

# THE CRITICAL ARABESQUE

**On Jean-Luc Godard's  
*Nouvelle Vague* (1990)**

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## **The Motion Picture as a Total Work of Art**

The transformation of the proletarian penny arcades and nickelodeons into movie theaters that were also recognized by a middle-class audience was accompanied by the elaborate commercial construction of gigantic premiere houses, whose magnificent façade design and fantastic and eclectic interior decor created experiential spaces that complemented the narrative space of the films being presented and exponentially increased their illusionistic effect. Siegfried Kracauer commented on those “palaces of distraction” in 1926:

*A glittering, revue-like creature has crawled out of the movies: the total artwork (Gesamtkunstwerk) of effects. / This total artwork of effects assaults every one of the senses using every possible means. Spotlights shower their beams into the auditorium, sprinkling across festive drapes or rippling through colorful, growth-like glass fixtures. The orchestra asserts itself as an independent power, its acoustic production buttressed by the responsory of the lighting. Every emotion is accorded its own acoustic expression, its color value in the spectrum—a visual and acoustic kaleidoscope which provides the setting for the physical activity on stage: pantomime and ballet. Until finally the white surface descends and the events of the three-dimensional stage blend imperceptibly into two-dimensional illusions.<sup>1</sup>*

In addition to this critical perspective toward a “false totality” of the movie theater that serves entertainment and is suggestive of the “upscale and sacral” of the art tradition, which, in Kracauer’s opinion, contests the artistic independence of film, the metaphor of the total work of art is also employed for genuine cinematic art. Thus the composer Giuseppe Becce proclaimed in 1929: “...and one day, the really great art/sound film will be there, the product of a single person, who will be a film artist, director, and composer at the same time, a Wagner of film!”<sup>2</sup> The expressionist film, exemplarily *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920), was explicitly inspired by synesthetic ideals and also involved painting in the form of painted backdrops.

With the establishment of the sound film as the most important mass medium, which effectively opened up the market through its differentiation of different genres, the overall artistic quality took a back seat to the narrative function. The diversity of artistic media employed in each film was subordinate to the plot, the image and sound were used as a mere vehicle of dramaturgy. Not until the late 1950s and 60s, as the era of cinema was coming to an end, and initiated by the Nouvelle Vague, an intensive theoretical discussion about the medium began, did this illusion of transparency come to the test. Above all others, Jean-Luc Godard developed his cinematic reflections on the stereotypes of the popular motion picture, as my thesis will show, through a reversion to the total artistic foundations of cinema as a hybrid entertainment machine. He recalled the total art character of film and, not in the least through this strategy, exercised a sharp critique of the imaginary totality that was fabricated in the early movie palaces through spectacular, overpowering aesthetics that were articulated in the architecture as well as the arts and crafts, and later by making all aesthetic means subordinate to the narrative logic of a fixed genre. Even in his early films, he combined different film genres through a specific rhetoric of citation and frequently granted painting, architecture, music and poetry, but also the landscape and its aesthetic experience, an independent rank beyond



narrative logic. This essay shall focus in particular on the latter dimension—nature as the matrix of the total work of art.

### **Nature as History: Godard and the Romantic Tradition of the Total Work of Art**

In *À Bout de souffle* (1959), as Michel Poiccard (Jean-Paul Belmondo) is driving in a stolen car on his way to Paris, he suddenly steps out of his role, notices the beauty of the landscape and turns to address the audience directly. Upon arriving in Paris, without any narrative motivation the camera focuses in passing on the Cathedral of Notre Dame, which appears at this point not only as itself, but also to latently invoke the “cathedrals” of cinema, as the early movie palaces were often called, not in the least because of their function as assembly spaces.<sup>3</sup> Gothic architecture refers to the Romantic tradition of the total work of art, as does the aesthetic experience of nature that Godard, in his first feature film, already extends to include the lights of the nighttime city, thus explicitly associating it with the motion picture theater (German: *Lichtspieltheater*, lit: theater for light play).<sup>4</sup> Godard’s known affinity for the early Romantic objective of a universal poetry substantiates his artistic intention to enhance the cinematic form into an instrument of reflection that, like philosophy, enables insight, and not, for example, only through the citation of philosophical figures of thought, but through the cinematic medium itself—through editing and camera work.<sup>5</sup> The reference to the theatric total work of art known as cinema and to the early Romantic concept of the total work of art, as it takes form in, for instance, Schlegel’s idea of the novel as arabesque and Philipp Otto Runge’s vegetal arabesques of the *Die Zeiten* (*Times of Day*) series, thus does not serve an affirmative resumption of that tradition.<sup>6</sup> Rather, the citations of the total work of art are gathered in Godard’s reflexive instrumentation of editing. It occurs, as shall be explained, as a mode of totality, whose constructedness then does not become less manifest as the conventionality and artificiality of genre motifs. In the 1980s, Godard programmatically intensified his citation of total artistic ideals that he had already laid out in his early work, in a phase which has been frequently interpreted as a retreat from his political ambitions into a mystical and theological sphere. However, Daniel Morgan, in his recently published study on Godard’s late work, solidly established that the new opulence of natural beauty and the sacral is completely in line with Godard’s historical-critical project of qualifying the film to become a quasi-philosophical penetration of the history of the medium and the modern society documented in it.<sup>7</sup> The images of nature in the film under discussion here, *Nouvelle Vague*, are accordingly not escapist counterparts to the bad

reality of capitalist society, but visual arguments for a “true history of the cinema.”<sup>8</sup> However, Morgan neglects to make any further commentary about how Godard’s film relates to the *Nouvelle Vague* cited in the title. This question is to be linked here with the theme of the total work of art, which has not thus far been explored in the research on Godard, as far as I can see. Morgan, too, leaves out of consideration that in *Nouvelle Vague*, Godard not only indirectly touches the pertinent metaphor of the arabesque, but explicitly visualizes it and lets it interact with the key image of the waves, so that the allusion to the early romantic equation of nature, history, and art receives an explicit media-reflexive accent.<sup>9</sup> In the following, it will be demonstrated that the critical recourse to the history of cinema—in terms of an industrial-technological densification of the aesthetic utopia of the total work of art as the subtext of the film—is conveyed with the help of the arabesque ornament and its historical connotations.

### The “New Wave”: Resurrection of the Cinema?

With its title *Nouvelle Vague*, the 1990 film, a Swiss-French production, refers programmatically to the cinematic avant-garde movement of the same name, which was decisively influenced by Godard and failed in 1968—without, of course, producing a documentary in the conventional sense. What it does offer—which is not apparent at first glance, however—is a rather bitter historical interpretation of the revolutionary impulses of that movement by accurately following the natural symbolism of the name and its philosophical implications. But the star-studded cast nevertheless draws one’s attention at first to the very rudimentary film plot. What is sketched out is the love story between the rich countess and industrial magnate, Contessa Elena Torlato-Favrini (Domiziana Giordano), and a stranger (Alain Delon) who is known as Roger Lennox in the first part of the film. After a mysterious traffic accident, she takes him to her villa, which is populated by company members who are continually hurrying about and engaged in lively discussions, as well as many administrative assistants and a vast staff of servants. Most of the film’s scenes take place on the grounds of this magnificent estate situated on a large lake amid an expansive park landscape, which is a reminiscence of Godard’s own background, coming as he does from a wealthy Swiss family on Lake Geneva.<sup>10</sup> Godard already links this setting, both consciously and ironically, with the tradition of the total work of art—which, however, is clearly presented as a fabricated construct based on exploitation. The gardener, introduced immediately at the outset as a key figure, acts as the alter ego of the (film) artist, who is charged with bringing forth the beauty of a changing and unpredictable nature while in a constant (also poetically



and philosophically reflected) struggle with it, and with appropriating this natural beauty as the imaginary natural habitat of the economic elite.<sup>11</sup> The female staff, in turn, is responsible for transforming the luxuriously appointed interiors into earthly paradises by bringing in and arranging magnificent bouquets. Provided they are not embroiled in business transactions, the residents and guests of the villa, on the other hand, are given the part of enjoying, albeit in what is, again, a hierarchical and this time gender-specific matrix. Raoul, one of Elena's business partners (and her former lover), replies three times to his girlfriend's question about what she should do.<sup>12</sup> In the park, he advises her, with a grand gesture: "Admire la nature," and then, in the magnificent entry hall with its marble staircase, he tells the woman clothed in a white fur: "Admire l'architecture!"; and finally, as the couple visits the villa later, he calls on her to admire the décor ("Admire le décor!"). That the constituents of a total artistic synthesis are hereby invoked and simultaneously attributed to the logic of class and gender relations is indubitable, not least through the reference to the ornamentation that the generation of a Henry van de Velde advocated for the renewal of art in general.<sup>13</sup> The role of ornament as a symbol of a second ideal nature, also in view of the image of the woman, will be explored still further. First, it should be noted that Godard's ironic citation of aesthetic experience undermines its claim of integrity.

Just like the setting, the plot is also marked by irresolvable contradictions. The events decompose into two halves, whose interface is the death of Roger in the lake. During a boat ride together, Elena entices the non-swimmer into the water and lets him sink helplessly. However, this "murder" sequence, like the accident at the beginning of the film, is full of line crossings; it lacks an establishing shot that could provide orientation in space, and thus a causal relationship among the events. Like the views of the tree trunk, the branches and the treetop in the former scene, here in the latter, images of moving water interrupt the dramatic action—indeed, they exactly take the place of the decisive moments of action. Like his accident at the beginning, Roger's fall in the water remains invisible. In the spring, his supposed brother Richard, who is also played by Alain Delon, appears on the estate. Rimbaud's statement "Je est un autre" (I is someone else) is displayed as an intertitle, so that the questioning of a fixed identity is linked with the motif of the look-alike. A maid, on the other hand, speaks of resurrection.<sup>14</sup> In addition to and with the natural cycle, the Passion of Christ, which is invoked by corresponding intertitles that structure the film as a whole ("Incipit Lamentatio," "Veni Creator," "Ecce Homo," "Te Deum," "Consummatum est"), serves as another reflection plane for the transformation of personality—which, of course, as the title of the film suggests, means the transformation and rebirth of cinema from the spirit of Nouvelle Vague.

The recurring image of moving water, which is shown in ever new manifestations, is thus a literal translation of the name “Nouvelle Vague,” just as in *Allemagne année 90 neuf zéro* (1991), the image of a white rose represents the name of the Scholl siblings’ resistance movement. The historical is visualized through nature. The natural flow and wave movement of the water, like the grasses and leaves that quiver in the wind, denotes the inherent motion of history, concretized here as that of the film.<sup>15</sup> And as that which is elaborated, in Godard’s film nature gets the status of an authority antecedent to the plot, so that the ordinary figure-ground relationship of the feature film, which uses nature as a backdrop and an echo of the acting characters, is literally inverted. With such empowerment of the landscape vis-à-vis narration, Godard is heir to German Romantic painting, and like it, he projects the history of salvation on the natural cycle. Introduced by the intertitle “Veni Creator,” the “resurrected” Richard appears first as a mirror image in the water, perhaps at the shore of the lake, overgrown with reeds—a biotope, as it were, with a wind blowing past an abundance of fertile pollen. In other words, Richard reemerges (albeit not physically but as a projection, which is a reference to the resurrected cinema) from the element in which he had disappeared.

It takes a miracle for the assertion of the new and the cycle of nature’s reawakening each spring to be reconciled in this way. In his *Times of Day* series, Philipp Otto Runge has conveyed this synthesis of linear eschatological progression and cyclical repetition with the form of the arabesque,<sup>16</sup> to that which the “new ornament” of a van de Velde reconnected. The fact that this implicitly religious understanding of nature as the image of history represents the ideological core of the Gesamtkunstwerk can also be attested to by Caspar David Friedrich’s art. For example, in addition to four sheets on the times of day and the seasons as well as the ages of life, the seven-part Hamburg sepia cycle contains three leaves about creation, death and resurrection, among which the image of the waves represents creation.<sup>17</sup> Godard, who also draws on Friedrich’s iconography, as is often the case, with the motif of the image-dominating, mighty tree,<sup>18</sup> does not at all follow the transcendental idea of Romantic total art, because it bursts the immanence of the landscape that Jules the gardener, as a philosophizing artist, is most likely to seek to preserve, by confronting or also reconciling its measure of time and its tranquility, as already done programmatically in the accident scene with the second technological nature of the automobile (always also a symbol of the cinematic apparatus<sup>19</sup>) as here: the mirror image of the resurrected one travels ahead of his arrival in a red sports car; and some minutes later in the film, the figure with the dark suit and white shirt gets out in the middle of a forest meadow and walks, accompanied by the twittering of birds, a few steps and then stands in the landscape like a nature-worshipping *Friedrichesque*





1 Series of shots from *Nouvelle Vague*: The arrival of Richard Lennox.

*Rückenfigur*, followed by the intertitle “Ecce homo.” Hence, there is no salvation, but merely a second Passion narrative.

The rehabilitation of natural beauty, insofar as Morgan rightly links it to Adorno’s strengthening of this category, does not hamper Godard from presenting an explicitly materialistic interpretation, inasmuch as he construes the “new wave” of cinema as a renewal of capitalism—that is, of Hollywood.<sup>20</sup> The resurrected one is not melancholy and despondent like his predecessor. He appears to be a smart businessman; in appearance more like we know Delon as a star. The story repeats itself. Elena falls in love again. But now she appears to be the inferior one, passive, while Richard monopolizes the business dealings for himself. On a boat ride, he pulls her into the water and she sinks below the waves. Since she previously appeared as a good swimmer, the symbolic character of the scene is unmistakably clear. But, in an action that is visible for only the fraction of a second, he reaches out his hand to her and saves her. The law of repetition seems broken, then again things come full circle because at the beginning, Elena had offered Roger her hand.<sup>21</sup> The conclusion: ostensibly a happy ending, it tells of the compromise of the *Nouvelle Vague* and its reversion to the stereotypes of Hollywood. Elena and Richard are at long last a romantic couple: she ties his shoelaces, which, at the beginning, while still in the guise of Roger—before his collision with the technological age in the form of the truck and the entrepreneur—he had tied himself. The arrival in the Hollywood cinema also marks the resumed citation from Howard Hawkes’s film *To Have and*

*Have Not* (1944). Richard, unlike Roger, knows the answer to the question of the dead bee. With a dignified speech, Elena dismisses the staff, the actual producers of the cinematic total work of art, and drives away with Richard—an image commonly used by Godard for the imaginary journey that the feature film offers, at the exclusion of all real social conditions, to its viewers.<sup>22</sup>

## The Arabesque as Motif and Cinematic Form

Originally a decorative motif used to frame jewelry, the autonomized arabesque in romantic and neo-Romantic total works of art testifies to the existence of a form that emerges from the innermost forces of nature itself. In this sense, Henry van de Velde had based his vision of a synthesis of the arts on a philosophy of the line as “transferred gesture[s].”<sup>23</sup> He referred back to primitive techniques, to which he attributes an immediate expressive power that is comparable to nature as an artist:

*Psychic forces led the hand armed with primitive tools—bones or stone—just as natural forces bend the tip of the blade of grass to Earth, where it draws small circles in the sand. Natural forces shook the rock, which, upon falling, left behind visible traces on the surfaces it hit; natural forces created those capricious, fleeting arabesques in moving water.*<sup>24</sup>



2 Shot from *Nouvelle Vague*: Arabesques in the moving water.

Godard makes reference to this tradition of modern “natural” ornaments, and indeed not only in the image of glistening, rippling water surfaces that are filmed decidedly in such a way that sharply contoured biomorphic patterns emerge. The arabesque, in its art theoretical importance as an aesthetic form that—as Runge and Schlegel have shown us—is in keeping with the fullness of being and directed against historical imagery and the linear narrative of the novel, is both subject and agent of the film *Nouvelle Vague*.



The challenge for our consideration, however, is that nature, as a form-defining creative power in its infinite wealth, by no means brings forth a structural or meaningful totality, but only ever cites this, albeit with pathos. Godard admittedly uses the modernist idea of a “development of art into life,” which was also propagated beyond van de Velde’s conception of a new ornamentation, in order to represent the Nouvelle Vague ambition to resurrect and reform cinema by liberating it from the fictional plot continuum of the Hollywood film and by developing a documentary and essayistic quality.<sup>25</sup> The previously commented, sobering rebirth of pensive Roger in the guise of cool businessman Richard showed that Godard does not revere this myth, but construes it as a service to the capitalist enterprise (of the company Torlato-Favrini and of the cinema). The birth of the entrepreneurial subject Richard Lennox from Lake Geneva<sup>26</sup> is likely to have constituted an attack on the author ideal of the Nouvelle Vague, yet the movement was based, as can be read in Francois Truffaut’s article “Une certaine tendance du cinéma française” (1954), on a reliance on the creative force of the director as an author who no longer just implements prescribed stories from the script, but recreates them instead (*récrée*).<sup>27</sup> The demand that the director, for the purpose of cultivating a personal signature, must help fashion all the sectors and stages of the film production himself can be read as a continuation of Becce’s hope, cited at the outset, for a director who is the creator of a total work of art.

So in the image of the arabesque, Godard cites the total artistic impetus of the Nouvelle Vague and reveals its system-stabilizing effect. At the same time, the arabesque principle of cinematic form serves as a moment of disturbance that undermines the option of totality. Godard develops the arabesque as a critical form by establishing it as an order of (“painterly”) surface positioned against the narrative space of the romance, which is absolutely laid out in van de Velde’s cited examples of nature’s “draftsmanship.” From the beginning, as already described, nature appears as an autonomous power and activity, so very much so that Morgan has rightly pointed out that its grandeur is tamed to the benefit of beauty, but nature plainly always remains a product of human activity. In the beautiful order of nature that is cultivated to the arabesque, it must be added, however, that the film reflects itself as an image-producing machine—more specifically, it exhibits its “negative” actions, which Godard represents in the temporal quality of the context, which is defined primarily through the editing: much more distinctly than painting, film constitutes itself through the boundary of the image; it must incessantly remain accountable for the chosen view and how it is modified through tracking shots and pans; it must consciously manage the boundaries between the shots. This structural conditionality of the film image, that it is contingent upon its boundary,

is not ordinarily given conscious attention in commercial cinema and television. Godard reveals it: the framing activity of the film is expressed in a variety of ways in the diegetic space, such as when a fenced enclosure gradually becomes visible, correcting the initial impression of horses grazing in a pristine wilderness; or in the many and varied views out the window and the reflections of the landscape in window panes, which cite the projective mechanism of the cinematic apparatus. Just as the painter Piet Mondrian explored the dialectic between line and surface, between border and field of view, using the motif of the tree like that of the sea and thus ultimately attained a radical dissolution of the perspectival illusion of space in the materiality of the colored surface, Godard uses the tree motif, and later that of the waves, to transform the spatial-anthropocentric structure of the film into a flat arabesque, albeit without establishing an abstract harmony, because for Godard, the materiality of the film is the historical process that comes to light in the stories of the cinema.<sup>28</sup>

His concern was actually to tell a story, explains the voice of Alain Delon at the beginning of the film. The wide shot of an idyllic hilly landscape, where a man with a suitcase comes along a curving road framed by trees, promises, in an almost classical way, the beginning of one such tale. Its space, however, is immediately obstructed by a massive tree trunk that conceals the wayfarer. He is about to be approached by Roger Lennox, who will be introduced here as the hero of the film, and who, in the next moment and on the run from a truck, seeks refuge in great terror.<sup>29</sup> Not this action, but the nature that frames it has priority. The camera does not focus on the star Alain Delon; it tilts upward and follows the branches, until the sun ultimately refracts through the twigs. But then in the next moment, the dramatic situation seems to sharpen. Elena is in the open roadster: as could be seen before, she had sought to overtake the truck and, in doing so, may have caused the accident; she screeches to a stop and drives back, evidently to attend to the injured. That she does not now get out and tend to the needy, but remains sitting at the wheel and turns around, looks up and looks down—this leads every logic of action ad absurdum, especially since as she looks up and then down, she removes her sunglasses as if she wants to underscore the unfiltered cognitive power of this act of seeing.<sup>30</sup> This is followed in turn by tracking shots along the tree and its branches. Line crossings make it impossible to find orientation in space. The glances of the female protagonist open no space of action, but refer to the horizontal and vertical camera movements that, similar to the form-giving natural elements, structure the film. Elena will later repeat these gestures, *inter alia* in the “murder scene” on the lake, while Roger sinks beneath the surface, thus indicating to us (with Étienne Souriau<sup>31</sup>) that we are looking at a projected picture that has a top and a bottom,



a left and a right.<sup>32</sup> The climax of the plot breaks down in the indifference of the (ornamental) surface.

Alone due to her pre-Raphaelite head of curls, which are reminiscent of Botticelli's Venus and Runge's personification of the dawn, Elena embodies the arabesque law of natural beauty, present in the biomorphic form, which the film depicts in the close-up of the impressive relief of the tree bark, as well as in the curves of the country road, the tangled wave crests of the water. The fact that Godard has chosen the lead actress from Andrei Tarkovsky's cult film *Nostalgia* (1983) for this role speaks volumes, both with regard to the theme of melancholic reverie<sup>33</sup> and in terms of the romantic natural symbolism of this film, which grants a very special meaning to the element water. A movie poster superimposes the lush waves of hair of the frontally photographed Domiziana Giordano with the image of sea waves—a popularization of Edvard Munch's portrayal of the woman as an overpowering natural being.<sup>34</sup> The arabesque principle is consequently intensified in the character of the entrepreneur Elena and it becomes programmatic as a symbol of the entanglement of nature and society. Godard also underscores this by means of a concrete visualization of the arabesque as an ornament.



3 Shots from *Nouvelle Vague*.

Several shots of the first half of the movie, in which Elena embodies the unquestioned authority of the company, show her wearing a jacket with the embroidered decoration of an abstracted plant tendril.<sup>35</sup> A short static shot shows her at first on the edge of a field of head-high reed grasses, as if sunken into a dialogue, touching the plants, looking up to them. Here as well, similar to the beginning of the plot, gestures and glances remain without narrative or psychological grounds. Much like Richard's arrival (and thus, his takeover of the company), which is later also presented in the image of his contemplation in nature, Elena here seems to be embedded into the wickerwork of the curved stems; unrecognizable on first view. This im-

age, which cites the vegetable line of Art Nouveau, is related to an “impressionistic” shot that shows Elena on a sunlit meadow while reading a newspaper, undoubtedly the stock market news.

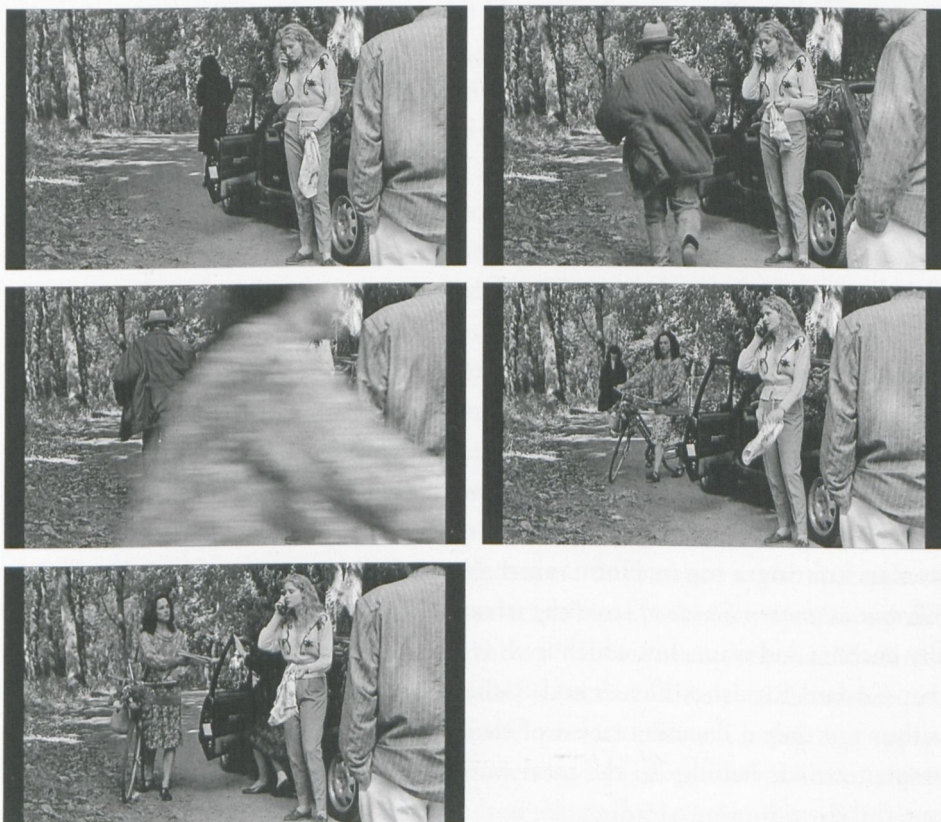


4 Sequence from *Nouvelle Vague*: Elena, Roger, and Gauguin's *Undine*.

Godard extensively implements the program of the arabesque in the sequence showing Elena and Roger in conversation in the park, when their separation is already looming. Elena shows Roger two art postcards, surprised about the “simple” taste of a mass public, which accepts long waiting periods for the visit of an exhibition. Both cards show, as becomes obvious in a close shot later in the same sequence, Paul Gauguin’s ornamental act figure *Undine* (1898), namely in different proportion and different coloration in order to thematize the industrial exploitation of the avant-garde movements (such as *Nouvelle Vague*)—particularly as the letterhead with the company logo is visible.<sup>36</sup> Godard obviously reacts upon the large Gauguin exhibition at the Grand Palais in Paris, which was shown during the shooting of the movie. Günter Metken found it to be dedicated to the French “Wagnerian of the visual arts.”<sup>37</sup> His “red-haired Undines with their vigorous forms, which, bathing, plunch into the Hokusai-waves of the Atlantic,” transform, as Metken puts it, “into archetypes of women on Tahiti, ... the desired paradise of pre-civilized naïveté.”<sup>38</sup> With the water spirit of the undine, whose name stems from the Latin word “unda,” Godard presents another (preceding the resurrected Roger/Richard) incarnation of the “new wave.” Since ancient tradition has it that undines are nymph-like



elemental beings that kill their lovers, which is also the story told in Friedrich de la Motte-Fouqué's romantic version of the legend, the allusion to Elena is clear. In her character, as is indicated to us, economic and erotic power appear as elementary and dangerous forces of nature. As a critical Wagnerian, Godard of course handles the ideal of the unconscious beauty in a different manner. Elena, who is surprised, even annoyed by the "simplicity" of such a manner of painting and its attraction, is unaware of the fact that she is regarding her own reflection. Her longing for wholeness is directed at the elegance of clothing. Thus, she criticizes that Roger's trousers and jacket do not match. Richard will realize this all-encompassing artistic aspect of fashion through a pristinely uniform business attire. Elena's swim in Lake Geneva, by which she causes Roger's death and motivates Richard's appearance, is presented as theatrical, insistently illogical (in terms of plot) "after-image" of Gauguin's paradise vision, which implies the dissociation of the fascination of



5 Images from a shot of *Nouvelle Vague*: The arabesque as palimpsest of motions.

images, preventing empathy. Roger, who signals an understanding of Gauguin's "simple" ornamenting, has to yield to Richard, since he does not meet Elena's demands. Gruffly, she glances at her watch, while he, almost defiantly, takes a broom and sweeps, thereby adopting the role of the artist as gardener, who, leading a white horse, is equally present in the scene. Like him, Roger seems to belong to the overall artistic ideal of the historical avant-garde preceding the development of film industry. In the same sequence, an employee of the company baffles him by asking Roger whether he has ever been stung by a dead bee. Only Richard will arrive in Hollywood.

In one of the following shots, which shows Elena in the park making phone calls with international business partners while Roger is watching, she wears the conspicuously decorated jacket again. It becomes apparent here that the arabesque decor not only illustrates the "straightened unstraightendness" of natural processes, but also symbolizes the chaotic movements of members of society, which are nevertheless subjected to legality. In this long shot, Elena as protagonist who wirelessly communicates worldwide and Roger as spectator function as center of tranquility within a circulating, manifold dynamics coming from the staff. The gardener passes Elena while walking into the forest, Cécile cycles cross the picture, concealing the scene for a moment only to reappear later from behind (literally) to hand Elena the newspaper,<sup>39</sup> while another assistant, sitting in the car, holds an envelope ready for her. The vegetal ornamentation and its connotation of opaque, global networks is supplemented by focusing on a valuable oriental rug that is on display in a hallway of the villa. It first comes into focus as the "resurrected" Richard, coming from the park, steps onto it. The change from the sunlit image of the meadow to the gleaming, colored surface of the rug's ornament serves a paradigm already visualized by the Pre-Raphaelites and unfolded art-theoretically by Symbolism.<sup>40</sup> Thus, Maurice Denis has not only compared Gauguin's coloration with Wagner's music and gothic glass windows, but also with oriental rugs.<sup>41</sup> The woman knitting a rug in Hofmannsthal's narrative *Die Frau ohne Schatten* (*The Woman without a Shadow*) sees "the stream of life itself, in which things continually become and wane, but which itself is eternal and forever the same."<sup>42</sup> The fact that Godard furnishes Elena's and Richard's capitalist world with valuable rugs is thus not only a documentation of their wealth, but also a critical reply to the utopian artistic liability to the total work of art. While Richard steps onto the rug, thereby assuming a leading role in the business, the buzzing of an insect rings from offscreen, undoubtedly the bee from Howard Hawks's already mentioned Hollywood comedy!



A second iconic nude figure, connected with a second reference to contemporary, now political events, serves as paraphrase of the arabesque subject in Godard's film. At the airport—which, ever since *À bout de souffle*, constitutes the locus of the utopian awakening of art for Godard, but also its necessary connectedness to the commercial and technological communication structures of existing society—delivery is taken of a painting as part of a barter trade.<sup>43</sup> It is Goya's painting of *La maja desnuda* (*The Nude Maja*), which, as we are told, was found in a cellar in Beirut. This scene thus alludes to the bloody civil war in Lebanon that ended in 1990, which was about the conflict between Islamist-national and Christian, Western-oriented factions. Here, the Islamic motif of the arabesque finds a concrete political point of reference. Goya's painting of the courtesan, which already appears in *Passion* (1982) as a tableau vivant, defines more than just the market value of art, not least of cinematic art; and as an Arabian import, it embodies, as Gauguin's arabesque nude had already done, the Western fascination with the Orient, which is characterized further in two sentences of dialogue: Richard explains: "L'Islam n'est pas une civilisation de doute comme la nôtre, mais de la certitude"; whereupon the boss with the lap dog, contemplating the painting, gives a sigh and exclaims: "L'arabesque. Le nude sans la volupté!" As the viewer of Goya's nude painting, he appears, so to speak, in the role of the lady with a puppy, also coming from Goya's visual repertoire, and who, in *Passion* as the representative of an idle upper class, introduces the "indifferent" aesthetic experience that is involved in neither political nor sexual tensions. He finally mentions Maja's unusual, sideways oriented breasts, which, one could add, tend to transcend the body in a symmetrical ornamental order. And she solicits others intensely, he says, commenting on her direct gaze out from the picture. In contrast to this is the veiled Muslim woman whom he has also received, apparently also an object of trade. This scene—in which the arabesque, the ornamentation of image-critical culture of Islam, is placed in relation to an aesthetic stance that is hostile to sexuality, on the one hand, and in the motif of prostitution, on the other hand, to a capitalist logic of exchange—again surprisingly exploits a basic attitude of film with respect to romance as the spectacle of the motion picture par excellence. Sexual relationships consistently appear in poses of subordination, dominance or masturbation.<sup>44</sup> If one considers that Godard's cinema understands itself as a form of doubt, it becomes clear that the arabesque, as the embodiment of a "culture of certainty" and its affiliated indifferent appreciation of aesthetic judgment cannot be understood per se as alternatives to action cinema. Godard treats the arabesque as a mythological motif that, like all his citations of religious or mythical traditions, addresses the cinema as a dream factory; this is what is meant by the label of a culture beyond doubt.<sup>45</sup>

In *Nouvelle Vague*, not only literature and art are invoked as models of the film; “there is the quotation of water, the quotation of trees.”<sup>46</sup> The reflexivity of the arabesque only unfolds as a cinematic form principle that works against the notion of a totality of history, art, and nature. The key here is the use of repetitive structures. The repetition (of the same or similar form elements), the fundamental organizing principle of the arabesque, is not traced back to the totality of an organic whole, as envisaged in van de Velde’s total artistic design practice. Rather, the film fits in with a series of artistic narrative forms of the “new” that preceded it and, at the same time, insists on the unique present of their revival—and thus fulfills the meaning of the title “Nouvelle Vague” beyond historical criticism for Godard’s production of 1990.<sup>47</sup> The sound of barking dogs, which we hear beginning with the first shot and repeatedly thereafter, and the image of the moon darkened by clouds both make reference to Luis Buñuel’s *Un chien andalou* (1929) as one of those precursor films whose psychoanalytical doppelgänger motif and resurrection theme are reinterpreted by Godard. The tragedy on the water recalls Howard Hawks’s *To Have and Have Not* (1944) and René Clément’s *Plein Soleil* aka *Full Sun, Blazing Sun, Lust for Evil* and *Talented Mr. Ripley* (*Purple Noon*, 1960, with Delon in the leading role).<sup>48</sup> The latter film is also about an impersonation and is cited by Elena’s and Richard’s eyes squinting toward the sun, which, in turn, is a literal realization of the title metaphor.

The most impressive arabesque artistic device is the frequent use of tracking shots that, as already mentioned, do not follow the actors’ movements or only do so marginally or just briefly. Indeed, it often remains unclear whether the camera is following the path or motion of a person or these two movements are simply formally synchronized with one another. As already described with the gestures of Elena’s glance, the action of the actors can also be used as a repetition of the camera movement. When later, after Richard’s arrival, Elena strides back and forth on the stairs, this is again legible as a recollection of the back and forth of the camera. Godard thereby radically eludes the grammar of Hollywood, which specifies that the agent is rooted in the psyche of the movie heroes, which is continuously driving the plot forward. The rhythmic movement in *Nouvelle Vague*, which is molded by camera movements and editing, seems patterned more on the wave motion, the infinite progression united with repetition, the new united with the declining. In other words, Godard’s film, which presents the story of a repetition and also a resurrection, works with a historico-philosophical reading of that special quality of the ornament that, as Niklas Luhmann formulates it, is based on the unity of “redundancy and variety,” where his translation of the word redundancy as “the return of a wave (unda)” precisely matches the meaning of the arabesque mirrored as cinematic



form in the elements of water and vegetal nature in Godard's *Nouvelle Vague*.<sup>49</sup> Godard's film is about the articulation of a "non-identity in identity"; albeit not in the sense of the imaginary space described by Luhmann, which the ornament generates "by continuously transforming formal boundaries into transitions that have more than one meaning."<sup>50</sup> Horizontal and vertical tracking shots weave through the film as warp and weft, but using them to draw parallels with the vertical of the tree trunk and the horizontal of branches and wave motions does not result in an abstract texture, but in the historical reification of the relation between the individual and the whole, between stories and the history of the cinema.

A sequence already described by Morgan exemplarily illustrates the principle. The camera moves twice, back and forth between a room in which Elena and Roger are to be found and the entry hall of the villa, where Raoul and his girlfriend and eventually Cecile are to be seen. Morgan explains:

*Suddenly, during one of the movements [this is the first track back to the right, R.P.] toward Roger and Elena, Godard cuts to a stationary shot of the lake, taken from above and fairly close to the surface, with the waves moving left. Because the shot is away from the shore, the waves do not break but appear instead as a succession of lines, their movement creating a visual effect that makes it feel as if the camera itself were continuing to move to the right. After fifteen seconds, Godard returns to the scene inside the house.*<sup>51</sup>

In the second tracking shot to the right, Godard cuts again to the water, but this time it does not remain as a static shot:

*... the camera suddenly accelerates to the right, and the waves appear to move even faster to the left ..., then it comes to a grinding halt. After a moment's pause, Godard slowly starts to move the camera up and to the left, tracking parallel to the lines of the waves. The effect of this movement ... is vertiginous. ... Our external reference point in the shot suddenly feels unstable and fluctuating.*<sup>52</sup>

The significance of this dizzying change in direction of the camera becomes clear when one considers that here, as in all the other scenes of the film, Godard presents nothing other than cinema itself. The views of the two interior spaces of the villa thematize the narrative space of the feature film, whose perspective depth contrasts with the lateral camera movement that penetrates the partition wall. In the juxtaposition of the rooms, it refers to the physical sequence of the frames on the film negative, and thus on the materiality of the medium, which is, in turn, mirrored in the materiality of nature and its dynamics. The camera that lurches to the left

while tracking back, as if carried by a wave, introduces an egalitarian force without perspective that seems to register Elena's and Roger's poses of humility and dominance, congealed into still images as mere moments in time. The two surely also represent the "heterosexual couple at the end of the twentieth century."<sup>53</sup> Primarily, however, they represent the history of cinematic romance, which Dziga Vertov and Buñuel have viewed critically in the past and which Godard continues to do. In the first shot of the described sequence, Roger obsequiously declines to dance with Elena because he has not shaved—a gender-political "updated" variation of the scene from *To Have and Have Not*, where after a kiss, Lauren Bacall suggests to Humphrey Bogart that he get a shave. The barking of dogs leads over to Raoul and his girlfriend in the entry hall, who, listening carefully, ponder whether it is *Un Chien andalou* or *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. They are, in other words, at the cinema, audience members like us. Cecile, already in her nightgown, comes down the stair and pauses in a position where she is cut off at the upper edge of the screen. Not until the second view into the entry hall, brought in closer but out of focus, does she walk further down the stairs, but without her upper body being visible.<sup>54</sup> This detail points out that the back and forth of the camera is a "literal" translation of the shot-reverse shot principle. The cut is replaced or rather imitated by tracking shots to the left and to the right; Cecile pauses on the stairs, as if she must wait for the reverse shot, in order to ensure the continuity of her gait; all this is a comedic enactment of the grammar of Hollywood and its theatrical 180-degree principle. There is even the hint of an action axis between the rooms: after slapping Elena, Raoul leaves the frame to the left, so that his presence in the entry hall is expected. But a plausible spatial relationship between the two interior spaces that has been established by an external observer location, such as that which substantiates the views into the different living spaces in Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954), is lacking.<sup>55</sup> The positivity of the perspectival vanishing point construction turns into the negativity of the opaque wall that, as a basic principle, even with Alberti, constitutes the imaginary view out the window. This wall is present in the blackness of the image frame between the room views; it is the subject of the film and its images of nature. The first cut to the "all over" of the moving water surface is in fact placed so that it appears in lieu of the now actually expected black image; the movement of the water thus comments on the materialization of the cinematic space. The static shot of the water that is unrecognized as moving, the acceleration and the change in direction of the camera during the second cut to the lake are actually summarized in a replica of Hitchcock's *Vertigo* effect, the constituents of cinematic fiction. The collapse of the perspectival reference field and of the perception of form called for by the theorists of the total work of art elevates Godard's arabesque to the critical form.<sup>56</sup>



## The Romantic Couple: Concluding Remarks

Despite all the splendor of nature that it shows, Godard's film delivers a completely anti-idealistic interpretation of the total work of art, to wit, through the demonstrative connection between the utopia inherent in him and the luxury of the Western European world of commodities.<sup>57</sup> The measured grandeur of the arriving and departing convoys of luxury sedans (Mercedes, Toyota, Maserati) is compared to the holiday serenity of grasses and leaves tossed by the wind; the painted surfaces of the car bodies compete with the luster of the sun-drenched park landscape and the water surfaces glistening in the light. Godard conducts this hymn to a suggestive, artistic nature, repeatedly from the beginning, over and over, ad absurdum, through engine noise and squealing brakes, authoritarian assaults, the shouting and clamor of owners and staff, so that, in all clarity, the class society as producer of the total artwork of nature and architecture, as well as of the cinematic illusion he advocates, is made aware. As representatives of the propertied upper class, Elena and Roger/Richard are residents of the total work of art, and as such, also the exemplary lovers, necessarily cast with stars in the leading roles, that Godard and Gorin (re)introduced in *Tout va bien* (1972) as the public appeal factor needed in every feature film. Godard visualized this cinema-disposition in a wide shot that looks through a frame of metal rods to show Elena and Roger as they take the boat out on the lake. Cuts to an attendant looking out the window and to the gardener, who sits on the shore with Cecile—as the mirror-image pair, as it were—represent the role of the viewer. The question posed in *Tout va bien* with Jane Fonda and Yves Montand—whether the revolutionary impulse of the collective can be carried on by a relationship in which the couple sees itself as a working group and not just as recreation cell for isolated workers—is indeed also still posed in *Nouvelle Vague*, and, as in the earlier film, is answered in the negative. Elena and Roger's relationship fails because melancholic Roger does not find a role within Elena's entrepreneurial world. The ultimately successful relationship with Richard is, as it takes shape, the consequence of a resurrection legend, of the rebirth of (commercial) cinema in the Nouvelle Vague. Entirely in the mode of the arabesque and its romantic Christian interpretation, the last sequence of the film is thus twisted: following Elena's rescue, she recognizes in the end that Richard is not another, but identical with Roger (which is immediately denied again by a voiceover). The relationship between variety and redundancy is affirmed as the ornamental formulation of genre cinema. While Elena and Richard head to the house, the camera tracks upwards along a mighty tree trunk in the foreground, taking up again the first images from the film's story line. Shortly afterwards, a sentence that ended the Passion

of Christ and proclaimed salvation is faded in: “Consummatum est”; this, too, is a reply to the initial accident scene, which was preceded by the proclamation “Incipit Lamentatio.” But the end of the film is also associated with the saying “Omnia vincit amor”; so it is clarified by multiplying the formulaic nature of the concluding statements. It would, in other words, be wrong to expect that Godard would have an ending at the ready of the sort: and they lived happily ever after in their villa on the lake. The film presented the life of a total work of art in all of its idyllic splendor and undeniable beauty, and at the same time as the cold reality of a class society. The ideals of nature and art are ornaments of a financially strong upper class who nurture their aesthetic observations alongside stock market news, financial transactions, and intrigues. The break with this phantasmatic idyll is, analogous to Godard’s biography, at the end. Godard does not, however, scrimp with hints, inter alia in the form of grotesque performances by Delon as interlude, that this parting and this new beginning takes place in the cinema—that is, in a different total work of art—and that an exterior, in which the goal would be valid to break it open, does not exist. Godard’s arabesque thus does not serve to find closure, but rather to reveal the ordinarily hidden seams of fictional space. While van de Velde designed the arabesque as a new vessel for an ideal life, Godard’s cinematic arabesque, which devotes more or just as much attention to a tree as to a movie star, is out to track down the real in its masked forms.

## Notes

- 1 Siegfried Kracauer, “Cult of Distraction: On Berlin’s Picture Palaces,” (orig. publ. in: *Frankfurter Zeitung*, Mar. 4, 1926), in Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans./ed. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1995), 324. See also: Dominik Keller, “‘Gesamtkunstwerke’ in der amerikanischen Kinolandschaft der zwanziger Jahre,” in *Der Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk: Europäische Utopien seit 1800*, exh. cat. (Frankfurt: Verlag Sauerländer, Aarau, 1983), 395–400.
- 2 Giuseppe Becce, “Tonfilm und künstlerische Filmmusik,” transl. in: Joachim Fontaine, “Caligari meets Schönberg: Music, Art, and Film as Total Artwork in Expressionism,” in Ralf Beil, Claudia Dillmann, eds., exh. cat. *The Total Artwork in Expressionism: Art, Film, Literature, Theater, Dance, and Architecture 1905–1925* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2011), 316.
- 3 See Keller 1983, 395. Cf. Erwin Panofsky’s comparison of a cinematic work with the construction of a cathedral: “Stil und Stoff im Film,” *Filmkritik*, 11 (1967): 353.
- 4 In the digesis, the movie theater also concretely plays a role as the meeting place and shelter for Patricia and Michel.
- 5 On this theoretical quality of the cinematic form, see in particular: Volker Pantenburg, *Film als Theorie: Bildforschung bei Harun Farocki und Jean-Luc Godard* (Bielefeld: Transkript, 2006), and Daniel Morgan, *Late Godard and the Possibilities of Cinema* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2013).
- 6 See Werner Busch, *Die notwendige Arabesque: Wirklichkeitsaneignung und Stilisierung in der deutschen Kunst des 19. Jh.*, (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 1985) 44–47 (Schlegel) and 49–55 (Runge).
- 7 Morgan, *Late Godard and the Possibilities of Cinema*, 69–119.
- 8 That was the title of a series of talks—and later published as a book of the same name—held in Montreal that Godard devoted to the project of a screenplay about cinematic history, which was realized in the monumental video work *Histoire(s) du Cinéma* (1989–1998). Jean-Luc Godard, *Einführung in eine wahre Geschichte des Kinos* (Frankfurt am Main: Hanser, 1984).
- 9 Morgan, *Late Godard and the Possibilities of Cinema*, 108.
- 10 In a discussion about *Nouvelle Vague*, the director compares the dreamy isolation of his childhood—a seclusion that knew nothing of war, which he shamefully had to admit—to his second dream, that of the *Nouvelle Vague*: “And then there was the New Wave, a team ... it disappeared, it couldn’t last long.” Concluding in a way that indeed strikes the tenor of his film, he says: “So after having known that, one begins to know the real and to move forward.” Richard Brody, *Everything is Cinema: The Working Life of Jean-Luc Godard* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), 526.
- 11 See Morgan, *Late Godard and the Possibilities of Cinema*, 106. In the (artist) figure of the gardener, Morgan significantly anchors the argument that Godard employs nature as a product of human labor and not as the antithesis of



- civilization, critical herein with respect to the pastoral genre that is evoked in the first scene of the film, a seemingly uninhabited rural idyll. The further context of the total work of art that I have introduced seems to me to embrace these traditions of pastoral and idyll or signify their modern form of presentation.
- 12 A variant of Marianne's boredom in *Pierrot le fou* (1965). The Robinsonesque love idyll on the beach anticipates the Gesamtkunstwerk and its criticism in *Nouvelle Vague*. Because the contemporary ideal subject is defined as male, to wit, distinct from the woman as representative of the "other" nature, the woman, who is still defined as an object to behold, cannot act on her own as the subject of aesthetic experience. Godard makes this convention of the woman as image (of nature) explicit by having Raoul's girlfriend appear wearing a fur and, for the third question, lingerie. Elena breaks through this convention only by applying another stereotype, which is analogous to that of the total work of art: the image of the siren who acts in conjunction with the forces of nature.
  - 13 Morgan (*Late Godard and the Possibilities of Cinema*, 108) already suggests this interpretation with references to Kant's assessment of the arabesque as the governor of natural beauty and by reference to the English landscape garden.
  - 14 For her information about the resurrected, the maid receives a few bills from Raoul, thus succeeding in expressing the general foundation of the exhibited social relationships in monetary transactions, but also the fact that the popular truth of faith has become a coveted commodity for the enlightened middle class.
  - 15 Morgan does not reach this conclusion, even though his repeatedly affirmed analytical insight into the interconnectedness of the views of nature with the downright intrusively evinced present situation of capitalist society makes this conclusion irrefutable. The understandable intention of defending the film and its images of nature against the accusation that it is a sort of extra-long promo clip evidently means that Godard's borrowings remain excluded from the Romantic idea of a total work of art. Thus it escapes Morgan that Godard has a criticism to mete out to the *Nouvelle Vague*, which is articulated at the same level as the reflection of genre cinema in the early work.
  - 16 On Runge's (unrealized) ideal of a total work of art, see Jörg Träger, *Philipp Otto Runge und sein Werk: Monographie und kritischer Katalog* (Munich: Prestel, 1975), 130–132. On the mediation between the Christian doctrine of salvation and the natural processes in *Der Kleine Morgen* (1808) and the unfinished *Großer Morgen*, see Jörg Träger, *Philipp Otto Runge und sein Werk*, 156–169.
  - 17 See Peter Märker, *Caspar David Friedrich: Geschichte als Natur* (Heidelberg: Kehrer Verlag, 2007) 82–91.
  - 18 For example, see *Dorflandschaft bei Morgenbeleuchtung* [Village Landscape in Morning Light] (1822), whose counterpart is, in turn, *Mondaufgang am Meer* [Moonrise by the Sea] (1822), which anticipates a Godardesque motif. See Märker, *Caspar David Friedrich*, 91–97.
  - 19 The previously mentioned visual metaphor of the *Lichtspieltheater*, already substantiated in *À bout de souffle*, is also variously shown in *Nouvelle Vague* in numerous nighttime shots of street traffic. By playing with the focal length, which turns headlamps into dancing colorful circular forms, the theme is transformed here into the ornamental, thus creating a parallel between the arabesque and geometric abstraction.
  - 20 Morgan, *Late Godard and the Possibilities of Cinema*, 72, 105.
  - 21 On the game with the hands with respect to the "uneconomical" structure of the swap in love, see Natalie Binczek, "An-ökonomie und Codierung: Zur Liebessignifikation und Liebeskommunikation in Jean-Luc Godards *Nouvelle Vague*," in Volker Roloff and Scarlett Winter eds., *Godard intermedial* (Tübingen: Stauffenberg Verlag, 1997), 153–171. Silverman and Farocki also relate the "wonder" of love to the topos of a pure gift. See: Kaja Silverman, Harun Farocki, "The Same, Yet Other: New Wave/*Nouvelle Vague* (1990)," in Silverman, Farocki, *Speaking about Godard* (New York: NYU Press, 1998). In our context, it should be noted that the autonomous shot of hands gripping each other in front of a landscape background frames these as an arabesque.
  - 22 See, for example, the long trip taken by Charlotte and Robert along the Seine in *Une femme mariée* (1964), Marianne and Ferdinand's trip south in *Pierrot le fou*, or the conclusion of *Alphaville* (1965).
  - 23 Henry van de Velde, *Die Linie*, ed. Hans Curjel. (Munich: Piper Verlag, 1955), 181. For commentary about van de Velde's line philosophy, see the chapter "Linie und Ornament," in Ole W. Fischer, *Nietzsches Schatten: Henry van de Velde—von Philosophie zu Form*, (Berlin: Gebrüder Mann, 2013), 305–324.
  - 24 Henry van de Velde, *Die Linie* [The Line], 181.
  - 25 Henry van de Velde "Allgemeine Bemerkungen zu einer Synthese der Kunst," *Pan* 5 (1899/1900): 4, 267.
  - 26 The film was shot in September and October 1989 on the Swiss side of Lake Geneva. Elena's palatial villa is modeled after the estate of Godard's grandparents (on the maternal side), where the director spent his childhood and also experienced his first total art dream. See note 10.
  - 27 See Simon Frisch, *Mythos Nouvelle Vague: Wie das Kino in Frankreich neu erfunden wurde* (Marburg: Schüren Verlag, 2007).
  - 28 In other words, photography and film were not needed in order to abolish perspective, painting's "original sin," as André Bazin had asserted: "Perspective was the original sin of Western painting. Niépce and Lumière redeemed it." André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," in Hugh Gray, trans., *What Is Cinema?* Vol. 1, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 16. Translation modified by Morgan, *Late Godard and the Possibilities of Cinema*, 4.
  - 29 The sequence described in the following can be retrieved here: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F6\\_K2NXLYFs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F6_K2NXLYFs) (accessed October 7, 2013).
  - 30 Apparently, the view through the sunglasses signifies the diegetic seeing, while the view without glasses refers to non-diegetic, "seeing" vision. On the symbolism of sunglasses, see Regine Prange, "Genre und Genrekritik—Der Western in Jean-Luc Godards *À bout de souffle* (1959)," in *Kinematographische Räume. Installationsästhetik in Film und Kunst*, ed. Ursula Frohne and Lilian Haberer (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2012), 621–660, esp. 634, 636, 652f.
  - 31 Etienne Souriau, "Die Struktur des filmischen Universums und das Vokabular der Filmologie [French, 1951]," in *montage AV* 6, no. 2, (1997): 140–157, 144: "Zum einen gibt es die Tatsache der Leinwand, der Rahmung aller sichtbaren Erscheinungen auf einer rechteckigen Fläche, die sich an immer derselben Stelle befindet und deren Dimensionen festgelegt sind", zum andern werde "ein völlig anderer, unendlich viel weiterer, dreidimensionaler Raum vorgesetzt ...", nämlich "der Raum, in dem sich die Geschichte abspielt." ("On the one hand, there is the reality of the screen, the framing of all visible manifestations, which are always in the same place, whose dimensions are fixed", on the other hand "an utterly different, endlessly wider three-dimensional space is presented ...", namely "the space in which the plot takes place.")



- 32 The relation between the moving glances (here performed by the two protagonists) and the tracking shot directed upward becomes particularly visible during Elena's and Roger's walk through the park.
- 33 Morgan (2013) dedicates himself extensively to the theme of melancholic reverie and its political relevance, yet without debating its relation to *Nostalgia*. This would be worth a separate investigation.
- 34 The film poster is illustrated here: <http://worldscinema.org/2012/06/andrei-tarkovsky-nostalgia-aka-nostalgia-1983/> (retrieved October, 7, 2013). See for example Edvard Munch's lithography *Lovers in the Waves*, 1896, illustrated in *Edvard Munch. Einführung von Per Amann* (Ramerding: Berghaus Verlag, 1979), Figure 54.
- 35 Her predecessor, hotel owner Hanna (Schygulla) in *Passion*, wears a blouse with a similar ornament in a scene at the hotel bar.
- 36 Kaja Silverman (1998, p. 238) sees here "great examples of a non-identical repetition" and thereby implicitly refers to the structure of ornament.
- 37 Günter Metken, "Ausstellung im Grand Palais Paris: 'Paul Gauguin'—Künstliche Paradiese. Der Wagnerianer der bildenden Kunst," *Die Zeit*, February 3, 1989.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 It remains to be mentioned that the vegetal ornament finds its counterpart in a crystalline pattern that decorates Cécile's pullover. The economic elite presents itself within the image of the "whole" nature.
- 40 See for example the parallelization of the view into nature with the view into the richly decorated, with a magnificent rug furnished interior in the oil painting *The Awakening Conscience* (1853–54) by William Holman Hunt.
- 41 See Hans-Günther Schwarz, *Der Orient und die Ästhetik der Moderne* (München: ludicum, 2003) 252f. Also relevant: Joseph Masheck, "The Carpet Paradigm: Critical Prolegomena to a Theory of Flatness," in *Arts Magazine*, Vol. 51 (1976): 82–109.
- 42 Cited according to Wolfdieter Rasch, "Fläche, Welle, Ornament," in *Studien zur Deutschen Literatur seit der Jahrhundertwende* (Stuttgart 1967) 220.
- 43 Here again, one is impressed by an illogical, complex choreography the arriving luxurious limousines obey.
- 44 See the poses of Elena and Roger solidified into tableaux during a back and forth tracking of the camera in the villa (discussed further below). Cécile, who, during the "murder scene" sits with Jules on the lakefront and looks off in the distance as if to a movie screen, touches her shame as she declaims poetic texts.
- 45 Such as the Greek gods in *Le Mépris* (1963). In *Je vous salue, Marie* (1984), a parallel is drawn between the virgin birth of Christ as a creation myth and scientific theories of human origin, an assonant motif pair that also appears in *Nouvelle Vague* just before Richard's arrival.
- 46 Godard in the daily newspaper *TAZ* from November 22, 1990, quoted from Kaja Silverman, Harun Farocki, "The Same, Yet Other: New Wave/Nouvelle Vague (1990)," in *Speaking about Godard*, ed. Silverman and Farocki (New York: NYU Press, 1998), 242. The analytical integration of literary texts and music must remain untouched here, even though they carry the hybrid total artistic impetus of Godard's critical arabesque in equal measure to the visual form given priority here.
- 47 The couple's relationship is analogous to the film's simultaneity of historicity and the present, which may reemphasize the primary media-reflexive significance of *Nouvelle Vague*. In the final sequence, as Elena and Richard head toward the house in the golden afternoon light of the park, a sound rings out; introduced by Roger's call, Elena should not turn around, a voiceover makes the following comment: "Tout cela, ils avaient l'impression de l'avoir déjà vécu, et leurs paroles semblaient si immobilisées dans les traces d'autre paroles d'autre fois. Ils ne faisant pas attention à ce qu'ils faisaient mais bien à la différence qui voulait que dans acte de maintenant fut du présent et que des actes analogues eussent été de passé. Ils se sentaient grands, immobiles, avec au-dessus de l'eux le passé et le présent comme les vagues identiques dans le même océan." As on the text level, history and historical amnesia are blended into each other in the image of the arabesque and its principle of repetition. The couple vanishes behind the tree trunk, which, like the ocean, represents history. Then comes the intertitle "Omnia vincit amor" (Love Conquers All). Natalie Binczek does not consider the second segment, which thematizes the experience of the present and addresses the visual level, to reach the conclusion that the film is primarily characterized by its discourses(!)—see "Anökonomie und Codierung," 160. Kaja Silverman construes the final sequence on the basis of the above-cited text in a far too novel-like way, as overcoming the "roles of master and servant, donor and recipient"—see Silverman and Farocki, *Speaking about Godard*, 224. Farocki's reference to an implicit analogy for the sensibilities of Elena and Richard, who supposedly feel "tall and motionless" as they are given a "prominent place" among the giant trees (ibid., 225) behind which the couple vanishes at the end of the majestic camera crane shot, justifies the "new beginning" for the couple (ibid.) less than the triumph of the (Hollywood) story. In this respect "the central characters succeed in transcending their everyday limitations" (ibid., 220).
- 48 On additional film citations, see Richard Brody, *Everything is Cinema: The Working Life of Jean-Luc Godard* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008).
- 49 Niklas Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*, trans. Eva M. Knodt (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2000) 222, 347.
- 50 Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*, 120.
- 51 Morgan, *Late Godard and the Possibilities of Cinema*, 52.
- 52 Morgan, *Late Godard and the Possibilities of Cinema*, 53.
- 53 Kaja Silverman, Harun Farocki, *Speaking about Godard*, 197.
- 54 This and other anti-narrative stair scenes unequivocally invoke Duchamp's painting *Nu descendant un escalier* (1912), which, for its part, responds to the proto-cinematographic technique of motion photography and suggests it dissolves the boundaries of design.
- 55 In shots of the marital home in *Une femme mariée* (1964) or in the shots of factory spaces in *Tout va bien* (1972) this media-reflexive role of the tracking shot is already laid out; there however, it is still understood with the plausibility of a potential external viewer position that does not apply in *Nouvelle Vague* due to the cut to the water surface.
- 56 This consists of using a magnifying zoom while the camera tracks back, illustrating Scottie's fear of heights and the conflicting impulses, the "prospect" of falling and the reaction of drawing back.
- 57 In my lecture in Weimar at the Bauhaus Colloquium on the Total Work of Art, I explained that Jeff Koons's artistic method can likewise be found in such an over-fulfillment of total artistic harmony. Due to lack of sufficient space, this part had to be removed from here and will be presented elsewhere.