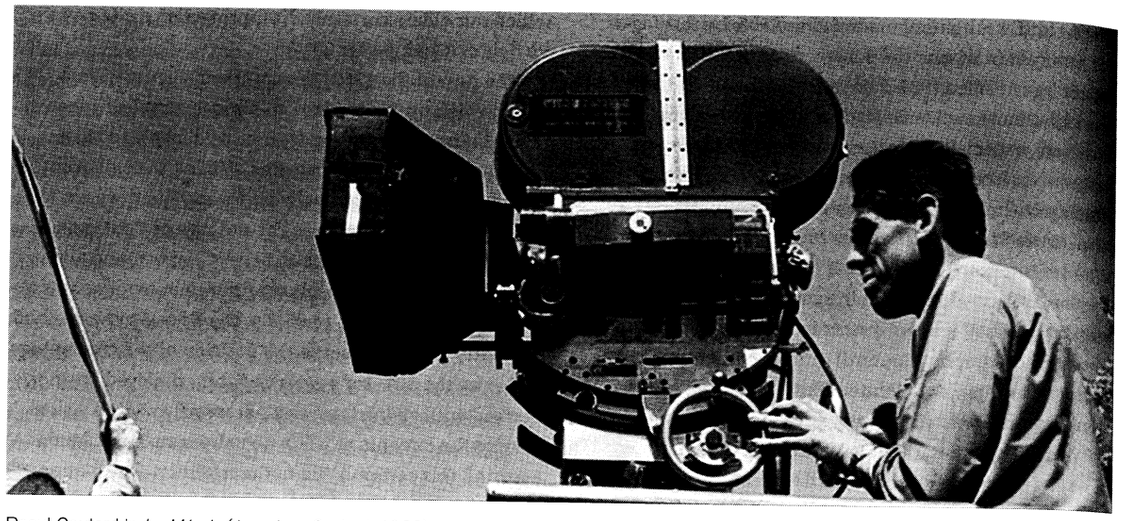

Raoul Coutard in *Le Mépris* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1963)

(Nauroy 1964: 85). Even Almendros eventually expressed some doubts about the legacy of the early 1960s, fearing that it had led to 'over-simplified, impoverished' conventions (Almendros 1985: 7). Although Coutard worked on a number of unremarkable studio comedies in the 1970s, he never regretted the days of studio lighting, and returned to militant artistic minimalism towards the end of his career (his last film came out in 2001, since when he has completed an autobiography), forging a new partnership with Philippe Garrel. His comments on his work, often provocative, make it clear that part of the attraction of the style he was most famous for was its very lack of resources, the practical challenge of doing more with less: 'I like quick, candid work ... I started by eliminating from my films all the so-called artistic effects, all those things cameramen thrive on. We shot fifteen times more quickly for ten times less money' (Neupert 2002: 190). He insists also on the primacy of the director, as a true auteurist should ('My idea of the profession has always been: "the photography should be as the director wants it"'), but in the same interview he recounts how he told a director who preferred an elaborate style that he should have chosen someone else; like most cinematographers, Coutard holds an ideal of adaptability which sometimes clashes with his personality (Gilles 1989: 70). One of the legends of French cinematography – and the mentor to Caroline Champetier, one of the few high-profile women in the profession, who 'inherited' Godard from him in the late 1980s – finally sums up his role as follows:

> The story-teller is the director, who constructs the fiction, with the screenwriter and the rest of the team. [...] Within this competence, this intelligence, this talent, the DP has a key role, since after all a film without images would be radio. (Coutard 2007: 322)

Screenwriters

If the profession of cinematographer underwent much change in nature, but little in prestige, during these years of upheaval, scriptwriters suffered the opposite fate. The legend of unscripted, improvised films created by the cameras of the New Wave directors, or from a few scribbled notes penned by themselves, has long been set aside; all but the most radical directors sought the collaboration of screenwriters at some point or another, while outside the 'auteur sector' work for traditional dialogue writers never dried up. Despite the concentrated bile which Truffaut directed at Jean Aurenche and Pierre Bost in 1954, Aurenche's filmography during the 1960s counts sixteen titles, as against nineteen during the 1950s (Truffaut 2009). Henri Jeanson, the other figurehead of the *qualité française*, scripted twenty-five films from 1950 to 1959, and nineteen from 1960 to 1969, but during the latter decade he also worked occasionally for television, developed his activity as a journalist, wrote his autobiography, and presumably suffered declining health: he died in November 1970. Reports of the disappearance of the screenwriter were thus greatly exaggerated. The New Wave themselves established writing collaborations early: Truffaut with Marcel Moussy, Claude Chabrol (and Éric Rohmer for *Le Signe du lion*, 1962) with Paul Gégauff, Jacques Rivette with Jean Gruault. Alain Resnais made a point of refusing to write his own scripts, and offered almost equal auteur status to the writers he worked with, who often had considerable literary reputations.

On the other hand, the rise of the auteur-director dealt a massive blow to the reputation of scriptwriting as a profession, and its status in the French cinematic universe. Christian Salé has described the 1960s as 'the crossing of the desert' for scriptwriters, and remarked that even in the late 1970s a student at the French national film school might be taught every other cinematic profession by practitioners and experts, but not scriptwriting (Salé 1981: 6). While the majority of directors had returned to collaborations with writers by the mid-1960s – Barthélemy Amengual has written that '1965 would confirm the return of the script, and of the film as a creative collaboration' (Amengual 1991: 24) – the legend of the scriptless project thus lived on among film students. In the 1980s and 90s French production, brought up short by a confrontation with the methods of the all-conquering American industry, would discover this lack of preparation and react with panic (Smith 2004: 204).

Panic, however, had characterised the French industry's relationship to its screenwriters from the days of the *qualité française*. As with the rumours of sudden redundancy in 1960, assumptions that the 1950s were a golden age of well-written scenarios involve some rewriting of history. Jean-Claude Carrière commented on the scenarios of the classic Tati films: 'If the advance on receipts had existed at the time, Tati's scenarios wouldn't have had a chance. Nobody would have got it anyway, the scenarios were all unreadable' (Salé 1981: 53). By the mid-1950s the industry was alarmed. Pierre Cabaud, CEO of Pathé-Consortium-Cinéma, told an audience in Algiers in 1955 that 'to fight foreign competition, the French cinema must vary its subjects endlessly, deal with new themes, and above all not always rely on the sacrosanct stars' (Cabaud 1955). The highly respected critic Hubert Revol took up this theme three months later, emphasising that the poor quality of scripts was of more concern than the disappointing new generation of stars: 'A few "monstres sacrés" won't be enough to ensure a film's success, if the script of the film isn't interesting' (Revol 1955). In the winter of 1955–6 the journal *Cinéma* launched a public debate among its readers: what solutions could be found to the 'crisis of the subject'? Interestingly, they suggest a 'script competition' or 'a reading committee of unarguable reputation who would indicate the good scripts they were sent and publicise them widely', essentially a pre-announcement of the *avance sur recettes* system (Anon 1956: 4). Over the following two numbers, they published a number of responses. In March, Louis Chavance suggested that the 'crisis of the subject' was in fact a 'scriptwriters' crisis', and suggested that the screenwriter was not getting enough respect. Why be a scriptwriter, Chavance wonders, when literary authorship is so much more prestigious and attractive, directing so much more creatively satisfying and better remunerated (Chavance 1956: 77). He suggests that royalties be collected from ticket sales and replace the screenwriter's salary, ensuring that 'the author has a part in the success or failure of his work' (Chavance 1956: 78). The word 'author' here clearly designates the scriptwriter and not the director, but already the reality does not correspond to the term.

Chavance was fighting a losing battle, but in the course of his intervention he put his finger on the paradox of the scriptwriter, one which would particularly affect the profession as its prestige declined. Caught between two art forms that both hold out the prospect of real authorship, it hardly seems surprising that scriptwriters who show complete commitment to the function are rarer than in the other major creative roles in cinema. In the mid-1960s, Pascal Jardin observed sourly to *Cinéma* 65: 'In general, scriptwriters come from the ranks of literary failures, journalists and others' (Nauroy 1965: 91). Among other scriptwriters interviewed by the magazine for this issue are Jean-Pierre Rappeneau and Nina Companeez, both of whom were to turn to directing. Even the consummate celebrity-screenwriter of the mid-century, Michel Audiard, had had literary aspirations and directed a number of successful comedies between 1969 and 1974. An exploration of the most prominent French scriptwriters of the second half of the twentieth century reveals how large a proportion either came from a literary background and remained primarily active as writers, or else moved from scriptwriting to directing as soon as resources and confidence permitted. Some, such as Marguerite Duras, used the experience of scriptwriting as a bridge from one kind of highly innovative authorship to another. These patterns are by no means unique to France, and in all probability they are both inevitable and relatively healthy. The sharp drop in esteem which scriptwriters suffered as a result of the New Wave, however, was a uniquely French phenomenon which added instability to an already unstable function, and led to an equally extreme reaction (Smith 2004: 204).