***BREATHLESS* (*À BOUT DE SOUFFLE*, 1960)**

Jean Luc Godard’s *Breathless* captures French New Wave’s rejection of traditional cinematic form, and its style has been a huge influence on alternative, political, and documentary filmmakers. An homage to Hollywood’s film noir, the film uses conventions like expressionist chiaroscuro lighting, newsreel style, and an existential hero driven to his death by a femme fatale. Its protagonist, Michel Piccard is a conman wanted by the Parisian police for stealing a car and killing a cop. He tries to persuade his girlfriend, Patricia, to escape to Rome with him but she feels conflicted and betrays him to the police. Instead of running away, he stays and gets shot. The film noir plot, however, is subjected to Godard’s experiment with the film’s style which renders it almost incoherent at times. In line with New Wave’s modernist experiments with the film form, he breaks all rules of continuity editing and therefore its self-reflexively draws attention to the craft of film making. Littered with jump cuts, disorienting camera placements, breaks in eye-line matches, and characters’ direct address to the audience, *Breathless* forces a distanced and critical gaze on the viewer which disallows immersion into the world of the film. The film was remade by Jim McBride in 1983.

**References and further reading:**

Barr, Charles (1970). “À Bout de Souffle.” *The Films of Jean-Luc Godard*. Ed. Ian

Cameron, NY: Praeger.

Dixon, Wheeler Winston (1997). The Films of Jean-Luc Godard, New York: SUNY.

Greene, Naomi (2007). *French New Wave*. NY: Wallflower.

**Paratextual Material**

* Trailer at the Criterion Collection

(<http://www.criterion.com/films/268-breathless>)

* Link to images and filmography of Godard’s works

(<http://en.unifrance.org/directories/person/15597/jean-luc-godard>)

**Gohar Siddiqui**

**Syracuse University**