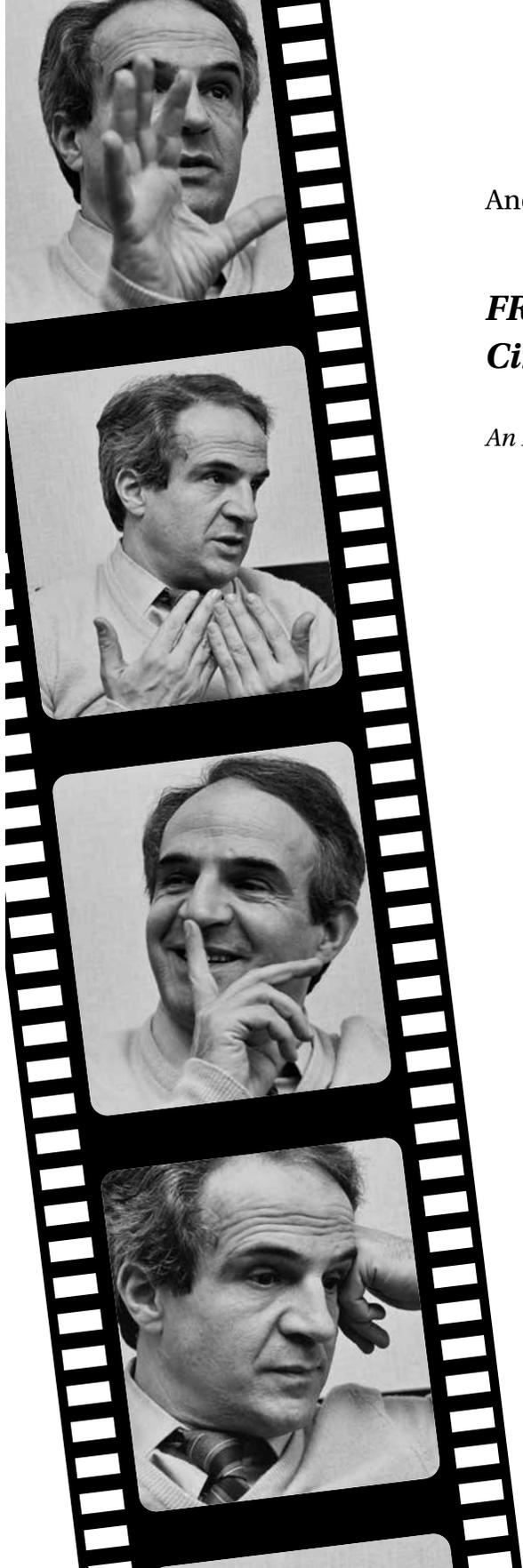


Aner Preminger

FRANÇOIS TRUFFAUT
Cinema as an Act of Love

An Intertextual Approach



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Antoine Doinel (Jean-Pierre Léaud) in the final scene of *The 400 Blows*.

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“The film of tomorrow will be an act of love.”

—François Truffaut



*In memory of my mother and father, whose spirits were with me
while writing this book.*

Table of Contents

Prologue	9
PART I	
FRANÇOIS TRUFFAUT – From Life to Cinema From Cinema to Life	15
Chapter 1: The Film of His Life – Biography	19
Chapter 2: The Films of his Life – Filmography.....	35
Chapter 3: Collector of Culture.....	57
PART II	
Intertextuality – The Theoretical Discourse	63
Chapter 4: Defining the Intertextual Discourse	67
Intertextuality	67
Intertext.....	69
Intertextual Categories	70
The Bloomian Discourse	71
Chapter 5: Cinematic Intertextuality: Applying the Semiotic-Conceptual Framework	83
The Status of Intertextuality in Cinema Studies Today	84
An Overview of Intertextual Approaches in Cinema Studies ...	85
A Summary of the Intertextual Studies of Truffaut’s Films	96
Uncharted Fields of Study in Cinematic Intertextuality	97
Chapter 6: François Truffaut and the French New Wave The Historical Context	103
The Importance of Intertextuality in the Study of Truffaut and the French New Wave	103
François Truffaut as Reflected Through the Prism of Harold Bloom.....	107
From Realistic-Classical Narrative to Modernism.....	111
Chapter 7: Hypotheses and Goals	115
Study’s Goals.....	115
Methodology	117

PART III

The Films in His Life	119
Chapter 8: The Mischief Makers (Les Mistons, 1957).....	123
Chapter 9: The Antoine Doinel Cycle	135
The 400 Blows (Les Quatre Cents Coups, 1959).....	135
Antoine and Colette - Love at Twenty (Antoine et Colette - L'Amour à Vingt Ans, 1962).....	173
Stolen Kisses (Baisers Volés, 1968)	184
Bed and Board (Domicile Conjugal, 1970)	201
Love on the Run (L'Amour en Fuite, 1979)	220
Antoine Doinel and The Human Comedy	239
Chapter 10: Shoot the Piano Player (Tirez sur le Pianiste, 1960)	243
Chapter 11: Jules and Jim (Jules et Jim, 1961)	261
Evolution of the Narrative in Truffaut's First Three Films: from the Classical Realist to the Modern.....	288
Chapter 12: The Pygmalion Trilogy	293
Chapter 13: The Soft Skin (La Peau Douce, 1964).....	315
Chapter 14: Mississippi Mermaid (La Sirène du Mississippi, 1969).....	333
Chapter 15: Day for Night (La Nuit Américaine, 1973).....	347
Chapter 16: Conclusion - Truffaut's Cinema.....	403

PART IV

APPENDICES	411
Chapter 17: Quantitative Tables	415
Chapter 18: Study Objectives - A Summary	437
Filmography.....	445
Bibliography.....	453
General Index	461
Index of Books	465
Index of Names	468
Film Index	481

Prologue

François Truffaut - Cinema as an Act of Love derives from an extensive study of Truffaut's films and constitutes an expanded version of the Hebrew book *François Truffaut - The Man Who Loved Films* published by *Hakibbutz Hameuhad*, The Porter Institute for Poetics and Semiotics, Tel Aviv University, and Sapir College in 2006. The book is based on my doctoral dissertation, "Cinematic Intertextuality and the Films of François Truffaut," written under the supervision of Professor Ziva Ben-Porat and Professor Michal Freedman and submitted to Tel Aviv University in December 2001. Since then, I continue to study Truffaut's films, and their intertextuality, both for my own research and as a teacher and dissertation supervisor of students studying Truffaut's films.

My acquaintance with Truffaut's films began more than 40 years ago, as an enchanted viewer. As a film student and later, as a filmmaker, I found his work instructional and illuminating. My familiarity with his cinematic oeuvre has evolved over my thirty-year career as a teacher of film studies. In twenty years of research, I have viewed each Truffaut film dozens of times and I find them ceaselessly enjoyable and fulfilling. Each viewing reveals added nuances and increasingly complex dimensions in terms of content and the original manner in which he confronts cinematic poetics.

The unique nature of such an innovative and wide-ranging filmmaker

as Truffaut is difficult to encapsulate, and it is impossible to express the “bottom line” on such a complex long-term research project. I believe that Truffaut’s uniqueness and special, powerful cinema is expressed, among other things, by the fact that his films address two levels simultaneously. On the one hand, one finds a mildly experienced simplicity that allows most viewers, even nonprofessionals, to follow the plot and enjoy Truffaut’s virtuosity as a dramatic, moving, humorous, and humane storyteller without feeling that they’ve failed to grasp the filmmaker’s intentions. On another level, most of his films are complex masterpieces that address profound issues, complicated interrelationships, tangled passions, and multi-faceted characters. Truffaut’s power and distinctive portrayals of nuanced complexity are inherent to his wide-ranging ability to alternate between emotional and stylistic tones effortlessly and naturally.

Concurrently, his films, for the most part, were innovative for their time, undermined cinematic norms, and defined numerous innovations, the sum of which constituted a significant contribution to the development of cinematic language during the nineteen-sixties and seventies. Combining these two seemingly contradictory levels awards Truffaut a place in the small group of innovative humanistic filmmakers that includes Charlie Chaplin, Billy Wilder, Ernst Lubitsch, and Vittorio De Sica. It was these dual features that led me in the choices I made in adapting my doctoral thesis into this book. On the one hand, I felt the importance of preserving the references to as many relevant sources as possible, as well as to the intertextual theories prevalent in semiotic literary criticism, an indispensable element in developing the tools necessary to illuminate the depth, complexity, and innovation of Truffaut’s films. On the other hand, in my desire to remain faithful to Truffaut’s style, I refrain from including cumbersome quotations to provide clear, simple summaries of the relevant theories. *Cinema as an Act of Love* divides into four sections. Part I constructs the historical

and cultural context of Truffaut's oeuvre and includes a short review of his biography, which plays a central part in his films; a review of his filmography, and finally, an analysis of the manner in which he internalized his cultural background. Part II relates to the theoretical grid on which I base my interpretations of Truffaut's films; it is research-oriented and contains a wide range of academic information, explained in as straightforward a manner as possible. Part III, the heart of the book, as it were, is dedicated to the discussion and interpretation of eleven major films from Truffaut's corpus. Part IV includes appendices that summarize the quantitative aspects of the research and examine its conclusions in light of the study's original goals. And lastly, this section includes a detailed filmography, bibliography and indices.

Cinema as an Act of Love is a book for viewers who are interested in and love Truffaut's films, including those viewers less practiced in reading academic or theoretical texts. Anyone interested in understanding why Truffaut's films are so moving and enjoyable, why he influences so many filmmakers, or why he has become one of the most important filmmakers of the twentieth century will find many of the answers in *Cinema as an Act of Love*, as will film school students or scholars and researchers in the fields of cinema studies, literature, art or cultural studies. For consistency's sake, I use gender-specific nouns common for the time in which Truffaut's film were made, and in no way does this stylistic choice claim gender bias. Readers will find a comprehensive and far-ranging analysis of a unique and significant cultural icon, a master of cinematic language, and a man of profound and expansive culture. To paraphrase a sentence from Truffaut's film, *Day for Night*, I hope you enjoy reading the book as much as I enjoyed writing it.

Finally, I'd like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the following people: I'd like to thank my devoted doctoral advisors, Professor Michal Freedman, who has accompanied me for many years in my love for French Cinema in general, and François Truffaut, in particular. Professor Freedman's vast knowledge of historical cinema has been a

great aid in enabling the verification and examination of my theories within the wider context of a multi-dimensional cinematic heritage; Professor Ziva Ben-Porat, who illuminated the way when I began to decipher the entanglements of intertextual theory. Her comments during the various stages of my research helped me refine and clarify the relevance of intertextual discourse to interpreting Truffaut's films.

Professor Yesha'ayahu Nir, one of the members of my dissertation committee, whose feedback provided a detailed and instructive response to my research, proving very helpful when I expanded my original study to its present format.

I am also grateful to Professor Yehuda Moraly, who read my manuscript in the early stages of revision, believed in the importance of its publication, and provided encouragement and valuable comments.

I would like to thank the staff and administration at Sapir College for their help and support in bringing this project to fruition. I am especially grateful to Professor Ze'ev Zahor, the former president of the college, who tirelessly expressed his interest and encouragement during my doctoral research and provided support and aid during the publication process. To Nachmi Paz, the college's CEO and to Muhammad Abu Abed, who provided practical support during the publication of the Hebrew version of this book. I would like to thank Mindy Ivry, who translated the book from Hebrew to English, for her careful work, and faithful and accurate translation. Many thanks also to Netanel Semrik, CEO at Contento, who recognized the importance of the Hebrew book, introduced its publication in English, and who, with his devoted staff, has accompanied its translation and production, uncompromisingly fulfilling all of my demands to produce a perfect result.

I am very grateful to the kind and generous people who gave me the right to use their stills from Truffaut's films: Ronit Shany who took Truffaut's unique profiles during his 1980 visit in Israel; Laura and Eva Truffaut who gave me the family permission to use Truffaut's pictures; Anne-Laure Barbarit from MK2 for André Dino's still pictures from *The*

400 Blows; Dominique le Rigoleur for her still pictures from *Love on the Run*. All these pictures are a significant contribution to the book.

I am grateful to my friend, Yoram Navon, who joined me in watching Truffaut's films for many years, listened to my ideas on applying intertextual approaches to the interpretation of his films, questioned my theories, provided illuminating comments, and helped with the translation's early stages.

My heartfelt gratitude goes to my wife, Michal, my partner and witness to my enthusiasm for Truffaut's films. Her comments during my original research and its following publication in Hebrew were the first feedback I received, and her insights helped me refine my thoughts and perfect my formulations. My sister, Lilach Lachman, read parts of my early study and her on-target remarks helped me clarify and refine my arguments. And finally, I'd like to thank my children, Matan, Ayana and Tamar, for their support, interest and participation in the journey that this study has been and in which I've been involved since they were born.

Aner Preminger

PART II

FRANÇOIS TRUFFAUT

From Life to Cinema
From Cinema to Life

“The film of tomorrow appears to me as even more personal than an individual and autobiographical novel, like a confession or a diary.”

(Truffaut, 1978, (1975), p. 19)



The 400 Blows (1959) – Antoine and René stealing posters from Cinema Pigalle; seen here with a still photo from Ingmar Bergman's film *Summer with Monika*.

© André Dino/MK2 DR.

"I was twelve when I decided to be a film director because I'd been seeing movies."

(Truffaut & Moussy, 1969, p. 231)

11

The Film of His Life – Biography

François Truffaut's book, *The Films in My Life* (1975), begins with two quotes: "I believe a work is good to the degree that it expresses the man who created it" (Orson Welles), and "These books were alive and they spoke to me" (Henry Miller, *The Books in My Life*). These two quotes faithfully express Truffaut's understanding of the dialectical relationship between life and film. He believes, like Welles, that an oeuvre's quality depends on the existence of a profound affinity between the work and its creator. In other words, an artist's inner world defines and formulates his work. On the other hand, a work of art defines the inner world of its creator and speaks to the reader in his name—just as books speak to Miller, living films speak to Truffaut, as they provide a vibrant and real encounter with their creators. The interrelationship between a film, its creator, and the creator's life is a constant theme throughout Truffaut's films. Truffaut was the first filmmaker to legitimize cinematic autobiography, a genre that originated with his *Antoine Doinel* cycle of five films. Many of his other films included autobiographical details as well, as did his films in which he adapted literary works. From the moment he became a professional filmmaker, his life was interwoven with his films, and his films immediately became an integral part of his autobiography. At times, he even changed his biography to suit his films' dramatic demands. Moreover, Truffaut addresses the connection between autobiography and a work of art and the reciprocal relationship between the two in many of his films. The fascinating affinity between

his personal life and his films compels one to delve into his biography while a review of his turbulent life story grants another perspective to our understanding of his films and creative processes. After Truffaut's death, historian Antoine de Baecque and film critic Serge Toubiana conducted intensive research into his life, based on thousands of documents from his estate as well as interviews with relatives and friends. They produced a biographical documentary (*Stolen Portraits* 1993), as well as a lengthy book (*François Truffaut* 1996). Truffaut's correspondence, dating from age thirteen (1945) until ten months before his death (October, 1984), was published in a book (*François Truffaut, Correspondence* 1988) edited by Gilles Jacob and Claude de Givray.

François Truffaut was born in Paris on February 6, 1932, when his mother, Janine de Monferrand was not yet twenty. Her family kept her pregnancy secret, and the child's father was registered as unknown. At the age of twenty months, he was adopted by Roland Truffaut, who married his mother two weeks later. The circumstances of his birth and even his very existence were kept secret from close family members for quite some time. Two days after his birth, François was sent to a wet nurse, who raised him until he was three years old, with infrequent visits from his mother. From the age of three until her death when he was ten, Truffaut's grandmother cared for him. To his mother's displeasure, he then moved for the first time to his parents' home. He felt rejected and hated his mother. He expresses his feelings in the film *The Man Who Loved Women* (*L'Homme qui Aimait Les Femmes* 1977). The leading character, Bertrand Morane (Charles Denner), is a child who sits in the middle of a room reading a book, glancing occasionally at his scantily clad mother who wanders about completely ignoring his existence. Denner tells the story in a voice-over: "She was in the habit of walking around half-nude, not to provoke me but rather, I suppose, to confirm to herself that I did not exist" (*The Man Who Loved Women*, 1977, 1:04:25-1:04:32).

The episode is filmed as an aggressive act aimed at writing off