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| Breathless (À Bout de Souffle, 1960) |
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| Jean Luc Godard’s *Breathless* captures French New Wave’s rejection of traditional cinematic form. Its style has had a large impact on alternative, political, and documentary filmmakers. An homage to Hollywood’s film noir, the film uses expressionist chiaroscuro lighting and newsreel-style footage to depict 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 police officer. He tries to persuade his girlfriend, Patricia, to escape to Rome with him but she betrays him to the police. Instead of fleeing, Michel remains and is shot. The film noir plot, however, is subjected to such stylistic experimentation that Godard’s film is almost incoherent at times. In line with New Wave’s modernist experiments with film form, Godard abandons continuity editing and self-reflexively drawing attention to the craft of filmmaking. 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. Jim McBride remade the film in 1983. |
| File: Breathless.pdf  <http://en.unifrance.org/directories/person/15597/jean-luc-godard>  Jean Luc Godard’s *Breathless* captures French New Wave’s rejection of traditional cinematic form. Its style has had a large impact on alternative, political, and documentary filmmakers. An homage to Hollywood’s film noir, the film uses expressionist chiaroscuro lighting and newsreel-style footage to depict 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 police officer. He tries to persuade his girlfriend, Patricia, to escape to Rome with him but she betrays him to the police. Instead of fleeing, Michel remains and is shot. The film noir plot, however, is subjected to such stylistic experimentation that Godard’s film is almost incoherent at times. In line with New Wave’s modernist experiments with film form, Godard abandons continuity editing and self-reflexively drawing attention to the craft of filmmaking. 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. Jim McBride remade the film in 1983.  File: <http://www.criterion.com/films/268-breathless>  Trailer at the Criterion Collection |
| Further reading:  (Barr)  (Dixon)  (Greene) |