that which dominated in a more or less vague fashion all the techniques of the mechanical reproduction of reality in the nineteenth century, from photography to the phonograph, namely an integral realism, a recreation of the world in its own image, an image unburdened by the freedom of interpretation of the artist or the irreversibility of time. (Bazin, 1992:36)

Wollen reiterates Bazin when he states that, 'Realism was the vocation of the cinema, not to signify, but to reveal' (Wollen, 1969:32). This phrasing is indicative of the essential

ideological passivity which realism ascribes to the director: by claiming access to an existential link between the world and what is represented on screen, these critics paradoxically exempt Truffaut from directorial agency.²⁶ In this way, the “naïve realist” theory is in direct opposition to what George Currie has termed the “representation thesis” and which is, to my mind, the more commonsensical approach. Trevor Ponech summarises this theory as a simple reminder that ‘when we look at photographic and cinematographic images, we see representations but not the things represented, our perceptual access being to the image and not to the referent’ (Ponech, 1997:85). An acknowledgement of the image as representation would necessarily invoke questions of “how” and “why”, which in turn bring into play both historical and ideological determinants. Heath accordingly articulates the historical ignorance of the realist approach when he demands that, ‘Of the reproduction [naïve realist] thesis one has the right to demand to know where the image comes from and what it is doing in the film’ (Heath, 1981b:4). So, the flaw with a line of criticism that insists on realism as the central characteristic of Truffaut’s films is in its prioritisation of content over form and its insistence on regarding the image as referent rather than representation. In other words, these critics engage too readily with the narrative and in the process, neglect to ask important ideological questions regarding Truffaut’s chosen modes of representation.

Another way of explaining this critical trend is as an instance of collusion with the film’s suturing process. The term, first transposed from psychoanalysis to cinema in 1969 by Oudart, designates the procedure by which a spectator is transformed to the subject of a film. According to Oudart, seeing a film occurs in three phases: the first is characterised by simple pleasure in the image; in the second, the viewer loses this pleasure by becoming aware of the frame and the absences and limitations implied by framing; in the third, suture restores pleasure by erasing absence, typically through the device of shot-reverse-shot (Dayan, 1976:448-9).²⁷ It is in this effacement of absence that the (invisible) ideological workings of a

film are situated. In Heath's terms, 'Ideology is *in* the suture' (Heath, 1981b:14). In this context, the critical tendency to laud Truffaut's realism suggests that these critics unproblematically occupy the position of the spectator who progresses through Oudart's three phases of seeing. In other words, they allow themselves to be sutured, and it is this process which results in the fundamental problem of neglecting to take into account Truffaut's agency in constructing the images on screen.

Daniel Dayan also provides a concise explanation of the relationship between suturing and ideology when he suggests that, 'By means of the suture, the film-discourse presents itself as a product without a producer, a discourse without an origin. It speaks. Who speaks? Things speak for themselves and of course, they tell the truth. Classical cinema establishes itself as the ventriloquist of ideology' (Dayan, 1976:451). The first task of a film analyst must therefore be, I believe, to locate oneself *between* Oudart's second and third phases of seeing, that is between the awareness of absence and the process of suturing. In other words, the analyst must be situated in a moment of resistance to being inscribed as the film's subject. In the context of subject inscription as a psychological process, Wollen articulates the ideal position of the analyst as one of risk:

It would situate the consciousness of the reader or spectator no longer outside the work as a receiver, consumer and judge, but force him to put his consciousness at risk within the text itself, so that he is forced to interrogate his own codes, his own method of interpretation, and thus to produce fissures and gaps in the space of his own consciousness (fissures and gaps which exist in reality but which are repressed by an ideology, characteristic of bourgeois society, which insists on the "wholeness" and integrity of each individual consciousness). (Wollen, 1969:162)

The 'fissures and gaps' produced by this critical position mean that loss of pleasure in the image becomes a prerequisite for analysis. Without this loss of pleasure, cinema cannot be

recognised as the discourse that it is.²⁸ It is only from this place that one can read rather than see a film, and thereby access its ideological determinants. Put otherwise, it is here that the politics of film are revealed, or, in Colin MacCabe's terms, in 'the breaking of the imaginary relationship between text and viewer' (MacCabe, 1992:90). It is precisely this imaginary relationship that the suture functions to maintain, and that is consolidated by critics who neglect Truffaut's ideological agency by insisting on his images as referents rather than representations. In this context, an insistence on realism becomes an evasion of politics.

In summary, there are three dominant trends of criticism, the first two of which rely on the *auteur* theory while the third identifies realism as the defining element of Truffaut's cinema. The limitations of these approaches lies, as we have seen, in their common neglect of the important historical and ideological determinants of the films. Yet they are not without merit. These trends provide a valuable starting point from which to progress in a direction that attempts to take account of what has hitherto been neglected. In other words, to begin the critical process of problematising the work, and thereby to undertake two tasks which this thesis proposes to accomplish: firstly, to give the work the critical attention that it deserves, and in so doing, to restore it to its socio-historical context. Existing critical works, or more precisely the silences therein, supply the first methodological tool for these tasks. The second, and crucial, tool will be provided by psychogeography.

2. Psychogeography and Situationism: A Historical Survey

While the Introduction provides the key definition of psychogeography as it will be applied in this work, the concept remains out of context. In order to appreciate its full historical and political significance, this chapter delineates the theoretical scaffolding of both Guy Debord and the Situationist International (S.I.), of which he was considered the leading proponent. This background includes the pivotal influences of Karl Marx and Henri Lefebvre, whose respective works on the commodity and the everyday I chart as central not only to Situationism, but also to what I consider the culmination of Debord's theoretical work, The Society of the Spectacle (1967).

Technically, the term psychogeography can be considered pre-Situationist, as it appeared before the S.I. was officially established. Debord's "Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography" (1955), in which the term is first used, was published in a journal entitled Les Lèvres Nues (Naked Lips), under the aegis of the Lettrist International, a splinter group of Lettrism founded by Debord in 1952. Lettrism had been initiated circa a decade earlier under the leadership of Isidore Isou, a Rumanian former Communist, and was a sufficiently scandalous movement to attract the then adolescent Debord. The specific appeal of Lettrism is succinctly expressed in Debord and Guy Wolman's essay "Why Lettrism?", published in Potlatch, the official Lettrist International journal: 'The outrageous provocations that the Lettrist group has carried out or prepared (poetry reduced to letters, metagraphical recital, cinema without images) unleashes a fatal affliction in the arts. We therefore joined them without hesitation' (Debord & Wolman, 1955).

So, the Lettrist movement provided Debord with a platform from which to launch a lifestyle and a career characterised by controversy and, not least, disagreement with colleagues. The first of these was with Isou,¹ and led to the formation of what Martin Jay, in

his incisive book on ocularcentrism in twentieth-century France, terms the 'more politically radical' Lettrist International (Jay, 1993: 420).² This group, with the added influence of the Surrealist inspired Cobra and Imaginist Bauhaus movements, would soon mutate into the S.I., albeit retaining several important concepts either directly borrowed from Lettrism or independently developed in the Lettrist International. The most important of these include the theory of the *dérive* (the "drift"), *détournement* ("diversion"),³ the importance of play, the construction of situations, and psychogeography, all of which are now generally regarded as key Situationist terms.⁴ But their origin in other movements is an important indicator of the theoretical continuity that is necessary to historicise Debord's intellectual work, which is too often now decontextualised and confined to his opus The Society of the Spectacle.

One of the most influential pre-Situationist texts is Ivan Chcheglov's "Formulary for a New Urbanism" (1953), which describes the poverty of human creativity as a result of increasingly artificial urban space:

Darkness and obscurity are banished by artificial lighting, and the seasons by air conditioning; night and summer are losing their charm and dawn is disappearing. The man of the cities thinks he has escaped from cosmic reality, but there is no corresponding expansion of his dream life. The reason is clear: dreams spring from reality and are realized in it... A mental disease has swept the planet: banalization. Everyone is hypnotized by production and conveniences [sic] sewage system, elevator, bathroom, washing machine. (Chcheglov, 1953)

Chcheglov goes on to advocate 'a complete spiritual transformation' which will come about through 'constructing situations.... This need for *absolute* creation has always been intimately associated with the need to *play* with architecture, time and space.' Finally, the technique by which to achieve this is the 'continuous *dérive*. The changing of landscapes from one hour to the next will result in complete disorientation.' So, while we wait for the

advent of Chchegllov's vision of glass houses that can turn with the sun and move with the tides, individuals are encouraged to *dérive*, that is, to wilfully disorient themselves physically so as to be released from the stultifying comforts of synthetic environments.

This linking of the environment to psychology is clearly related to and anticipates psychogeography, particularly in the context of cities as prime sites for *dériving* as stated in Potlatch: 'Big cities favor the distraction we call the *dérive*. The *dérive* is a technique for moving around without a goal. It is based on the influence that décor exerts' (Debord & Fillon, 1954). Despite this Lettrist origin, the *dérive* will, indeed, become a primary means by which to undertake psychogeographical situationism, as proclaimed in the official journal, Situationist International, in 1958: 'One of the basic situationist practices is the *dérive*, a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances. *Dérives* involve playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects, and are thus quite different from the classic notions of journey or stroll' (S.I. 2). Yet however stable the theory that he proposed turned out to be, Chchegllov himself was less so. He was excluded from the Lettrist International shortly after writing his article, for reasons of 'mythomania, interpretative delirium, lack of revolutionary consciousness' (Potlatch 2, 1954). He later ended up in an asylum, but kept in touch with Debord, who published one of his letters in S.I. in 1964, in which Chchegllov retracts his earlier call for a 'continuous *dérive*', claiming that too much "therapy" is potentially dangerous and therefore contraindicated.⁵

Another key-concept devised during the Lettrist years is that of *détournement*. Wollen's definition of this practice is simple and concise: 're-contextualization and active plagiarism' (Wollen, 2001:34), while Jay provides a more nuanced explanation that conveys the politics of *détournement*: 'it meant confronting the Spectacle with its own effluvia and reversing their normal ideological function' (Jay, 1993:424). The technique itself is not specifically Lettrist nor Situationist, as avowed by Debord and Wolman in "A User's Guide

to *Détournement*’, presenting it ‘not as our own invention, but as a generally widespread practice which we propose to systematize’ (Debord & Wolman, 1956). The “system” of *détournement* is thus, in effect, a *naming* of this ‘widespread practice’ which thereby secures it as a Situationist concept. It gives a name to, among other things, the kind of exercises that drew Debord to Lettrism in the first place: ‘poetry reduced to letters, metagraphical recital, cinema without images’.⁶ Although to some extent comparable to parody, *détournement* is essentially concerned with dismantling artistic canons and, moreover, erasing the hierarchical divide between art and life. It was envisaged as a ‘real means of proletarian artistic education. the first step toward a *literary communism*’ (Debord & Wolman, 1956).

This is reiterated a decade later by Mustapha Khayati, a respected Situationist intellectual who would resign in 1969 to join the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Khayati advocated *détournement* as a means of liberating language from ideology, from ‘the watchdogs of the reigning spectacle’ who are ‘emptying content from the most corrosive concepts and putting them back into circulation in the service of maintaining alienation’ (Khayati, 1966). In other words, by re-contextualising hegemonic terminology, *détournement* could put an end to this spectacular impoverishment of language which he concludes is a form of ‘dadaism in reverse’. *Détournement* could be used, moreover, as an antidote to what Khayati saw as the corruption of Marxism:

To salvage Marx’s thought it is necessary to continually make it more precise, to correct it and reformulate it in the light of a hundred years of reinforcement of alienation and of the possibilities of negating alienation. Marx needs to be *détourned* by those who are continuing on this historical path, not moronically quoted by the thousand varieties of coopters. (*ibid.*)

So, in a process which recalls Marx's unmasking of the commodity to reveal the social relations it conceals, 'the transparency of human relations will replace the poverty of words under the old regime of opaqueness. Words will not cease to *work* until people do' (*ibid.*). But *détournement* is not confined to language: 'Finally, when we have got to the stage of constructing situations – the ultimate goal of all our activity – everyone will be free to *détourn* entire situations by deliberately changing this or that determinant condition of them' (Debord & Wolman, 1956). In this way, psychogeography, in its context of reinvention, becomes a form of *détournement*, or, an awareness of psychogeographical effects becomes indispensable to the successful construction or *détournement* of a situation. As already expressed with regard to the *dérive*, the city – and specifically Paris - was the definitive space in which to undertake the practice. As Jay explains: 'Only there could the practice of urban nomadism *détourne* the modern cityscape into a liberated zone in which authentic life would loosen the deathgrip of dessicated [sic] images' (Jay, 1993:425).

The stress on the city in theorising the *dérive*, *détournement* and psychogeography is an important indicator of the historical context out of which these concepts materialised. The founding of the Lettrist International in 1952 coincided with the final years of the Five Year Plan (1947-1953) conceptualised and implemented by Jean Monnet, the Minister of Commerce in France's first post-war government. It was a national project of modernisation designed to counter the debilitating effects of the war on France's economy and infrastructure, and also what James McMillan terms 'the humiliating experience of the Occupation' (McMillan, 1992:168). The success of Monnet's plan was a result of the close collaboration between the French State and industry,⁷ and also the American aid that formed part of U.S. Secretary of State George Marshall's European Recovery Plan.⁸ From a hegemonic viewpoint, this was, then, a time of unsurpassed economic growth and urban efficiency, or, in Eric Hobsbawm's terms, the 'Golden Age of capitalism' (Hobsbawm,

1994:273). Yet for the Lettrists and the soon-to-be Situationists, among others, it was a critical period that witnessed the establishment of the socio-geographical structures that would alienate individuals by optimising consumerism. In short, Monnet's policies helped to lay the foundational capitalist situation that Debord and his colleagues would devote their energies to dismantling.

To this end, the concept of play was also central to Situationism as a means of annihilating the capitalist division between work and leisure:

The element of competition must disappear in favor of a more authentically collective concept of play: the common creation of selected ludic ambiances. The central distinction that must be transcended is that established between play and ordinary life, play kept as an isolated and provisory exception.... Ordinary life, previously conditioned by the problem of survival, can be dominated rationally – this possibility is at the heart of every conflict of our time – and play, radically broken from a confined ludic time and space, must invade the whole of life.

(“Contribution to a Situationist Definition of Play”, *S.I.* 1, 1958)

The individual empowerment intimated in this “definition” of play – that ‘ordinary life ... can be dominated rationally’ - is the basis for the close relationship between play and the construction of situations already intimated by Chcheglov (‘This need for *absolute* creation has always been intimately associated with the need to *play* with architecture, time and space’, Chcheglov, 1953). So, the Situationist game is political: playing, by means of the *dérive*,⁹ *détournement*, and psychogeography, will necessarily produce novel situations that will not only challenge literal and physical hegemonic structures but in so doing, will set in motion the historical progression that these structures are perceived as having halted through the processes of alienation characteristic of consumerist culture. To the question ‘what really is the situation?’, the “Situationist Manifesto” accordingly answers: ‘It’s the realization of a

better game, which more exactly is provoked by human presence. The revolutionary gamesters of all countries can be united in the S.I. to commence the emergence from the prehistory of daily life' (S.I. 4, 1960).¹⁰ Finally, outside of their specific application to language and art, the concepts henceforth elaborated fall, in Situationist vocabulary, under the umbrella term of Unitary Urbanism (U.U.). Like psychogeography, U.U. is defined as at once a critical concept and a potential practice:

U.U. is not a doctrine of urbanism, but a critique of urbanism. ...U.U. is a matter of reaching – beyond immediately useful – an enthralling functional environment. ... In light of the fact that today's cities themselves are presented as lamentable spectacles, a supplement to the museums for tourists driven around in glass-in [sic] buses, U.U. envisages the urban environment as the terrain of participatory games. ... U.U. is opposed to the fixation of people at certain points of a city. It is the foundation for a civilization of leisure and play. ("Unitary Urbanism at the End of the 1950s", S.I. 3, 1959)

The idea behind Unitary Urbanism thus invokes the 'new culture' advocated in the "Manifesto". It is a culture is predicated on two primary tenets: that it be 'against the spectacle', and secondly, that it be a culture of 'total participation' ("Manifesto", S.I., 1960).

The revolutionary potential of this Situationist culture – a macrocosm of the situation constructed through play - finally finds fuller (and more militant) expression in Raoul Vaneigem's The Revolution of Everyday Life (1967):

Suffering is the pain of constraints. An atom of pure delight, no matter how small, will hold it at bay. To work on the side of delight and authentic festivity can hardly be distinguished from preparing for a general insurrection.

The complete unchaining of pleasure is the surest way to the revolution of everyday life, to the construction of the whole man.

Henceforward, the total game and the revolution of everyday life are one.

(Vaneigem, 1967)

As devoted to the 'new culture' that these formulations appear to be, however, this book in fact led to Vaneigem's exclusion from the S.I., on the basis that he was constructing a revolutionary theory but neglecting actual social relations. His lamentable enterprise is recorded in "Notes to Serve as a History of the S.I. from 1969 to 1971" as follows:

Vaneigem wrote a revolutionary book in a certain period, a book that he knew neither how to translate into practice nor how to correct in the light of the advances of the revolutionary epoch. In this matter, one can only judge the beauty of a book by that of the life of its author. Moreover, at a time when so "subjective" a book ... can only be the consummation of a life generously risked and tasted, Vaneigem has only prefaced his nonexistent life. (Anon, 1972)

Vaneigem was thus another in a string of transitory Situationists who "failed", in the end, to live up to the political ideals set forth by the S.I. and, more specifically, by Debord, whose unofficial leadership was secured, if by nothing else, by his conspicuous constancy in the group. The Revolution of Everyday Life nevertheless remains an important testimony to some of the key Situationist concerns of the 1960s.

This brings us to the final, and arguably most influential, Situationist text: Debord's The Society of the Spectacle (1967). Given that it was published in the same year as Vaneigem's book, and was far from slandered, it is, perhaps, fair to assume that this book was seen to represent the "correct" version of revolutionary theory. In other words, that Debord *did* know how to translate his theory into practice, and *did* know how to correct his mistakes 'in light of the advances of the revolutionary epoch'. How true all this is in retrospect is as debatable as the actual role played by the Situationists in May 1968.¹¹ Another less than encouraging indication is Wollen's claim that by the end of 1972 (at which time the S.I. dissolved), 'Debord's political theory was more or less reduced to the title of his book, generalized as an isolated catchphrase, separated from its theoretical project' (Wollen, 1993:124).

Debord's personal career aside, there is no doubt of the longevity and (still increasing) relevance of the theme of the spectacle that his book was the first to articulate in such depth.¹² Indeed, Jay asserts that, 'By the end of the 1970s, scarcely any discussion in France or elsewhere of the manipulative power of mass culture could resist blaming its spectacular dimension' (Jay, 1993:432). One confirmation of this is in the writings of two prominent intellectuals. The statements on consumer society by the North American critic Susan Sontag and the French intellectual Roland Barthes, written respectively in 1973 and 1981, could both serve as "nutshell" definitions for the society of the spectacle:

Needing to have reality confirmed and experience enhanced by photographs is an aesthetic consumerism to which everyone is now addicted. Industrial societies turn their citizens into image-junkies; it is the most irresistible form of mental pollution. (Sontag, 1973:24)

What characterises the so-called advanced societies is that they today consume images and no longer, like those of the past, beliefs; they are therefore more liberal, less fanatical, but also more “false”.

(Barthes, 2000:118-9)¹³

Yet Debord’s text is not only descriptive; it delineates a specific project which brings together important Situationist concepts in service of constructing the ideal non-spectacular psychogeographical situation, or, in Debord’s (Marxian)¹⁴ terms, ‘the anti-state dictatorship of the proletariat’ (Debord, 1995:179).¹⁵ The evolution of the concept of a situation from an individual solution to a means of liberating an entire society is concisely summarised: ‘From the start, psychogeography was bound up with the creation of situations; and the concept of situations was expanded, in time, to cover not just the city, but the whole of society, the totality of possibilities open in an unalienated community’ (Wollen, 2001:131). It is the realisation of this unalienated community that The Society of the Spectacle sets as its project.

The section on “Environmental Planning” is the most pertinent in the context of psychogeography, which takes its place in the spectacular society through Debord’s critique of urbanisation as a capitalist ‘mode of appropriation of the natural and human environment’ (Debord, 1995:169). According to Debord, economic history is embodied in the division between town and country,¹⁶ but this division is, with the advent of the spectacle, becoming less discernible. This occurs in several ways, such as the gradual decrease of geographical distances between town and country as well as the proliferation of peripheral “centres” (either in the form of new CBDs or shopping malls) that is the result of urban expansion. The outcome of the blurring of these previously (to a large extent) unexamined¹⁷ boundaries is not, however, the abolishment of separation. On the contrary, Debord argues that urbanisation lays the very foundations that are necessary for a more thorough and disturbing form of *internal* separation. It is the separation of classes that is achieved by isolating individuals

together.¹⁸ But while this is designed to secure productivity by producing a geographical concentration of labour (or, in the case of shopping malls, to secure optimum consumption) it also inevitably presents a potential for organising revolution. The spectacular society allays this threat by ensuring that each “pocket” of isolation is replete with images that reinforce the status quo. That is, it ‘ensures that ... [the individual’s] isolation is filled with the dominant images – images that indeed attain their full force only by virtue of this isolation’ (172).¹⁹

The implications of Debord’s argument are twofold: firstly, if the history of the economy is commensurate with the division between town and country, and that division is threatened by urbanisation, then the age of the spectacle represents an era of gradual historical paralysis. The manifestation of this paralysis – and this is the second implication – is that the images that prevail provide spectators with a form of pseudo-experience, as opposed to “real” lived experience. So, the design of a capitalist society is predicated on the production of individual alienation through the consumption of hegemonic images. The disalienation that The Society of the Spectacle foresees is to be effected psychogeographically, that is, through *détournement*, *dérive* and play, each in their dual capacity as critique (a theoretical concept) and technique (this concept put into practice):

The same history that threatens this twilight world is capable of subjecting space to a directly experienced time. The proletarian revolution is that *critique of human geography* whereby individual and communities must construct places and events commensurate with the appropriation, no longer just of their labor, but of their total history. By virtue of the resulting mobile space of play, and by virtue of freely chosen variations in the rules of the game, the independence of places will be rediscovered without any new exclusive tie to the soil, and thus too the authentic *journey* will be restored to us, along with authentic life understood as a journey containing its whole meaning within itself. (178)

This formulation makes clear Debord's theoretical and political maturation over the course of almost two decades from his leadership of the Lettrist International to the highly idiosyncratic The Society of the Spectacle. In relation to Debord's position in the S.I., this book did more than, as Jay suggests, help 'to solidify his role as its central spokesman, comparable to Breton in Surrealist circles' (Jay, 1993:431). I would argue on the contrary that, coupled with its critical endurance, the fact that the book was not published under the aegis of the S.I. in fact separated Debord from the by now conventional association with Situationism and established him as a cultural critic in his own right (particularly following the dismantling of the S.I. in 1972). That this intellectual advancement owed much, if not all, to the successes and failures of the Lettrist and Situationist movements is, by now, self-evident. But aside from the general stimuli provided by these groups, as well as those of the Surrealist, Imaginist Bauhaus and Cobra movements, we can, in addition, identify in Debord's work a theoretical dialogue with two other pivotal influences: Western Marxism, in general,²⁰ and Henri Lefebvre in particular.

One generation before Debord, Lefebvre's political and critical reputation was, primarily, established through The Critique of Everyday Life (1947). This book, written during his thirty-year membership to the French Communist Party, reveals several foundational concepts for Debord's own writings, not least Lefebvre's evaluation of the yet-to-be-named spectacular society:

We are now entering the vast domain of the *illusory reverse image*. What we find is a false world: firstly because it is not a world, and because it presents itself as true, and because it mimics real life in order to replace the real by its opposite; by replacing real unhappiness by fictions of happiness, for example – by offering fiction in response to the real need for happiness – and so on. This is the "world" of most films, most of the press, the theatre, the music hall: of a large sector of leisure activities. (Lefebvre, 1991a:35)

The echo of Marx and Engels' celebrated description of ideology as a *camera obscura* is obvious,²¹ and signifies Lefebvre's reliance on a Marxian framework to realise the project that is the title of his book. The aim of this critique alludes to the most obvious similarity between Lefebvre and Debord; that they both take as a premise Marx and Engels' insistence on the need for theory *and* action in order to occasion any form of revolution. In other words, they both reject, as Marx had done before them, philosophy as an absolute and dehistoricised category.²²

Lefebvre, however, claims to distinguish himself from Marx and Engels in methodology: whereas, he contends, the latter sought to render philosophy pragmatic by attempting to understand "real" life through an investigation of dominant ideologies, Lefebvre suggests the possibility of understanding ideology through an investigation of everyday life. In other words, while Marx and Engels study reality through ideas, Lefebvre proposed that 'it is equally possible to follow this link in another direction, taking real life as the point of departure in an investigation of how the ideas which express it and the forms of consciousness which reflect it emerge.... In this way we can arrive at a *criticism of life by ideas* which in a sense extends and completes the first procedure' (145). Just how different a 'direction' Lefebvre was suggesting is not immediately clear if we refer to the proposition in question in The German Ideology (1932):

In direct contrast to German philosophy which descends from heaven to earth, here we ascend from earth to heaven. That is to say, we do not set out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh. We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process.... Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life. (Marx & Engels, 1977:164)

By setting out from 'real men', this passage clearly espouses the same progression from 'life' to 'ideas' that Lefebvre suggests. This move from 'earth to heaven' is, furthermore, the prerequisite for Marx's vision of historical materialism as a revolutionary project of abolishing abstractions and restoring the primacy of pragmatism and sensuousness in society.²³ The only point of contention, then, is to what extent Lefebvre diverges from a Marxian methodology.²⁴

Marx's direct influence is, on the other hand, unquestionable, particularly if we return to the phrasing of Lefebvre's formulation, which makes clear his supposition that there exists a direct link between everyday life and ideology, or, put otherwise, that ideologies are synonymous with 'ideas that express' life or 'forms of consciousness which reflect it'. This notion is reiterated when he goes on to suggest that his critical methodology allows for an examination of what he terms "mystifications":

[F]or ideologies are based upon real life, yet at the same time they disguise or transpose that real life. A complete understanding of mystification presupposes that the link between ideas and the real has been followed in both directions, thus incorporating criticism of life by its own consciousness of itself. (Lefebvre, 1991a:145)

This act of disguising or transposing real life establishes a direct link between Lefebvre's notion of ideology and Marx's assessment of the commodity:

A commodity is ... a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour. (Marx, 1887:22)

So, like the Marxian demystification of commodities, Lefebvre's critique of everyday life seeks to demystify ideology, to reveal its basis in real life. It is only through this revelation that ideologies can be challenged and destabilised. In other words, the critique of everyday life would remove ideologies from the protective realm of 'heaven'. Lefebvre thus conceptualises a means of following Marx's recommendation in the final of his "Theses on Feuerbach" (1845): 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it' (Marx, 1997:157).²⁵ We can now discern a clear historical linearity between Marx's discourse on the commodity and Lefebvre's everyday, both of which become, in Situationist semantics, subsumed in the spectacle, that ubiquitous phenomenon designated by Debord as 'the *chief-product* of present-day society' (Debord, 1995:15) and therefore the ultimate manifestation of the dominant consumerist ideology.

The actual relationship between Debord and Lefebvre began amicably enough but was like with so many of Debord's acquaintances, marred by a disagreeable split. This followed the publication in 1965 of Lefebvre's book on the Paris Commune,²⁶ deemed an 'awful book' in an S.I. article ironically entitled "Lefebvre the Historian". The work, furthermore, earned Lefebvre the accusation of being a plagiarist: 'It is well known that by hastily copying fourteen situationist theses Henri Lefebvre purported to offer a new interpretation of the Paris Commune' (S.I., 10, 1966). It is, perhaps, this split that explains the conspicuous absence, besides an early debate in the S.I. on the merits of the situation versus the Lefebvrian "moment",²⁷ of references to one another in any of Debord's or Lefebvre's works.²⁸ This in spite of the importance Hussey attributes to their initial meeting in 1958: 'From this encounter onwards, much of Lefebvre's work would be either in reaction to or in debate with Guy Debord. Debord briefly put himself in the position of a pupil attending Lefebvre's lectures in the company of Jean Baudrillard and Henry Raymond' (Hussey, 2001:140). This phrasing suggests an overt intellectual – and largely one-way - influence between Debord and

Lefebvre, which I would argue is misleading. There is, rather, between their respective works, a covert *dialogue* that also extends historically to include Marx.

We can verify this by returning to one of Debord's central claims in The Society of the Spectacle, namely that of historical paralysis as a central characteristic of spectacular society. This paralysis manifests itself, to recall, in the omnipresence of images that alienate individuals by providing them with pseudo-experience as opposed to real life. So, consumerist culture is structured to increase individual alienation through the consumption of images that function, essentially, as hegemonic codes of behaviour. The paradox of this situation lies in the advertised necessity of consumption even as it destroys critical sensibilities, a necessity which is, in turn, dictated by these very codes that are consumed. In short, the spectacle's perpetuity paradoxically depends on its being consumed. And while providing fodder for the spectacle, the consumer, too, is fed on, stripped of individuality by the act of consuming. This argument can, in turn, be read as an extension of Lefebvre's summary of Marx's critique of individuality, in which the contradictory nature of capitalism is revealed by the fact that it is a system that simultaneously increases individual fulfilment (according to the logic of production) *and* alienation. Lefebvre goes on to validate Marx's analysis in his own historical context:

And nowadays we are still struggling with this deep – in other words everyday – contradiction: what makes each of us a human being also turns that human being into something inhuman. More biological than truly human, this organization [capitalist society] smothers the individual, dividing him and stunting his development at the very moment it is striving to create him as a human individual. It is just one of the many painful contradictions our era is experiencing, and which we must resolve if we are to move forward. These contradictions are at the same time a measure of greatness, the richness and the suffering of the age in which we live. We are all familiar with the drama of youth destroyed by this arrested state of the human being, as also with that drama of

more mature, more conscious years, acted out within the asphyxiating straightjacket of fragmented activities. (Lefebvre, 1991a:150)

That Lefebvre published this critique in 1947 and Debord reworked it in 1967 is testimony not only to the common point of dialogue that these two theorists found in Marx, but more importantly, to the ongoing cultural pertinence of this Marxian line of thought.

To summarise, Lefebvre studies the everyday as expressive of a dominant ideology and its attendant myths. While taking a similar approach, Debord isolates the spectacle as a manifestation of capitalism, a manifestation that is at once everyday and mythological: 'it is the very heart of society's real unreality' (Debord, 1995:6). The role of geographical organisation in the spectacular society is to optimise delivery and consumption of the spectacle. In order for this to be implemented successfully, argues Debord, the boundaries between town and country are necessarily blurred, for it is only in the realm of the *urban* that the productivity and specialisation required by capitalism can be wholly realised.²⁹ So, geography functions as a category of the everyday that can be investigated in order to arrive at the ideology of which it is an expression. Psychogeography, then, entails an extension of this analysis to consider the effect of that geographical layout on the psychology of individuals and, moreover, to challenge or *détourne* this effect. That is, it allows for an analysis and potential "correction" – interpretation *and* change - of the psychological effect of a specific ideology.

3. Truffaut and the Situationists: A Structure of Feeling

All changes in the methods of an art ... are related, essentially, to changes in man's radical structure of feeling.
(Raymond Williams, "Film and the Dramatic Tradition")

In this chapter I suggest that, despite superficial differences between Truffaut and Debord, there exist strong grounds for aligning them in what Raymond Williams terms a "structure of feeling". This shared context is, I argue, expressed both thematically and formally, and functions to support my proposed reading of The 400 Blows from a psychogeographical perspective. I conclude the chapter with an analysis of the credit sequence of the film that demonstrates what I believe to be the pertinence of this Situationist concept to Truffaut's film.

There is no documentation to suggest any direct link between Truffaut and Debord; no evidence of their ever having met, much less of any influence the one may have had on the other. The closest suggestion to a common interest between the two is provided by Hussey, who likens the opening scenes of Debord's film Critique of Separation (*Critique de la Séparation*, 1961) to a film by Jean-Luc Godard. 'The aim was', Hussey contends, 'as it was for Godard, François Truffaut and Alain Resnais, the most notable young turks at the forefront of the "New Wave" in French cinema, to capture something of the textures and surfaces of real life' (Hussey, 2001:154). Apart from this interest in 'real life', all evidence would, in fact, point to an antagonistic hypothetical relationship between the two, primarily because of their opposing political views, as expressed both personally and professionally.¹ The *auteur* theory with which Truffaut is closely associated is, as we have seen, essentially reactionary. Situationism, on the other hand, clearly belongs to the radical left, meaning that Debord would conceivably provide an excellent target for what Truffaut's biographers term his habitual attack on 'left-wing intellectuals and their "cultural political activism"'

(De Baecque and Toubiana, 2000:80). This means that, superficially, Debord and Truffaut – as well as any manifestations of their respective positions, such as psychogeography and The 400 Blows – stand in direct opposition to one another.

Yet despite this seeming contradiction there exists, I maintain, an important premise for bringing together Truffaut and the concerns central to Debord and Situationism in this work. This premise is a shared structure of feeling,² and for the purposes of this discussion, it is worth quoting Williams' definition in full:

In principle, it seems clear that the dramatic conventions of any given period are fundamentally related to the structure of feeling in that period. I use the phrase *structure of feeling* because it seems to me more accurate, in this context, than *ideas* or *general life*.... In the study of a period, we may be able to reconstruct, with more or less accuracy, the material life, the general social organization, and, to a large extent, the dominant ideas.... But while we may, in the study of a past period, separate out particular aspects of life, and treat them as if they were self-contained, it is obvious that this is only how they may be studied, not how they were experienced. We examine each element as a precipitate, but in the living experience of the time every element was in solution, an inseparable part of a complex whole. And it seems to be true, from the nature of art, that it is from such a totality that the artist draws; it is in art, primarily, that the effect of the totality, the dominant structure of feeling, is expressed and embodied. To relate a work of art to any part of that observed totality may, in varying degrees, be useful; but it is a common experience, in analysis, to realize that when one has measured the work against the separable parts, there yet remains *some element for which there is no external counterpart*. This element, I believe, is what I have named the *structure of feeling* of a period, and it is only realizable through experience of the work of art itself, as a whole. (Williams, 1954:33; my emphases)

Williams' concept is important on several levels. Firstly, by differentiating between 'ideas or general life' and a 'structure of feeling', Williams refuses the transparency of form that

realism insists on. This is implied by that fact that a structure of feeling, that 'element for which there is no external counterpart' prevents absolute reconstruction of a given period. In other words, any image will always be a representation rather than a reflection of 'general life'. The second significant point Williams makes concerns the relationship between life and art. He suggests that art derives from lived reality ('it is from such a totality [of 'the living experience of the time'] that the artist draws'), and thus validates the idea that studying a work of art provides a means of access to a particular structure of feeling. His insistence, furthermore, on the necessity of experiencing the 'work of art itself, *as a whole*' (my emphasis) means that all aspects of a text must be taken into account, including content, form and socio-historical context. To begin with, then, Williams' notion of structure of feeling provides a theoretical foundation for reading The 400 Blows as a representation of a particular historical period, namely the end of the 1950s in France, the context out of which psychogeography also derives.

Yet a shared historical context is clearly not enough to justify applying a Situationist concept as an analytical tool to a New Wave film. Also, the fact that The 400 Blows is a film and psychogeography a theory is potentially problematic in that the latter could be taken as an example of a historical *idea*, as distinct from a structure of feeling. But if we keep in mind the dual capacity of psychogeography as at once a critique and a technique, it is clear that it represents not just an idea but also a practice. It is my contention that The 400 Blows and the concept of psychogeography are motivated by the same impulses, a commonality which not only locates them in the same structure of feeling, but also justifies reading the film from a Situationist perspective. Applying psychogeography to The 400 Blows is, therefore, not to suggest that Truffaut's first film may be more radical than the director himself claims,³ nor, it follows, is it an attempt to align Truffaut with Debord's leftist politics. In fact, their outspoken political differences only serve to strengthen, I believe, the existence of that

'element for which there is no external counterpart': that it can be identified in two so discrepant camps stresses this structure of feeling as truly pervasive, rather than the more common phenomenon of a shared thematic concern among artistic or political movements with obvious ideological similarities.⁴

The specificities of the structure of feeling that draws together Truffaut and Debord can only emerge through analysis, and this analysis must, as Williams argues, consider the film in its totality. This immediately distinguishes the present discussion from that of the majority of previous analyses which have tended to focus on one aspect of the film – whether content or *auteurism*, for instance - to the exclusion of all else. It is only by reading the text as a whole that important contradictions can emerge, and through which we can, according to Pierre Macherey, discover the silences or absences of a work:

The concealed order of the work is ... less significant than its real determinate disorder (its disarray). The order which it professes is merely an imagined order, projected onto disorder, the fictive resolution of ideological conflicts, a resolution so precarious that it is obvious in the very letter of the text where incoherence and incompleteness burst forth. This distance which separates the work from the ideology which it transforms is rediscovered in the very letter of the work: it is fissured, unmade even in its making. A new kind of necessity can be defined: by an absence, a lack. (Macherey, 1981:194-5)⁵

The echoes of the suturing process here are not incidental: Macherey is, in essence, describing the resistance to suturing which is essential to determining the ideological context of a work. It is by severing ideological seams that the 'imagined order' of a work is disrupted, leading to the discovery of absences. And these absences represent, I would argue, the textual manifestation (or lack thereof) of Williams' structure of feeling. So, the first step will be to define the signifying mechanisms at work in The 400 Blows, through which we can access

any potential inconsistencies in the text. These will then allow us to define the structure of feeling underlying the work and relate it to that of Situationism.

On a more theoretical plane, Heath provides an important argument regarding film as the natural site for a conjunction of historical materialism and psychoanalysis:

Cinema brings historical materialism and psychoanalysis together in such a way that the consideration of film and ideology begins from and constantly returns us to their conjuncture, in such a way that from the analysis of cinema, of film, we may be able to engage with theoretical issues of a more general scope, issues crucial for a materialist analysis of institutions and practices. (Heath, 1981b:4)

Heath's proposal is pertinent to the present discussion in the way that firstly, his designation of film as a means of access to 'theoretical issues of a more general scope' concurs with Williams' suggestion that a work of art is an expression and embodiment of something exterior to it, that is, a structure of feeling. In addition, the investigation facilitated by the 'issues' that an analysis of film exposes, namely 'a materialist analysis of ideological institutions and practices', corresponds precisely with the theoretical project of Situationism, while historical materialism and psychoanalysis are both indispensable to psychogeography as a system of critique. Heath goes on to specify the functionality of psychoanalysis and historical materialism in film analysis by the way in which, 'Psychoanalysis becomes ... within historical materialism, the description of the constitution of the individual (subject-)support as subject for interpellation in discursive formations as ideological subject' (104). We have already seen that the constitution of the 'ideological subject' in film takes place through the system of suture. So, Heath proposes a specifically Marxist framework to disrupt this process, a disruption which will, in turn, enable an analysis of ideological institutions and practices.

Furthermore, the relationship between film and ideology is, crucially, not limited to a common structure of feeling, but also to film as an economic product. As Jean-Luc Comolli and Jean Narboni claim in their seminal essay “Cinema/Ideology/Criticism” (1969), film is,

a particular product, manufactured within a given system of economic relations, and involving labour (...) to produce – a condition to which even “independent” filmmakers and the “new cinema” are subject – assembling a certain number of workers for this purpose (...). It becomes transformed into a commodity, possessing exchange value.... On the other hand, as a result of being a material product, it is also an ideological product of the system, which in France means capitalism. (Comolli & Narboni, 1992:683-4)

In this context, Truffaut’s film is, before “New Wave”, “*auteurist*” or whichever label conferred on it, an ideological product. Or, in Situationist terms, it remains a historically specific form of the spectacle and therefore an expression of a particular ideology. It thus follows that it be an object of study for the analysis of ideology, revealed through a film’s system of subject construction. This system, also known as suture, is, according to Heath, best accessed through a critical method combining historical materialism and psychoanalysis. Psychogeography as critique provides this method and thereby validates an analysis of The 400 Blows from a Situationist perspective. Granted, this line of reasoning could serve to validate a Situationist reading of any film, since Comolli and Narboni’s statement reveals the economic homogeneity of film in general. Yet if we return to Heath, who stresses that ‘each film is specific in the ideological operation of its text and in its operation of the ideological specificity of film’ (Heath, 1981:9), we can distinguish between the application of psychogeography as critique to The 400 Blows in its ‘ideological specificity of film’, while, as we shall see, psychogeography as technique becomes important in the ‘ideological operation of its text’, that is, in the context of the film’s own signifying mechanisms. It is

here that fundamental thematic and structural similarities are located, and hence where a shared structure of feeling will emerge.

As noted, the theme of the effect of the environment is pervasive in The 400 Blows. Critics have repeatedly remarked on the difference between the protagonist Antoine Doinel when he is within the confines of societal structures (home, school, reformatory, jail) and outside of these structures (fairground, streets, the sea). Holmes and Ingram, for instance, make the following observation regarding the film's two geographical and psychological domains:

The film contains a number of images of pleasure, mobility, imagination and emotional warmth, but these are all situated outside the institutions that shape future citizens.... There is a clear opposition between the repressive (phallic) social order, which Antoine will nevertheless have to enter if he is to survive, and the pleasurable, creative domain associated with transgressive behaviour and with fiction. (Holmes & Ingram, 1998:147)

The neat distinction provided by Holmes and Ingram between structures that are, on the one hand, 'repressive' and, on the other, 'pleasurable', suggest the possibility of reading some of this film's thematic concerns in the context of what Wollen terms Phase 1 of Situationism (1957-1962), in which Debord and his contemporaries espoused 'play as free and creative activity' as a means to transform the oppressive character of everyday life in a capitalist society (Wollen, 1993:121). In other words, Antoine's character can be read as an expression of the *desire* for freedom from the 'repressive' geographical structures that Debord gives fullest articulation in The Society of the Spectacle when he designates the proletarian movement, to recall, as 'that *critique of human geography* whereby individuals and communities must construct places and events commensurate with the appropriation, no longer just of their labor, but of their total history' (Debord, 1995:178).

Furthermore, the primacy of 'geography' as a category of the everyday that can be investigated and challenged means that The 400 Blows, which takes place in Paris - a "real" geographical location in which an everyday is realised by its inhabitants - provides fertile ground for a psychogeographical assessment. Granted, the perspective of Paris that the film presents is qualified in two important ways: it is, on the one hand, the literal perspective of Truffaut, whose direction of the film dictates the construction of sequences and thus the spectator's gaze; on the other hand, it is a Paris experienced by the fictional Antoine Doinel, who, as the protagonist, functions as the spectator's primary site of identification. These perspectives, although at times in tandem, amount to two forms of subjective interaction with the city: Truffaut's, manifested in the film's mechanical representation of Paris, and Antoine's, manifested in the emotional responses of this character to the geographical structures and social institutions with which he is confronted. The points-of-view of Truffaut and Antoine loosely correspond to two of the three "looks" in the cinema identified by Laura Mulvey, namely 'that of the camera as it records the pro-filmic event' (Mulvey, 1976:314) - Truffaut's directorial perspective - and the intradiegetic look, or 'that of the characters at each other within the screen illusion' (*ibid.*), which will, for the present discussion, be limited to Antoine's character. The third look, 'that of the audience as it watches the final product' (*ibid.*) is equally important as it relates to how the film situates the spectator. Yet as I have suggested, this location is, for the most part, aligned with that of either the first or second looks so does not, in the first instance, merit a category of its own. Later in the film, however, this look is separated from the other two, the critical importance of which will be discussed in due course.⁶

The first task of a psychogeographical reading of the film thus consists in identifying the polarities that define the film - established variously through the looks of both Antoine and Truffaut - and tracing Antoine's movement within these structures. Through the course of

this analysis it will become evident that not only does psychogeography provide an important frame for understanding the film's systems of signification, but also that it is thematically central to The 400 Blows. Antoine's actions are motivated, I will argue, by the same impulses that inform psychogeography as technique. In other words, this character's behaviour can be defined as psychogeographical situationism; an attempt to *détourne* his existing circumstances and construct a new, more favourable situation. Also, the fact that the film ends with Antoine running to the sea is of particular interest in the context of Debord's thesis on the dissolution of boundaries between town and country and the consequent historical paralysis of the spectacular society. The intrigue of the ending lies in the freeze frame, and in the fact that it is at this point that the spectator's look is actively separated from those of Antoine and Truffaut. My analysis of this conclusion will further consolidate the structure of feeling shared by Truffaut and Debord as one that entertains the potential of psychogeography as a means of transcending repressive societal configurations.

Two further points of correspondence remain to be outlined before moving onto the credit sequence of The 400 Blows. The first is the role of youth, which is obvious on Truffaut's side in his decision to make a film featuring a young child as the protagonist. But his interest in children was not confined to this film: they were the subject of his second short film, The Mischief Makers (*Les Mistons*, 1957), as well as The Wild Child (*L'Enfant Sauvage*, 1969) and Small Change (*L'Argent de Poche*, 1976). Truffaut explained this interest in childhood in an interview in 1970, stating that, "My films are a critique of the French way of bringing up children. I only realized this gradually, through travel. It struck me that the happiness of children is completely unrelated to the wealth of their parents or their country. In Turkey, a poor country, the child is sacred. In Japan, it is inconceivable that a mother show indifference to her son. Here adult-child relationships are always ugly and petty" (cit. De Baecque & Toubiana, 2000:270-1). Although this realisation was only

expressed more than a decade after making The 400 Blows, it is, nevertheless, an important indicator of Truffaut's conception of youth as subjugated in a capitalist society, or, put otherwise, of the misplaced attentions of parents in that society.

The theme of youth is similarly expounded upon in Situationist works, particularly in The Revolution of Everyday Life, in which Vaneigem suggests that only children are truly free because they are the only ones who exist outside of the constraints of time (read: money):

Every aspect of daily life is lived to some extent in embryonic form during childhood. The rich hoard of events lived in a few days or a few hours prevents time passing. Two months holiday is an eternity. Two months for an old man is just a few minutes. The child's days escape adult time; their time is swollen by subjectivity, passion, dreams haunted by reality. Outside the educators look on, waiting, watch in hand, till the child joins and fits the cycle of the hours. It's they who *have time*. (Vaneigem, 1967)

It is, presumably, once they join the 'cycle of hours' that the child enters that 'drama of youth destroyed by ... [the] arrested state of the human being' that Lefebvre so succinctly articulates as the result of the contradictory forces of capitalism (Lefebvre, 1991a: 150). Vaneigem accordingly characterises the only potential for revolution as a rediscovery of the timelessness of childhood: 'There cannot be a new proletariat unless it possess in its purest form the realisation of childhood in an adult world' (Vaneigem, 1967). However idealistic this stipulation is, Vaneigem's bleak outlook on things as they are – 'If you're not busy being born you're busy rotting' (*ibid.*) – certainly has something in common with Truffaut's description of adult-child relationships as 'ugly and petty'.

A final – albeit more tenuous - parallel can be drawn by referring to two writers who respectively discuss Truffaut's work and the potential of Situationism in terms of

improvisational jazz. The first is Insdorf, who likens Truffaut's achievements in the world of film to Keith Jarrett's position in the musical world. She does this by suggesting a sphere of influence in which she places Jarrett between the classical French composer Claude Debussy and the more experimental Miles Davis, and Truffaut between Renoir, on the one hand, and Godard on the other, concluding that 'Truffaut and Jarrett exemplify how you can improvise if you know the score' (Insdorf, 1994:25). In terms of Situationism, I refer, once again, to Vaneigem, who argues that the consciousness that will arise by restoring play to everyday life – or in Marxist terms, by the restoration of sensuousness through historical materialism⁷ – is akin to the pleasure derived from listening to improvisational jazz:

Consciousness of the present harmonizes with lived experience in a sort of extemporization. The pleasure this brings us – impoverished by its isolation, yet potentially rich because it reaches out towards an identical pleasure in other people – bears a striking resemblance to the enjoyment of jazz. At its best, improvisation in everyday life has much in common with jazz as evoked by Dauer: "The African conception of rhythm differs from the Western in that it is perceived through bodily movement rather than aurally. The technique consists essentially in the introduction of discontinuity into the static balance imposed upon time by rhythm and metre. This discontinuity, which results from the existence of static centres of gravity out of time with the musical rhythm and meter proper, creates a constant tension between the static beat and the ecstatic beat which is superimposed on it."

The eruption of lived pleasure is such that in losing myself I find myself; forgetting that I exist, I realize myself. Consciousness of immediate experience lies in this oscillation, in this improvisational jazz. (Vaneigem, 1967)

It is a precarious parallel to draw because Vaneigem's reference to jazz is essentially a projection of a desired situation, rather than a description of a product, as in Insdorf's case.

Nevertheless, the choice of jazz as a point of reference is intriguing in that it implies that both Truffaut's work and the Situationist project are indescribable according to standard definitions. Improvisational jazz is not quite classical and not quite radical, but "something" in between. It is literally revolutionary by virtue of being inexpressible. So, these references suggest a shared structure of feeling characterised by extemporisation. Or, indeed, the spontaneity of childhood: 'Isn't the revolutionary moment', Vaneigem asks, 'an eternal youth?' (Vaneigem, 1967).

Let us now put some of these theoretical considerations into practice by turning to the credit sequence of the film. The 400 Blows opens with a shot of a series of unremarkable city façades, behind which stands the Eiffel Tower, a monument that instantly anchors the film's diegetic space to a real geographical location: Paris. The following nine shots that constitute the credit sequence revolve around this monument, now moving towards it, now away, the Tower itself appearing and disappearing from behind buildings that function more as obstructions to our view than as signifiers.⁸

Shot	Visual image	Score / Noise / Writing
1	Fade in. ES: buildings; Eiffel Tower (E.T.) behind, tracking shot (as if in moving car) along buildings, E.T. disappears as building furthest away approaches	400 Blows theme; Jean Pierre Léaud dans <u>Les 400 Coups</u> (cast)
2	High angle tracking shot: large building, pan past statue of man on horse (to left), E.T. appears behind next building	Scénario de François Truffaut Adaptation de M. Moussy et F. Truffaut; Dialogues de Marcel Moussy
3	Low-angle tracking shot, E.T. closer now, disappears and reappears as building is passed on right (repeat three times)	Les Enfants: Daniel Couturier ... Chef-opérateur: Henri Decae Cameraman: Jean Rabier Assistant: Alain Levent Photographe: André Dino
4	Same angle, different buildings, E.T. still appearing and disappearing behind buildings, columns, etc.	Décors: Bernard Evein Musique: Jean Constantin Son: Jean-Claude Marchetti Montage: Marie-Josèphe Yoyotte ... Scriptgirl: Jacqueline Prey Accésiores: Raymond Le Moigne Assistants-Réalisateurs: Philippe De Broca, Alain Jeannel, François Cognany, Robert Bober Régie: Jean Lavie Robert Lachenay

5	E.T. behind block of flats, then trees. Continue pan, to MCU, trees still obstructing view	<i>Directeur de Production: Georges Charlot</i> <i>Administrateur: Roland Nonin</i> <i>Secrétaire: Luce Deuss</i>
6	CU: base of E.T. fills frame, pan to underneath, then linger on view of base as camera tracks back, moving on past E.T.	<i>Mise en scène</i> <i>François Truffaut</i> (acknowledgements)
7	MCU to LS: camera continues tracking back, E.T. recedes	(acknowledgements)
8	LS: E.T. still receding, fade to black	<i>Une Co-Production</i> <i>S.E.D.I.F. Les Films Du Carosse</i>
9		<i>Ce film est dédié à la mémoire d'André Bazin:</i> This film is dedicated to the memory of André Bazin ⁹

This intermittent view places the spectator in a species of “fort-da” relationship¹⁰ with the Tower, albeit one that is controlled by the camera, which at this early stage and in the absence of a protagonist, poses the question of whose look is being represented. I suggest that in this sequence, the camera’s perspective is consonant with Truffaut’s look because the montage culminates, as we shall see, in a clear moment of self-assertion. The sixth shot in the sequence brings us closest to the monument: as the camera approaches the Tower on ground level, the low angle perspective fills the frame with the intricacies of the steel work. The camera then turns slightly to the right as it progresses, so that once it is directly beneath the Tower, we are presented with a symmetrical frame in which three of the lower arches are visible. It is at this point that the final and most important credit appears (bar the acknowledgements): “*Mise en Scène de François Truffaut*”. In order to understand the significance of this moment, and, indeed, of the entire opening sequence as more than simply a means of conveying the information that the film is set in Paris and is directed by Truffaut, it is useful to consider the role of the Eiffel Tower as a signifier. This entails looking beyond the structure as merely a representation or symbol of Paris, and taking into account, rather, that its construction, placement and history are closely connected to a particular ideology: that of the panorama.

The Eiffel Tower was opened to the public in 1889 and was, according to Christopher Prendergast, conceived of as a way of providing a novel view of the city that would create an illusion of accessibility and control in the face of increasing social disquiet and fragmentation: 'The city seen from the point of view of the panorama was the city evacuated of obstructive challenges to understanding, the city perceived from a position of mastery, confirming an "identity" at once of the viewing subject and the object viewed' (Prendergast, 1995:47). This illusion of power that the panorama offers is pivotal to the myth that has developed around the Eiffel Tower, one that exemplifies the relationship between ideology and mystification suggested by Lefebvre (see p.48 above). It is a myth that functions to conceal the fact that the Tower affords a view that is not only aesthetically gratifying in its dominance, but perfect for surveillance of the city's inhabitants.¹¹ As Prendergast argues, 'It is one of the myths of the modern city that it "belongs" to no one in particular, that everything in it is perfectly up for grabs to everyone. No belief could have been more convenient to those with an interest in disguising the fact that they actually owned most of it' (15-16).

Another facet of the Tower's mythology, and the one that facilitates a feeling of supremacy, is the fact that the panoramic view transforms the cityscape into a landscape, that is, the urban to the natural. Roland Barthes provides the following analysis of this phenomenon:

The Tower looks at Paris. To visit the Tower is to get oneself up onto the balcony in order to perceive, comprehend, and savor a certain essence of Paris. And here again, the Tower is an original monument. Habitually, belvederes are outlooks upon nature, whose elements – water, valleys, forests – they assemble beneath them, so that the tourism of the “fine view” infallibly implies a naturalist mythology. Whereas the Tower overlooks not nature but the city; and yet, by its very position of a visited outlook, the Tower makes the city into a kind of nature; it constitutes the swarming of men into a landscape, it adds to the frequently grim urban myth a romantic dimension, a harmony, a mitigation; by it, starting from it, the city joins up with the great natural themes which are offered to the curiosity of men: the ocean, the storm, the mountains, the snow, the rivers. To visit the Tower, then, is to enter into contact not with a historical Sacred, as is the case with the majority of monuments, but rather with a new nature, that of human space: the Tower is not a trace, a souvenir, in short a culture; but rather an immediate consumption of a humanity made natural by that glance which transforms it into space. (Barthes, 1997:8)

This transformation of the city into a “natural” space recalls Haussmann’s strategy of renovating and constructing public parks in Paris. The official reasoning of creating classless leisure areas was, of course, laudable enough, but beneath this was an ideology that sought to ameliorate the attitude of the working class towards the bourgeoisie. In other words, it was hoped that seeing the middle classes strolling with their families would convince the working class that their employers were not, in the end, so evil and therefore did not deserve to be overthrown by a revolution.¹² The similarity between Haussmann’s parks and the Eiffel Tower thus lies in the fact that, through a process of mystification that conceals the practical and ideological interests of the authorities, both parade as leisure facilities for the city’s inhabitants. Indeed, the very fact that the Eiffel Tower is considered a monument, that is, a cultural artefact that has become one of the prime tourist sites of France, testifies to this process.¹³

However, the more sinister etymology of the word “monument” - a sepulchre – is a pertinent reminder of the shifting semantics of “nature” in an urban, consumerist culture. As Lefebvre noted in 1974,

To say “natural” is to say spontaneous. But today nature is drawing away from us.... It is becoming impossible to escape the notion that nature is being murdered by “anti-nature” – by abstraction, by signs and images, by discourse, as also by labour and its products. Along with God, nature is dying. “Humanity” is killing both of them – and perhaps committing suicide in the bargain. (Lefebvre, 1991:70-1)

In this context, the naturalisation of the city effected by the Eiffel Tower’s panoramic perspective is testimony at once to the death of the old signification of ‘nature’ (‘spontaneous’), and to its new meaning. Although Lefebvre insists on distinguishing the latter by the prefix “anti”, the important point to acknowledge is, I believe, that it is the signified of one word – nature - that has been distorted. This is, moreover, the central issue when Lefebvre discusses what he terms “nature parks” and confesses that ‘it is not at all easy to decide whether such places are natural or artificial’ (83).¹⁴ Finally, the Tower’s conspicuous presence in Parisian quotidian life means that it is at once everyday and mythical, real and unreal, much like a static manifestation – a monument - of the spectacle.

Bringing these historical concerns to bear on the credit sequence of The 400 Blows, it is evident that Truffaut’s representation of the Eiffel Tower has several important implications. In order to understand these, it is useful to begin by considering what the director has *not* done. He has, in the first instance, chosen to not simply film the Tower from a stationary point, from a position that would, for example, afford a view of the monument in its entirety, and in so doing emphasise its fixity and grandeur. Instead, the look in this sequence is characterised, firstly, by mobility and secondly, by inaccessibility: the camera

pans along the side of the street that is manifestly separated from the Tower by rows of buildings. In this way, Truffaut constructs an Eiffel Tower that is fragmented and not ever wholly available to the gaze. As a result, its uniqueness is subordinated to the generic façades that foreground most of the frames. Yet this foregrounding does not, curiously enough, detract from the Tower. On the contrary, it stresses the monument as at once unattainable and, through the camera's insistence, desirable. It is this implied desirability that recalls Freud's comments on an infantile game in which the child would purposefully throw his toys out of reach and then retrieve them, each action accompanied by either the exclamation "fort" (go away) or "da" (there). Freud provides two possible interpretations of this game:

This effort might be ascribed to the impulse to obtain mastery of a situation (the "power" instinct), which remains independent of whether the recollection was a pleasant one or not. But another interpretation may be attempted. The flinging away of the object so that it is gone might be the gratification of an impulse of revenge suppressed in real life but directed against the mother for going away, and would then have the defiant meaning: "Yes, you can go, I don't want you, I am sending you away myself." (Freud, 1922:14)

In Freudian terms, then, the teasing camera in the first five shots of Truffaut's credit sequence suggest two conflicting impulses towards the Eiffel Tower: mastery and defiance.¹⁵ The sixth shot, bearing the director's name, represents both of these impulses. The fact that only three of the four arches are visible means that both Truffaut and the spectator are positioned under and inside the Tower, appropriating it from beneath, so to speak, and therefore in reverse, since this framing disregards the panoramic function of the monument. The centrality of this moment to the sequence is confirmed by the remaining two shots that move away from the Tower. The camera can recede because Truffaut's position – one that acknowledges, but refuses to subscribe to, the ideology of the panorama – has been asserted.

In this way, the credit sequence introduces a space that is at once fictional and real. It is Paris, recognisable by the Eiffel Tower, but a Paris in which the Tower's mythology is disavowed and thereby problematised. To return to the critical trend that focuses on Truffaut's realism, Lopez suggests that the camera movement in this sequence is responsible for the 'special "feel" of The 400 Blows', that is, the quality that sets the film apart from conventional French films and marks the beginning of the New Wave. This feel is, according to Lopez, the documentary trait: 'It purports to demonstrate, to reveal in the best documentary fashion, while concealing the true object of the narrative fiction: not Paris or the Eiffel Tower, but Antoine Doinel' (Lopez, 1985:145). The logic of this argument lies in Lopez's reading of Truffaut's representation of the Eiffel Tower as one that is mirrored in his portrayal of his protagonist: Antoine will be objectified ('captured, flattened, pressed against anamorphically curved surfaces, presented as a case study', *ibid.*) much like the cityscape in the credit sequence. The problem with this argument is twofold. Firstly, by regarding the sequence as documentary simply because of the use of an actual (real) geographical location, Lopez ignores Truffaut's directorial – ideological - choices in his representation of the city. To reiterate, her argument rests on the equation between the documented and the real that characterises the naïve realist theory.¹⁶ We can, in this context, recall Heath's contention that in order to restore the historicity that the reproduction thesis lacks, one needs to question 'where the image comes from and what it is doing in the film' (Heath, 1981:4). The extent to which Lopez *does* ask what the image of Paris is doing in the film leads us to what is, in my view, the second problem with her analysis. By claiming that the credit sequence conceals 'the true object of the narrative fiction: ... Antoine Doinel', and that the images of the city are mere indexes of the imminent representations of Antoine, Lopez fails to separate the protagonist from his environment; she regards the cityscape as a metaphor for Antoine. The effect of this conflation is to justify ignoring Antoine's interaction with his surroundings and,

in that process, to dehistoricise Paris by rendering it symbolic and thus fictional. Put otherwise, this amounts to uncritically embracing and perpetuating the mythology of the city.

In opposition to this critical tendency, a psychogeographical approach necessarily maintains the distinction between subject and environment by placing emphasis, precisely, on their interaction. This is critical in the context of historical materialism as summarised by Lefebvre: 'The term "historical materialism" does not designate a philosophy of history but the genesis of mankind as a totality, object of every science of human reality and goal of action.... How can man be separated from nature with which he maintains a dialectic relationship – unity and scission, struggle and alliance?' (Lefebvre, 1968:20). It is paramount, in other words, to read the Paris of the opening sequence not as symbolic, but as the diegetic space with which the spectator and protagonist will interact in the course of the film. The way that this space is represented in the credit sequence – Truffaut's fort-da game with the Eiffel Tower – signals that his fiction is predicated on a disruption of conventional forms of interaction with this real city and its mythologies. Rather than perpetuating the panoramic ideology that traditionally informs the Tower, Truffaut produces a look that is subversive in its desirousness. The sequence avows a simultaneous desire to appropriate and defy the Tower's mythology and, furthermore, implicates the spectator in this desire by conflating the pro-filmic look with that of the viewer. The film's first signifying mechanism can thus be summarily defined as a disavowal of the city's mythology.

So, laying emphasis on the interaction between subject and environment is not only dictated by psychogeography but is, indeed, consistent with the film's own system of signification. Furthermore, focusing on interaction rather than symbolism necessarily invokes the issues of ideology and subject construction that Heath specifies as paramount to resisting the unity that the *auteur* theory seeks to impose on a work. While critics in the past have also identified the sense of interaction between Antoine and his surroundings as important to the

film's impact,¹⁷ these have tended to remain on the level of using that interaction to create a psychological character profile, often simply as an index – once again - of Truffaut's realism, measured by his ability to create a “believable” character. Psychogeography proposes a more complex and, I believe, interesting investigation by questioning that character sketch in relation to the film's geographical profile in order to ascertain to what degree Antoine's behaviour is either a *product* of the spaces he is in or it represents an attempted *détournement* of those structures. Practically, this means that we can take as a starting point the psychological ‘accuracy’ with which Hoveyda accredits Truffaut:

To appreciate the accuracy of the film it is enough to take any manual of psychology or psychoanalysis and consult the chapter on the phenomenological description of “the adolescent's difficult period of adjustment”. All the characteristic features of adolescence are evidenced in the personality and the situation of little Antoine Doinel. (Hoveyda, 1985:54)

Yet to introduce a theory of the subject entails denying this ‘difficult period of adjustment’ the absolute value that Hoveyda proposes. It is, rather, to return to a Debordian methodology and investigate the role of specific – literal and figurative - structures in the Lefebvrian ‘drama of youth’ central to consumerist society. As Caughie writes, ‘What a theory of the subject pursues is an account of the determinations and pressures which operate on individuals in terms of the places they come to occupy within the formations (social, textual, sexual, familial, discursive) which provide the sites of their activity’ (Caughie, 1980:200-1).

It is, by now, clear that the approach exemplified by Lopez's analysis of the credit sequence is deficient in two important ways. Firstly, by refusing to regard the image of Paris as a representation as opposed to a reproduction, she denies Truffaut's directorial agency. This leads to the second point, which is that by not questioning the specific way in which Paris and the Eiffel Tower are represented, Lopez misses the crucial signifying mechanism

that is established in this sequence. Instead, she reads the Tower as symbolic of Paris, and Paris as symbolic of Antoine and thereby paradoxically mythologises the city in the very act of claiming its authenticity. This type of circular logic is, I believe, the result of a constricted critical perspective, that is, the result of focusing on one aspect – realism, in this case – to the exclusion of all else.

Psychogeography as a critical tool provides a valuable counter to the limitations of this approach. This is, first of all, due to the obvious stress that psychogeography lays on the environment, which precludes reading geographical space – whether it be real or represented – as merely symbolic or unfettered by ideological determinants. And to consider space as the expression of a particular ideology necessarily means to contextualise it historically. So, it is only by paying attention to Truffaut's particular representation of the Eiffel Tower *in relation to* the monument's historical significance that we can identify the signifying code that is established by the filmic text. This code is characterised by the dual impulses of mastery and defiance that Freud ascribes to the fort-da game. In this way, by placing equal emphasis on the psychological and environmental aspects of the representation of the Tower, a psychogeographical approach has allowed us to identify not only the diegetic space in which the narrative will unfold, but also Truffaut's comment on the actual geographical space that is Paris. This comment is conveyed through the simultaneous desire to appropriate and subvert that the pro-filmic look of the credit sequence testifies to. What remains to be seen is how consistent this signifying system is within the film, particularly once the third look is introduced, namely that of Antoine.

Part II: The 400 Blows

In this part of the dissertation, I examine key sequences of The 400 Blows in light of the theoretical preliminaries outlined in Part I. Chapter 4 traces the way in which the film establishes Antoine's everyday as being informed by the institutions of family and school. This everyday provides the structural basis for Antoine's psychogeographical situationism: his behaviour is dictated by a desire to evade these institutions, an impulse that culminates in his theft of a typewriter. It is in the suspense device used when Antoine is caught that I identify the film's second signifying mechanism as one that condones State apparatuses. Chapter 5 focuses on Antoine's interaction with the law. I argue that the series of physical handovers that punctuate the period between Antoine's arrest and his arrival at the juvenile centre confirms the depersonalised societal configuration previously alluded to by the predominantly structural position Antoine occupies in school and at home. In Chapter 6, I consider the narrative and discursive significance of the film's closing freeze frame and argue that this device serves to disengage – to un-suture – the spectator from Antoine's narrative. Chapter 7 demonstrates how this un-suturing also entails a rejection of the Romantic dichotomy of town and country, as well as filmic conventions of gender, by simultaneously "feminising" and empowering the spectator. All of this combines to reveal Truffaut's privileging of discourse over story and thus his impulse to disrupt not only the prescriptions of classical film narrative, but also the hegemonic formulae of which these conventions are an expression. This is, I conclude, a form of discursive psychogeography that complements and extends Antoine's fictional efforts to construct a situation commensurate with his desires.

4. Parents and Teachers

Antoine's role as the protagonist of the film is established immediately after the credit sequence:

1	<p>Dissolve to BS/MCU: Classroom. Boy opens desk and retrieves picture of semi-naked woman, passes to boy in front. Camera follows picture, passed from hand to hand, around class, ending with Antoine (A.). MCU again as he stops to draw on it, passes it forward. Pan to teacher (t.) at front. A. walks to front, hands picture over. Camera follows A. to corner. He signals to boys, goes behind blackboard. Pan to teacher getting up, walking forward</p>	<p>T: Doinel, bring me that. ... Very nice. Stand in the corner. ... One minute left. Boys: Oooooah T: Silence!</p>
2	<p>FS: class, t. walks down aisle, round back, looks out door, turns, walks forward, ruffles boy's head, walks forward out of frame</p>	<p>T: Papers will be collected in thirty seconds. Silence, silence. Monitors get ready. I'll count to three.... One, two three, collect.</p>
3	<p>SS: boy still writing Monitor takes paper</p>	<p>(T: What's going on? No favouritism.) R: Crawler!</p>
4	<p>MS: t. at front as monitors bring papers, t. moves out of frame, camera follows boys and A. emerging from corner, boys exit, t. walks into frame, points A. back to corner, follows boys out, closes door, A. in left corner of frame, camera centres on him, follows him back behind board</p>	<p>T: Everyone handed in his papers? You can go. ... Not you, bright boy. Break is a reward, not a right.</p>

Although he is not the first boy to be seen, he is the first to merit the camera's attention as he pauses to deface the "naughty" picture that is being passed around the classroom.

Furthermore, it is Antoine who is caught, although in a somewhat arbitrary manner, for it is not while drawing on the picture that the teacher discovers him, but as Antoine tries to pass it on as his classmates have successfully done before him. Yet his defacement of the picture, coupled with the teacher's discovery of it, functions to establish Antoine not only as the more wayward among a group of naturally deviant boys, but as the one who is most likely to be caught. The camera's – and by extension, the spectator's – relationship with Antoine is, in this first instance, one of collusion, albeit without recourse to point-of-view shots: when he is sent

to the corner, the camera follows him slowly and watches him signal to the boys in the class while the teacher's back is turned, after which it quickly returns to the teacher. This movement corresponds to the probable gaze of one of the boys who would be watching Antoine and then quickly looks back at the teacher so as not to be caught engaging with the mischief maker. So, in the classroom, the first of the social institutions in the film, a polarity is constructed between the boys on the one hand and the teacher on the other. The spectator is situated among the boys, that is, not on the side of authority.²

A further separation occurs when the bell rings for recreation time. As all the boys shuffle through the door, Antoine, who begins to follow, is held back with the reminder that, "Break is a reward, not a right" (s.4). This indicates the weight of a system by which treatment is dependent on behaviour rather than entitlement, an ironic contradiction of the "*Liberté Egalité Fraternité*" sign that we see dominating the school's entrance at the beginning of the following sequence. It is due to this reward system that Antoine's first physical separation from his classmates occurs: he is held back while the others go out to play. This situation portends the lack of freedom that characterises Antoine's institutional life:

8	Interior; BS: A. writing on wall	("Here suffers poor Antoine Doinel, unjustly punished
9	Exterior; MS: boys playing in courtyard, two fighting, teacher interjects	for a pin-up. Revenge will be sweet") Teacher: All right, prize-fighters, here's the verdict. No break for three days.

The voice-over that connects shots 8 and 9 stresses the spectator's required identification with Antoine in the confined space of the classroom. This montage confirms that not only does a divide exist between Antoine and the authorities, but also between the boy and his peers.³ It is, therefore, significant that one of the two boys fighting in the courtyard is René. This character has, by now, been established as Antoine's friend and co-conspirator in the classroom by virtue of their sharing a desk and also by their conspicuousness. Just as Antoine

was the one to be caught with the picture, René is the one who is reprimanded for dawdling when the dictation scripts are being collected (s.3). A double divide thus prevails in the classroom that separates, firstly, the teacher from the students and secondly, the students from Antoine and René. In structural terms, these divisions and the respective positions that they allocate function both literally and figuratively to dictate expected behaviour. On a literal level, the fixity of positions is reinforced by the teacher's repeated references to "places" (Antoine is told to go back to his place, s.14; Richer is asked who gave him permission to change places, s.22), while René's response to Antoine's comment that their teacher is a bastard ("It's his job", 3:s.3)⁴ suggests the accepted association of a given role with a particular position. Vaneigem provides a pertinent analysis of the primacy of roles, or, in his terms, a 'Form':

When the widow weeps tenderly beside her husband, we think that she is crying because she feels her loss so keenly. When some engineer, doctor or lawyer murders his wife, his children or a friend, we suppose that he was driven to the deed by violent or bloodthirsty impulses. When some politician expresses himself vacuously, we say that he is stupid because he expresses himself stupidly. But the fact of the matter is this: a human being does not externalise himself in an immediate manner, according to his nature, but always through a definite Form; and this Form, this way of being, this way of speaking and reacting, does not issue solely from himself but is imposed on him from the outside. (Vaneigem, 1967)

So, the teacher's behaviour is explained by the Form that is consonant with his profession. And it is, indeed, this particular profession which is charged with the duty of cultivating in children the adherence to Form, the first manifestation of which is, then, the requirement that the boys remain in their "places". This is thus the first indicator of the ideologically determined geographical structures that inform the film's diegetic space, which corresponds,

in this instance, to the configurations of a consumer society. As Vaneigem continues, ‘The conveyor belts called school, the advertising industry, the conditioning mechanisms inseparable from any Order – all conspire to lead the child, the adolescent and the adult as painlessly as possible into the big family of consumers’ (*ibid.*) In this context, René’s reminder to Antoine that the teacher is just doing his job is, furthermore, a telling indicator of the extent to which these boys are already aware of the primacy of roles. This implies, in turn, that any behaviour that deviates from a given Form can be read as conscious resistance to that Form, rather than simply insufficient knowledge of what is expected of a particular role. In other words, “mis”-behaviour is always deliberate.

The notion of fixity is a central theme in the film, as it is precisely Antoine’s resistance to this rigidity of structures and placement that the narrative revolves around. One manifestation of this inflexibility is the way in which his parents repeatedly refer to Antoine as “the kid” (*le gosse*). To his stepfather’s question of what they’ll do with “the kid” for the holidays, Antoine’s mother replies that, “Summer camps aren’t for poodles, you know” (4:ss.12-13). This reinforces Antoine’s anonymity in a society where children occupy structural positions that are catered for by various social institutions in order to minimise any inconvenience to their parents’ lives. The next reference follows the discovery of a missing Michelin guide. When his mother suggests that they ask “the kid” and the stepfather replies that he denies it, Antoine’s mother retorts that the boy is a “born liar” (7:s.7). In this way, Antoine also comes to occupy a scapegoat position. As we later discover when the two boys are shooting spit-guns at the street with the pages of the missing Michelin, he *is* culpable in this case, but the significance of the parents’ dialogue is that they automatically attribute guilt to Antoine. In the household, he thereby occupies a role that at once fuels and detracts from the parents’ deteriorating relationship: he is made to carry the blame for any familial dysfunction. The expedience of this logic is obvious. If Antoine stole the guide, then both the

parents are blameless for possibly having misplaced it. But using Antoine as a scapegoat does not automatically restore harmony. On the contrary, it fuels antagonism between the parents as they variously use him for their own ends. The stepfather invokes Antoine to criticise his wife, for the boy is, after all, his mother's child: "He takes after you!". The mother's response to this accusation ("If you want to get shot of him, just say so; anything for a bit of peace!", 7:s.7) suggests that all her faults reside in the child, so if Antoine is removed, all will be well. These two exchanges make clear that Antoine's position in his family is primarily structural; there is little evidence that he is emotionally significant to his parents.

When Antoine resolves to change his situation by deciding that he cannot occupy this position any longer, René responds by reiterating the primacy of Form. Like that of teachers, parents' behaviour is to be expected:

Antoine: I can't live with my parents any longer, I'll have to disappear.

René: They're no worse than mine. (10:s.1)

René's statement has two important implications. Firstly, it underscores a difference between the two boys despite their unity in relation to their peers. René comes from a family which is *overtly* dysfunctional and which therefore allows him greater freedom and independence (Antoine: "What about your parents?"; René: "They're hardly ever here, my mother drinks and my father goes racing", 17:s.6). René is, as a result, the more content of the two boys, as there is no façade of structures in his home against which he must struggle. This is clear when his father catches the two boys drinking and smoking and delivers a half-hearted reprimand that is accepted with equal lightness by René. When, by contrast, Antoine is accused by his stepfather of taking the Michelin guide, he is visibly shaken by the reprimand (even though it is his due). The disparity in treatment and behaviour between the two boys in their home

environments thus corresponds to the kind of structures that are in place in those homes. René's home is structurally fluid and therefore represents more of a playground than a home, as evidenced by the presence of a stuffed horse in the boy's bedroom. In Antoine's home there is an obvious effort to keep up the appearance of a "happy family" - which is, we are told, the principal reason for the stepfather marrying Antoine's mother in the first place: to give the boy "a name" in order to spare his mother the socially frowned-upon position of a single mother - the result of which is a stultifying and repressive environment.

Another manifestation of this difference between the homes is in the family meal. In Antoine's home, a family hierarchy clearly dominates the temporal and physical space of the meal: Antoine sets the table, his mother cooks, his stepfather serves, the parents chat and smoke after the meal as Antoine awaits the signal that the meal is over so that he can clear the table, take out the rubbish, and go to bed. So, the table functions as a family platform. It is a site of consumption and discussion and at which, moreover, the slightest change in normality is monitored, such as when Antoine's father notices a new pen in the boy's schoolbag and accordingly questions him about it. In René's home, on the other hand, we see only the boy and his father at the dining table, as the mother is off "hatching something" (17:s.12). As his father leaves the room briefly to fetch some fruit, René quickly changes the time on the clock, the result of which is that the father thinks he is late for what is presumably a nightly session at the "club" and rushes off before eating his fruit. This brief but significant moment signals that "ritual" in René's home is open to subversion because time, the predominant regulator of social structures, can be manipulated to suit the boy's needs.⁵

The second implication of René's counsel that Antoine's parents are no worse than his own ironically relates to the fixity that the former boy is spared in his home. By suggesting that parents are expected to make one's life difficult, René also alludes to the fact that children are expected to experience that difficulty as integral to their own roles, typically

pre-determined by parents and teachers. So, when Antoine's mother attempts to win the boy's affection after he tries to run away, she shares a childhood experience which is meant to convince him of the normality of his rebelliousness, but more importantly, to warn him of the futility of it:

I was your age once; you children always forget that. I wouldn't talk to my parents.... Once during the holidays I ran off with a young shepherd, but they caught us. I had to promise to forget him, and my father wasn't told. I cried a lot, but I obeyed my mother; mothers should always be obeyed. (12:ss.13-18)

Antoine rolls his eyes in response, a gesture implying that he knows and understands what is expected of him, but with which he is "fed up", having written to his parents that he intends to break away "to prove I can become a man" (11:s.4). In other words, he is – much like Truffaut's rejection of a conventional view of the Eiffel Tower - resisting the conventional role of a child. It can, of course, be argued that resistance is in itself central to this role, that it is part of that 'difficult period of adjustment' referred to by Hoveyda as testimony to Truffaut's realism. But Antoine's eventual severance from his friend René and, indeed, from all his peers through periodic institutionalisation, suggests that the course of resistance that he adopts deviates from the norm by its extremity.

However, this resistance is not constantly but only cumulatively extreme. After the classroom incident, the first moment of defiance we participate in is relatively harmless: Antoine comes home from school to an empty flat and sits in front of his mother's dressing table to play with her things:

4	Dissolve: A. in living room, adding coal to fire, wipes hands on curtain, takes money from under mantelpiece (glances at camera); pan to money in hands, then into pocket, A. exits room		
5	Interior of bedroom as door opens and light enters. A. sits at dressing table, his face reflected in one large mirror straight ahead, one at side, one small on table. Brushes his hair, smells perfume, tries the eyelash curler, gets up to walk out		400 Blows theme (slow) Music fades
6	A. into dining room, starts laying table, fetches schoolbag, sits down, pushes plate aside and starts writing. Looks up, waits, rushes to put book away	("I defaced the classroom walls")	Footsteps; door opening

The three mirror images that result are ripe for psychoanalytical interpretation,⁶ but in the context of psychogeography, it is more rewarding to consider the scene as an index of the shift in behaviour that different environments occasion and enable, as well as of the role of human agency in the production of these environments. So, the mirror sequence demonstrates that it is specifically the presence of Antoine's parents - representing the institution of family - that dictates the psychologically oppressive quality of the geographical space that is "home". When he is alone he is at liberty to ignore the structural precedents of family and thus change the nature of that environment. In other words, his solitude engenders a situation in which play is permissible. Finally, the music in this sequence colludes with Antoine: it stops as soon as he exits the room to lay the table, a chore that indicates the end of his freedom.

The second and more obvious form of rebellion is truancy. The sports sequence (13), in which all the boys eventually disappear from behind the sports teacher as he takes the class for a run around the streets, reminds us that skiving is not restricted to our protagonist. But when Antoine and René take the entire day off the spectator is invited to experience in a more complete manner the way in which Antoine's discontent dissolves as soon as he is temporally and spatially removed from any form of authoritative institution. The contentment that we see

in the game hall and at the fairground suggests a reading of the boys' truancy as a form of psychogeographical situationism in its use as a means of appropriation: by indulging in play instead of attending classes, they *détourne* the power structures that dictate their presence and behaviour at school. Yet given the youth of the boys, Hussey's definition of the technique of psychogeography as 'a way of restoring meaning to the city' (Hussey, 2001:90) is, perhaps, better articulated not in terms of restoring but rather as *inventing* meaning by experiencing a day in an unconventional manner; an experiment in possession.

The generation of this new meaning is, however, disrupted as soon as Antoine comes across his mother kissing a stranger in the street:

1	Aerial shot: A. & R. in street	
2	High angle: people on street, mother (m.) & man kissing centre frame; A. & R. approach from left	
3	BS: m. & man	
4	SS: m. & man	
5	FS: A. & R.; A. looks left, sees m.	
6	SS: m. & man; she looks	
7	A. & R.	
8	SS: m. & man break away	
9	A. & R. keep walking	
10	FS: m. & man	M: Oh my God, Antoine must have seen me. Man: Which one is he?
11	BS: m. & man	M: The brown-haired one.
12	BS: A. & R. walk away	Man: Why isn't he in school now?
13	FS: A. & R.	R: You'll catch it tonight. A: She won't dare tell dad.
14	FS: A. & R.; walk forward out of frame	R: Who's the guy? A: I've never seen him before. R: You're in the clear then.
15	A. & R. walking; (boy hiding behind tree); they walk to the doorway, emerge with schoolbags, go off around corner	
16	FS: A. & R. walking; they stop They shake hands, A. walks off	A: I need a note for school tomorrow. What are you going to do? R: I've got an old one; I'll cut the date off. I'll lend it to you to copy. A: What about the handwriting? R: Imitate your mother's. A: Her writing's tricky. R: You'll manage. A: I hope so. R: <i>Salut</i> .

This meeting at once invades Antoine's independence and equalises mother and son in terms of culpability and subversion. The second shot in the sequence is significant because it is the only one which frames all four characters, thereby capturing the imminence of a collision of two forms of independence that are not compatible. This incongruity is confirmed by the fact that once they have seen one another, Antoine and his mother do not appear in the same frame again. Rather, the camera moves erratically from the couple to the boys, as mother and son respond individually to their own as well as to each other's guilt. In this way, the montage defines their interaction by restraint rather than confrontation. Antoine and René are, however, quick to expound on the system that dictates treatment according to behaviour. So, although Antoine has misbehaved, his mother's transgression is clearly the more serious and he is, therefore, "in the clear". In fact, Antoine is so convinced of the gravity of his mother's misdemeanour that when he comes home that evening and is told by his stepfather to set only two places at the table, he asks in all seriousness (and with some anticipation), "Has mum left?", as if banishment would be the logical result of her behaviour.

The importance of the encounter between mother and son is that it destabilises the myth of the anonymity of the streets by casting them together in the place in which they least expect to be recognised. A contrast thus emerges between, on the one hand, home, where Antoine the only child is referred to generically as "the kid" and, on the other, the school and the streets, two crowded places in which his individuality is paradoxically starkest and in which his freedom is, as a result, the most compromised. This ironic configuration of spaces reiterates the paramount role of human agency in determining the quality of a geographical environment. In other words, although we can ascribe certain characteristics to specific spaces, these features are not predetermined in any scientific or mechanistic sense; they are, rather, the result of very conscious social organisation. Furthermore, despite the fixity that results from stringent administration of these structures, this non-essential or artificial quality

means that they are susceptible to transformation, a fluidity that is paramount in a Situationist context because it legitimises the concept of psychogeography as a political project. But in order for that project to be actualised, existing hierarchies need be dismantled, for as it is, it is only those in positions of authority – parents and teachers - that can effect change without justification. One example of this is the volte-face we witness in the teacher’s behaviour. When, for instance, Antoine delivers the lie that his mother is dead, his teacher at once becomes sympathetic and consoling (“You should have told me. You should always confide in your teachers. Join your friends”, 9:s.3). Yet soon after this, the teacher’s authoritarian role is re-established as he threatens to show René who “who makes the laws here” (16:s.15), where the use of the verb ‘make’ (rather than, for example, ‘uphold’) stresses the power of transformation invested in a position of authority.

It is in this context that we can understand the dramatic shift that occurs when the family goes to the cinema directly after the candle in Antoine’s “shrine” to Balzac has almost set fire to the flat:

4	A., mother (m.) & stepfather (sf.) at table A. looks up	... Sf: You’ve left something on the stove again.	
5	They run into the room; curtain ablaze Sf. offers A. his Zippo lighter Sf. leaves room M. into dressing room	Sf: What the hell are you playing at, lighting a candle there? A: It was for Balzac, to help with my French composition. M: He promised me something. Sf: What? To collect on the fire insurance? You won’t make it with a candle, why not borrow my lighter? While you’re living here, you’ll do as I tell you. Otherwise, it’s the Prytanée for you. They’ll keep you in step, toe the line. M: Why don’t we all have a change and go to the cinema? Sf: Yes, why not, that’s a great method of education. M: Are you pleased with your composition? A: Yes, it’s not bad. M: Julien, Julien, listen Julien.	
6	M. (& sf.) A. into room	M: He’s got a nice surprise in store for you. So, how about the cinema? Sf: What’s on? M: “ <i>Paris Nous Appartient</i> ”. [<u>Paris Belongs To Us</u>] Sf: If this is a plot... M: If you’d rather not... Sf: Why not? I’ve earned it. But arsonists are frowned on in cinemas.	

7	(Dissolve) Outside cinema		Happy family theme
8	Family into car		
9	Aerial view: street at night		Laughter
10	FS: car, three laughing		Music fades
11	SS: street		Laughter
12	FS: car	A: I liked the film a lot. Sf: It wasn't exactly fun. M: It wasn't bad, you know. It was deep, it had substance. Sf: ... M: The film... Sf: Yes, yes, yes.	
13	SS: car		Laughter
14	FS: car, family getting out	Sf: Come on. M: Come on.	
15	(Dissolve) inside building, sf. walking comically, shouts at corner, runs up, A. up last, laughing SS three up steps, m. first	Sf: "The Devil's General and his staff." Sf: Look what pretty legs your mother has.	Laughter
16	MS: interior, dark flat, door opens, light on, m. & sf. in corridor, coats off, A. enters A. exits Sf.'s hands on m.'s breast	Sf: So we return to home, smelly home. M: Don't forget the dustbin, darling. A: Yes, mother M: You see, I've won him over. I hope I shan't regret it.	Laughter
17	A. into passage, down step, out of frame (smiling), then back		

The mother's final remark in this scene indicates that the family outing is strategic: she wants to gain favour with Antoine so as to preserve the secrecy of her own indiscretions. It is for this reason that her suggestion directly follows the stepfather's display of authority when he reminds Antoine who is in charge at home and threatens him with military school if he is disobedient (s.5). But unbeknownst to her husband, Antoine's mother has already attempted to assert her authority independently. This is done not by recourse to her position in a family hierarchy, which has clearly been compromised (in her son's eyes) by her affair, but by promising Antoine money if he does well in his class composition. So, in order to protect two secrets from her husband – her affair and the silencing bribe she has offered her son - she

must now do what she can to retain the peace, and the chosen means of doing this is, significantly, to leave home and go to the cinema.

Although we as spectators do not enter the cinema, this choice of destination as a generator of family contentment - or, as a prophylactic against conflict - is clearly an important moment in the film. Considering Truffaut's own dedication to the cinema in his youth, it is, firstly, difficult not to imagine the ironic pleasure that the director derived from giving the stepfather's character the line, "That's a great method of education" (s.5). In this way, Truffaut also ascribes educational value to his own film, thereby creating an affiliation between spectator and characters: we, like them, are being "educated" by watching a film. The spectator is thus officially inaugurated into the film's diegetic space. Secondly, given that the film they see had not yet been released at the time of production of The 400 Blows – and that Truffaut would, indeed, use the proceeds of his own success to actualise the release of Paris Belongs To Us – this moment functions on an extradiegetic level as a signal of encouragement to Jacques Rivette and, further, as an indicator of the group ethic that characterised the New Wave movement in its early stages. Thirdly, as the title suggests, Paris Belongs To Us is a film about the organisation of space, specifically the city of Paris, and evidences – as does The 400 Blows - the New Wave's rejection of the studio system in favour of depicting an everyday which was typically to be found in the streets. Douchet summarises this tendency as follows:

The Paris that the New Wave wanted to represent was the Paris of everyday life. The city that was laid out before them as a kind of immense background, the city that no one paid attention to. People went about their business with indifference. And since the majority of the young were from provinces, they affected the behaviour of the blasé Parisian. On the other hand they acknowledged that the street was indiscriminate in its indifference to individual fate. Out of this stubborn indifference Rohmer extracted the drama of *Le Signe du Lion*, Rivette that of *Paris nous appartient*, Varda, *Cleo from 5 to 7*, Chabrol *Les Bonnes Femmes*. (Douchet, 1998:124)

The episode with the film and the cinema thus represents an instance of self-reflexivity on both a personal and professional level for Truffaut, as well as formally in the fictional world of The 400 Blows. The result of this multiplicity of meanings is that this sequence evidences all three of Mulvey's looks: the pro-filmic, by extradiegetic allusion to Truffaut and the New Wave, and the audience and intradiegetic looks, which as well as being literally present, are figuratively conflated in the act of watching a film. That the cinema is the site chosen for this integration of looks is paramount to the New Wave conception of its institutional potential as an antidote to hegemonic structures; whereas the "tradition of quality" cinema connotes the power of the state, Truffaut's cinema is democratised by its production of a non-hierarchical community of gazes.

This is further supported if we refer to the central thesis of The Society of the Spectacle, namely that the spectacle is not simply a collection of images, but 'a social relationship between people that is mediated by images' (Debord, 1995:4). Debord's thesis validates reading the cinema sequence as Truffaut's suggestion that film represents a potentially positive form of spectacle, as it is consequent to this outing that we see Antoine and his parents enjoying each other's company for the first and only time. This affirmative representation of the spectacle is, however, problematised by the fact that the sequence is also an example of familial pleasure which is permissible only because it has been licensed by

the parents. Similarly, it is they who dictate the end of this situation when they return to “home, smelly home” and Antoine is reminded of the dustbin, signalling a return to a familiar domestic configuration. In other words, the positively spectacular value of the cinema remains subordinated to the ideological use of the spectacle: the mother cleverly uses the outing to mediate the microstructure of social relationships that is her family. This does not necessarily detract from Truffaut’s positive portrayal of the cinema, but it does signal that this particular form of spectacle – however “fun”, “educational” and, indeed, “New Wave” it may be – is not impervious to strategic use by the (literal and figurative) parental authorities that Antoine seeks to undermine and that are challenged, on an extradiegetic level, by Truffaut and the New Wave movement.

So, the cinema provides a brief respite from the everyday of the Doinel family. The restoration of this everyday by a physical return to the flat reiterates the role of the parents in the psychological structuring of this geographical space, to which Antoine again decides he cannot return after being accused of plagiarism the following day at school. Although his misdemeanour jeopardises the deal he has with his mother, he is, ultimately, scared to go home because of the threat of military school, the institutional connotation of which is clearly ominous to Antoine: “I can’t go home after this, dad said he’d send me to the Prytanée” (17:s.1). The possible consequences of Antoine’s misconduct thereby reconfigure the mother and stepfather as one combined figure of authority that is, moreover, directly associated with institutionalisation, a connection that consolidates the urgency of his escape.

It is, at this point, possible to trace the smooth succession of events that lead Antoine from the hands of his parents into the custody of the law as his transgressions become increasingly extreme and, finally, unlawful. To summarise, first we see his rebelliousness in the classroom and at home in his parents’ absence. He and René then play truants, which leads to the street encounter with his mother. This meeting, in turn, engenders the deal

between mother and son that leads to a fire in the apartment as the boy seeks inspiration for his composition. His mother, in apparent collusion with Antoine, intercepts the father's anger by suggesting a trip to the cinema. In other words, she constructs a situation designed to protect her own interests, and of which Antoine is the arbitrary benefactor. But the collusion between mother and son disappears as soon as Antoine's previous wrongdoing is replaced by the plagiarism incident that puts him, anew, at risk of punishment. In flight from this threat, he runs away from home to stay with René, who has also been expelled from school for trying to defend his friend. Thanks to the autonomy permitted by René's home, the two boys now enjoy a camaraderie predicated on defiance of - and separation from - peers, parents, and school. This nonconformity finally culminates, as we shall see, in a critical encounter with the law that effectively transforms Antoine from being a mischievous boy to being a *criminal* and also signals the end of his relationship with René.

Even though, as in the classroom, it is Antoine who is finally caught, René is fully complicit in the illegalities that come to replace the boys' truancy and insolence. This is clear from their first nightly outing, when together they steal a movie poster, as well as small change and an alarm clock from the ladies bathroom (7:ss.20-2). In this light, the fact that the clock starts ringing in Antoine's pocket can be read as a comic foreshadowing of his fate: the shrill sound of the alarm augurs ill for his prospects. Yet the excitement of these petty thefts clearly whets the boys' appetite for more substantial loot and soon Antoine is pondering the value of the stuffed horse: "With that sort of money we could go to the sea and set up a boat business" (18:s.1). The comedy - and tragedy - of this remark lies in Antoine's understandably childish naïveté in thinking that such an adult venture is within his reach. This is compounded in the ensuing puppet-show sequence, in which Truffaut provides a remarkable portrayal of the world of children to which Antoine and René at once do and do not belong:

1	Exterior: snow covered park, A. & R. approach with little girl between them, walk forward out of frame		Fairy tale theme (1 shot)
2	FS: puppet show ("Little Red Riding Hood")		
3	Child getting up		
4	MCU: children sitting		Laughter
5	MCU: different children		Shouting
6	MS: children		Screaming
7	MCU: wolf puppet		
8	Children		
9	Wolf attacking LRRH		
10	Children; one covers ears		
11	LRRH attacks wolf		
12	Children		
13	Puppets		
14	MS: A. & R. sitting at back of hall, hands folded in laps	R: We have to know what we're after. A: There's one in my father's office. R: Let's go then. A: We couldn't sell it; they're numbered. R: We'll pawn it, my mother hocks everything.	
15	Camera pan across children		
16	MS: children shouting at puppets		
17	Puppets		
18	MCU: little boy in crowd		
19	Children		
20	Puppets, wolf dies		
21	Children; two boys at front, one leans head on other's shoulder, fade to black		

The montage that constitutes shots 3-13 succinctly demonstrates the innocence of children who are able to suspend their disbelief entirely and be taken in by the spectacle in front of them. In shot 10, for instance, we see a child covering his ears and, throughout the sequence, hear squeals of delight as well as shouts of terror as the fiction that is "Little Red Riding Hood" unfolds on the puppet stage. Also, the audience participation in shot 16 when the children shout at the puppets signals the very tenuous divide between fiction and reality in the mind of a child.

It is precisely this endearing naïveté that rendered Antoine's idea of stealing the stuffed horse from René's house to set up a boating business relatively harmless. Yet amongst these children, Antoine and René distinguish themselves by sitting at the back of the room and talking in such a way as to suggest that they, unlike the children, are *not* taken in by

the spectacle. Granted, they are older than the majority of children, and a puppet show understandably holds little fascination for adolescent boys. But it is difficult not to regard the manner and subject of their conversation as a parody of adult behaviour, or at least the kind of behaviour one witnesses in gangster films when crooks choose, for purposes of inconspicuousness, very public places in which to plan their crimes. That Antoine and René actually imitate this behaviour – at a puppet show no less, and seated next to the only adult at the performance – skilfully reinforces the fact that they *are* still children. Finally, the montage of the sequence suggests a touching parallel between the affection of the two small boys in shot 21 and the friendship that Antoine and René share.

It is therefore at once tragic and ironic that the failed execution of this crime is what jeopardises the boys' relationship and catalyses the process of transference that will displace Antoine not only from his friend, but also from his parents' guardianship and into the hands of the law. There are, moreover, proleptic indications of Antoine's imminent isolation in the composition of the theft scene:

2	Interior: arcade; A. & R. enter, walk past camera, out of frame	Footsteps
3	High angle panning shot: A. coming up stairs, shadow on wall, checks corridor before crossing, walks past pillars (and camera), bends under counter, goes through glass door (camera remains behind glass separation)	
4	BMCU: A. & typewriter. Stops, looks left	
5	SS: A. leaving with typewriter, moves straight towards camera, puts machine on counter, bends under, picks up machine, camera follows him running	
6	MS: feet down stairs, up to body, then camera remains at high angle as he runs down last flight, shadow on wall	Footsteps
7	Exterior: A. & R. emerge with typewriter, run past stall shielding camera, which then follows boys from behind	Street noise

The glass partition in the office is deceptive. It generates the impression that we are following Antoine; that we are, in effect, at risk with him. Put otherwise, the transparency of the glass suggests that the spectator's look is consonant with that of Antoine. Yet the spectator is, in fact, aligned with the pro-filmic look: the camera stays behind the glass partition – either

behind (ss.3-7), next to (ss.3; 5), or one step ahead of Antoine (ss.2-3), but never *with* him. In other words, the lack of point-of-view shots in this sequence relegates the spectator (and camera) to a position of voyeurism rather than one of sympathetic complicity. So, while the montage seemingly invites the spectator to identify with Antoine – we do not, for instance, have to wait outside with René – the extent of this identification is, by virtue of the glass partition, limited to sympathy rather than empathy.

When they exit the arcade, the conspicuousness of two boys lugging a typewriter down the street and, in addition, scattering a flock of pigeons in their path, suggests that despite the street encounter with his mother, Antoine continues to entertain the myth of the anonymity of the streets. That is, he continues to take chances, each one more reckless than the last, an indication now of his ingenuousness combined with an increasingly acute desire to be the master of his situation. The boys are, however, unable to “hock” the spoils of their theft - are, indeed, on the verge of being cheated by a “real” crook - which leads to the first argument between them and the decision to take the typewriter back (René: “It was your idea”; Antoine: “Yours! I was going to ditch it. I’d better take it back.... You take it back”; René: “No, it was your idea”, 20:ss.19-20). Predictably, it is Antoine who goes back inside, and the camera takes the same precautions as when he went in the first time:

1	<p>Interior: office, A. outside opaque glass door. Opens door, enters, runs past camera which remains fixed on elevator, now coming up. We see man inside through glass panel, he opens door, comes out. Camera pan left to A. from behind glass partition. Caretaker grabs him by shoulder, jerks hat off</p> <p>Pulls A. to table, sits down Lifts phone receiver</p> <p>Caretaker gets up, slams hat back on A.'s head</p>	<p>Caretaker: You're the Doinel boy. Put that down. Your dad <i>will</i> be pleased. They say I don't keep watch, well, I'll show them. And don't try to hop it! I'm onto your kind.</p> <p>"Hello, Mr. Doinel? I'm sorry to disturb you in conference... No, you'd better come up yourself ... Let's say it's a surprise, not a pleasant one." Keep that on!</p>	
2	Exterior, MS: R. standing on street outside		

3	Sf. & A. come around corner, approach and stop by R. They walk off, sf. holding A. by cuff	Sf: The fun and games are over, your mother and I are going to sleep easy. Have a last look at your friend, you won't be seeing each other again.	Melancholic theme
4	Exterior MS: sf. & A. approach camera, then pass it in street full of people		Music fades
5	F/SS: Sf. & A. walking, camera pans to follow them from side, stays behind as they enter police station	Sf.: It's time some sense was knocked into you. My father would have killed me for behaving like you. Good evening, superintendent.	

Our positioning this time is more clearly significant, because by remaining outside the glass partition, the mobility of the camera and the spectator is not compromised by Antoine's capture. His precaution of wearing a hat - "in case the caretaker sees me" - is, of course, made ludicrous by the fact that he is seen and recognised instantly. Yet if we recall Debord and Wolman's contention that disguise is 'closely linked to play' (Debord & Wolman, 1956) and therefore represents a form of non-linguistic *détournement*, the hat is important to a Situationist reading of this sequence. Antoine's disguise - though futile - testifies to a self-constructed role that he is adopting. In this context, the fact that we are separated from Antoine by the glass partition means that we are also excluded from this particular form of "play", presumably, as we shall see, because of its unfortunate outcome.

The (passive) voyeuristic aspect of the camera's position is stressed by the fact that we see the arrival of the caretaker, providing a moment of suspense in which the spectator knows more than the protagonist. Charles Derry defines suspense - as opposed to surprise - as follows:

[T]he creation of suspense demands that enough information be revealed to the spectator so that he or she can anticipate what might happen; suspense then remains operative until the spectator's expectations are foiled, fulfilled, or the narrative is frozen without any resolution at all.

(Derry, 1988:31-2)

In this sequence, the suspense operates until expectations are fulfilled: when we see the man we expect that Antoine will be caught, which he is. In light of the cumulative extremity of Antoine's transgressions, this inevitability reiterates the primacy of a hierarchy in which the "system" (represented variously by parents, teachers, and the law) dominates and will continue to do so. The implication of this is that the more the boy resists the role determined by dominant social structures, the more likely he is to be thwarted by those structures. In simple terms: the stronger the rebellion, the stronger the system in return.

If we now return to the initial definition of psychogeography as 'the study of precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals', this fleeting moment of suspense and inevitability becomes the crucial hinge around which the film's narrative revolves. So far, we have seen the effects of Antoine's various geographical surroundings and can confirm Holmes' and Ingram's suggested connections between, on the one hand, 'pleasure, mobility, imagination and emotional warmth' with 'transgressive behaviour' (by himself and with René) and, on the other, discontent and the social institutions of school, family and shortly, the law. Further, Truffaut's representation of these psychogeographical situations is executed in such a way as to elicit sympathy for Antoine: we see how his parents and teachers treat him, and can therefore "understand" his behaviour. Also, the scenes of pleasure when he plays truant are often so comical and pleasant to *watch* that we do not question that Antoine should partake in them. In other words, Truffaut portrays Antoine's subversive (*détourning*) behaviour as a logical reaction to the system.

However, the suspenseful moment when the caretaker enters the office implies an equivalent logic in Antoine's capture. Truffaut thus uses the suspense technique to justify the narrative link between the first and second parts of the film, represented respectively by the rule of parents and school, and then the law. In this way, Truffaut also constructs a

paradoxical set of values in which rebellion against the system is at once condoned and rendered futile. And it is, perhaps, this implied futility that explains the increased frequency of point-of-view shots from this moment on:⁷ unable, like Antoine, to do anything constructive – or, in psychogeographical terms, *destructive* - against authority, all the camera and spectator can do is sympathise more keenly with the boy as the law tightens around him. This heightened identification would, moreover, be consistent with Truffaut's own definition of suspense, as he articulates it in the introduction to his book-length interview with Hitchcock:

Suspense is simply the dramatisation of a film's narrative material, or, if you will, the most intense presentation possible of dramatic events.... The art of creating suspense is also the art of involving the audience, so that the viewer is actually a participant in the film. In this area of the spectacle, film-making is not a dual interplay between the director and his film, but a three-way game in which the audience, too, is required to play. In the filmic context, suspense, like Tom Thumb's white pebbles or Little Red Riding-hood's walk through the woods, is a poetic means that serves to heighten the emotions and to make the heart beat faster. (Truffaut, 1984:15-16)

But the passivity implied in representing Antoine's capture as logical is problematic because it essentially reinforces the fixity of hegemonic structures, thus situating Truffaut at odds with the New Wave and Situationist structure of feeling that defines itself in opposition to those structures.

Looked at one way, this could merely confirm the many praises for Truffaut's realism in that he succeeds in portraying the social configuration *as it is* (it is thus in this sense that the film has "documentary" value). Petrie, for instance, describes the main characteristic of Truffaut's films as a conflict between real and utopian versions of the world, noting that the

director does not finally give in to the comforts of fantasy but uses it, rather, to stress the limitation of reality:

There is a constant tension between the inhibiting, restrictive moral, social and economic world that is everyday life, and the dream world of freedom where responsibilities and confinements can be ignored. The impulses of the films is towards the dream, and one result of them is to make us aware of the limitations and to respond towards them in a new way.

The organisation of the films points to a way of transcending or escaping the unnecessary and arbitrary restrictions of the everyday world, but with a realistic assessment of the limits to which this escape can go and a refusal to surrender to mere fantasy and wish-fulfilment.

(Petrie, 1970:169,199)

The tension that Petrie refers to can be translated into the two psychological domains pointed out by Holmes and Ingram, where reality ('the everyday world') corresponds to Antoine's discontent in institutions, and utopia ('dream', 'fantasy', 'wish-fulfilment') to the pleasure he derives from 'transgressive behaviour'. This correspondence is supported by the fact that Holmes and Ingram further qualify Antoine's pleasure as essentially fictional: 'the pleasurable, creative domain associated with transgressive behaviour and with fiction' (Holmes & Ingram, 1998:147). In the context of fiction as an inventive and imaginative process, these divisions are, then, consistent with what we have seen of Antoine and René's psychogeographical situationism: instants in which the boys behave in defiance of rules in order to generate their own or new meanings. But there are two important problems with drawing such a neat distinction between "fiction" and "reality" in what is, ultimately, a fictional film (despite autobiographical sourcing and the use of real locations). The first is that by relegating Antoine's pleasure to pure fiction, these critics effectively delegitimise any

potential threat to dominant structures posed by the boy's behaviour. In other words, this division eradicates Antoine's – and by extension, Truffaut's - agency. The second problem, not unrelated to the first, returns us to the issue of the so-called documentary style of The 400 Blows: if the film is made up of a neat opposition between fiction and reality, and 'pleasure' and 'fantasy' constitute its fictional side, then only the social institutions (and the discontent that results from them) qualify as bona fide, the logic of which again embraces and perpetuates the primacy of these structures.

Nevertheless, we have seen that clear divides do exist in the film,⁸ affirming that The 400 Blows does, indeed, make us aware of limitations. So the question that then remains is whether the dilemma is in fact to do with Truffaut or his critics. In my opinion, both parties are guilty of a form of contradictory logic. Firstly, it is Truffaut who suggests - by means of the suspense technique – that his protagonist's capture is inevitable and it is therefore Truffaut who implies the greater strength of hegemonic structures. I would argue that this contradicts the signifying system that is established in the opening sequence of the film, in which the montage purports, precisely, to *de*-stabilise conventional configurations and their limits. If we accept this, and we accept the spectator's required identification with the boy (within given limits), then it is clear that Antoine's incarceration is basically at odds with the camera's subversion of the panoramic ideology in the opening sequence. The critics, then, who endorse the inevitability of capture by their insistence on a clear divide between "fiction" and "reality" have failed to take note of this contradiction. That is, they have failed, in my opinion, to recognise the significance of the opening sequence as a crucial index of the challenge to an existing system that informs the theory behind the New Wave movement. This leaves us in a difficult theoretical space. For if Truffaut contradicts his own signifying system by first implying a disputation with and then finally perpetuating the status quo, how can we reconcile this with his prominent position in a movement that in effect transformed

the idea of “French cinema”? The main problem here is that both the boy’s capture (content) and the mise-en-scène of that sequence (form) represent the “safer” political option: by allowing justice - *as it is* - to run its course, Truffaut cannot be indicted for challenging the system.

One way to explain this preference for compliancy is to reconsider the state of politics in France at that time. Writing in 1958, Marcorelles provides a useful account of the post-war schism between, on the one hand, Communism and Marxism and, on the other, an increasingly Americanised – capitalist – system. One result of this discord was, he suggests, a growing lack of interest in politics: ‘The majority of the public find it increasingly difficult seriously to concern themselves with the manoeuvres of the politicians; and this plays its part in giving the more forceful of the young a certain detachment from social issues’ (Marcorelles, 1958:191). The cinema industry was clearly affected by the American side of the division, as the studio system was firmly established in France after 1945, creating ‘an industry both more solid and more rigid, more firmly based but offering fewer opportunities for creative adventure’ (192). The products of this reconstructed industry were costly and highly stylised, “quality” films that did not, apparently, satisfy public demand. What was needed instead, argues Marcorelles, was a “popularisation” of film:

[T]he problem for the young film-makers now coming to the fore in France is how an art in danger of becoming remote, over-intellectualised, can rediscover contact with popular feeling.
(*ibid.*)

We can, in this context, read the literal popularity of The 400 Blows as an index of the film’s answer to this need, and extend the argument to suggest that the lack of confrontational politics in the film corresponds to the depoliticised atmosphere that Marcorelles refers to.

But to qualify the film as New Wave or as a “sign of the times” because it takes an appropriately reactionary stance is, of course, a somewhat superficial claim which clearly disregards the very real revolutionary politics that were developing elsewhere, and not only *outside* of the New Wave movement, as the films of Godard would soon confirm. A more rewarding approach, then, is to consider the shifting semantics of the term “realism”. Truffaut articulates his conception of the term in “A Certain Tendency”:

This school [the “tradition of quality”] which aspires to realism destroys it at the moment of finally grabbing it, so careful is the school to lock these beings in a closed world, barricaded by formulas, plays on words, maxims, instead of letting us see them for ourselves, with our own eyes. The artist cannot always dominate his work. He must be, sometimes, God and, sometimes, his creature. (Truffaut, 1976:232)

This formulation is intriguing because Truffaut invokes the roles of the director and of the audience. That is, he espouses an ambiguity of structure that implicates both the creation and reception of a film. The importance of this reasoning in the context of my argument lies in its relation to responsibility: by rejecting formula (and, therefore, expectation), Truffaut advocates a theoretical space in which accountability is marginalised. While this is in curious discordance with the *auteur* theory, the notion that the director at times can – indeed, should – be ‘God’s creature’ exempts him from needing to justify inconsistencies in the filmic text. As for the audience, they are, in a sense, left to their own devices. Left, in other words, to make what sense they can of these potential incongruities. Interestingly, it is precisely this freedom of interpretation that James Monaco designates as the at once problematic and enticing feature of Truffaut’s films: ‘The main difficulty we have with Truffaut’s films is also their most attractive attribute: that they leave room for their audiences in which to operate’ (Monaco, 1976:96).⁹

Returning to the film, it is in just such an 'attractive' difficulty that we find ourselves when Antoine gets caught. But what now emerges is that, rather than signalling a straightforward contradiction, this sequence demonstrates that there is more than one signifying system at work in the film. This can be considered a manifestation of Truffaut's rejection of the "traditional" realism that is defined, according to him, by strict codes and expectations. Following from this, it is easier to see the problem with critics insisting on clear-cut boundaries between "reality" and "fiction" in the film, as this approach flies in the face of Truffaut's theoretical and, I would argue, practical rejection of the 'closed world' of categorisation. Put otherwise, these critics read against the grain of the systems of meaning generated by the filmic text. In addition, it seems that these labels are used in order to make sense of inconsistencies in the film or, worse, to avoid admitting to their presence. But to recall Heath's argument of a theory of the subject as a preferred alternative to the *auteur* theory, this recognition is imperative to an understanding of the film in relation to ideology: 'A theory of the subject ... allows at once the articulation of contradictions in the film text other than in relation to an engulfing consciousness, in relation now, that is, to a specific historico-social process, and the recognition of a heterogeneity of structures, codes, languages at work in the film and of the particular positions of the subject they impose' (Heath, 1981:217). Along these lines, we can now describe two out of the three major segments in the film, each representing a different system of 'structures, codes, languages'. The first is the opening sequence which signifies desire and defiance. The second revolves around the suspense and inevitability of Antoine's arrest and implies hegemonic stability. In order to understand the interaction between these disparate signifying systems, we now need to identify the third, which leads us to the remainder of the film.

5. The Law

Antoine's capture initiates a series of handovers that systematically remove him from the positions that he has hitherto occupied with family, friends and school, and place him, instead, under the jurisdiction of the law. As we shall see, this transference implies not simply a physical relocation but a psychological shift as his identity – variously manifested thus far as son, “kid”, friend, schoolmate - is progressively subsumed under the label “delinquent”. This constructs a new parameter that not only determines and influences Antoine's behaviour, but also redefines the social structure against which he rebels. In other words, his installation under the law has explicit psychogeographical implications.

The first index of Antoine's new circumstance is his stepfather's remark to the boy immediately after his capture: “The fun and games are over.... Have a last look at your friend; you won't be seeing each other again” (21:s.3). While this may seem like the familiar idle threat from a parent who can think of no alternative to emotional blackmail, the melancholic music that immediately follows the statement alerts us that the threat is far from idle. And although the two boys do see one another, they will be prevented from interacting again. So, the failure of their crime has cost Antoine and René the freedom to be friends.

The conversation between Antoine's stepfather and the police inspector that results in the boy's first “handover” highlights several of the important themes of the film, as well as the collusion between the institution of family and State apparatuses:

Stepfather: We've tried everything, Inspector. I've never laid a finger on him, of course.

Inspector: Sometimes the old methods are best.

Stepfather: It's not really our style. We gave him a good deal of freedom.

Inspector: Too much, perhaps.

Stepfather: I don't think so, but both of us work, so you see...

Inspector: Yes, I'm a father too. I must admit, it's sometimes rather a problem.

Stepfather: If only he'd confided in us, but he's always dreaming. He's not listening now. Look how I found him with the typewriter. (*places hat on Antoine's head*)

...

Inspector: (*to an officer*) Prepare the charge, will you? Vagrancy and theft. (*to father*) What now?

Stepfather: We can't take him back home at once; he'd run away again. Could you put him under supervision somewhere where he'd have to work? He's bone idle at school.

Inspector: We could try the Observation Centre.... If there's a place, and you give him in charge to the juvenile authorities. (22:ss. 1-11)

The first theme that this exchange invokes is “freedom”, a concept that clearly has shifting connotations in the film’s semantic repertoire. For Antoine’s stepfather – and the inspector who agrees with this logic – freedom means being left alone. In other words, freedom is equal to not being constantly supervised, and, in addition, not being corporally punished for transgressions. Furthermore, while his stepfather justifies not using corporal punishment as “not really our style”, the form of freedom Antoine is given is obviously not the result of a carefully considered choice, but rather a matter of convenience: “both of us work, so you see...”. In this way, the stepfather translates not having enough time to supervise Antoine adequately into the seemingly positive guise of “freedom”. The inspector’s suggestion that perhaps *too much* freedom is the cause of the boy’s misbehaviour stresses that the particular kind of freedom they are discussing is, indeed, inseparable from supervision and discipline. That is, it is an exclusively *physical* liberty.

As a counterpoint to the physicality of this concept of freedom, George Simmel, one of the pioneers of professional sociology, provides the following definition of freedom:

A person does not end with the limits of his physical body or with the area to which his physical activity is immediately confined but embraces, rather, the totality of meaningful effects which emanates from him temporally and spatially. In the same way the city exists only in the totality of the effects which transcend their immediate sphere. These really are the actual extent in which their existence is expressed. This is already expressed in the fact that *individual freedom, which is the logical historical complement of such extension, is not only to be understood in the negative sense as mere freedom of movement and emancipation from prejudices and philistinism*. Its essential characteristic is rather to be found in the fact that the particularity and incomparability which ultimately every person possesses in some way is actually expressed, giving form to life. That we follow the laws of our inner nature – and this is what freedom is – becomes perceptible and convincing to us only when the expressions of this nature distinguish themselves from other; it is our irreplaceability by others which shows that our mode of existence is not imposed on us from the outside. (Simmel, 1971:335; my emphases)

Antoine's encounter with his mother in the street provides a good example of the first characteristic of Simmel's version of freedom: that it relates not simply to where you are, but rather to the liberty to behave in a distinctively idiosyncratic manner, or, to express one's individuality. This is manifested in their encounter in the way that the unexpected presence of his mother clearly affects Antoine's otherwise carefree behaviour in the street.

Simmel's second qualification of irreplaceability becomes paramount in the context of the dialogue between Antoine's stepfather and the inspector, specifically at the point at which they establish an understanding based on the fact that they are both fathers. Paternity here is both literal and metaphoric. Firstly, on a superficial level, Antoine's stepfather is, of course, not his biological father, but the man who has assumed a role of paternity in order to

complete the conventional composition of “family”: mother, father, child. That it is possible to *assume* this role is the first indicator of what is the very structural (as opposed to emotional) configuration of social institutions. Secondly, the handover of his “child” to the law renders the police inspector another metaphorical father figure, that is, the person into whose custody Antoine now falls. And it is on this condition that the handover can occur: “If there’s a place, and you give him in charge to the juvenile authorities”. The exchange thus highlights the essential *replaceability* of subjects to occupy structurally determined positions. Furthermore, the necessary relinquishing of authority by Antoine’s parents implies that while parental authorities can be exchanged, so to speak, they cannot be accumulated: either one or the other can be in control, but not both.¹

This concept of individuals as replaceable is paramount to a psychogeographical critique because it is fundamentally at odds with the democratic aspirations of a society represented by the motto “*Liberté Egalité Fraternité*”. In his “Individuals and Societies” (1961), Williams specifies the requirements of democratic governance as predicated on precisely the opposite, namely the uniqueness of individuals:

It is right to recognize that we became human individuals in terms of a social process, but still individuals are unique, through a particular heredity expressed in a particular history. And the point about this uniqueness is that it is creative as well as created: new forms can flow from this particular form, and extend in the whole organization, which is in any case being constantly renewed and changed as unique individuals inherit and continue it. This recognition of individual uniqueness, and of the relation of its creativity to general human patterns, is, of course, the permanent basis of the case for democracy as a system of government. (Williams, 1961:82)

In this context, the fact that human replaceability is implied in a dialogue between two figures that represent authority is indicative of a crucial contradiction between hegemonic theory and

practice. While democratic idealism is publicly proclaimed, the actual procedures of the system are better defined according to the consumerist ideology that informs a society based on commodity production. For exchangeability is, after all, the primary characteristic of the commodity: 'the value of a commodity obtains independent and definite expression by taking the form of exchange-value' (Marx, 1887:15). It is for this reason that Vaneigem discusses his projected revolution of everyday life in terms of a refusal to sacrifice, which corresponds to, he contends, 'the refusal to be bartered: human beings are not exchangeable' (Vaneigem, 1967). So, it is only by refusing the status of a commodity that subjectivity can be secured, or, in terms of historical materialism, that social relations can be redefined as the interaction between human beings, rather than between commodities. In this way, the dialogue reveals two important characteristics of the film's social space. Firstly, a discrepancy exists between institutional theory and practice which can be broadly defined as a contradiction between democratic and consumerist ideologies. The second characteristic is thus that the society is organised according to a hierarchy that perpetuates itself by designating individuals as exchangeable objects, meaning that structural voids are easily filled.

We can further qualify this society as *spectacular* if we recall the example of the Eiffel Tower, which demonstrates the same discrepancy between theory and practice. The function of the monument was represented as a democratisation of space by its promise of affording *all* the panoramic perspective of the cityscape. Yet what this view facilitated was a perspective from which to survey the subjects of the city, who then become objects of the gaze of authority. In this way, the Tower represents a spatial reconstruction of the social hierarchy that depends, for its existence, on the very illusion that it produces, that is, the illusion of democracy. In other words, the theoretical significance of the Tower, like that of the motto "*Liberté Egalité Fraternité*", functions to safeguard hegemonic practice, which corresponds to the spectacle in its capacity as 'a world view transformed into an objective

force' (Debord, 1995:5). Finally, the fact that the film's social space is defined by the extradiegetically significant "*Liberté Egalité Fraternité*" supports reading Antoine's environment as consonant with that of Truffaut. This is not intended in the autobiographical sense, but as a validating example of Heath's argument that film provides an important platform for undertaking a 'materialist analysis of institutions and practices' (Heath, 1981:4). The use of the French national dictum in The 400 Blows thus endorses reading the representation of social space in the film as Truffaut's comment on contemporary French society.

Returning now to the dialogue between the inspector and Antoine's stepfather, it is also here that Antoine's misdemeanour is first defined in terms that belong to the legal "reward" system, by which treatment – punishment - is determined according to a set of predefined crimes. This naming of Antoine's crimes ("Vagrancy and theft", 22:s.6) is crucial as it catalyses his progression into a psychogeographical structure called "delinquency", the consequences of which will dominate the remainder of the film. This also represents a move from the private to the public realm: when his parents can no longer control him, he becomes the property of the state. Furthermore, the manner in which the inspector utters the charge at once asserts the seriousness of this progression, and undermines that very seriousness, because we cannot help finding it comic to hear the hushed tone and syllabic emphasis on "*va-ga-bon-dage*" (vagrancy) when applied to a child. So, this utterance functions both to ridicule the seriousness with which the inspector takes his own job and to recall the tension between naivety and maturity that characterises Antoine and René's behaviour as they plan their crime at the puppet show.

Antoine's move away from his parents' guardianship is represented in this sequence by a series of physical handovers:

12	MS: officer 1 at typewriter; A. seated to his right Officer starts typing as door opens, man enters, passes behind A.	Officer 1: No-one saw you enter the office? A: No. Officer 1: Right ... "declare that I unlawfully entered..."	
13	Low angle: sf. descending spiral steps		
14	Officer & A.	Officer 1: "... a typewriter" Good!	
15	MCU/BS: A. signing document, camera pans up and back as officer 2 enters and A. leaves with him (forward then left through side door)		
16	Low angle: Officer 2 and A. down same spiral steps, meet officer 3, they separate, camera lingers on steps	Officer 2: Take over.	
17	FS: officer 3 & A. approaching down corridor. Camera tracks back, revealing its position behind door that they enter (filming through glass window). They move to the cage which officer 3 starts unlocking		
18	SS: A. enters cage (camera remains outside); prisoner gets up. Track back to show whole room	Prisoner: What have you done? A: I ran away from home. And you?	
19	Dissolve: 2 officers playing boardgame, 1 reading newspaper. Camera pan to right, around room, stop at cage. Prisoner sleeping, pan down and zoom closer to A. asleep on floor (camera stays outside bars). A. wakes up	("Here they are, the darlings)	
20	Officer 4 ushers 3 prostitutes into cage, moves A. out into smaller cage	Prostitute 1: I saw a police station in a film, it was a hell of a lot cleaner. Prostitute 2: I saw a dirtier one.	400 Blows theme (slow)
21	A. point-of-view shot: prisoner and prostitutes in other cage, pan to wall, to back of officer's head, to boardgame		
22	MS (outside cage): A. in corner, covers legs with jacket; pulls polo neck up over mouth		Vehicle stopping; Footsteps
23	Officer 4 picks up weapon and goes to A.'s cage, camera follows other officer to the bigger cage to let out prisoner and prostitutes, A. in background	("The van's early") Officer 4: Put your jacket on.	

So, from the moment he is charged until he is transported to prison, Antoine passes through the hands of three different officers and is also moved from one holding cell to another before being ushered to the van. It is noteworthy that when Antoine approaches the room with the holding cells (s.17), the camera is already inside as we see him arriving through a small

window in the door. In other words, the camera and spectator are, in a sense, waiting for him, watching. This passive perspective continues as he is locked up with another offender. It is only once he is placed in a cage by himself (s.21) that we are given Antoine's point-of-view: it is only once he is truly alone (separated even from the other prisoners) that we are allowed inside the cage and thereby asked to identify completely with him. This is, then, indicative of the camera's heightened sympathy for Antoine's character in the latter part of the film. Just as the suspense sequence suggested a certain inevitability, so the camera waiting for Antoine suggests a familiarity, once again, with the workings of the system; it knows exactly where he will end up. And it is once he is locked into the familiar machinations of this system that sympathy is required of the spectator by the use of point-of-view shots.

This heightened identification takes on the tones of veritable commiseration when the final transportation takes place and the camera alternates between Antoine's point-of-view and showing us the boy in his new misery:

1	Exterior MS: 3 women, 1 man, and A. get into police van, door closes, A. looking out of bars as it drives off		400 Blows theme (dramatic)
2	A. point-of-view: street through bars		
3	BS: van, A. clutching bars, camera zoom to MBS		Music more dramatic
4	BS (A.'s head), street view		REVUE FLO LES NU LES PLUS OSES DU MONDE NARCISSE
5	Exterior: another police van passes		
6	FS: A. looking out (with tears now)		
7	A. point-of-view: street view		
8	MS: A. as van stops moving		

The music in this sequence functions to heighten the tragedy of the situation. We have heard the theme several times before,² but now it takes on an unmistakably melodramatic quality. Coupled with Antoine's point-of-view and his tears, it suddenly becomes clear that this is no longer a case of simple adolescent disobedience, but of a citizen who has disobeyed the laws of state and is facing the very real consequences of his actions. That Antoine is a child, and

that we have seen him laugh, makes the scenario that much more poignant. This is reiterated by shot 4, when they pass the night-lit streets. Firstly, the contrast between the bright lights of the signs and the darkness of the police van stresses the division between outside and inside in the way the street becomes a forbidden spectacle. Given the street's typical configuration as a public space, this represents a curious reversal of Antoine's move from private to public realm. Also, the fact that it is specifically striptease on offer in these clubs (*Les Nus Les Plus Osés Du Monde*: "The Most Daring Nudes in the World") constructs a twice-removed prohibition: not only can Antoine not partake in street pleasures because he is locked inside a police van, but he is also a child who would not be permitted entry into these places.

This separation – literal and metaphorical – from the "familiar" culminates in the following sequence, when Antoine is officially incarcerated.

1	Slow dissolve: dark wall, camera pan slowly to right to reveal corridor with light on at end; silhouette of officer and barred gate		400 Blows theme (dramatic) Music fades
2	Diss. to FS: A. & desk officer, camera zooms in as A. removes everything, signs book. Pair of hands grabs A.'s shoulder and shoves him to the right	Officer: Tie, belt, laces, empty your pockets...sign here	Lonesome theme
3	Diss. to low angle pan up through grated floor to reveal many stories: back down to panel on barred door as it shuts		Sound of keys
4	Diss.: A. on bed, stares up, covers mouth and closes eyes.		Music stops
5	Diss.: A. waking up, goes to door to get cup being pushed in. Sits back on bed, tastes, throws it all against the wall. Picks up paper from floor, collects tobacco dust from jacket pockets, rolls cigarette and lies back		Door opening; knocking sound
6	Diss.: MCU fingerprinting		
7	Diss.: Mug shot set-up		
8	MCU/FS: A's face as hands turn his head		

The first shot of a police officer silhouetted against a barred gate signifies the boy's definitive entrance into and enclosure by State apparatuses. That this enclosure entails more than a physical confinement is evidenced by the procedures Antoine has to go through in order to be "admitted", the first of which is the removal of all personal effects, including a tie (s.2). The fact that he is not wearing a tie merely highlights the perfunctoriness of this procedure and implies, furthermore, the incompatibility of individuality with this institution: the clerk's mechanical instructions means that he does not see a *person* in front of him, merely another prisoner. Antoine's compulsory signature represents an agreement to relinquish his individuality; an agreement, in Vaneigem's terms, to sacrifice.

This first procedure thus anticipates the ironic loss of identity that will result from the next process whereby Antoine is fingerprinted and photographed (ss.6-8). The irony of this process lies in the fact it entails a more rigorous attention to personal detail than Antoine has yet experienced: fingerprints are, after all, our most idiosyncratic feature. But Antoine's fingerprints and photograph in police files means that he is now a "case"; his identity is documented and is thus made available for bureaucratic use. John Tagg, in his insightful history of the ideological use of the photograph, succinctly articulates the essential loss of freedom that a mug shot represents:

What we have in this standardised image is more than a picture of a supposed criminal. It is a portrait of the product of the disciplinary method: the body made object; divided and studied; enclosed in a cellular structure of space whose architecture is the file index; made docile and forced to yield up its truth; separated and individuated; subjected and made subject.

(Tagg, 1988:76)

So, as much as Antoine has struggled against the machinations of the system through various attempts at expressing an individuality at odds with this system, he finally ends up in a

situation where he is, in Tagg's terms, 'separated and individuated', but it is precisely here that his lack of freedom is, ironically, most acute.³ Despite the attention to personal detail, then, the space represented by the delinquent centre is essentially an intensified version of the controlling structures of school and home in which we have seen Antoine so far. As Nelson suggests, 'The substitution ... of jail for the school-home authoritarian team of the earlier segments shows us to what extent the legal power of society underlies parental and academic sanctions. Antoine has thus moved in wider and wider circles, to ever larger "jails", under constantly broadening sanctions' (Nelson, 1985:143).

Antoine, however, appears oblivious to the long-term consequences of this process, as is clear when he is about to go for his first session with a psychologist and is talking to another more "experienced" offender while waiting outside:

Boy: Don't look at her legs, or it'll go on your record.

Antoine: What record?

Boy: It's what they think of you: doctor, judge, everybody. I know my record by heart. I'm a psychomotor unstable type with depraved tendencies.

Antoine: Suppose I talk crap, just for a lark? (27)

Antoine's final utterance in this exchange indicates that his subversive streak has not yet diminished. Another way of articulating this is that the psychogeographical implications of his delinquency have not, at this point, been actualised. That is, as far as Antoine's behaviour henceforth demonstrates, the institution he ends up in is much like another school. The difference is, though, that his identity is now objectively qualified as delinquent by the sign that inaugurates the sequence in the film's final institutional space: *CENTRE D'OBSERVATION DE MINEURS DELINQUANTS* (Centre for the Observation of Juvenile Delinquents). The normality of this qualification in this particular space is manifested in the

series of encounters that Antoine shares with other boys at the centre, each of which have their own measures – some more, some less than our protagonist – of transgressions that have landed them in this institution which serves the specific the purpose of isolating individuals who do not harmoniously subjugate themselves to the dictatorship of hegemonic structures.⁴

Boy 1: How did you tumble?

Antoine: Oh...how about you?

Boy 1: I slipped.

Antoine: I pinched a typewriter.

Boy 1: That wasn't bright; typewriters are all numbered, you know. See that big guy? He pinched car tyres.

...

Boy 2: Whenever I cried at home, my dad used to imitate me on his violin. One day I got fed up, had a fit and attacked him.

Boy 3: I'd have killed my dad for that.

Two guards enter gate with adolescent between them.

(ooh, aah)

(Who's he?)

(He ran away a week ago.)

(You mustn't escape and you mustn't get caught.) (26:ss.6-8)

So, as Antoine was represented as a deviant amongst deviants in the classroom sequence, he is now a delinquent among delinquents. But, just as Antoine's character was soon distinguished from his peers in the classroom, so will he imminently be distinguished in this space, once the psychological conditioning of the institution begins to take effect and he responds by running away. Whether this running away involves the 'escape' or getting 'caught' that the last boy cautions against will be discussed presently.

When he is finally interviewed by a psychologist, the spectator has no way of knowing whether Antoine is talking “crap, just for a lark”, or whether this sequence in fact divulges important information as to his character that would explain, to some extent, his hostility towards his parents and thus elicit more sympathy for his behaviour. The issue of whether or not he is lying is, moreover, cleverly included in the interview itself:

Psychologist: (Your parents say that you lie all the time.)

Antoine: Sure, I lie from time to time. Sometimes because if I told the truth, they wouldn't believe me.

Psychologist: (Why don't you love your mother?)

Antoine: Because I was sent to a foster-mother, then later to my grandmother. She got too old when I was eight, and they took me back. I realised my mother didn't care for me much; she was always on at me. Also I ... when they had scenes at home, I heard that my mother had me when she was an unmarried mother. She quarrelled with my grandmother once, too, and I found out that she wanted to abort me, but grandmother had stopped her. (28:ss.3-5)

The spectator's situation and lack of concrete knowledge in this case are important to the film's New Wave status for several reasons. Firstly, the *mise-en-scène* of the sequence challenges the conventional shot-reverse-shot configuration of dialogues. Here, instead, Antoine faces the camera directly (albeit without eye-contact) and responds to a psychologist whose presence is only aural: we hear her voice but do not see her. This in effect situates the spectator in the place of the psychologist so that we, like her, are unable to determine the “truth” of Antoine's disclosures. Put otherwise, we are as liable to be duped by his character as she is, meaning that (as with suspense technique) the spectator is brought into the diegetic space of the film. Secondly, the possibility that what we hear *is* true suggests an inconsistency in Truffaut's character development: surely to elicit complete sympathy for the

protagonist, this information would have been divulged earlier. We also learn in this interview of Antoine's attempted visit to a prostitute: "I went along there, but the tarts yelled at me, so I got scared off. Another time a North African asked me what I wanted.... So he took me to a hotel, but she wasn't there that day. I waited for an hour or two, but she didn't arrive, so I left". This second point is thus one of the spectator learning new details about a character that are either surprising or not quite consistent with earlier indications. Another important example of this is the scene in the prison cell, where Antoine is suddenly "grown-up" and critical enough to find the coffee he is given so repulsive that he throws it on the ground, and instead rolls himself a cigarette with tobacco dust from his pocket. This sudden maturity and experience seems at odds with the child who hungrily drinks a litre of milk when he is forced to spend a night on the streets and almost bursts into tears when his stepfather (rightly) accuses him of stealing a Michelin guide.

But how important are these discrepancies, and the fact that we only learn so late in the film that Antoine, on top of everything else, has possibly stolen money from his grandmother? We might, as a starting point to answering this question, consider some practical aspects of the New Wave. Insdorf, for instance, proposes a direct relationship between the practical factors and restraints facing the New Wave directors (as well as those of the Italian Neo-Realist school) and the main features which would come to typify their films. Since these directors were, she argues,

young, independent, and without studios, they resorted to on-location shooting, the use of non-professional or relatively unknown performers, and an address to daily experience ... [which] led to the elements that best characterise most New Wave films: spontaneity and improvisation.

(Insdorf, 1994:24)⁵

She then goes on to designate Truffaut's films specifically as dealing with 'characters in the act of creating their identities' (29). This characteristic, coupled with the fact that the actor Jean-Pierre Léaud did, at Truffaut's behest, improvise much of the psychologist sequence, complies with what we have seen, at least in terms of description. Working independently of studio and capital-bound formulae, an amateur director affords himself and his young protagonist the freedom to improvise and experiment, resulting in a film which is lauded primarily for its departure from the conventional, that is, for its rejection of the "rules" of fiction films. Given this cursory explanation, it may appear unfruitful to worry about minor discrepancies and whether or not Antoine is telling the truth, but there is, to my mind, a somewhat more problematic implication here. This is that these discrepancies represent minor but nevertheless significant examples of the fundamentally contradictory structure which I have argued defines the film and which must be acknowledged if we are to avoid simply giving the film credit for its difference from what came before, rather than questioning the specificities and consequences of this difference. It is not difficult to imagine the appeal to both Truffaut and Léaud of the freedom to improvise which led, finally, to an intriguing and very likely unexpected sequence. But at the same time it is worthwhile to consider the importance of intentionality versus fortuity, because deliberate or not, this sequence now forms a part of the film as a finished product.

In his essay "On Framing", Gerald Mast discusses Bazin's rejection of Sergei Eisenstein's theory of montage as the only valid filmic signifying system. Bazin argued, in contrast, that meaning was created not primarily through the collision of images, but also within the frame, and proposed, in addition, that the use of deep focus allowed for a more democratic production of meaning by affording the spectator the liberty to decide what to focus on and therefore what meaning to infer from a particular shot.⁶ Mast then draws attention to the central paradox of this theoretical position:

But if the viewer is free to read the cinema frame, does that mean that the filmmaker can put no specific meaning or meanings within the frame that he expects the viewer to read properly if the viewer is to understand the image and the film? *The notions of freedom and artistic coherence are antithetical*, and the current attacks of the deconstructionists on specific, correct, or intended readings of texts reveal that the tension (perhaps even internal contradiction) in Bazin's position between freedom and intentionality is no isolated crisis of theory and criticism at mid-century.

(Mast, 1984:87; my emphases)

The psychologist sequence provides an example of a reverse kind of freedom to that which is central to Bazin's argument, because in The 400 Blows, we have a case of freedom of directing and acting as opposed to that of viewer interpretation. It could, of course, be argued that a lack of intentionality on the director's part merely increases the spectator's freedom of interpretation - surely if no specific meaning is intended, then we are free to invent one that suits our purpose? This, to my mind, is probably one of the fundamental problems with many experimental films: they are often treated like metaphorically extended versions of the democratic principle that Bazin attributes to the deep focus shot.⁷ The hazard that follows this kind of "democracy" is that these films become vulnerable to strategic use by critics who see themselves as justified in forwarding almost any thesis, that can neither be refuted nor sanctioned by the director who claims that a particular sequence is simply a "happy accident". In the end, though, it amounts to an issue of responsibility, which we have touched on before in the opening and suspense sequences. In this context, Mast's formulation that 'freedom and artistic coherence are antithetical' is no small matter in the case of a film that inaugurated its director's career as an *auteur*. In light of all this, it seems clear that our task is not to impose unity or coherence where it is not, but rather to collect and acknowledge all the disparate filmic enunciations in order to determine what they signify collectively, that is,

what the film reveals of itself as a comprehensive text, directorial intentions aside. In order to complete this comprehensive picture, let us now turn from the extradiegetic freedom of Truffaut and Léaud to the - not unrelated - intradiegetic question of Antoine's freedom that is posed by the final frame of the film.

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6. Freedom?

... in film, no one ever looks at me: it is forbidden, by the Fiction.
(Roland Barthes Camera Lucida)

One of the ways a film leaves an impression is by one or two remarkable shots that remain etched on one's mind. In the case of The 400 Blows, one of these images is undoubtedly the freeze frame that concludes Antoine's run to the sea and the film's narrative. This closing sequence is fertile for psychogeographical analysis because it invokes the pivotal issues of freedom and the mythology of the city that I have argued permeate the film so far.

But what is it that makes this particular image so unforgettable? Tom Sutcliffe, for instance, argues that, 'Truffaut's final shot is so memorably arresting – an adjective that conventionally applies a rapt immobility in the audience, but that here is just as applicable to the image that fixes us in our seats.... The moment is so canonical, and the film so influential, that it is difficult to think that it might have ended otherwise' (Sutcliffe, 2000:149). In just which context Sutcliffe arrives at the designations 'canonical' and 'influential' is not clear, but presumably these adjectives result from the sheer volume of criticism produced on Truffaut to date. There is, however, a useful point in his formulation, namely the parallel that he draws between what occurs on and off screen. In terms of (non-)action, the shot merges Antoine and the spectator so that we, like our protagonist, are "frozen" or immobilised by the frame. Sutcliffe goes on to propose that this 'rapt immobility' in the audience is at once physical and psychological, in response to,

a moment that remains poised between Antoine's temporary jubilation and our knowledge that his joyful flight is bound to end. The preservation of his fugitive gesture has the poignancy shared by all photographs: their paradoxical reminder that human flesh does not endure. But this will only go some way to explain the aesthetic thrill an audience is likely to feel at such a moment. Part of this must be physiological. Our brains are adept at projecting motion forwards in time, and so it wouldn't be particularly surprising to find that our minds have anticipated the frames visible on-screen and will already have plotted the likely trajectories of light and shade. And then the body suddenly stops, without deceleration or recoil, freed from the physics that we know all bodies to be subject to. (150)

The crux of Sutcliffe's argument is, then, that the power of the freeze frame lies primarily in its *suggestion* of what will follow, but which is not realised. This calls to mind, by contrast, the sequence in which our expectations *are* realised, namely when Antoine is caught with the typewriter. The technical difference here would be that the freeze frame falls into the third of Derry's categories of the suspense device, that is, when suspense functions until 'the narrative is frozen without any resolution at all' (Derry, 1988:32). In light of this, we can begin to answer the question of the power behind the film's ending by suggesting, first of all, that the freeze frame allows Truffaut to end his film in mid-suspense. In this context, the director's own definition of suspense as a means to actively involve the audience in the narrative goes some way to explain the unity between Antoine and the spectator that Sutcliffe refers to.

There are, however, two other formal considerations that add to the significance of this closing frame. Firstly, Sutcliffe (in a footnote) provides a valuable qualification to his definition of a freeze frame as a device of suggestion: 'In the best of freeze frames ... there should always be a sense that the image is on its way to being something else but that this interim moment offers its own revelation. *It is a negotiation between the entirely accidental*

and the carefully calculated (Sutcliffe, 2000:153; my emphases). This quality of being at once fortuitous and intentional renders the freeze frame – and the particular image under analysis – a succinct embodiment of Mast’s antithesis between freedom and artistic coherence, and thus pivotal to our discussion by creating a tangible link between the form and content of the frame.¹ The second factor also relates to content, and refers back to Barthes’ “rule” of fiction that serves as an epigraph for this chapter: by allowing Antoine to look directly at the camera, Truffaut challenges the convention that precludes such a confrontation. In his discussion of Christian Metz, Jay provides a useful account of this convention:

Film, at least in its classic form, disavowed its discursive underpinnings, presented itself as a “real” story on display for the voyeuristic spectator. But it is not the voyeurism of an interaction in which the object of the gaze is exhibitionally making itself available, but rather that of an object that disavows its awareness that it is on view (a conceit abetted by the normal taboo against actors looking directly into the camera). (Jay, 1993:482)

Jay’s phrasing puzzlingly suggests that the “prohibition” of looking at the camera is primarily related to the diegetic character on screen: it is s/he that is ‘an object that disavows its awareness that it is on view’. This would imply that Antoine’s gaze at the camera represents, above all, a diegetic avowal of exhibitionism. While that is, to some extent, what occurs, such a reading understates the more significant, in my opinion, position of the spectator in what is essentially an *exchange* of gazes when an actor looks into the camera. Metz’s own articulation of the convention makes clear that this moment in the film is, indeed, one of confrontation: ‘If the traditional film tends to suppress all the marks of the subject of enunciation, this is in order that the viewer may have the impression of being that subject himself, but an empty, absent subject, a pure capacity for seeing’ (Metz, 1981:230). What occurs in the instant of the freeze is precisely an expression, rather than a suppression, of the

subject of enunciation so that, in effect, the spectator is no longer a 'pure capacity for seeing'. The spectator is, rather, seen – by virtue of the diegetic avowal of exhibitionism - and is, thereby, forced into a confrontation with, or consciousness of, *self*. As Arlene Croce asserts, 'The important thing is that ... at the end, you are no longer looking at the film – the film is looking at you' (Croce, 1978:725).

The freeze frame also succinctly challenges Mulvey's psychoanalytical reading of the cinema as a dramatisation of the mirror phase: 'the cinema has structures of fascination strong enough to allow temporary loss of ego while simultaneously reinforcing the ego' (Mulvey, 1976:308). It is, according to Mulvey, the loss and relocation of self in the screen character that effects the simultaneous repression and reinforcement of the spectator's ego: we are at once empowered and disempowered by relegating our agency to a diegetic character. Jean-Paul Sartre encapsulates this process when he summarises the attraction of watching films: 'In the cinema we *are* the hero, we participate in him, we dash to our own destruction' (Sartre, 2000:202).² When Antoine looks at the spectator, then, the latter is forced out of identification with the screen character and is, thereby, made aware of the very process of identification which is no longer available. In this way, the end of The 400 Blows represents a disconcerting reversal of classical narrative cinema by refusing to preserve the continuity of spectator identification for the entire length of the film. Translated into structuralist terms, this means that the freeze disrupts the story to proclaim the film as discourse.

So, the power of the freeze frame lies at once in its form and content. Formally, it challenges narrative conventions and also functions as a mode of suspense by suggesting a narrative continuation that remains unrealised. In terms of content, this non-realisation calls into question the specificities of that continuation by leaving it ambiguous. In the case of this particular image, Antoine's direct gaze at the camera compounds the formal and narrative

qualities of the device by implicating the spectator directly in the ambiguity implied by the freeze frame. There appears to be critical consensus over the fact that this ending is at once powerful and ambiguous, but critics to date have seemed unwilling to go beyond the level of description to that of interpretation. In other words, it is not, I believe, enough for us simply to assert, as Insdorf does, that 'a freeze frame expresses uncertainty' (Insdorf, 1994:33) nor, as Nelson enigmatically claims, that 'filmic techniques are creating the subject in this striking ending' (Nelson, 1985:141). Our task as critics must go two steps beyond this: firstly, to investigate any political implications of ambiguity as a device in itself; secondly, and this is crucial to reach any kind of conclusion, to consider the implications of this ending *in relation to* the rest of the film's signifying mechanisms.

The curiously self-imposed critical limitations of description rather than analysis can be understood as a manifestation of the overwhelmingly emotional response to Truffaut's films, which is related to the critical trend of realism discussed in Chapter 2. Holmes and Ingram also comment on this phenomenon:

Some critics, while writing positive appraisals of Truffaut's work, resort to descriptors such as 'charming' and 'nostalgic', 'lightness of touch'. Such approaches draw attention to Truffaut's intuitive, nuanced investigation of human, mainly heterosexual, relationships, to his success in handling child actors which enable him to convey convincingly the experience of childhood, to his somewhat romantic evocation of a recent past. By implication, such critics suggest the lack of an intellectual edge, the failure to inject into the films any sort of social or political critique.

(Holmes & Ingram, 1998:30-31)³

If we now return our discussion to a Lefebvrian context, it is not difficult to draw a connection between, on the one hand, precisely the realism that blinds critics to the kind of

political and/or social critique that Holmes and Ingram refer to and, on the other, the very real political implications of this everyday that Truffaut 'intuitively' evokes. As Lefebvre states:

Everyday life includes political life: the public consciousness, the consciousness of belonging to a society and a nation, the consciousness of class. It enters into permanent contact with the State and the State apparatus thanks to administration and bureaucracy. But on the other hand political life detaches itself by concentrating itself in privileged moments (elections, for example), and by fostering specialized activities. Thus *the critique of everyday life involves a critique of political life, in that everyday life already contains and constitutes such a critique: in that it is that critique.* (Lefebvre, 1991:92)

The continuum between Lefebvre's perspective and Situationist theory is clear from Wollen's summary of Debord's prognosis for a successful revolution, in which the category of politics is similarly disallowed an autonomous existence: 'For Debord, the poetic revolution must be the political revolution and vice versa, unconditionally and in full self-consciousness' (Wollen, 1993:136). These two formulations make it impossible to deny The 400 Blows political significance, as the narrative focuses primarily on Antoine's continuous resistance to State apparatuses, including school, family and, most obviously, the juvenile delinquent centre.⁴ We can thus, in this context, translate his flight as a desire to escape the political undertones of the everyday. How we interpret the ambiguity of his "arrest" by the freeze frame will thus take us some way to understanding Truffaut's stance on the relationship between everyday life and political life and thereby to locate his politics within a particular structure of feeling.

If, then, the freeze frame suggests ambiguity and Antoine's gaze implicates the spectator in this uncertainty, we need to consider what exactly it is we are being implicated in. One way to tackle this is to ascertain what constitutes the range of possibilities for

narrative continuation. To do this we need to establish what is that does *not* happen, or to address the question that Sutcliffe seems reluctant to pose, namely how *could* the film have ended otherwise? Answering this question seems, at first, relatively straightforward: Antoine is stopped in mid-flight and therefore his escape does not materialise, suggesting that an alternative ending would simply continue the adventure. Yet how this adventure would be played out remains ambiguous. One way of interpreting the freeze as a suggestive device is that it represents the failure of Antoine's attempted escape. This reading can, to some extent, be supported by the technical abruptness of the device; the freeze metaphorically grabs him as the caretaker literally does by the shoulders in the film's other important suspense sequence. Allen Thiher similarly proposes interpreting the final frame as a failure of escape, although he does so by likening the freeze to the police photographs of Antoine:

The film's final freeze frame presents a still image that recalls the mug shots the police made of Antoine.... Moreover, the image, in that it recalls the police photo, seems to offer a kind of summing up, a résumé that might attempt to fix the boy's identity, though in absurd world of radical freedom this final résumé can only be fixed by death. And so the final image perhaps connotes death, the final absurd limit of all freedom. (Thiher, 1979:147)

Thiher's reading of the freeze as connotative of death can also be contextualised in relation to the caretaker sequence, in which the impossibility of freedom is represented by the perpetuity of hegemonic structures connoted by the suspense technique. Just as we see the caretaker and thereby resign ourselves to Antoine's capture, so Thiher suggests that the freeze frame signifies – by 'fixing' Antoine's identity – the abrupt end to all movement and development, a metaphoric death.⁵

I do not agree that the freeze frame represents death, nor that it signifies the failure of escape, although my reading does give some credence to Thiher's designation of this final

space as 'the absurd world of radical freedom'. My contention is that Antoine does, indeed, escape, and that the freeze functions to exclude the spectator from the fictional world of the film in which escape is possible and successful. This is, I believe, legitimised by comparison once more to the previous suspense sequence in which we see the caretaker and thereby *know* that Antoine will be caught. In this case, although we do see a teacher running after the boy once his absence is noted, this character is soon lost to the camera, and there remains no indication of a continued threat. Indeed, once Antoine begins his descent down the embankment leading to the sea, the occasional voices and whistle blows that punctuated the first stretch of his run and implied someone "on his trail" stop, and the "400 Blows" theme is resumed:

23	ES: boys playing football	
24	MS: boys playing football	
25	MS, different angle: A. runs to side after ball, throws it back onto field, runs off, climbs under fence, camera pan back to field, teacher (t.) in pursuit, under fence, camera pan left to A. running next to lake, t. following behind	Whistle
26	T. approaches bridge, camera pan down to A. underneath, he runs off	
27	SS: A. running, passes sign, ducks under another, passes field with cow, another sign, fences, looks left, passes fallen sign, a house, a laundry line	Birdsong Voices receding Whistle
1	Diss.: A. down slope, camera pan left to water, pan left again, two boats, left again to BS of A. running along track; he stops, then keeps going	400 Blows theme
2	A. down steps to beach, runs down to water, looks left and right, runs across footprint line in sand, and another, then reaches water, looks down (at wet feet), turns right, walks, turns again (out of water), looks at water, then up and straight at camera; zoom to MCU, freeze.	Tempo of music increases, then decreases Wave sound continues after freeze, music slows progressively
3	Diss.: superimpose writing	<i>FIN</i> : The End

In this way, the music functions to initiate a new sequence, which is no longer characterised by pursuit and the threat of capture. By virtue of the music, then, the diegetic space that Antoine enters in the final sequence is one that is largely emptied of danger. Although his action of running is consistent and thus conjoins the two sequences, there is a subtle grammatical shift in the transitivity of this verb; he is no longer running *away from*, but now

running *to*. To what? To the sea that has, so far, been a fiction to the boy. The desirability of this fiction is clear from repeated references by Antoine himself (R: "You'll have a future in the army"; A: "I'd much rather it was the navy. I've never seen the sea", 17:s.1; A: "With that sort of money, we could go to the sea and set up a boat business", 18:s.1) including the one by his mother (M: "Could it be by the sea, your Honour?" 25:s.9). So, Antoine's arrival at the sea represents the fulfilment of a personal expectation, as opposed to one that is socially constructed. It can, therefore, be read as the culmination of the psychogeographical situationism that his character has been attempting throughout the narrative: that is, his endeavour to variously construct, invent or find meaning other than that imposed on him.

In this context, it is easier to think about how the ending might have been different, and thereby to understand the significance of why it is as it is. The freeze frame could have "arrested" Antoine while still running, which would simply have cut the narrative abruptly by leaving unresolved the issue of whether or not he will be caught. I suggest, though, that this issue is no longer at stake. Not only does the music signify the dissipation of this threat, but we also see him slow down and, even, stop by the water's edge before he turns and walks towards the camera (s.2). It is only *then* that the frame is frozen and the narrative discontinued. This timing is paramount for two reasons. Firstly, the fact that Antoine's image is not frozen while he is running means that it is not his *flight* that is interrupted, a significant detail that, to my mind, discredits readings that insist on treating this conclusion as failure. What is interrupted instead – and this is why the timing is crucial – is a double confrontation. The first is Antoine's encounter with his fiction that is the sea, a fiction which, crucially, turns out to be real: the sea is there, his feet get wet. The reality (or realisation) of his fantasy means that Antoine's metaphorical journey *is* complete; he has reached the limits of his imagination. When the boy then looks at the spectator, we are confronted with the fiction that we have been following, namely that of Antoine and his fantasy. At this moment of

reckoning, the spectator is excluded from a diegetic space that is, I suggest, finally too hypothetical. In other words, it is here that Truffaut's realism ceases, because this realisation of the boy's fantasy remains fundamentally at odds with an otherwise "realistic" portrayal of childhood in Paris. And it is in the cessation of realism that I believe the ultimate significance of the freeze frame lies. By cutting us off and freezing Antoine's image, Truffaut at once endorses and disavows psychogeographical situationism. Put otherwise, the freedom promised by this practice is represented as a fiction which is allowed to exist in film, but that, Truffaut suggests, cannot exist outside of this medium. This suggests, in turn, that a *real* escape from State apparatuses is more problematic; an everyday outside of politics is not feasible. This moment is thus intriguing and masterful: Truffaut represents the fantasy, but does not deliver it to us. Instead, the freeze frame disengages the spectator from Antoine, thus reversing Mulvey's mirror-phase identification process. In brief, it functions to separate fiction from reality.

This separation further corresponds to a reversal of the suturing process that is central to classical film narrative for creating the illusion of film as pure story by concealing all discursive signs. So, by separating the spectator from the fiction, Truffaut essentially disrupts the story with discourse⁶ and thereby unstitches, so to speak, the sutured text. That this represents a radical reversal of filmic convention is clarified by Caughie's description of the ideological function of story versus discourse in classical film:

[I]t is precisely the masquerade of discourse in the form of story which allows the ideologically and the historically specific to masquerade in the form of the natural and the everlasting.... The removal or suppression of the clear marks of "authored discourse" transforms ideology from something produced out of a locatable, historical, determined position into something natural to the world. (Caughie, 1981:202)

In this context, the freeze frame becomes critical to situating the film ideologically, that is, within a particular structure of feeling, for, as Heath contends, 'A theory of ideology must ... begin not from the subject but as an account of suturing effects, the effecting of the join of the subject in structures of meaning' (Heath, 1981:106). Granted, the ending of The 400 Blows is a peculiar place to begin to consider Heath's theory of ideology, for rather than an example of suturing effects, what we are faced with is a case of un-suturing, that is, the *disjoining* of the subject from structures of meaning. Yet this need not obstruct our task of locating the film ideologically. On the contrary, the un-suturing effected by the freeze frame is an important indicator of Truffaut's impulse to disrupt the seams that protect the screen illusion, an illusion that engenders spectator passivity by prescribing an essentially unthreatening interaction with the diegetic space. Truffaut threatens that passivity by forcing the spectator into a self-confrontation. Finally, this threat to ideological passivity consolidates the structure of feeling shared by Truffaut and the Situationists, whose refusal to indulge hegemonic dictates is evidenced in the various proactive techniques of *dérive*, *détournement* and psychogeography. Debord concisely articulates the prescriptiveness of hegemonic structures as productive of inertia: 'The spectacle is the bad dream of modern society in chains, expressing nothing more than its wish for sleep. The spectacle is the guardian of that sleep' (Debord, 1995:21). It is this sleep that is disturbed by Antoine's gaze.

In addition to disturbing the spectator's conventional passivity by the un-suturing effect of the freeze frame, Truffaut also asserts himself by restoring what Caughie terms the marks of "authored discourse" to the film. This is clearly important in the context of *auteurism*, although this one limited moment is not sufficient to proclaim the presence of a "Truffaut" structure in the film. In order to do this, we need to examine the ending in relation to the other two major signifying systems in the film, namely the suspense (caretaker) and credit sequences. To summarise the multivalent significance of the freeze frame, then, it

represents at once the endorsement and disavowal of psychogeographical situationism, the interruption of story by discourse, and Truffaut's directorial self-assertion.

While chronologically and formally closest to the suspense sequence, the freeze frame poses a fundamental contradiction to the primacy of hegemonic structures suggested by the episode in which Antoine is captured. Although the ending does insinuate this primacy by implying the impossibility of real (read: extradiegetic) escape, it is important to remember that the suspense sequence is firmly within Antoine's fictional world. So, the incongruity is one within the film's diegetic space: the suspense sequence suggests that Antoine cannot escape or subvert authoritarian structures, while the ending represents precisely such an achievement, but *on condition that* it remain fictional. It is only by acknowledging this condition that we can begin to make sense of the contradiction between these two signifying mechanisms. In order for Antoine to get to the point where Truffaut can depict his conclusion, the boy's character has to go through all the machinations of the system. In other words, the contradiction is a narrative imperative: Antoine has to be caught so he can run away, and he has to run *away from* before he can run *to*. While there is a formal correlation between these two sequences in that they both use the suspense device, that device is put to a different signifying use in each sequence. In the first, it suggests no escape in the fictional world, whereas in the second, escape in fictional world *is* possible. So, the difference in signification is paradoxically in the service of narrative continuity.

In terms of content, however, there exists a clear correlation between the film's opening and concluding sequences. This is signalled most obviously by the resumption the "400 Blows" theme. Richard Neupert argues that this score is an aural device that frames the film, concluding that, 'A film's beginning and ending prepare and conclude the spectator's activity and thus prove to be fertile locations for analyzing a film's textual strategies' (Neupert, 1985:31). While this point may have some theoretical validity, it is, nevertheless,

important to resist such proposed “shortcuts” to analysing a film that, firstly, de-emphasise the significance of what occurs *between* the beginning and the end and, secondly, presuppose that there will be a correspondence of signifying systems at the beginning and the end.

Because as we shall see, what is fascinating about this film is that Truffaut conveys a similar impulse in both the opening and concluding sequences, but by recourse to very different textual strategies, the disparity of which is itself productive of meaning.

In the credit sequence, meaning is produced by the interaction between the camera and the Eiffel Tower, the first subject of the narrative of The 400 Blows and also the first object of our gaze. The looks of Truffaut and the spectator are thus aligned in a gaze that is characterised by intermittency: we are never allowed to simply look at the Tower in its entirety for any continuous period of time. I’ve likened the effect of this fleetingness to the tension of the fort-da game, that is, a conflict between mastery and defiance. To recall, this conflict culminates in the panning shot that pronounces Truffaut’s direction of the film, in which his name is briefly framed by the lower arches of the Tower. In this way, the shot simultaneously establishes the Tower as a diegetic landmark (the fiction is in Paris), thereby acknowledging its mythic role as signifier of the city, and signals an interference with this myth by constructing an inverse perspective that refuses the panoramic ideology underlying the monument. The superimposition of the director’s credit on the symmetrical frame is crucial as it signals Truffaut laying claim to this perspective and the refusal of myth that it implies. We can thus define the textual strategy of the credit sequence as the technical use of mobility and perspective to suggest the possibility of subversion. And the implication of this possibility is, of course, the desire to subvert. Truffaut galvanises his narrative by asserting a desire and the potential for its fulfilment. The Tower specifies this desire as a fantasy of appropriating the city: it is a psychogeographical hypothesis. So, we can now see that, despite formal dissimilarities between the credit and concluding sequences - the former is based on

movement, the latter on immobility – there is a strong narrative link between the two (facilitated by the suspense sequence) in that the freeze frame provides a conclusion to the film's opening premise. This conclusion is, likewise, predicated on a tension between acknowledgement (of the fiction of psychogeography) and rejection (of its realistic possibilities), and thus reiterates *desire* as the film's key structuring principle.

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7. A Final Note, on Men and Women in the City

Given that desire has been qualified as specifically related to the city, it is, of course, paramount that Antoine's narrative should conclude by the sea as this invokes the mythical polarity between the city and the country. Within the logic of the film's fictional world, Antoine's choice of the sea as the fantasy onto which he projects his desire is, in my opinion, an arbitrary one: the sea is something that the boy can think of that he has not yet encountered, and therefore holds promise of otherness. The idea of the sea becomes a manifestation of his envisioned escape from authoritarian structures. In other words, the sea, in Antoine's mind, represents everything that the everyday does not. The only experience he has had outside of this everyday is in temporary episodes of truancy (a "forbidden" activity) at the fairground, in the cinema, and at René's house. Furthermore, the conventional association with the sea and leisure (the beach as a typical holiday destination) validates this fantasy of freedom. In this context, Lefebvre's comment on the separation between leisure activity and the everyday is useful:

Only the domain of leisure escapes the technical environment, escapes necessity, in other words, escapes depersonalization. In our leisure activities we are already beyond techniques. We achieve a leap from necessity into freedom, from the enslavement of the individual into whatever will permit his self-development. (Lefebvre, 1991:37)

The crucial association here is that of the everyday with depersonalisation, recalling as it does the dialogue between Antoine's stepfather and the police inspector that suggested the perceived replaceability of individuals. This exchangeability extends both to people in authority (where the law would take over as Antoine's "father figure"), and also to their

charges (Antoine would occupy a slot in the State apparatuses designed for such).¹ More than simply escape, then, Antoine's sea fantasy also offers the potential for individuation; a place where he is no longer a generic specimen, '*le gosse*'. Finally, we can say that the specifically personal quality of this projected situationism – the desire for a specifically *self*-determined situation - not only validates but, indeed, necessitates the separation between Antoine (fiction) and the spectator (reality) that is enacted by the freeze frame.

Outside the diegetic space, though, it is Truffaut and not Antoine who is responsible for constructing the sea as fantasy. There is, thereby, a seeming disparity between, on the one hand, Truffaut assigning his protagonist a desire for the country and, on the other, the fantasy of appropriating the city expressed in the credit sequence. In order to negotiate this discrepancy, it is, I believe, useful to begin by translating it into a polarity, rather, and then to examine the implications of polarising country and city, or, in Williams' terms, 'nature versus industry' (Williams, 1983:79). Williams locates the literary origins of this schism in Wordsworth, and suggests that it materialised as the result of an increasing sense of alienation in the city, brought on, moreover, by nothing less than the ubiquity of images that would later be defined as the spectacle:

Wordsworth saw strangeness, a loss of connection, not at first in social but in perceptual ways: a failure of identity in the crowd of others which worked back to a loss of identity in the self, and then, in these ways, a loss of society itself, its overcoming and replacement by a procession of images.... No experience has been more central in the subsequent literature of the city. (150)

In this way, the superficial opposition between town and country that frames The 400 Blows could be used to locate Truffaut in what Williams terms the 'Romantic structure of feeling' (79).² This argument could continue along the lines of suggesting that the century and a half or so between Wordsworth and Truffaut is an important indicator of the enduring search for

an artistic form to adequately convey the sense of alienation in the city. In other words, that the historical context provides an index of the ongoing desire for respite from urban estrangement, which in a Romantic structure of feeling is projected onto the country as a potential site of salvation. Yet it is precisely this conception of the country as salvation that *prevents* us from situating Truffaut in a Romantic structure of feeling. By un-suturing us from the diegesis, Truffaut denies the film's final geographical space the realistic potential for deliverance that a Romantic imagination would assert. Only Antoine can "saved" by the sea. The fictionality of this scenario represents a critique rather than a corroboration of the Romantic conception of town and country.³

Truffaut invokes the country not as a channel of escape, but, I would suggest, as a means to describe the city, and the polarity that is constituted by the two is, therefore, better understood dialectically, using Williams' 'looser' definition of the dialectic as '*interactions of contradictory or opposite forces*' (Williams, 1983:108; my emphasis). In this context, the spectator's exclusion from Antoine's fictional escape from the system functions to highlight what is not realistically available and thereby to draw attention to actuality. It functions, that is, to return the spectator to the cityscape of the credit sequence, the only episode in the film that serves as a representation of the actual Paris of 1959 given that there is, if we recall, no intradiegetic look in this sequence. In other words, the credit sequence remains outside the fictional narrative of The 400 Blows. Yet this non-fictionality does not, to reiterate, amount to a documentary sequence. Truffaut chooses to represent the city in a particular way, and it is this representation that suggests the viability of refusing the status quo and thus rejecting ideological passivity.

The importance of understanding the city and country dialectically rather than dichotomously is further clarified by Doreen Massey's contention that dualisms are problematic because one of their poles is necessarily defined in terms of lack: 'within this

kind of conceptualization, only one of the terms (A) is defined positively. The other term (not-A) is conceived only as ... lacking in A' (Massey, 1992:72). Massey goes on to suggest that dualisms are aligned to the hegemonic mode of thinking that prescribes not only a sexist perception of society, but also the privileging of time over space:

[I]n current Western culture, or in certain of its dominant theories, woman too is defined in terms of lack. Nor, as we shall see, is it entirely a matter of coincidence that space and the feminine are frequently defined in terms of dichotomies in which each of them is most commonly defined as not-A. There is a whole set of dualisms whose terms are commonly aligned with time and space. With Time are aligned History, Progress, Civilization, Science, Politics and Reason, portentous things with gravitas and capital letters. With space on the other hand are aligned the other poles of these concepts: stasis, ('simple') reproduction, nostalgia, emotion, aesthetics, the body. All these dualisms, in the way that they are used, suffer from the criticisms made above of dichotomies of this form: the problem of mutual exclusivity and of the consequent impoverishment of both of their terms. (73)

In Massey's spectrum, it is not difficult to align the received connotations of Time with the city, and those of space with the country. And if we consider the credit sequence in this context, it becomes clear that Truffaut's rejection of the mythology represented by the Eiffel Tower is precisely a rejection of the primacy of 'History, Progress, Civilization, Science, Politics and Reason'. Instead, he constructs an idiosyncratic perspective of the monument that invokes the more personalised concepts of 'nostalgia, emotion, aesthetics, the body'. Put another way, his representation of the hegemonic *urban* monument that is the Eiffel Tower is technically reminiscent of the qualities typically associated with the country. By forcing the 'space' of the country to interact with 'Time' of the city, Truffaut's pro-filmic look rejects the dichotomy of town versus country and insists, instead, on a dialectic interaction between

Time and space. This would correspond to the space-time conception that Massey designates as imperative to avoiding the ideological privileging of signifiers: 'One way of thinking about all this is to say that the spatial is integral to the production of history, and thus to the possibility of politics, just as the temporal is to geography. Another way is to insist on the inseparability of time and space, on their joint constitution through the interrelations between phenomena; on the necessity of thinking in terms of space-time' (84).

Somewhat closer to Truffaut on a historical spectrum, the Romantic dichotomy of the country and the city was also central to the Modernist imagination, albeit with the qualification of the city as productive of identity that is not only estranged, but fragmented.⁴ Although Truffaut's space-time conception distinguishes him from a conception of the country as a site of salvation, the Modernist experience of urbanity as fragmented is not unrelated, I would suggest, to the psychogeographical situationism that is hypothesised by Truffaut's credit sequence, particularly in the context of historical materialism as 'the genesis of mankind as a *totality*' (Lefebvre, 1968:20; my emphasis). Williams perceives a direct correspondence between this experience of fragmentation and the formal qualities of cinema

This fragmentary experience ... has remained a perpetual condition. It is deeply related to several characteristic forms of modern imagery, most evident in painting and especially in film which as a medium contains much of its intrinsic movement. There is indeed a direct relation between the motion picture, especially in its development in cutting and montage, and the characteristic movement of an observer in the close and miscellaneous environment of the streets.

(Williams, 1973:242)

In this way, Williams proposes film as the most formally apt medium through which to convey the experience of the city. This appropriateness can be further enriched if we include

in the equation the analogy that Prendergast draws between cities and narratives, based on the fact that they are both fundamentally mechanisms of desire:

Let us say that cities and narratives have at least one thing in common: they are both desire-producing machines. Rousseau denounces the city for creating an endless multiplication of desires and a correspondingly restless quest for impossible gratification (...). Similarly, desire in narrative and desire for narrative are what keeps narrative going and what keeps our reading [and watching] of narrative going. (Prendergast, 1995:28)

We can now summarise and compound Williams' and Prendergast's suggestions to produce a sequence of logic that runs along the following lines. Film, a succession of images, is formally characterised by movement. Life in the city is similarly characterised by movement. The effect of this transience in the city is a sense of fragmentation. The result of a fragmented experience is a desire for the country, which represents the unity of self that is perceived as lost in the city. So, the city is productive of desire, as is narrative. It thus follows that the optimal means of expressing desire is through a filmic narrative of life in the city, which will necessarily invoke the country as its historically dialectic complement.

In The 400 Blows, we have precisely such a narrative that in both form and content is dialectically structured to engender and convey desire as its fundamental principle. The film's opening sequence alludes to both city and country by recourse firstly to the Eiffel Tower as a signifier not only of Paris, but of the panoramic ideology that, to recall Barthes, 'makes the city into a kind of nature' (Barthes, 1997:8) and secondly, by the non-conventional space-time representation of that signifier. Similarly, although the film ends in the country, the freeze frame invokes the city by separating the spectator from Antoine's fiction, thus implying the inaccessibility of the myth represented by the sea and also, thereby, refusing the Romantic dichotomisation of town and country. In this way, the freeze frame functions in

much the same way as the camera in the opening sequence which, by remaining beneath the Tower, refuses the panorama's offer of naturalising of the city. Yet these two textual devices do not amount to a simplistic rejection of the country in favour of the city. On the contrary, the interaction between city and country – between space and time - acts as a vehicle for the tensions that predominate the film. These include the drive towards mastery *and* subversion of the city intimated in the opening sequence, the simultaneous disavowal *and* endorsement of psychogeographical situationism asserted in the concluding sequence, the fortuity *and* intention embodied by the freeze frame.

In this way, the dialectic informing Truffaut's treatment of the town and country in The 400 Blows corresponds to the similarity Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell suggest exists between Eisensteinian montage and the Marxist dialectic, when 'antithetical elements clash and produce a synthesis that goes beyond both' (Thompson & Bordwell, 1994:141). It is the result of this clash that produces that 'element for which there is no external counterpart' in The 400 Blows; its structure of feeling. That element is *desire*. To undermine, construct, invent, overturn, satisfy, resist, satiate, wake up. In short, to participate. And this is, moreover, the primary goal of Situationism: 'Against the spectacle, the realized situationist culture introduces total participation' (S.I. 4, 1960).

Truffaut's rejection of the town versus country dichotomy also places him in a perceptual kinship with Debord, who argues, in The Society of the Spectacle, that this conventional polarity is demolished by the consumerist society, the result of which is a state of historical inertia:

The history of the economy, whose development has turned entirely on the opposition between town and country, has progressed so far that it has now succeeded in abolishing both of these poles. The present *paralysis* of overall historical development, due to the exclusive pursuit of the economy's independent goals, means that the moment when town and country begin to disappear, so far from marking the transcendence of the split between them, marks instead their simultaneous collapse. (Debord, 1995:175)

To recall, Debord goes on to suggest that this inertia is finally manifested in the pseudo-experience offered by spectacular society. In other words, that individuals under the sway of the spectacle are, rather than *living* (in a historical, forward-moving context), consuming the *illusion* of living. This state of affairs is, I suggest, both represented and contested in The 400 Blows. Firstly, in the act of representing town and country dialectically rather than dichotomously, Truffaut effectively destabilises the received connotations of both and thereby linguistically signals 'their simultaneous collapse'. A collapse, that is, according to conventional signification. Secondly, in the privileging of discourse over story that signals Antoine's escape as purely fictional, Truffaut concludes his narrative by challenging the primacy of illusion that is central to the spectacle. What he advocates in its place - and this is realised by returning the spectator to the actuality that is portrayed in the film's credit sequence - is the psychogeographical potential of *discursive* dissidence. In other words, Truffaut discounts Antoine's rebelliousness as fictitious but endorses his own subversive representation of the Eiffel Tower. This representation constitutes the filmic equivalent of Khayati's call to arms in his "Preface to a Situationist Dictionary": 'We propose the real liberation of language because we propose to put it into a practice free of all constraints. We reject any *authority*, linguistic or otherwise: only real life *allows* a meaning and only praxis verifies it' (Khayati, 1966).

There is a final point of tension in The 400 Blows that distinguishes Truffaut's film from French "quality" cinema and the cinematic codes that inform this school. This is not unrelated to Massey's conception of space-time, as it concerns the gendered conventions of the city, the gaze and, by implication, the everyday. Naomi Schor provides an outline of these patriarchal conventions as well as the more recent feminist counter-conventions, the distinction between which is useful in considering the signifiers at work in The 400 Blows:

Two widely shared but diametrically opposed views inform what theories we have on the everyday: one, which we might call the feminine or feminist, though it is not necessarily held by women or self-described feminists, links the everyday with the daily rituals of private life carried out within the domestic sphere traditionally presided over by women; on the other, the masculine or masculinist, sites the everyday in the public spheres dominated especially, but not exclusively, in modern Western bourgeois societies by men. According to the one, the everyday is made up of the countless repetitive gestures and small practices that fall under the heading of what the existentialists call the contingent. According to the other, the everyday is made up of the chance encounters of the streets; its hero is not the housewife but the *flâneur*.⁵ (Schor, 1992:188)

In this way, Schor proposes a dichotomy *within* the city, where public spaces represent "masculinity" and domestic spaces the "feminine". Antoine's psychogeographical movement within both these spheres would suggest that Truffaut portrays an everyday that combines both these "masculinist" and "feminist" perspectives. In other words, in Schor's schema, Antoine at once represents the housewife and the *flâneur*. The resulting indistinctness between these two perspectives is, finally, closer to Lefebvre's less categorical approach when he states that 'ambiguity is a category of everyday life, and perhaps an essential category' (Lefebvre, 1991:18).

But there is another, more important way in which Truffaut disrupts gendered conventions. Besides, the lack of a specific historical context for the theory Schor designates as feminist prevents us from investing too much in the assumption that Truffaut would have been familiar with it at the time of The 400 Blows. Her use of the word '*flâneur*', however, specifies the masculinist view as dating back at least to Baudelaire, and it is therefore safe to assume the strong currency of this perspective in the first half of the twentieth century. So, traditionally, the city and, more specifically Paris as the site of Truffaut's narrative, are masculine.⁶ If we now narrow our focus and turn to specifically cinematic gender codes, the masculine is conventionally constituted by the gaze, which relegates the object of this gaze to the feminine. Mulvey articulates this convention in her landmark essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975): 'In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly' (Mulvey, 1976: 309).⁷ This means that, traditionally, a filmic narrative will be centred on a woman whose function is to satisfy the "visual pleasure" expected by the male gaze, which is characterised by the power of agency. This is not to suggest that male protagonists are unlikely in classical film. On the contrary, the male hero is, according to Mulvey, as ubiquitous as the female object and is, indeed, indispensable to the mirror-phase identification process by which the spectator's ego is simultaneously repressed and reinforced: 'As the spectator identifies with the main male protagonist, he projects his look onto that of his like, his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence' (310).

Throughout the narrative of The 400 Blows, our gaze is directed at a young boy. Until, that is, he turns and looks at us. The implications of this are manifold. On the one hand, a tension is created between the city as a traditionally masculine space and the movement

within that space by a male protagonist who occupies a position which is, I suggest, at once masculine and feminine. Antoine, unlike Mulvey's 'main male protagonist', does not 'control events', and neither does he demonstrate the 'active power of the erotic look'. This lack of agency suggests that in a classical psychological spectrum, Antoine represents the female object.⁸ This is, of course, supported by his youth: an adolescent boy is far from a "real man". Yet the fact that he is the protagonist, coupled with use of point-of-view shots, means that he is also the spectator's primary site of identification, thus structurally fulfilling the masculine position. The tension resulting from the ambiguity of this masculine-feminine subject-object role serves as a formal complement to the difficulty Antoine will have in adjusting to life in the city. Truffaut's association of this adjustment with the process of growing up is, moreover, cleverly conveyed by Antoine's decision to run away 'to prove I can become a man' (11:s.4). When the boy finally turns and looks at the spectator, then, this represents not only an instance of disrupting the fiction by reversing the traditional identification process, but also of reversing the gendered roles dictated by the gaze. It is a confounding moment because although Antoine is "frozen" and thereby stopped in the act of self-empowerment that is constituted by his usurping of the gaze, it is the spectator who finally remains the object of that gaze, and is thereby left in the conventionally passive feminine position.

So, Truffaut's disruption of gendered conventions of filmic narrative serves to compound the destabilising effect of un-suturing on the spectator's traditionally comfortable position. Gender is thus another means by which the film unsettles the fixed notions of power and agency that are similarly called into question by the tensions between town and country, mastery and subversion, disavowal and endorsement. This formal and narrative dialectical organisation of the film succinctly describes the conflicting forces of alienation and fulfilment that Lefebvre defines as central to 'the drama of youth' (Lefebvre, 1991:148). It is

a drama played out not only by Antoine Doinel, but also by Truffaut in the act of directorial self-assertion that is signified by The 400 Blows.

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Conclusion

*The camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does
psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses.*
(Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction")

Sitting through what is probably my twentieth viewing of The 400 Blows, I realise that expectations have little to do with the continued impact of a good film. The only difference is that now I face the film as a critic, meaning that I *see* more than I did as a spectator. And from my differently sighted, un-sutured perspective I can confirm that my first intuition was not far off. My initial fascination with the boys' friendship was based on a sense of their impatience at being just boys; the "infantile adulthood" with which I characterised their interaction signalled their desire to be more, older, other. To resist, in other words, prescribed roles. A psychogeographical analysis of The 400 Blows has not only confirmed this initial impression, but has demonstrated that the entire film is structured according to this desire for a self-determined context. To be precise, psychogeography reveals that desire for nonconformity informs the three perspectives that constitute The 400 Blows: those of Antoine, Truffaut and, by invitation, the spectator.

Antoine's narrative begins in an urban school and ends by the sea. His progression between these two geographical sites is characterised by a systematic extrication from familiar everyday structures. After the predictive separation from his peers *in* the classroom, Antoine's character is successively uprooted from school, parents, his one friend René and finally, Paris, the location of this everyday. Within the film's diegetic space, Antoine's eventual incarceration in the juvenile delinquent centre is as much a result of his agency as of the machinations of the system. For, according to the standards set by this social configuration, Antoine behaves subversively, and is treated accordingly. In this way, the progression of his narrative is catalysed by the direct and continuous confrontation between

Antoine's subversive behaviour and the social structures that this behaviour seeks to undermine.

The youth of Antoine's character renders his dissidence a particularly succinct example of psychogeographical situationism, for his actions are – naturally, for a child – essentially forms of *play*. We can easily laugh at the transgressions of being in possession of a “pornographic” picture, playing truant, using his stepfather's Michelin guide for spit-gun ammunition, and pinching an alarm clock that goes off in his pocket. We can even laugh at the “real” crime of stealing a typewriter, because Antoine's disguise makes even theft a game. Yet from a Situationist perspective, subversion *is* a game, and a game with important political implications. Vaneigem summarises the centrality of play to the Situationist project:

Subversion is essentially playful: in a broader sense, subversion can be seen as the re-entry of play into any given aspect of daily life, at first on the level of disrupting the organization of appearances, and, with the successful extension and generalization of the “situation” thus created, on the level of transforming the organization of society itself, by putting all its techniques, its tools, its structures, its entire space-time, to new purposes. Only play can deconsecrate, open up the possibilities of total freedom. This is the principle of subversion; the freedom to change the sense of everything which serves Power; the freedom, for example, to turn a cathedral, a civic center, or a shopping mall into a fun-fair, into a labyrinth, into a dreamscape. (Vaneigem, 1967)

In this context, Truffaut's child protagonist incarnates at once the disruptive behaviour and the youthful spontaneity that Situationism deems paramount to revolutionise everyday life.

Although our laughter ceases as soon as the boy is caught, this incident is, I maintain, a narrative device that functions to enable Antoine to confront and defy the final, definitive Power: the law. In other words, Antoine's games facilitate his progression along the institutional hierarchy to where a more serious and subversive game can be played: the

pursuit of freedom. That the narrative concludes shortly after Antoine runs away from the juvenile centre does not signify the failure of his pursuit of freedom. On the contrary, Antoine's contact with the sea before the freeze frame represents precisely the achievement of this freedom because it signals the realisation of his fantasy of otherness. For Antoine, the sea is the antithesis of the urban everyday that includes parents, school and the law. It therefore also signifies a release from his generic identity as "kid" and "delinquent" in that everyday. In the story of The 400 Blows, the sea condones Antoine's refusal to be exchangeable.

The confrontation of gazes that occurs at the moment of the freeze frame signals the disruption of this story by discourse. This discursive assertion represents Truffaut's own desire to subvert in several important ways. Firstly, Antoine's direct look at the camera challenges the conventions of classical film narrative by disallowing the spectator to continue to identify with this fictional character. That the spectator becomes, instead, the object of Antoine's gaze destabilises the ideological comfort of the conventional spectator situation that is guaranteed by a sutured text. The gendered hierarchy of this location is consequently also disrupted by the un-suturing effect of the freeze frame, as the spectator comes to occupy the traditional female object position. Yet this does not simplistically amount to spectator disempowerment, for what Truffaut is challenging is, precisely, the received associations of male/active versus female/passive.

Truffaut refuses these gendered polarities by refusing the polarity of town and country that would have been endorsed had we been "freed" by the sea, as Antoine is. By un-suturing his text, Truffaut situates the spectator outside of fiction, that is, in reality. This actuality is, importantly, represented for the spectator in the credit sequence, the only sequence in the film without an identifiable intradiegetic look. This means that the freeze frame not only disengages the spectator from the fiction, but returns us to the city of the credit sequence. By

rejecting the panoramic perspective, Truffaut's representation of the Eiffel Tower in this sequence functions as a form of discursive psychogeography or, in Vaneigem's terms, anti-conditioning: 'The function of conditioning is to place and displace everyone along the length of the hierarchical ladder. The reversal of perspective entails a sort of anti-conditioning, not conditioning of a new type, but playful tactics: *diversion*' (*ibid.*). So, Truffaut asserts power and agency through representation. His version of the Eiffel Tower demonstrates the radical potential of discourse by depicting the monument unconventionally. His camera appropriates and personalises the Tower, thus naturalising it according to his own experience. This functions to destabilise the conventional connotations of "town" and "country" and points to a dialectical interaction between the two rather than the received dichotomy that asserts the city as a site of Power and Reason. The spectator is, finally, implicated in Truffaut's asserted agency by being denied both the typically gendered position assigned to viewing and also the Romantic fiction of the country as a site of salvation. In other words, Truffaut empowers the spectator by denying us the ideological passivity offered by seamless fiction.

Psychogeography extends Walter Benjamin's critical vision by revealing the unconscious optics *and* impulses that inform The 400 Blows. The concept brings to the film not only an apposite term to describe Antoine's behaviour, but also a critical framework that helps to situate The 400 Blows ideologically. By focusing on social conditioning of the environment and the interaction between the individual and this environment, psychogeographical analysis introduces a combined psychoanalytic and materialist perspective to the film. This critical perspective supplements existing scholarship not only by regarding Antoine as a product of the spaces that he is in, but also, and more crucially, by understanding the film as a discursive response to a particular socio-historical context. That context is capitalist France, 1959, and the discursive exercise that is The 400 Blows is characterised – both intra- and extradiegetically - by the impulse to disrupt hegemonic codes.

This disruption asserts the desire for a self-determined situation that refuses to indulge the alienating doctrine of compliance that is central to consumerist culture. The ideological mechanisms of The 400 Blows thus place Truffaut, un-sutured, in a structure of feeling with Debord and the Situationists who proclaim that, 'The primary moral deficiency remains indulgence, in all its forms' (Debord, 1955).

Beginnings: An Introduction

¹ A French greeting that, depending on the context, means either “hello” or “goodbye”.

² Situationist and pre-Situationist texts have primarily been sourced from the Situationist International website (www.situationist.cjb.net), which specifies that ‘All texts published in *Internationale Situationniste* may be freely reproduced, translated or adapted, even without indication of origin’. I have taken no such liberties with the texts, all of which are reproduced as they appear in English on the website. As the online articles are not paginated, all future references to texts sourced from this site will similarly be without page numbers.

³ Literally the “drift”, the Situationist application of the term denotes a practice by which an individual or group wilfully disorient themselves in protest against the behaviour and routes dictated by socio-geographical structures. See Chapter 2 for further discussion.

⁴ *Détournement* translates as “diversion”, and refers, in Situationist terms, to the literary and/or artistic practice of placing existing works, usually canonical, in new or different contexts in order to destabilise their received meanings. “The Boy Scout’s Guide to the Situationist International” states that, ‘*détournement* within the old cultural spheres is a method of propaganda, a method which testifies to the wearing out and loss of importance of those spheres’ (Anon, 2000). See Chapter 2 for further discussion.

⁵ A cursory definition of the “spectacle” is virtually impossible, given that Debord’s spectacle refers not only to the ubiquitous images that typify consumer societies, but also to the main product of and the social relations that constitute such societies (‘The whole life of those societies in which modern conditions of production prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. All that once was directly lived has become mere representation’; ‘The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images’; ‘The spectacle is chief product of present-day society’; ‘The spectacle is capital accumulated to the point where it becomes image’ Debord, 1995:1,4,15,34). See Chapter 3 for further discussion of the term in its historical context.

1. Truffaut and the French New Wave

¹ First published in *Cahiers du cinéma* 31, January 1954. Reprinted in Bill Nichols’ *Movies and Methods: An Anthology* (1976).

² For a comprehensive anthology of the different versions of the *auteur* theory and the debate surrounding the theory, see John Caughie’s *Theories of Authorship* (1981).

³ See Terry Lovell, who suggests that the French film industry was state-controlled to an extraordinary degree: ‘The Centre National du Cinématographie (CNC) controls everything to do with state finance and receipts of films. It grants authorization to make films, issues professional cards, gives advances and subsidies, and organizes professional training. The amount of state intervention is greater than in any other non-socialist country’ (Lovell, 1972:345).

⁴ Pierre Kast had, in fact, published an essay in 1951 which took a similar position: ‘Our own delightful French system has reached such a stage of timidity, blindness and concealed police coercion that we cannot even imagine making a film about the French colonial empire’ (Kast, 1985:229-30). That it should be Truffaut’s article and not Kast’s that was hailed as revolutionary is, perhaps, best explained by the strong impression generated by Truffaut’s polemical writing style coupled with his youth. In retrospect it is also, of course, due to Truffaut’s subsequent international fame as a director; Kast remains a figure to be identified with a specific era, and by a select few, and could therefore not adequately represent the New Wave transition from theory to practice that Truffaut has come to exemplify.

⁵ For a comprehensive history of the journal, as well as the New Wave movement in general, see Jean Douchet’s *French New Wave* (1998), which includes reproductions of original articles, journal covers, film posters and stills, as well as film reviews from 1956 to 1964. For an excellent anthology of articles from the journal, see Jim Hillier’s *Cahiers du Cinéma* (1985).

⁶ See, for instance, the debate between six critics on the *auteur* theory in Bazin *et al.* “Six Characters in Search of Auteurs” (1957).

⁷ In terms of the New Wave, the most important of these films include Roger Vadim’s *And God Created Woman* (1957), Alain Resnais’ *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959), Truffaut’s *The 400 Blows* (1959) and Jean-Luc Godard’s *Breathless* (1960).

⁸ Antoine de Baecque and Serge Toubiana account for this “Golden Age” primarily in terms of France’s isolation from the rest of the world: ‘French movies made during the occupation left a deep impression on the minds of people at that time. And in spite of a production reduced by half, the war years, paradoxically, could surely be considered a golden age. It seems that being cut off from the world allowed the “French school” to express itself at its best’ (De Baecque & Toubiana, 2000:21-2).

⁹ Peter Wollen modifies this description somewhat by distinguishing between the ‘lesser’ and ‘greater’ *auteurs*, relegating those who fit Bazin’s description of always telling ‘the same story’ to the former: ‘Perhaps it would be true to say that it is the lesser auteurs who can be defined ... by a core of basic motifs which remains constant, without variation. The great directors must be defined in terms of shifting relations, in their singularity as well as their uniformity’ (Wollen, 1969:102-4).

¹⁰ See, for instance, Truffaut’s glowing review of Ray’s *Rebel Without a Cause*: ‘Yes, Nicholas Ray is a poet, bitter and pessimistic. His films bear witness to a sensibility and sincerity that are rarely seen in Hollywood... Like Cocteau, there is a sense of realism in Ray’s work, which violently bursts to the surface, and ricochets back and forth in a flurry of words, a theatrical realism that possesses the sudden energy of a musical beat’ (cit. Douchet, 1998:71-2). Ray is then praised again for *Party Girl*, which Jean Douchet deemed ‘at the same time a poem, a meditation and undoubtedly a confession’ (159), the last of which clearly qualifies the film as “personal” enough to hail from an *auteur*. The New Wave esteem for Orson Welles is clear from Douchet’s description of the director as ‘a genius, a prodigy – and the absolute model for each and every New Wave director’ (68).

¹¹ Chabrol, Claude & Eric Rohmer (1979) *Hitchcock, the first forty-four films* (transl. Stanley Hochman) New York: F. Ungar, Truffaut, François (1984) *Hitchcock* (transl. Helen Scott) New York: Simon & Schuster.

¹² For an account of Sarris’s critical activity, see the section on “Andrew Sarris and American Film Criticism” in Cook & Mieke’s *The Cinema Book* (1999:256).

¹³ This perceived relationship between constraint and heightened creativity is reiterated by Jean-Loup Bourget: ‘Structures traditionally passed on the Hollywood film fail to take into account the basic fact that its conventionality is the very paradoxical reason for its creativity’ (Bourget, 1986:50).

¹⁴ These ‘specific capabilities’ presumably include those of textual interpretation, leadership, and a technical expertise not typically required of a writer.

¹⁵ See, for instance, John Caughie, who designates the journal as part of an ‘oppositional culture which took various forms, but which invariable involved a generational clash, a rebellion against old values and a disappointment with the sterile conventionality of the post-war society from which so much had been hoped’ (Caughie, 1981:36).

¹⁶ See also Buscombe’s suggestion that *auteurism* was flawed due to its refusal to confer importance on anything but the director: ‘[A]ll films are affected by the previous history of the cinema. This is only one more thing that the traditional *auteur* theory could not cope with. It identified the code of the *auteur*: but was silent on those codes intrinsic to the cinema, as well as to those originating outside it’ (Buscombe, 1981:33).

¹⁷ This process is consistent with Henri Lefebvre’s Marxist reading of the process of ideology succession: ‘Only another ideology or a true theory can struggle against an ideology.... The consensus an ideology succeeds in bringing about in its heyday, when it is still growing and militant, eventually crumbles away. It is supplanted by another ideology, one that brings fresh criticism to bear on the existing state of affairs and promises something new’ (Lefebvre, 1968:77).

¹⁸ See, also, Lovell’s conclusion that the New Wave movement did little to effect any significant change in the French film industry: ‘The net result was merely that a generation of filmmakers were able to force entry into a moribund industry, without in any way changing its structure so as to make it any easier for future generations’ (Lovell, 1972:347).

¹⁹ After his marriage, Truffaut became the object of some contempt and was often accused of “selling out” by marrying the daughter of one of the most powerful film distributors in France. One example of this attitude is the article printed in *Cahiers des Saisons* in 1959: ‘And then Truffaut got married, as was his right, after all. But his father-in-law, alas!, is one of the shrewdest, most reliable producer-distributors of the old French cinema. I say “alas!” for the tough, uncompromising Truffaut that used to be. We are told that *The 400 Blows* did not cost much. Yet, thirty to forty million still needed to be found and normally this is not so easy. There are many young people, let alone those no longer so young, who have aged with their talent and their ideas merely because they have never inherited from a parent, like Chabrol, or married Madeleine Morgenstern, like Truffaut. Between the art of motion pictures and its expression there lies money, and I’m afraid that François Truffaut gave it too much thought’ (cit. De Baecque & Toubiana, 2000:137).

²⁰ Truffaut confirmed the financial and creative autonomy provided by his production company in a letter to Louis Daquin in 1974: "Having my own company, *Les Films du Carosse*, allows me to produce scenarios with my script-writing friends and then do the casting and set up a budget; this process gives me complete creative freedom since the film is thus protected from outside influences" (cit. Holmes & Ingram, 1998:39).

²¹ The film won Truffaut was the Best Director award at Cannes, 1959. *The 400 Blows* was also voted Best Foreign Language Film at the New York Film Critics Awards of the same year. See also Holmes and Ingram: 'Despite possessing a style and flair which are distinctively French, the film's appeal transcended national boundaries, receiving an equally enthusiastic reception in London, at the November Film Festival and, a month later, in New York' (Holmes & Ingram, 1998:41).

²² Higgins historicises what he terms critical cinema, that is, 'the theoretical analysis of film as a specific signifying practice' (Higgins, 1991:11) by relegating film reviewing to what he terms the "Prehistory" of film analysis. Walter Benjamin's comment on film viewing in his "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1937) is pertinent in this context: 'The film makes the cult value recede into the background not only by putting the public in the position of critic, but also by the fact that at the movies this position requires no attention. The public is an examiner, but an absent minded one' (Benjamin, 1992:233-34). In Higgins' spectrum, then, Benjamin's 'public'/'critic' would correspond to a film reviewer. This supports Higgins' claim that critical cinema is, indeed, a 'relatively new form'.

²³ 'These real women would later serve as models for the women in his films. Liliane Litvin would be the Colette of *Love at Twenty*, played by Marie-France Pisier, the proper young girls would recognize themselves in the Christine Darbon of *Stolen Kisses* and *Bed and Board*, played by Claude Jade; the mature, elegant women would be perfectly incarnated by Fabienne Tabard (unforgettably played by Delphine Seyrig); while prostitutes would appear in all his works' (De Baeque & Toubiana, 2000:60).

²⁴ Another example is provided by Roy Nelson, who justifies his emphasis on content rather than form in his reading of *The 400 Blows* as meeting the requirement of a particular kind of "realism" employed by Truffaut: 'With this sort of realism... the first concern of the director and the intelligent viewer is the understanding of the subject (why?), while the comprehension of the form (how?) remains a subsidiary matter' (Nelson, 1985:137).

²⁵ Geoffrey Nowell-Smith also places emphasis on identifying a structure as the first step in *auteurist* criticism: 'The purpose of criticism becomes ... to uncover behind the superficial contrasts of subject and treatment a structural hardcore of basic and often recondite motifs. The pattern formed by these motifs, which may be stylistic or thematic, is what gives an author's work its particular structure, both defining it internally and distinguishing one body of work from another' (Nowell-Smith, 1981:136-7).

²⁶ This equation between the documented and the real also provided the theoretical foundation for Italian Neo-realist cinema, a theory which many consider exemplified by Vittorio De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* (1948). See, for instance, Wollen: 'No more actors, no more plot, no more *mise-en-scène*: the perfect aesthetic illusion of reality. In fact, no more cinema. Thus the film could obtain radical purity only through its own annihilation' (Wollen, 1969:131).

²⁷ Colin MacCabe articulates the same process in terms of the difference between "point-of-view" and the "look": 'The charm of classical realism is that it introduces the gaze of the other but this introduction is always accompanied by the guarantee of the supremacy of the point-of-view; the threat appears so that it can be smoothed over, and it is in that smoothing that we can locate pleasure – in a plenitude which is fractured but only on condition that it will be reset' (MacCabe, 1992:86).

²⁸ See Heath's summary of Oudart's notion of resisting suture: 'Cinema as discourse, that is, is seen as implicated in loss, the loss of the totality of the image, the loss of the extreme pleasure of absorption in the image as the spectator is set as the subject of the film' (Heath, 1981b:89).

2. Psychogeography and Situationism

¹ Isou's, as well as seven others', exclusion from the Lettrist International is proclaimed in *Potlatch 2* (1954), under the typically non-sympathetic heading "Out the Door". Reasons include his being a 'morally retrograde individual' and having 'limited ambition'. The list concludes with a reminder that 'Harking back to the dead is pointless – a new generation has taken charge'.

² For a comprehensive history of the Situationist International, see Jay's "From the Empire of Gaze to the Society of the Spectacle: Foucault and Debord", in *Downcast Eyes* (Jay, 1993:381-434). See also Wollen's "The Situationist International" (1993).

³ Both of these terms were clearly chosen for their richly allusive qualities. While *dérive* translates as "drift", the phrase *à la dérive*, "adrift", suggests more precisely the Situationist desire to be un-anchored, in the non-conformist sense of the term. Similarly, *détournement*, which is typically translated as "diversion", is strongly connotative of subversive instincts. The term's various applications include "misappropriation", "fraudulent misuse", and "embezzlement". The phrase *détournement des mineurs* describes paedophilia.

⁴ See, for instance, Anon, "The Boy Scout's Guide to the Situationist International" which begins with a list of Situationist definitions, including those for "constructed situation", "psycho-geography", "*dérive*" and "*détournement*".

⁵ "The *dérive* (with its flow of acts, its gestures, and its encounters) was to the totality exactly what psychoanalysis (in the best sense) is to language. Let yourself go with the flow of words, says the psychoanalyst. He listens, until the moment he rejects or modifies (one could say *détourne*s) a word, an expression or a definition. The *dérive* is certainly a technique, almost a therapeutic one. But just as analysis unaccompanied by anything else is almost always *contraindicated*, so continual *dériving* is dangerous to the extent that the individual, having gone too far – not without bases, but without defenses [sic] – is threatened with explosion, dissolution, dissociation, or disintegration. And thus the relapse into what is termed 'ordinary life,' that is to say, in reality, into 'petrified life.' In this regard I now take back the *Formulary's* propaganda for a continuous *dérive*' (Chchevlov, 1964).

⁶ The more developed (theoretical) potential of Situationist cinema is described in "With and Against Cinema": 'We can envisage to distinct uses for cinema: firstly, its utilization as a form of propaganda in the pre-situationist period; and secondly, its direct employment as a constituent element of realized situations.... It is necessary to take advantage of the progressive aspects of industrial cinema, and, just as in the organization of architecture in favor of a psychological ambiance, we can extract the pearl buried deep in the steaming pile of absolute functionalist bullshit' (S.I. 1, 1958).

⁷ Monnet's first plan was dedicated to industry and energy. A second plan, focusing on housing and regional development, was implemented from 1954-1957. For further discussion, see James McMillan's *Twentieth Century France* pp. 168-76.

⁸ For a transcript of the Marshall Plan speech delivered at Harvard University (1947) that outlines the impetus behind the European Recovery Plan, see David Welch's *Modern European History*, pp. 206-7.

⁹ See "Unitary Urbanism at the End of the 1950s": 'Since the situationist experience of the *dérive* is simultaneously a means of study and a game in the urban milieu, it is already on track of U[nitary] U[rbanism].... [T]he first lesson of the *dérive* is its own status as a game' (S.I. 3, 1959).

¹⁰ Wollen also cites Jean-Paul Sartre as a prime influence on Debord and the Situationists. Wollen summarises the Sartrean "situation" as follows: 'Existence, Sartre had argued, is always existence within a particular context, within a given situation, which is not simply lived-in, but also lived-beyond, through the subject's free choice of the manner of his or her being within that given situation' (Wollen, 1993:125-6).

¹¹ Hussey's biography of Debord (2001), for example, gives Debord and his colleagues a pivotal role in the events of May 1968, while Hobsbawm's account refers to the event as a 'student rebellion ... outside economics and politics' (Hobsbawm, 1994:285) and makes no mention of the Situationists.

¹² It must be noted, however, that Debord was not the first to offer a negative interpretation of the media's role. As early as 1927, Siegfried Kracauer offered the following diagnosis of his society, which is remarkable in its thematic similarity to Debord's concerns: 'Never before has an age been so informed about itself, if being informed means having an image of objects that resembles them in a photographic sense. Most of the images in the illustrated magazines are topical photographs that, as such, refer to existing objects. The reproductions are thus basically signs that may remind one of the original object that was supposed to be understood.... The assault of this mass of images is so powerful that it threatens to destroy the potentially existing awareness of crucial traits.... In the illustrated magazines people see the very world that the illustrated magazines prevent them from perceiving.... Never before has a period known so little about itself. In the hands of the ruling society, the invention of illustrated magazines is one of the most powerful means of organizing a strike against understanding' (Kracauer, 1993:432).

¹³ Jay also refers to Michel de Certeau and Maurice Blanchot as having been profoundly influenced by *The Society of the Spectacle* and, albeit with a more optimistic attitude, the postmodernist Jean Baudrillard who 'stopped worrying and found a way to accept and even celebrate what Debord and his colleagues had found so troubling: the ubiquity of images without referents and the reification of experience' (Jay, 1993:432-3).

¹⁴ I use the term 'Marxian' to denote direct reference to Karl Marx, as opposed to the Marxist school of thought.

¹⁵ Due to the book's structure, references to *The Society of the Spectacle* are to paragraphs, not page numbers.

¹⁶ This topographical aspect of capitalism is also highlighted in Williams' *The Country and the City* (1973): 'The division of city and country, industry and agriculture, in their modern form, are the critical culmination of the division and specialisation of labour which, though it did not begin with capitalism, was developed under it to an extraordinary extent' (Williams, 1973:304). For further historical discussion of the town/country divide and role of the city in literature, see Williams' "Metropolitan Perceptions and the Emergence of Modernism" (1989). See also Chapter 7, which discusses the polarity of town and country in specific relation to *The 400 Blows*.

¹⁷ See, for example, Lefebvre, who discusses the town/country divide as fundamental to the human constitution: 'Among the various aspects of man's duality, that of art and nature corresponds to those of town and countryside, make-up and unpainted skin, clothes and body. The duality of the eternal and the circumstantial, of spirit and matter, is also the duality of good and evil, of the individual and the crowd' (Lefebvre, 1991:107). The somewhat esoteric tone of this formulation can be read as an index of the until then unquestioned acceptance of, and even dependence on, this divide. Later, however, Lefebvre articulates this 'duality' in terms of an intellectual divide: 'The social division of labour between town and country corresponds to the separation between material and intellectual labour, between the natural and the spiritual' (1996:87).

¹⁸ 'This society eliminates geographical distance only to reap distance internally in the form of spectacular separation' (Debord, 1995:167).

¹⁹ This ideologically motivated proliferation of images can be read as the culmination of class strategies that were conceived of and implemented in the nineteenth century. A case in point is that of the urban planner Baron Haussmann, who redesigned Paris under Napoleon III and who is, therefore, largely responsible for the city's present-day configuration.

²⁰ See Jay for an account of the influence of Georg Lukács's History and Class Consciousness (1923): 'Not only did the Situationists share Lukács's stress on criticizing the totality of social relations, his redemptive hope for a unity of subject and object, and his celebration of workers' councils, but also they adopted his critique of reification as the major obstacle to revolutionary change' (Jay, 1993:418).

²¹ 'If in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a *camera obscura*, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process' (Marx & Engels, 1977:164).

²² Lefebvre summarises this position in The Sociology of Marx: 'The essence of man is social, and the essence of society is praxis – acts, courses of action, interaction. Separated from praxis, theory vainly comes to grips with falsely formulated or insoluble problems, bogs down in mysticism and mystification' (Lefebvre, 1968:34).

²³ The revolutionary nature of Marx's historical materialism relates not only to its envisaged liberation of the proletariat, but also to the conceptual novelty that it represents. In order to undermine the authority of philosophical abstractions, Marx needed to redefine "consciousness", linking it to practical life rather than the hitherto accepted "spirit" of Hegelian Marxism. A noteworthy pre-figuration of this central claim of historical materialism occurs in The German Ideology: 'Men can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion, or anything else you like. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence, a step which is conditioned by their physical organization. By producing their means of existence, men are indirectly producing their actual material life... As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with *what* they produce and with *how* they produce. The nature of individuals thus depends on the material conditions determining their production' (Marx & Engels, 1977:160).

²⁴ In his "Individuals and Societies" (1961) Williams, by contrast, suggests that in examining society, we take precisely the 'direction' that Lefebvre attributes to Marx, that is, the direction that critically examining ideas ('descriptions') in order to arrive at life ('behaviour'): 'When we examine actual relationships, we start from the descriptions we have learned. When we speak of 'the individual' and of 'society', we are using descriptions which embody particular interpretations of the experience to which they refer: interpretations which gained currency at a particular point in history, yet which have now virtually established themselves in our minds as absolutes. By a special effort, we may become conscious of 'the individual' and 'society' as 'no more than descriptions', yet still so much actual experience and behaviour is tied to them that the realization can seem merely academic. There are times, however, when there is so high a tension between experience and description that we are forced to examine the descriptions, not so much as a matter of theory but as literally a problem of behaviour' (Williams, 1961:65-6).

²⁵ Continuing the same line of investigation, Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1991) narrowed his object of study from the everyday in general to social space in particular. He begins by reiterating that the 'successful unmasking of *things* in order to reveal (social) relationships – such was Marx's great achievement, and, whatever political tendencies may call themselves Marxist, it remains the most durable accomplishment of Marxist thought.... According to Marx (...), merely to note the existence of things, whether specific objects or "the object" in general, is to ignore what things at once embody and dissimulate, namely social relations and the forms of those relations' (Lefebvre, 1991b:81). He then proposes the application of this Marxian methodology to space: 'A comparable approach is called for today, an approach which would analyse not things in space but space itself, with a view to uncovering the social relationships embedded in it.... The *ideologically* dominant tendency ... bases its image of the forces occupying space on the idea that space is a passive receptacle. Thus ... we fall into the trap of treating space as space "in itself", as space as such. We come to think in terms of spatiality, and so to fetishize space in a way reminiscent of the old fetishism of commodities, where the trap lay in exchange, and the error was to consider "things" in isolation, as "things in themselves"' (89-90).

²⁶ *La Proclamation de la Commune* Paris: Gallimard, 1965.

²⁷ See "The Theory of Moments and the Construction of Situations" (S.I. 4, 1960), which describes the situation as a spatio-temporal phenomenon, while the moment is only temporal and thus of less interest as a revolutionary tool.

²⁸ An example of this absence would be Lefebvre's unreferenced use of the concept of *détournement* in *The Production of Space*: 'Appropriation should not be confused with a practice which is closely related to it but is distinct, namely 'diversion' (*détournement*)' (Lefebvre, 1991b:167).

²⁹ See also Lefebvre's chapter on "Industrialization and Urbanization" in his *Writings on Cities* (1996), in which he argues that in the face of urbanisation the urban/rural partition does continue to exist, but in a different ratio. This is because only small pockets of what he terms 'unintegrated' rural areas remain (that is, lacking services, consumer products, electricity etc.), resulting in a divide that is less apparent but significantly intensified.

3. Truffaut and the Situationists

¹ This hypothetical antagonism is not difficult to imagine after reading Hussey's description of Debord's growing friendship with Gérard Lebovici in the 1970s, a relationship which apparently disconcerted the latter's friends and associates: 'Debord was disparagingly described as Lebovici's "guru" and respected associates such as François Truffaut openly commented to friends about his state of mind.... Those who had observed his [Lebovici's] climb to power, such as François Truffaut, though he was literally going mad' (Hussey, 2001:285,324).

² For a useful discussion of the debate surrounding Williams' structure of feeling, see Higgins' *Raymond Williams* (1999) and Sean Matthews' "Change and Theory in Raymond Williams' Structure of Feeling" (2001).

³ See Truffaut's assertion that, "Doinel is certainly asocial, but he isn't revolutionary the way people are today. Given this statement, I can see my films being condemned politically. Doinel isn't out to change society; he's leery of it and protects himself from it, but he's full of good will and wants to be 'accepted'" (cit. De Baecque & Toubiana, 2000:267).

⁴ One such case would be the group made up of the Surrealist, Lettrist, COBRA and Imaginist Bauhaus movements that preceded the Situationist International, and in which a thread of ideological influence and continuity can be clearly discerned. Another example is provided by Scott Forsyth, who designates a Marxist/Socialist trend as 'central to film history', and substantiates this claim by grouping together 1920s Soviet cinema, Jean Renoir, the International Documentary Movement, Surrealism, the Hollywood blacklist, Italian Neo-realism, Third Cinema and the Dziga Vertov Group (Forsyth, 1997:266-7).

⁵ Jean-Louis Baudry articulates Macherey's 'lack' in terms of 'difference' when he argues that as a result of the suturing process of classical realism that creates an illusion of continuity, film paradoxically 'lives on the denial of difference [between frames]: difference is necessary for it to live, but it lives on its negation' (Baudry, 1992:306).

⁶ The common difficulty of separating the look of the audience from intradiegetic and pro-filmic perspectives – not, I would argue, unique to Truffaut's films – suggests that Mulvey's third look is, perhaps, too narrowly defined. Sandy Flitterman offers a modified definition of the spectator's look ("look-relay", in Flitterman's terms) which goes some way to take this difficulty into account. The spectator is, she asserts, 'both producer of the looks and traversed by these looks' (Flitterman, 1981:243).

⁷ For a helpful discussion on the Marxist project of historical materialism, see Terry Eagleton's *Marx and Freedom* (1997).

⁸ See the appendix for a list of abbreviations used in sequence transcriptions. Future references to the film will be structured according to the requirements of the discussion surrounding a particular sequence. This means that while tables will always include shot numbers and descriptions of visual images, columns for dialogue and/or score/noise/writing will not always be requisite. Similarly, if dialogue is the only point of interest in a sequence, it will be transcribed without reference to visual images.

⁹ Dialogue and credits are sourced from the 1993 Artificial Eye/FoxVideo English subtitled edition of *The 400 Blows* (see bibliography for production details). Where no subtitles are provided, or where deemed appropriate, the original French has been included in italics.

¹⁰ This is the game of disappearance and retrieval that Freud observed a young child playing and wrote of in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. See p.71, below.

¹¹ The use of panoramic views for surveillance finds translation into many modern policing techniques. One such example is Los Angeles, where identification numbers are painted onto residential rooftops, the effect of which, writes Mike Davis, is that the aerial view of the city is transformed into 'a huge police grid' (Davis, 1992:252). Furthermore, Davis historicises the ideology underlying these techniques by reference to nineteenth century Paris: 'All this airborne surveillance and engridding, endless police data-gathering and centralization of communications, constitutes an invisible "Haussmannization" of Los Angeles' (253-4).

¹² See Prendergast: 'Getting the poor out of the slums and into the parks would not only be good for the lungs but also be good for the order of things: rubbing shoulders with the well-to-do would show the not so well-to-do that Paris was a fairly friendly place after all, and that, in the perspective of a democratized and democratizing Nature, they were all more or less the same anyway. The idea that, on entering the park, one left one's class identity behind, at home, in the workplace or on the street, in order to participate in a socially ecumenical, fraternal get-together was, of course, a preposterous fiction' (Prendergast, 1995:171).

¹³ See, also, Lefebvre's analysis of the ideological function of monuments: 'Monumentality ... always embodies and imposes a clearly intelligible message. It says what it wishes to say, yet it hides a good deal more: being political, military and ultimately fascist in character, monumental buildings mask the will to power and the arbitrariness of power beneath signs and surfaces which claim to express collective will and collective thought. In the process, such signs and surfaces also manage to conjure away both possibility and time' (Lefebvre, 1991b:143).

¹⁴ Consistent with Debord's concern with the falsity of lived experience in a spectacular society is his engagement with the artificiality of geographical space: 'As it destroys cities, urbanism institutes a *pseudo-countryside* devoid not only of the natural relationships of the country of former times but also of the direct (and directly contested) relationships of historical cities. The forms of habitation and the spectacular control of today's "planned environment" have created a new, artificial peasantry' (Debord, 1995:177). These shifting semantics clearly have important implications for the conventional opposition between town and country by invoking the question of how dependent this division has been on language, that is, on a particular linguistic conception of 'town' and 'country'. See Chapter 7 for further discussion.

¹⁵ Nelson describes the Eiffel Tower in this sequence in different metaphorical terms, but as representative of similar impulses to those underlying the fort-da game. He suggests that the Tower functions as an axis that prefigures the Rotor, which, in his reading, acts as a synecdoche for the film in particular, and cinema in general: 'In the very editing of the Rotor sequence lies a reflection of the frustration of confrontation and a hint of the poignancy of separation, which are primary themes of the motion picture' (Nelson, 1985:141).

¹⁶ Of interest to the debate about what constitutes realism is the description Williams provides of the difference between what he terms "naturalism" and a "false actuality" in his discussion of the Russian actor and director Konstantin Stanislavsky: 'there is a vital difference between the film which is using naturalistic conventions to express an "inner, hidden psychological movement" [as, for example, Stanislavsky does], and, on the other hand, the film in which a relatively crude, "routine" conception of experience is given *apparent* actuality by the convincing representation of *external* details. Any competent film-maker can, nowadays, reproduce such an external reality – a house, a street, a general way of living, the appearance of a certain kind of person; but the test always is, in this essential distinction of types of naturalism that I am urging, whether the created actuality can be seen to have a necessary and genuinely revealing relation to the inner emotional movement; or whether, as I think is so in the majority of cases, we are offered what I would call a "false actuality," in which the convincingness of the external detail is operating as a substitute for a convincing actuality of considered and general feeling' (Williams, 1954:37). In this context, Lopez seems to want to attribute to Truffaut the use of authentic "naturalism", but does not provide enough evidence to substantiate her argument. Instead, by so readily conflating Antoine and Paris, she unproblematically reads the representation of external details as indexes of 'considered and general feeling'.

¹⁷ See, for example, Petrie's assertion that, 'normally we see Antoine as part of the world around him, and it is this sense of interaction between the boy and his environment that gives the film much of its strength and insight' (Petrie, 1970:40).

4. Parents and Teachers

¹ Brackets in dialogue transcriptions refer to off-screen voices.

² Nelson identifies this camera position as the second person perspective or "you", and which, Nelson rightly claims, 'predominates in the film, constantly stressing the spectator's relationship with Antoine' (Nelson, 1985:142). In Mulvey's terminology, Nelson's "you" thus refers to both the pro-filmic and audience looks, aligning the spectator with Truffaut as we watch Antoine.

³ This separation of the child protagonist from his peers would, according to Insdorf, become characteristic of Truffaut's films: 'The child in relation to society is, for Truffaut, the outsider par excellence, a mischief maker (*Les Mistons*), a hell-raiser (*The 400 Blows*), or a savage (*The Wild Child*).... But Antoine Doinel, Victor (the wild child), and Julien in *Small Change* are doubly distanced because they are outsiders even to the "mini-society" that children create for themselves in classrooms or playgrounds' (Insdorf, 1994:151).

⁴ Quotations of shots that are not included in the transcriptions provided are formatted according to sequence and shot numbers. For example, (3:s.3) refers to the third shot of the film's third sequence.

⁵ Another example of René's freedom at home is when he decides to "take an advance" on his inheritance, when he and Antoine are in need of money (17:s.6). The money is in a locked chest, the key to which is inevitably "hidden" in a vase nearby.

⁶ See, for example, Anne Gillain, who describes this moment as 'the painful fragmentation of his self in search of an identity' (Gillain, 1990:193).

⁷ The two important examples of the heightened frequency of point-of-view shots are the arrest and transport sequences, both of which are quoted and discussed presently (see pp.114-17, below).

⁸ Other critics who comment on contrast as the defining feature of the film include Anne Gillain: '*The 400 Blows* is entirely built on an opposition between on the one hand delinquency and repression, on the other, playing and writing' (Gillain, 1985:115) and Arlene Croce: 'In *The 400 Blows*, "new wave" technique serves to unite poetry [fiction] and journalism [documentary] in the powerful idiom of a particular environment' (Croce, 1978:723).

⁹ Taylor takes a similar approach when he suggests that, 'looked at one way it is a wholly clear-eyed, unsentimental, objectively believable picture of an adolescent, a specific adolescent in a specific situation; but in another way it gives us the curious feeling of seeing everything from the inside outwards. It is not so much that our sentimental participation is demanded in the hero's sufferings – quite the reverse; we are allowed to see round him and criticize him even as we sympathize – but that the life around him is shown only in so far as it impinges on him, and is coloured by his view of it' (Taylor, 1964:204-5).

5. The Law

¹ The conversation that takes place between Antoine's mother and a judge before the boy is transferred to the Centre for Juvenile Delinquents reiterates this notion of the state as a "macro-parent": (M: "We might take him back, if he promised to change. If you could frighten him..."; Judge: "That isn't my function. "; M: "We can't control him. "; ... Judge: "... In the circumstances, I think the boy should be placed in a home. "; M: "Could it be by the sea, Your Honour?"; Judge: "We are not running holiday camps, Madame, but I'll see what can be done", 25; ss.1-10). The mother's appeal to the judge to take control when she cannot, coupled with the allusion to holiday camps (which was, after all, their original plan for the boy) reiterates her perception of Antoine as a subject who can be structurally displaced for her convenience. That this mentality is satirised by the film is made evident by the judge's retort that frightening children as a means of control is "not his function", as well as her request – trivial, but seemingly full of maternal affection – that Antoine's punishment takes place "by the sea".

² The 400 Blows theme is also used in the credit sequence (see p.66), the mirror sequence (see p.85) and when Antoine is in the holding cell (see p.115).

³ In this context, see also Foucault on the shifting power structures effected by new disciplinary methods: 'The chronicle of a man, the account of his life, his historiography, written as he lived out his life formed part of the rituals of his power. The disciplinary methods reversed this relation, lowered the threshold of describable individuality and made of this description a means of control and a method of domination. It is no longer a monument of future memory, but a document for possible use' (cit. Tagg, 1988:89-92).

⁴ See, also, Vaneigem, who designates asylums and prisons as integral to the maintenance of spectacular society: 'The roles of paranoiac, schizophrenic or psychopath do not carry the seal of social usefulness; in other words, they are not distributed under the label of power, as are the roles of cop, boss or military officer. But they do have a utility in specified places in asylums and prisons. Such places are museums of a sort, serving the double purpose, from power's point of view, of confining dangerous rivals while at the same time supplying the spectacle with needed negative stereotypes. For bad examples and their exemplary punishment add spice to the spectacle and protect it' (Vaneigem, 1967).

⁵ It is in this context that Insdorf likens Truffaut's films to improvisational jazz, as discussed in Chapter 3 (see pp.64-5, above).

⁶ Insdorf articulates the effect of the deep focus shot in more technical terms, by focusing on the altered hierarchy in filmic equipment, rather than the relationship between director and spectator: '[Bazin] emphasized deep-focus photography, which maintains the integrity of the shot and restores faith in the camera over the cutting room' (Insdorf, 1994:19).

⁷ See, for instance, Bazin's essay on William Wyler: 'With the help of deep focus ... the spectator has the possibility himself of the final operation of decoupage ... William Wyler's deep focus endeavours to be liberal and democratic like the consciousness of the American spectator and the heroes of the film' (Bazin, 1980:44).

6. Freedom?

¹ Added to this is the coincidental fact that Truffaut has stated in an interview that the ending was, indeed, fortuitous: "the final freeze was simply an accident. I told Léaud to look into the camera. He did, but quickly turned his eyes away. Since I wanted that brief look he gave me the moment before he turned, I had no choice but to hold on to it; hence the freeze" (cit. Samuels, 1972:40). Yet, as with the psychologist sequence, the conscious manifest intention cannot exhaust latent textual effects: we cannot base our analysis on Truffaut's stated (non-)aims.

² Debord also locates this identification process in the everyday of spectacular society, suggesting that it is one of the means by which real lived experience is replaced by pseudo-experience: 'The spectacle's externality with respect to the acting subject is demonstrated by the fact that the individual's own gestures are no longer his own, but rather those of someone who represents them to him. The spectator feels at home nowhere, for the spectacle is everywhere' (Debord, 1995:30).

³ As a counter to the critical naivety of refusing to consider politics simply because a film does not express an explicit political "message", is Kast's suggestion – inspired by Engels' similar claim about the novel – that often the films that appear least politically motivated are those that wield the most social power: 'in the most unexpected way a confused and slapdash detective film, badly finished, baroque in form, is able to state more than any amount of choruses on the lines of let-us-work-together-brothers-our-time-has-come.... [T]hose who in no way claim to convey a message have, by a strange coincidence, caused the social edifice they didn't give a damn about preserving or not, but merely depicted, to totter in the most violent way imaginable' (Kast, 1985:231-3).

⁴ The other sense in which the film is political is as an economic product (also discussed in Chapter 3, see p.59, above): '*every film is political*, inasmuch as it is determined by the ideology which produces it (...). The cinema is all the more thoroughly and completely determined because unlike other arts or ideological systems its very manufacture mobilizes powerful economic forces in a way that the production of literature does not' (Comolli & Narboni, 1992:684).

⁵ Thiher's reading clearly alludes to Barthes' central thesis in *Camera Lucida* (1981), namely that all photographs connote death, and especially portraits: 'In terms of image-repertoire, the Photograph (the one I intend) represents that very subtle moment when, to tell the truth, I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro-version of death (of parenthesis): I am truly becoming a specter' (Barthes, 2000:14).

⁶ Richard Neupert comes to a similar conclusion about the film's ending, yet his reading focuses not on the freeze frame, but on the musical score as a discursive device. He argues that the closing music (400 Blows theme) 'not only brackets the film musically as it began, but it also closes off the narration by reasserting the manipulative narrational intervention.... [T]he final reprise returns the spectators to their original position, backing them out of the text as it were...' (Neupert, 1985:29,32).

7. A Final Note, on Men and Women in the City

¹ In the second volume of her autobiography, Simone de Beauvoir remarks on a development in Sartre's theoretical progress (which would form part of his *La Légende de la vérité*) which is pertinent in this context: 'Truth', he wrote, is a by-product of commerce, and commerce he linked with democracy: when citizens regard *themselves* as interchangeable, they must needs evaluate the world in similar terms, and science emerges as an index of their outlook' (De Beauvoir, 1960:45). Sartre revisits this issue in his analysis of a group of people waiting for a bus, in which he suggests that all traces of individuality are erased by the common purpose of queuing, waiting to get to work, etc.: 'to the extent that the bus designates the passengers who are there, it constitutes them in their *interchangeability*: each of them is produced by the social whole as united to his neighbours to the extent that he is strictly identical to them.... To the extent that *they have the same objective reality* in the future (one minute more, the same for all of them, and the bus will appear at the corner of the street), the *non-justifiable* separation of these organisms – to the extent that it derives from other conditions and another realm of being – is determined as *identity*' (Sartre, 2000:212). The incongruousness of this interchangeability and individuality or freedom is highlighted in his footnote that claims: 'The fact remains that the conflict between interchangeability and existence (as a single, lived, *praxis*) must be experienced at some levels as a *scandalous absurdity*' (213). This point reiterates Lefebvre's separation between technology and leisure; that it is only the realm of leisure that offers the potential of *re*-personalisation, but that the dominant perspective remains the scientific one.

² The origins of the country versus city polarity in Romanticism could provide an interesting theoretical angle to an analysis of New Wave films in the context of the association between *auteurism* and Romanticism (discussed in Chapter 2).

³ Truffaut's position is also apposite in the context of Hollywood formulae, one of which is specified by Richard Dyer as representing urban exhaustion and offering as its solution 'pastoral return'. Given that the representation of this 'return' is often effected by the cinema itself, Dyer concludes that 'entertainment provides alternatives to capitalism which will be provided *by* capitalism' (Dyer, 1976:229). Vaneigem proposes a very similar argument: 'Where power fails to paralyse with constraints, it paralyse by suggestion: by forcing everyone to use crutches of which it is the sole supplier' (Vaneigem, 1967). In this context, Truffaut's rejection of the Romantic conception of the country's liberating potential can be read as a refusal to participate in the self-perpetuating cycle of supply and demand characteristic of capitalism.

⁴ See, for example, William's comment on Virginia Woolf and the city: 'the discontinuity, the atomism, of the city were aesthetically experienced, as a problem of perception which raised problems of identity – and which was characteristically resolved on arrival in the country' (Williams, 1973:241).

⁵ For discussions of the *flâneur*, see Benjamin's *Charles Baudelaire* (1983) and Prendergast's *Paris and the Nineteenth Century* (1995). See also my review of Edmund White's *The Flâneur*, in *Pretexts* 10:2, 2001.

⁶ The convention of this gendered perception of the city is further supported by Massey's reference to Elizabeth Wilson's *The Sphinx in the City* in which Wilson argues, Massey summarises, that, 'The whole notion of city culture ... has been developed as one pertaining to men' (Massey, 1992:74).

⁷ Flitterman reiterates Mulvey's position when she argues that classical narrative cinema is 'a repository for male fantasy in which the visual and narrative exploitation of the woman is the pivotal figure which allows the machine to operate' (Flitterman, 1981:243).

⁸ Holmes and Ingram argue, by contrast, that the only feminine position in the film is occupied by Antoine's mother: 'As the only woman on screen for most of the film, she inevitable comes to stand for women in general – and the spectator is firmly positioned with the film's male subject' (Holmes & Ingram, 1998:118). My argument with this reading is that it too readily subscribes to the categorical positioning of males and females according to the active versus passive spectrum prescribed by classical narrative. In other words, Holmes and Ingram insist that the masculine perspective be held by a male character and the feminine by a female. This not only denies the possibility of subverting these traditionally prescribed positions, but also, I would suggest, contradicts the positioning that is evidenced by the text of *The 400 Blows*.

Appendix

List of Abbreviations:

ES	Establishing shot
LS	Long shot
MS	Medium shot
MCU	Medium close-up
BMCU	MCU from behind
CU	Close-up
FS	Front shot
BS	Back shot (from behind)
MBS	Medium BS
SS	Side shot (profile view)
Diss.	Dissolve
A.	Antoine
R.	René
T./t.	Teacher
M./m.	Mother
Sf./sf.	Stepfather
LLRH	Little Red Riding Hood

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Films

Truffaut, François (1993) *Les Quatre Cent Coups* [1959] (*The 400 Blows*) Paris: Les Films

du Carosse, distributed by Artificial Eye/FoxVideo;

With Jean-Pierre Léaud, Claire Maurier, Albert Rémy, Patrick Auffay;

Director: François Truffaut; Screenplay: François Truffaut & Marcel Moussy; Assistant

Director: Philippe de Broca; Director of Photography: Henri Decaë.

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