Under the Auspices of Simplicity: Roger Leenhardt's New Realism and the Aesthetic History of Objectif 49

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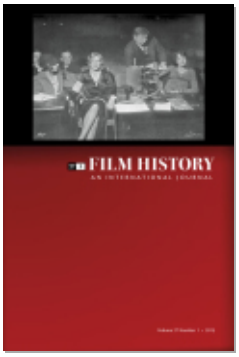

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ABSTRACT: The scholarly literature on the ciné-club Objectif 49 (1948–50) tends to focus on its institutional history. For this reason, historians have yet to account for the development of its aesthetic outlook. Objectif 49 attempted to launch a *nouvelle avant-garde*, and at its signature event, the Festival du Film Maudit of 1949, Jean Cocteau, one of the club's copresidents, stated that in today's avant-garde, "boldness" presents itself "under the auspices of simplicity." Using previously unexamined materials, I argue that the club's aesthetics owe much to the critic and filmmaker Roger Leenhardt, whose postwar career has never been exposed to systematic study. In the essays he published between 1945 and 1949 and in his debut feature, *Les dernières vacances* (The Last Vacation, 1948), he showed how French cinema could overcome a crisis of content and "aestheticized" style. Not only did this new realism position him as a leading figure in the club, it also sheds light on his role in the founding of *Cahiers du cinéma*.

KEYWORDS: Roger Leenhardt, Objectif 49, realism, *The Last Vacation*, *Cahiers du cinema*, new avant-garde

During an impressive film career that spanned over four decades (1935–80), Roger Leenhardt (fig. 1) wrote dozens of critical and theoretical essays, the best known of which were reprinted in *Chroniques du cinéma*, a volume that appeared a year after his death in 1985.[1] And yet even this widely available resource, by a figure lauded as the first true film critic by *Cahiers du cinéma*, remains understudied and therefore has the status of an archive—a collection of documents that interprets history and that itself awaits interpretation. Translation is partially responsible for the neglect that has befallen Leenhardt's oeuvre. For instance, English readers have access to just one of the essays that comprise "La petite école du spectateur" (The Spectator's Little Handbook), a pioneering series of theoretical pieces devoted to cinematic realism, rhythm, cinematography, and *découpage* that Leenhardt first published in the journal *Esprit*.[2] A more

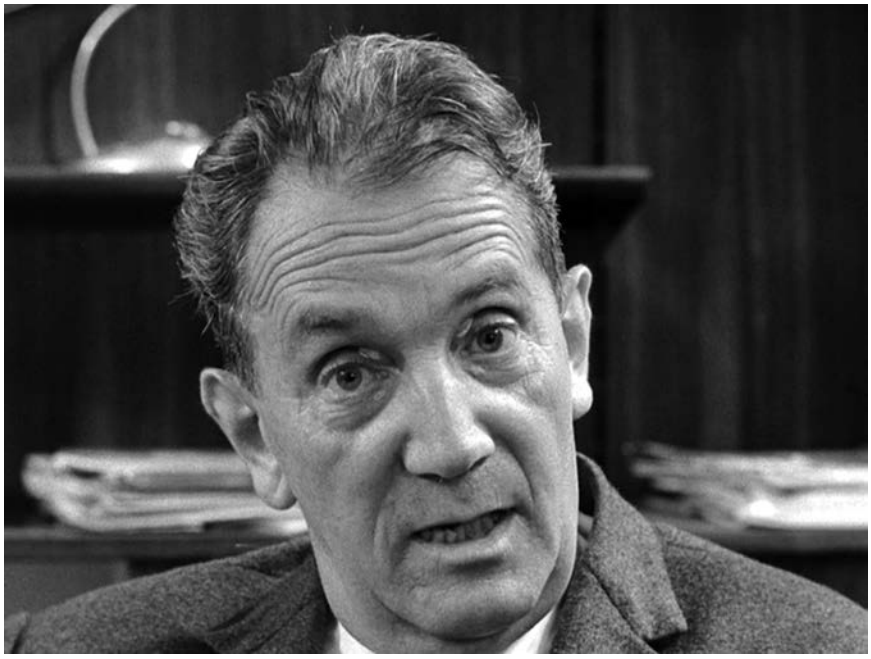

Fig. 1: Roger Leenhardt, in Jean-Luc Godard's *Une femme mariée* (A Married Woman, 1964)

pressing reason for the lack of revisionist research on Leenhardt is the continued focus on the *nouvelle vague* as the proverbial center of gravity in critical and scholarly work on midcentury French cinema. The New Wave ethos is deeply entrenched in writing on Leenhardt, where critics seem content to reconfirm his reputation as the Father of the New Wave, a loving moniker first used in print in the December 1962 issue of *Cahiers du cinéma*.[3] Leenhardt has long been recognized as a critic of some importance, then, but these two historiographic conditions—a dearth of available translations and a general impression that his place in history is secure—have discouraged further investigation into the precise nature of his contributions to film culture of the 1940s and 1950s.

Over the last decade, a handful of scholars have begun to reevaluate Leenhardt's writings, and their findings suggest new areas of inquiry. In the 2007 article "A Film Aesthetic to Discover," Dudley Andrew focuses on his contribution to realist film theory by inserting the "Petite école" essays into a tradition that runs from Leenhardt through André Bazin to Serge Daney and explores "the magnificence of the quotidian."[4] Originally an editor of newsreels,[5] Leenhardt believed that cinema's "primordial realism" resides not in the individual shot but in "assemblage, *rapprochement* [associations], ellipsis."[6] Leenhardt,

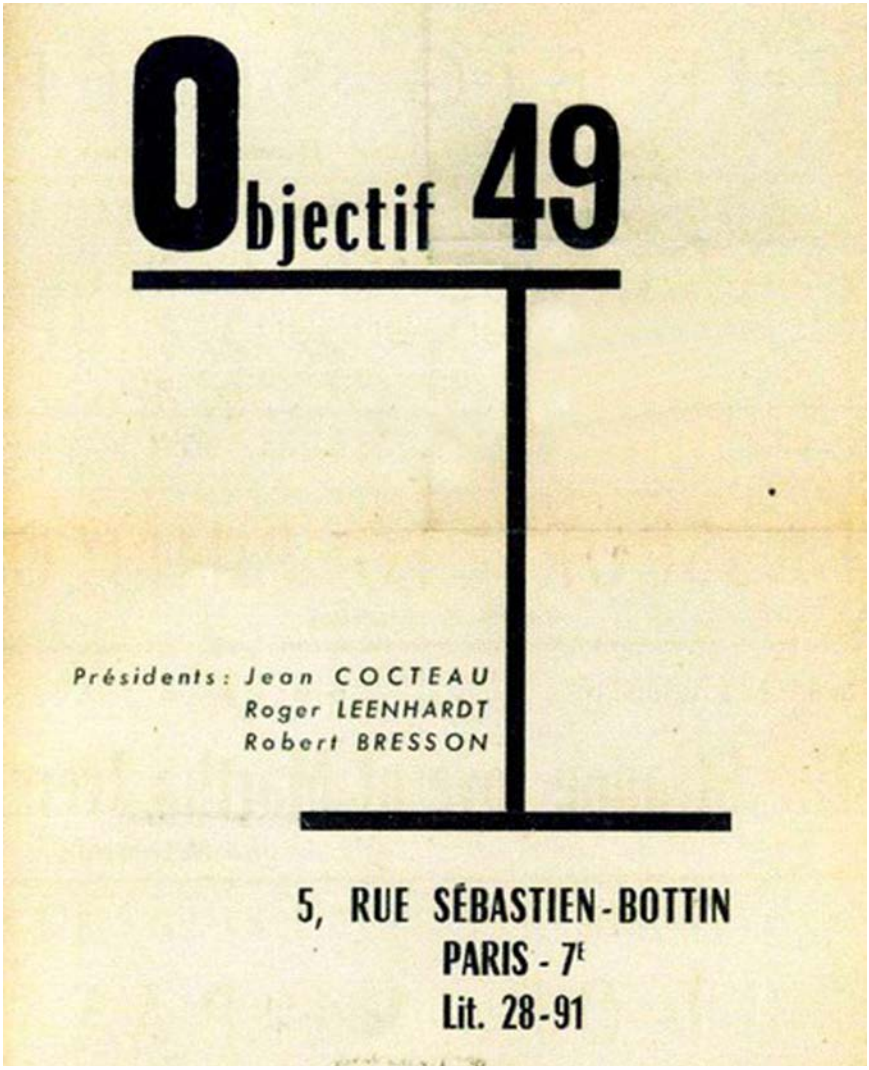

Fig. 2: Advertisement for Objectif 49 listing Jean Cocteau, Robert Bresson, and Roger Leenhardt as copresidents (undated)

Andrew argues, was interested in "the primacy of what is *not* given on the screen," in how film style can become an indirect means of discovery.[7]

Andrew's discussion of the French realist tradition suggests how we might come to terms with another version of Leenhardt that has recently emerged. As Richard Neupert and Frédéric Gimello-Mesplomb have shown, Objectif 49 (1948–50), a short-lived but ambitious ciné-club that sought nothing less than

to launch a *nouvelle avant-garde* in postwar cinema,[8] anointed Leenhardt as one of its copresidents, an honorary title he shared for part of the club's two-year lifespan with Jean Cocteau and Robert Bresson (fig. 2).[9] But if film aficionados today would have little difficulty appreciating why cinephiles elected two such distinctive voices as Cocteau and Bresson to represent their movement, Leenhardt remains something of an unknown quantity. Why was he so honored by a ciné-club committed to the avant-garde? In what way did he represent the future of French cinema? Were cinephiles like Bazin, one of the club's founders, simply expressing their respect for a theorist-auteur whose realism of the interstices had anticipated the ideas they now embraced, or were there more recent contributions by Leenhardt that account for his prominence in the Objectif 49 movement?

In what follows, I explore the links between these two versions of Leenhardt, the realist and the spiritual leader of postwar film culture. Using the essays collected in *Chronique de cinéma*, digitized videos, and documents from various archives, including the Bibliothèque du film and the Leenhardt estate, I claim that Leenhardt became an influential voice after the Liberation by putting out articles and films that challenged French filmmakers to explore a new mode of realist storytelling. Bazin already recognized this in a 1948 *Écran français* essay, "Défense de l'avant-garde" (In defense of the avant-garde).[10] Described by Jean Charles Tacchella as Objectif 49's manifesto,[11] Bazin's piece outlines some of the club's aesthetic commitments by drawing a stark line between the avant-garde of yesterday and today: "Between 1924 and 1930, what we called avant-garde took on a very precise and unambiguous sense," he wrote.[12] But "the films of Fernand Léger, of Richter, of Buñuel and later those of Cocteau" appealed to a limited public, and "all aesthetic research founded on the limitation of its audience is nothing more than a historical error committed to failure, a dead end." A more attractive alternative, Leenhardt's first feature is avant-garde in its aspiration to rival a popular art form: "*Les dernières vacances* [The Last Vacation] brings to the screen a subtlety in its psychological analysis and a narrative style capable of competing with the novel."[13] The film's flashback structure explores the nostalgic memories of a teenager named Jacques (Michel François), who escapes his ennui by reminiscing, by way of a photograph, about his last summer of innocence. But Leenhardt's new realism would not be defined by psychological depth or a novelistic approach alone; this new subject matter and narrative form, drawn from literature, would be expressed in a new visual style. Jean Cocteau describes this aspect of Objectif 49's aesthetic revolution most succinctly. On the occasion of the club's Festival du Film Maudit (Festival of accursed films) in 1949, he writes, in a preface to the catalogue printed for the event, that in today's avant-garde "boldness presents itself under the auspices of simplicity."[14]

Fig. 3: Robert Bresson's visually austere *Les dames du bois de Boulogne* (1945)

Cocteau's 1949 encomium to the aesthetics of simplicity clearly acknowledged the films programmed for the festival, like Bresson's visually austere chamber drama, *Les dames du bois de Boulogne* (Ladies of the Bois de Boulogne, 1945) (fig. 3), or Dudley Nichols's *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1947), which, as Bazin enthusiastically proclaimed, confronted audiences with "the *film maudit* par excellence" by virtue of "the austerity of its subject as much as the uncompromising rigor of its mise-en-scène."[15] However, it also paid tribute to Leenhardt's intellectual and artistic project in the prehistory of Objectif 49. Between 1945 and 1949, his theorization of the quotidian or the real advocated an austerity that prepared the way for the club's association of simplicity with the avant-garde.[16] His criticism, now more prescriptive than his 1930s writings, built upon his original realism of the interstices by promoting the possibilities of a vanguard, deaestheticized literary cinema dependent on a realism of modesty or restraint in the image itself. His debut feature, *Les dernières vacances*, made between 1946 and1948, put this rejection of aestheticism into practice by purifying individual images of artifice in an effort to develop an authentic "*style dépouillé*," as he called it[17]—a pared-down technique that allowed the innovative subject matter of his films to impress itself upon the viewer. These are the

qualities that garnered him attention from critics who, in the months leading up to the Festival du Film Maudit, championed Leenhardt as an emblem of the *nouvelle avant-garde*.

Thus, Leenhardt's role in film culture just prior to the club's founding encourages us to develop a more nuanced sense of the theoretical tradition of realism in France, its effect on the history of film style and storytelling, and the aesthetic values embraced by the *nouvelle avant-garde* movement.

But I wish to make a still bolder claim. If Leenhardt's defense of the aesthetic virtues of French literature and related commitment to a *style dépouillé* are major sources of the Objectif 49 aesthetic, they also shed new light on the club's demise and its posthistory. In a 1999 article, Armand Gourmelen argues that the end of Objectif 49 came when Jacques Rivette, one of the young critics who, like François Truffaut, Éric Rohmer, Jean Douchet, and Charles Bitsch, attended Objectif 49's events, proclaimed "Objective ruined" in his October 1950 *Gazette du cinéma* review of the club's second festival, the Rendez-Vous de Biarritz.[18] The impression one garners from this account is of a club that instantaneously collapsed when it faced criticism from a younger, energized group that we now associate with *Cahiers du cinéma*. The demise of Objectif 49 is presented as a historical turning point, in other words, in which one generation was being deposed by the next. But this explanation needs to be revised, for in studying Leenhardt as an emblem and key voice of the new avant-garde, we learn that members of the older Objectif 49 generation were responsible for the club's end as well, and that the club began to falter because it could not bring about the aesthetic revolution many of its founders had promised. What's more, the club's collapse did not constitute a radical historical break. Reconstructing the aesthetic motivations behind Leenhardt's new realism brings to light the continuities between the Objectif 49 and *Cahiers* eras.

If we take a full measure of Leenhardt's contributions to Objectif 49's aesthetic history, we learn that its collapse began when some of the older generation recognized—as early as April 1950—that the club was failing to launch the revolution in film subject matter, style, and culture that Leenhardt and others were calling for.[19] Leenhardt, Claude Mauriac, and Jacques Doniol-Valcoze began to voice their displeasure with those younger cinephiles whose rebellious exhibitionism and unruliness were tarnishing the club's events and its ability to encourage subtle viewing, informed debate, and a more nuanced approach to realist storytelling and style—all vital components of the club's intervention in film aesthetics. Leenhardt's role in the period thus makes clear that the more experienced members of the club were increasingly dismayed by a collision of values—and even of divergent interpretations of the avant-garde simultaneously asserted—and a resultant lack of progress in achieving the club's goals. Months

before Rivette's postmortem, the ciné-club had lost the support of founding members who were invested in an already-faltering effort to promote a new trend in style, storytelling, and aesthetic discourse.

Moreover, a close examination of Leenhardt's role in the period reveals the extent to which this concern for change in French film culture motivated the founding of *Cahiers du cinéma*. When it became clear that the Objectif 49 experiment was over, Leenhardt concurred with the club's founders that they could achieve some of their goals by founding a new journal. Leenhardt's writings between 1945 and 1949 and his testimony about the *Cahiers du cinéma*'s origins suggest that he hoped that the new publication would carry on the quest to solve a crisis in French cinema that had led him to the *style dépouillé* in the first place. In this way, the principles that underpin Leenhardt's postwar reinterpretation of realism link two defining moments in the era, the births of Objectif 49 and *Cahiers du cinéma*.

OBJECTIF 49: A BRIEF INSTITUTIONAL HISTORY

Let's set the stage for this reassessment of Leenhardt and the postwar narrative avant-garde with a brief overview of Objectif 49 and what we currently understand of its origins. The bulk of the available evidence about its history is anecdotal and focuses on the club's founding myth, as it were, as well as its institutional development and impact. The myth taps a sense of male camaraderie as it recounts the steps a few visionaries in French criticism and culture took in the struggle for cinema's independence from the vicissitudes of the commercial market. In his 1979 memoir, Leenhardt describes the club as a "true collective creation, a group effort" by the young critics of Saint-Germain-des-Prés.[20] The *nouvelle critique* reviewers he had in mind all appear in a famous photograph taken in Biarritz during the Festival du Film Maudit—future cofounder of *Cahiers du cinéma* Jacques Doniol-Valcroze; Claude Mauriac, reviewer for *Le figaro littéraire*; and Bazin, then best known as a critic for the daily *Parisien libéré* (fig. 4). Jean Charles Tacchella, then a reviewer for the weekly *Écran français*, recalls that the club was launched out of a sense of dissatisfaction with France's exhibition market, which simply was not supporting what Bazin called "risky" narrative filmmaking.[21] During the 1948 Venice festival, Tacchella gathered on several occasions with Doniol-Valcroze, Bazin, and Cocteau to lament the dire state of French cinema, plagued as it was by censorship, insufficient funding for truly experimental filmmaking, and distribution and exhibition sectors that were hesitant to release unconventional fare. Tacchella and company developed a mission, an *objectif*: "Why not set up a cine-club of a different kind, an avant-garde cine-club?" they wondered. "This was the start of the adventure of Objectif 49."[22]

Fig. 4: André Bazin (first row, second from left), Claude Mauriac (first row, third from left), Jacques Doniol-Valcroze (second row, fifth from left), and Jean Cocteau (second row, sixth from left) at the Festival du Film Maudit (July 28–August 5, 1949)

The institutional story of the club is one of quick growth followed by a tragic, premature demise (which we've briefly addressed). Almost immediately after the 1948 Venice festival, Doniol-Valcroze convinced numerous players to throw material and moral support behind Objectif 49's effort to launch a new avant-garde in French cinema. According to Tacchella, the first people to join its ranks were the young filmmaker Léonard Keigel, *Revue du cinéma* critic Jacques Bourgeois, and aspiring film director Grisha Dabat, who became the club's first general secretary. They were followed by Jean-George Auriol, *Revue du cinéma*'s influential founder; critic and film director Pierre Kast; and Alexandre Astruc, a journalist for *Combat* whose "Naissance d'une nouvelle avant-garde: Le caméra-stylo" had recently appeared in *L'écran français*.[23] Roger Leenhardt and Robert Bresson soon joined Cocteau as the club's copresidents.

Crucial to Objectif 49's institutional intervention was Léonid Keigel, Léonard's stepfather and owner of the Broadway, a first-run theater located at 34 Champs-Elysées. Keigel, also a distributor and the primary financier behind the postwar revival of *Revue du cinéma* (which had ceased publication in 1932), made room for Objectif 49 screenings in his programming schedule.[24] A wide range of contemporary films were subsequently re-released at the Broadway, the Studio des Champs-Elysées, and the Musée de l'homme (among other major venues), including sparser French ones like *Les dernières vacances*, *Espoir* (Man's Hope, 1939–44), and *Lumières d'été* (1943), all screened at one-night events between January and July 1949 (where over thirty films were shown).[25] These

screenings allowed the club to encourage the re-evaluation of numerous French films that soon found their place in the canon.

The movement continued to expand with the Festival du Film Maudit, a sequel to its inaugural event, the Festival du Film Noir Américain held on a single night, November 20, 1948, and described by Dudley Andrew as the "first concerted effort by French intellectuals to come to terms with the American cinema."[26] The Festival du Film Maudit, often labeled as Cocteau's brainchild, would be more ambitious—a celebration of the new avant-garde that would run from July 28 to August 5, 1949.[27] The organizers, Cocteau among them, planned the event at an office furnished by the influential publishing house Gallimard at 5 rue Sébastien-Bottin in Paris. Recognizing the need for external support for an event of this scope, Cocteau invited the Marquis Pierre d'Arcangue, a colleague who lived near Biarritz, to become the primary patron of the event. D'Arcangue, then the head of events and festivals for the city, agreed to finance the club's activities and facilitated the festival's use of Biarritz's exquisite art-deco casino as the prime exhibition site.[28] He also hosted the closing ceremonies at his private villa in Aiguebelle. Nicknamed Kaddour, a contraction of three Moroccan names the Marquis's father admired, and built in 1927, the villa's vanguard sparseness—"sober, purified," with no decorations on its walls—provided an appropriate setting for a festival that, on some level, aimed to celebrate more austere forms of storytelling.[29]

The other two copresidents, for their part, worked to increase the festival's visibility in the lead-up to the event. Bresson promoted the festival's 16mm film competition and the distinctiveness of *films maudits* in an April 26, 1949, Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française broadcast.[30] Likewise, on the eve of the event, Leenhardt contributed to the club's institutional stability by securing the support of the Centre nationale de la cinématographie (CNC), France's government regulatory body for the film industry, with which he had ties. His nephew, the filmmaker Sidney Jézéquel, who worked closely with Leenhardt for many decades, explained his role: "Leenhardt helped to organize the Festival [du Film Maudit] by pleading its case before the Centre national de la cinématographie, whose director [Michel Fourré-Cormeray] he knew, for just a few years earlier he had made the film *Naissance du cinéma* (The Birth of Cinema, 1946) for the CNC. Leenhardt also had good relations with the relevant authorities (ministries, embassies, prefectures) and knew how to get heard."[31] The participation of the CNC, charged as of its founding in 1946 with developing a noncommercial distribution sector, would at least help to ease some of the challenges related to locating prints and acquiring rights to screen them.

Historians like Frédéric Gimello-Mesplomb have documented the evolution of this eight-day festival and other Objectif 49 events and begun to

shed light on the club's influence on postwar film culture.[32] Despite its brief history, Objectif 49 left a mark on cinephilia and on the careers of numerous filmmakers in at least three ways. It did so, first, by codifying a range of cinephilic practices. Passionate viewing with a close attention to detail and illuminating dialogue and debate—by all accounts, these defining aspects of cinephilia were ritualized, and their importance to the development of film culture confirmed, at Objectif 49 events. During the Festival du Film Maudit, Bazin organized regular public discussions from 3:00 to 4:00 p.m. at the casino, where the previous day's screenings would be analyzed and debated.[33] He wrote: "the most important aspect of the festival will not have been on the screen but in the theater."[34] The club even went abroad. During a fifteen-day event held in Austria in January 1950, Doniol-Valcroze, Bazin, and Bourgeois screened twenty films (by Bresson, Cocteau, Eisenstein, Chaplin, and Von Sternberg) and held "passionate discussions" with students from Austria, Hungary, Germany, and Czechoslovakia.[35] But the club also discovered new talent and fostered new partnerships that benefited vanguard filmmakers. Some believe that it was at the Rendez-Vous de Biarritz festival that French cinephiles first became aware of the directorial talents of Michelangelo Antonioni, Nicholas Ray, and Alexander Mackendrick.[36] Not only was Jean Rouch one of the "great revelations" of the Festival du Film Maudit—his ethnographic film, *La circoncision* (The Circumcision, 1949), won the 16mm prize Bresson had promoted—but by drawing the attention of the industry, the festival became the site where Rouch met his future producer, Pierre Braunberger.[37] Finally, the Festival du Film Maudit contributed to the development of a third kind of exhibition site in France, the *art et essai* (art-house) cinema. Halfway between an exclusive, nonprofit ciné-club and a commercial venue, the *art et essai* theater followed in Objectif 49's footsteps by building on the concept of a "for-profit ciné-club" that supported "quality" cinema.[38]

Recent histories and anecdotal accounts of the club's origins focus in insightful ways on the social groups (the *nouvelle critique* crew) and institutions (Keigel's Broadway) that helped the club grow. They also draw attention to the significance of festivals (Venice, 1948) and what Thomas Elsaesser calls "counter-festivals" (in this case, the Festival du Film Maudit) in Objectif 49's history.[39] Nonetheless, these accounts leave unanswered the question of why the club's *nouvelle avant-garde* would be identified with an aesthetics of bold simplicity, as Cocteau called it. The answer becomes clear if we take a longer view of history and consider events reaching back to the war's end. Like other avant-gardes, Objectif 49 depended on more than institutions; in significant ways, an avant-garde is also defined by discursive and artistic tendencies that predate its institutions. Leenhardt, as I intend to show, played an important,

and until now unrecognized, role in shaping the tendencies relevant to the ciné-club's aesthetic outlook.

LE STYLE DÉPOUILLÉ: AN AVANT-GARDE AESTHETIC WITH ROOTS IN THE FRENCH NOVEL AND HOLLYWOOD

Starting in 1945, Leenhardt published a series of diagnostic essays that presented a negative picture of cinema in the Occupation (1940–44) and immediate post-Liberation eras. At the same time, he wrote several timely film reviews that elaborated on these themes. One of the recurring tropes throughout his postwar writings was that French cinema was in decline—though all was not lost. He predicted that filmmakers would promote a new phase in cinema's aesthetic evolution if they committed themselves to exploring intelligent and contemporary subject matter whose nuances would discourage the kinds of solipsistic aestheticism that currently plagued their art. In a period where many critics were taking stock of the present and future possibilities of French cinema, one of the most respected tastemakers of the 1930s was making his presence felt once again in writings that proclaimed the need for greater awareness of cinema's narrative potential—for films that respond to and illuminate the nuances of French life—and the related benefits of a new *style dépouillé* (pared-down style).

At the war's end, in other words, the state of French cinema encouraged Leenhardt to develop an approach to realism or the everyday that urged filmmakers to reclaim the power of understatement in their storytelling and image craft. Engaged in aesthetic play for its own sake, French directors were tinkering with the pictorial beauty of their images instead of recognizing the power of simple storytelling forms and functional visual styles to render reality. In "Continuité du cinéma français" (The continuity of French cinema), published in 1945, he writes that the conditions of *les années noires* "drove our cinema down a dangerous path, at the end of which one finds academicism and aestheticism."[40] As he would later argue in a piece titled "Le cinéma et les arts plastiques" (Cinema and the fine arts), "feature-length fiction films discover their highest calling" when they eschew "visual formalism (where they imitate painting without its force)."[41] He adds: "the image onscreen must remain subordinate to its meaning, at the same time as inspiration constrains itself by following a visual rigor that achieves a style."[42]

Leenhardt was not alone in holding the belief that French cinema of the 1940s had become far too disconnected and aestheticized. To cite but one example, the filmmaker Louis Daquin, also associated with the postwar new avant-garde, wrote that during the Occupation, films like *Les anges du péché* (The Angels of Sin, 1943) (fig. 5), *Goupi Mains Rouges* (It Happened at the Inn, 1943), and *Lumières d'été*, while often praised for their stark realism, had become

Fig. 5: The aestheticized style of the Occupation in Robert Bresson's *Les anges du péché* (1943)

obsessed with form and "quality," especially as it relates to "the composition of scenes and images."[43] The impression was that, free from the influence of Hollywood films (which were banned during the war), French filmmakers had set out to invent a new aesthetic language. But the results were mixed. Leenhardt elaborated on this concern during an October 1945 radio review of Bresson's *Les dames du bois de Boulogne.* For all its promise, the film brought to light the limitations of conspicuous formal restraint for its own sake: "This classic film [was] performed with only four characters, in an absolutely pared down décor, [and] Bresson directed it, as is his habit, with the most precise rigor. Served once again by Agostini's admirable photography, he has made an elegant, precise and cold work. This high level of ambition deserves to be applauded, but we must acknowledge the fact that this lack of real world application makes the story unconvincing, and despite its style, gives *Les dames du bois de Boulogne* a desiccant gratuitousness."[44] With this modern adaptation of Diderot's *Jacques le fataliste* (Jacques the Fatalist, 1765–1780), Bresson had taken a step toward elegant but lifeless minimalism—toward a style that betrays cinema's calling to discover life as lived, to inconspicuously peer out at characters and observe the nuances of psychology and routine that only the camera can capture. Simple

forms served a legitimate artistic purpose; chic formalisms drew attention to technique and thus offered empty delights.

Claude Autant-Lara's *Sylvie et la fantôme* (Sylvie and the Ghost, 1946) suffered from a different kind of academicism. In a February 1946 review, Leenhardt scolded the film's producer, André Paulvé, for providing the filmmakers with too much time and too many resources.[45] Because of their "superabundance of means," his films "sin through excess."[46] Philippe Agostini's images were too "glossy": "We've often said that a novel shouldn't be too 'written.' Well then! A film shouldn't be too 'photographed'!"[47] If the formalisms of Bresson and Autant-Lara were off track, what did Leenhardt view as a positive model for new French cinema?

In "Bilan autour d'une crise" (Report on a crisis), written for the inaugural October 1945 issue of Jean-Paul Sartre's *Les temps modernes*, Leenhardt argued that if the new French cinema were going to overcome its march toward pure aestheticism, toward technical displays that betray cinema's ability to capture the subtleties of the contemporary French experience, it would have to pursue "renewal from the outside" by drawing on influences from other media and national cinemas.[48] He recommended two sources in particular, the first being French literature. Always committed to the *patrimoine*, Leenhardt consistently praised France's literary traditions as a source for new, and more restrained, narrative forms. "Measured" and "precise," French literature was suspicious of the "torrential" in art, he once opined.[49] Leenhardt believed in the potential of the French novel to such a degree that the narrative and style of *Les dernières vacances*, his first feature, were drawn from the *roman de domaine*, a literary genre popular between 1890 and 1940 that centered on life in an old bourgeois estate.[50] In his review of the film, Bazin underscored the untapped potential of this genre: "One may wonder why French film hasn't exploited more the theme of the 'family estate,' to which literature owes numerous masterly novels, from Eugène Fromentin's *Dominique* (1863) to Alain Fournier's *Le Grand Meaulnes* [The Lost Estate] (1913)."[51] But for Leenhardt, it was a small group of writers associated with the *Nouvelle revue française* (*NRF*) who truly set the standard. Raymond Radiguet's *Le diable au corps* (The Devil in the Flesh, 1923) and Panaït Istrati's *Kyra Kyralina* (1923) differed from the works of other *NRF* writers like Louis Aragon, Jean Giraudoux, and Pierre-Jean Jouve by telling stories in a syntax and rhetorical form stripped of all artistic and academic pretense.[52] Especially important for Leenhardt was André Gide, whose *Isabelle* (1911), set in a Normandy manor house, offered an elegantly sparse approach to storytelling that eschewed even the excesses of the realist novel, whose style, so Gide believed, created an "inextricable mess," a dense weave of facts and descriptions.[53] He wished instead to "banish all superfluous detail," as one

Gide specialist puts it—to develop a writing style that remained focused on the essentials of the plot.[54]

Leenhardt also recommended a turn toward the style of American cinema because in his eyes, like the French novel, it sought a "transparent and classical form of expression" guided by a revulsion for the stylization of "artistic writing."[55] Despite his language, this was not, we should note, a rallying cry to adopt Hollywood's central tradition of classical découpage and invisible cutting. David Bordwell points out, correctly in my view, that Leenhardt admired the realism of Hollywood storytelling.[56] This is made evident in Leenhardt's provocative 1948 *Écran français* article, "À bas Ford, vive Wyler!" (Down with Ford! Long live Wyler!), where he wrote: "An implacable law encouraged the quality novel to strip itself [*à se dépouiller*] of literature as well as peripeteia, of style as well as drama. A contemporary novelist is suspicious of the well-written sentence, of plot that's too absorbing. Prefigured by Wyler, the new *cinéaste* in turn is concerned to avoid technical and dramatic effects. *Ah! Now that's cinema!* Altman quite rightly wrote to himself fifteen years ago . . . Today, we say of those movies we love: *Ah! Now that's not cinema at all.*"[57] But we should not generalize Leenhardt's remarks here. He was praising the realism of a specific strain of Hollywood practice, not the entire industry. For him, the promise of this American anticinema rested in a few salient films that had innovated a "style dépouillé," a restrained approach to visual style and narrative form that could access, through individual images, certain traces of the quotidian.[58] It was in 1938 that the "honest mise-en-scène" of William Wyler's *Dodsworth* (1936) made him aware of cinema's power of understatement: "Not for a moment did the director seek, as was apparently the rule of cinema until that time, to poeticize, to dramatize a commonplace story told in a matter-of-fact way."[59] In subsequent years, he defended Wyler's sober and sparse long takes and *profondeur de champ* (composition in depth) as hallmarks of the new realist style.

Perhaps surprisingly, he also enlisted as a model a Hollywood film that hardly seems to represent an aesthetics of simplicity: *Citizen Kane* (1941). In the postwar era, Leenhardt developed what on the surface appears to be a rather peculiar interpretation of the Welles film as a towering exemplar of bold restraint. But while peculiar, his interpretation is vital to understanding how Leenhardt contributed to the impression among cinephiles that simplicity of image making was a vanguard impulse.

To understand Leenhardt's interpretation of *Kane*, we need to briefly situate the film and his review in their proper contexts. As Frédéric Gimello-Mesplomb has shown, by the late 1940s, the cinephiles affiliated with Objectif 49 distinguished themselves for their belief that an "invisible" vanguard could be discovered in Hollywood cinema.[60] The reception of *Citizen Kane* in 1946 and

1947 had already shown the seeds of this aesthetic position. It is well-known that when Welles's film made its Parisian premiere on July 9, 1946, it immediately became the most controversial film of the day. Antoine de Baecque writes that Welles ignited the "first great critical debate of the postwar period."[61] The dispute over the film's philosophical and aesthetic implications was touched off (or so historians have claimed) when Bazin and Sartre brought a divergent set of political-philosophic values to bear on the film's style. A *résistancialiste* and socialist-inclined existentialist, Sartre wrote an August 1945 *Écran français* review that criticized Welles for being an American capitalist "elite" whose works had shirked the artist's responsibility to freedom: "The technical discoveries of the film are not designed to render life. There is an admirable cinematography, and it is well-known that Welles introduced the *ceiling* into the décor. The result of this is a constant sense of being crushed which contributes in no small way to creating the sordid and suffocating tone of this life which was both a complete success and a perfect failure."[62] Bazin confronted Sartre with a different interpretation of the film's style. Committed to the personalism of *Esprit* founder Emmanuel Mounier—innovator of an ethical philosophy in which, as Dudley Andrew has shown, "[a]ction is necessary, because man owes it to himself and his world to build with such materials as he finds around him and to peer outward with such light as he can gather and direct"[63]—Bazin's July 1947 response to Sartre analyzed *Kane* for its "inner orientation" (*pace* Mounier) toward the "materials" of cinema (namely, its techniques, especially those that grant the medium the power to approximate the phenomenological experience of continuous space and time). Welles was not a servant of, but had in fact reinvented, the "standardized, transparent cinema" of the Hollywood system, and this he had done with a unique way of "writing" that embraced a "complete realism" capable of "consider[ing] reality as if it were homogeneous and indivisible."[64]

Bazin's reproach of Sartre interpreted Welles's realism as a striking (which is to say, conspicuous) form of cinematic writing that went beyond the transparency of conventional Hollywood practice, whose continuity techniques delivered only an ersatz realism. But we can nuance our sense of the *Citizen Kane* debate if consider how other influential voices like Leenhardt entered the discussion as well. In some regards anticipating Bazin—like Bazin, he confronted Sartre with the thesis that *Kane* remained a legitimately realist film by a vanguard auteur—Leenhardt's July 1946 *Écran français* review nonetheless pushed the film's realist aesthetic in a different direction from Bazin by connecting the film's visual style with a French aversion to excess and self-indulgence. For Leenhardt, the film was an expression not of a flamboyant realism but of realist simplicity. If this seems bizarre, we should note that, like Sartre and Bazin, he

was reading the film's images through his own aesthetic and philosophic commitments. As an intellectual and filmmaker, Leenhardt embraced a Protestant worldview, often calling upon it to account for his artistic sensibility: "I have a taste for restraint, for discretion, for litotes, those of the Protestant writers of the *NRF* of my youth. A classic taste, thus a slightly conservative one, a taste at any rate for moderation."[65] His interpretation of *Kane* exemplified this taste and almost reads as an expression of a proudly Protestant aesthetic. Crucially, this aesthetic (or antiaesthetic) presented realism not as one of the interstices between images, but as a quality to be appreciated in the production of individual images themselves. "In France, a land of diversity, of moderation, nothing is more irritating than the genius," he wrote, reading the nation through the Protestant values of which he was so fond.[66] America, by contrast, land "of the masses, adores the genius (understood as a sensational, enormous, spontaneous, explosive talent, always at his paroxysm)."[67] Welles, he conceded, was a genius in the American sense, but *Citizen Kane* showed "Gallic" virtues as well in its deep focus cinematography:

> *Citizen Kane*, as Jean-Paul Sartre has argued, even disparagingly, in these pages, is an *explanation* of character and a *demonstration* of technique. Without doubt. But I cannot follow him when, as a result of this, he denies that this cinematic story has any attachment to the real, any virtues of efficiency. With its vigor and prodigious pace, the style of Welles has nothing of the slowness and limpness of "artistic writing." Yet, he will dazzle the experts, and not for that reason, I believe, lose the public, for despite appearances he goes for the essential, *in pursuit of simplicity*.[68]

At first glance, this appears to be a hopelessly idiosyncratic contention. The most iconic displays of *Citizen Kane*'s unique style—like the fifty-two-second-long take showing the effects of Susan Alexander's (Dorothy Comingore) attempted suicide (fig. 6)—tug at the viewer to attend to their relative sophistication at the level of composition. Far from austere or self-effacing, the film's visuals tend toward the extravagant or the baroque in their fluid, but highly stylized, multiplanar handling of narrative space. Yet Leenhardt's interpretation of the film as an exemplar of a realist simplicity is not so eccentric if considered from a perspective other than the viewer's experience.

Leenhardt, a seasoned filmmaker, recognized in Welles's solutions an impressive measure of restraint and efficiency in terms of practice. By paring down his creative options at the level of editing and camera position and remaining committed to the fixed long take, he had done away with techniques that, from a common-sense, problem-solving perspective, were uneconomical.

Fig. 6: Complex multiplanar composition in *Citizen Kane* (1941)

An efficient simplifying impulse rested behind Welles's inventive process: "It is simpler, and in the end more natural, to make characters perform in front of the camera, rather than move the camera to follow the characters. For twenty years the excessive dependence on lenses with a poor *profondeur de champ* and the immoderate use of tracking shots has made us forget that."[69] Using a straightforward logic that came from his experience as a director, Leenhardt aligned the film with the trend of simplified and, yes, at times, transparent staging and camera technique that he had associated with Wyler since 1938.

Leenhardt never explained how the subject matter of *Citizen Kane* served to motivate this simple aesthetic. One might have expected as much from Leenhardt's review given the importance he placed on the crisis of content—as a source of the crisis of unmotivated, aestheticized style in cinema—in his other writing from the era. Indeed, he often linked these problems of style and subject matter, even—and this is critical—during the height of Objectif 49's influence. Leenhardt's essay in the Festival of Film Maudit catalogue (where Cocteau celebrates the bold simplicity of the *nouvelle avant-garde*) rejected stylistic excess by drawing attention to the "malédiction de l'intelligence" (malediction of intelligence) in cinematic content. "Intelligence is ambiguity," he declared, "and it is this at the end of the day that the public cannot bear to witness on the screen,

where it demands pure tones, distinct genres. Here, intelligence is opposed to style in at least one sense. In the sense that novels are devoid of style, at least as far as their writing is concerned."[70] Once again, he was presenting the problems of style, subject matter, and the need to draw on models from literature as one and the same. In the end, he predicted that by eschewing style for style's sake, auteurs would one day express their unique intelligence through the content they brought to the art of cinema: "Tomorrow, will we not ask the *auteur de film* for his 'vision of the world'?"[71]

While Robert Bresson forged his own austere style in the period (by my reckoning he gave only one interview and published no personal statements on his art between 1945 and 1949), Leenhardt was the far more visible advocate for sparse aesthetics during these years.[72] It seems fair, then, to position Leenhardt's critical work in favor of a sparse realism, not to mention his search for external sources of inspiration (modest, transparent forms like the French novel and American cinema) and diagnosis of the crisis of content (and the related problem of widespread aestheticism), as one of the prominent sources for Objectif 49's tendency to associate simplicity with the *nouvelle avant-garde*. Considering the evolution of Leenhardtian realism—from a pre-1938 realism of the interstices to a post-1938 realism of the understated image (and subject matter that finds expression therein)—has helped us pinpoint one factor in the development of the club's aesthetic intervention. Since the Liberation (and even before), one of its copresidents and most celebrated auteurs had been presenting *dépouillement* and the deaestheticization of narrative as the central problem facing filmmakers.

LEENHARDT'S NEW AVANT-GARDE AESTHETICS IN *LES DERNIÈRES VACANCES*

Taking a longer view of history than institutional accounts of the ciné-club's origins, we have been attempting to ascertain how the culture surrounding Objectif 49 came to view Roger Leenhardt as a leading figure in the *nouvelle avant-garde*. Moreover, we have been attempting to isolate the factors that shaped the movement's tendency to equate the *nouvelle avant-garde* with an aesthetics of bold simplicity. These questions led us to Leenhardt's criticism, which made a consistent case for viewing visual restraint and a sober, understated approach to narrative as the standard against which a rejuvenated French cinema ought to be measured.

However, the writings only tell part of the story of Leenhardtian realism and the origins of the Objectif 49 aesthetic. Indeed, it seems unlikely that he and the aesthetic values he defended would have been positioned as prominently in Objectif 49's conception of the *nouvelle avant-garde* had the ideas expressed

in his critical work not served his artistic practice—his own shift to narrative filmmaking and a *style dépouillé* in the years before the club's founding.

Before embarking on *Les dernières vacances*, Leenhardt had forged an impressive career as a short filmmaker with his own independent firm, Les Film du Compas (now Les Films Roger Leenhardt[73]), founded in 1934. He was cinema's premier *touche-à-tout* (jack-of-all-trades) and pedagogue, producing educational films on such diverse subjects as modern Syria and the Levant (*L'orient qui vient*, 1937), early electronic music (*Le chant des ondes*, 1943), and France's recovery from war (*La renaissance de la France*, 1946, and *Lettres de Paris*, 1946). After the Liberation he also emerged as a respected authority on cinema's past when he collaborated with historian Georges Sadoul on the CNC-financed *Naissance du cinéma*, a pioneering documentary that was universally praised.[74] Much admired among intellectuals who frequented the cafés of the Odéon, the Rue du Bac, and the Seine, Leenhardt wrote and performed for these films a series of elegant and erudite expository voice-overs that seemed to flow naturally from his grace and intelligence as a conversationalist. "The style is the man himself," Bazin wrote of him and his oeuvre in 1948.[75]

At the same time, it would appear that many of his contemporaries held out high hopes for a more ambitious expression of the Leenhardt style. It was common knowledge in the Parisian intellectual scene that he had designs on publishing a major fictional work devoted to the formative moments of youth. In 1944, he completed "La folle vertu" (Mad Virtue), a *Bildungsroman* or *roman d'apprentissage* inspired by his own moral and political development in the 1920s. Perhaps because he never found a publisher, there were many, including André Bazin, who were inclined to view *Les dernières vacances* as his first "novel."[76] Expectations were high that the film would be overtly literary.

In the summer of 1946, these expectations turned into an opportunity when a producer close to Leenhardt suggested that he write a screenplay.[77] The producer in question was one Pierre Gérin, who was the head of the Institut des hautes études cinématographiques (IDHEC) until 1946 and now ran the company Les Productions Cinématographiques (LPC). With modest resources,[78] Gérin invested in a number of vanguard literary adaptations, including Georges Bernanos's *Journal d'un curé de campagne* (Diary of a Country Priest), a project completed by Robert Bresson and Union générale cinématographique in 1951. In Leenhardt's case, Gérin left the choice of subject matter entirely open—an extraordinary show of confidence—and was able to take such a risk on a relatively unknown commodity in feature filmmaking by compensating Leenhardt only when a draft of the script was approved. At that stage, Gérin negotiated a creative combination of loans and advances for the film's budget.[79]

The belief that French cinema should draw new stories and forms from literature was not an idle critical mantra for Leenhardt. The script for *Les dernières vacances* was his third postwar effort to translate literary ideas to film. In 1946, he coauthored the dialogue for Pierre de Hérain's *L'amour autour de la maison* (1946), based on a novel by Albert t'Serstevens, who was known for the clarity and economy of his word choices.[80] When Gérin invited him to submit a script to LPC, Leenhardt and his brother-in-law, Roger Breuil, the celebrated novelist and dramatist who had been publishing with Gallimard since the 1930s, were already halfway through an adaptation of Breuil's novel, *Une fille dans la montagne*, published under the pseudonym Jean Chartreux in 1944.[81] Leenhardt elected to set *Fille dans la montagne* aside[82] and produced for Gérin an adaptation of an unpublished literary property written by one Maurice Junod in 1932, titled "La grande chène" (The great oak tree).[83] Junod's lean plot about young adolescents discovering love for the first time and a great tree about to be cut down in a symbolic evocation of a passing era bore considerable resemblance to *Une fille dans la montagne* in any case. (Breuil's novel also has a tree, nicknamed "le grand Bouey."[84] In the final version of *Les dernières vacances*, a tree is planted rather than razed, thus becoming a living time capsule of the changing conditions in bourgeois life.)

Expanding Junod's short story into a fully developed script that had literary merit and expressed Leenhardt's aesthetic commitments would require a new approach to writing that was both truly authorial (in the sense of relatively isolated inspiration and creation) and democratic (in the sense of shared creative responsibility).[85] Leenhardt brought on Breuil as his coscenarist and, working fairly unimpeded on the screenplay,[86] they labored away on the story, characters, and dialogue independently and simultaneously; subsequently, after exploring different possibilities in isolation, they occasionally corresponded or met to negotiate a synthesis of their innovations. This fluid and unorthodox process—a violation of strict French studio standards—was in itself a mark of Leenhardt's avant-garde aspirations.[87]

The trusting collaboration between Leenhardt and Breuil facilitated the creation of a fresh, restrained piece of writing based on family history. They transposed "La grande chène" to a Protestant family estate, drawing on their experiences in the Languedoc-Roussillon and Pyrénées-Atlantiques regions of Southern France (prior to World War I, Leenhardt, then just a boy, vacationed at a family estate called Fontfroide-le-haut, just outside Montpellier, while Breuil moved his family to a large plantation home near Pau in the 1930s). This allowed them to fashion Junod's story of young love into a *roman de domaine*–style plot, one with autobiographical roots and set in milieus rarely if ever explored by French filmmakers.[88] In one draft of the script, to develop and personalize the

story, Leenhardt even temporarily renamed the film's characters after family members he and Breuil knew only too well.[89] And as their slice-of-life plot took shape, they held each other to high literary standards while also negotiating the line between style and stylization. In a March 1947 letter, Leenhardt critiqued Breuil's dialogue in a manner that echoed his reservations about Bresson's minimalist visuals. Both were austere, but stylishly so:

> To be sure, I now see that the naturalistic, the "spoken" aspect of my dialogue comes across as a little flat. It lacks the sparkle, the finesse, the profundity sprinkled throughout yours. But these beautiful touches, you often owe them specifically to style, that is to sparseness [*dépouillement*], to the absence of vulgarity, to a certain sentence construction that, it should be said, is contrary to that quality of continual elaboration, of the incomplete, that is the nature of real language. But then, the introduction of style into realism, that's the major problem that confronts this new art of cinema on all levels. On the level of dialogue, with you on the pedal and me on the brakes—even with the two of us, in other words—it's going to be a tall order.[90]

In the same letter, he made light of his penchant to theorize in this way: "I'm relying here on . . . my exaggerated preference for things that are subdued. Your theories are far too pedantic, you'll say. And what's more, far too familiar. Without question. You know my soft spot for didactic reflection [*réflexion didactique*]."[91] For Leenhardt, *Les dernières vacances* was an opportunity to apply his well-advertised aesthetic commitments—to adhere to a sparseness kept in check by a sober degree of transparency.

When the film approached production, Leenhardt continued to see writing problems through the eyes of a critic. One such problem pertained to characterization: how would he convey with realistic nuance the psychology of his protagonist Jacques? Apparently looking to Gide's *Isabelle* for inspiration, Leenhardt considered the possibilities of turning the narration over to the protagonist, depicting events exclusively through his point of view. Gide's novel, also about a young man's coming of age, had done just that, with the only difference being that Gérard Lacase, a student at the Sorbonne, is older than the teenaged Jacques. To translate the approach of this *roman de domaine* to film, Leenhardt opted for the device of the framing story, which would lead into a flashback, "a sort of flash of memory, a mental revision by Jacques of his vacation."[92]

A return to the character's past would also efficiently tie together the film's evocation of bygone moments in both life and French modernity. Set in the interwar period, *Les dernières vacances* begins with Jacques (fig. 7) daydreaming

Fig. 7: The coming-of-age teenager Jacques (Michael François) gazing at a family photograph in the opening scene of *Les dernières vacances* (1948)

about his summer vacation during rhetoric class, gazing longingly at a family photograph. A professor, played by Leenhardt himself (fig. 8), admonishes the boy for his inattention. The photo nevertheless triggers a lengthy flashback to the teen's last vacation at a summer home that, by the end of the film, is sold to developers looking to transform it into a hotel. The end of an era in life and for a certain bourgeois lifestyle—where, as Leenhardt put it in a letter to Breuil, "leisure is woven into the very fabric of everyday life"[93]—instantaneously converge.

With writing and directing increasingly viewed as central and imbricated aspects of film authorship in the era, it seems unlikely that *Les dernières vacances* would have been received as a fully realized expression of Leenhardt's aesthetic commitments, and thus positioned at the forefront of the narrative avant-garde, had Gérin not made the decision, in late 1946, to invite Leenhardt to direct the film as well.[94] *Les dernières vacances* became at this point a film that Leenhardt could truly *author*, for not only could he cast himself in a role that inscribed his didactic persona into the work itself, but the sparse realism and *roman de domaine* aspects of the writing could now be expressed in a look inspired by the understated American style he had been championing in his critical writings.

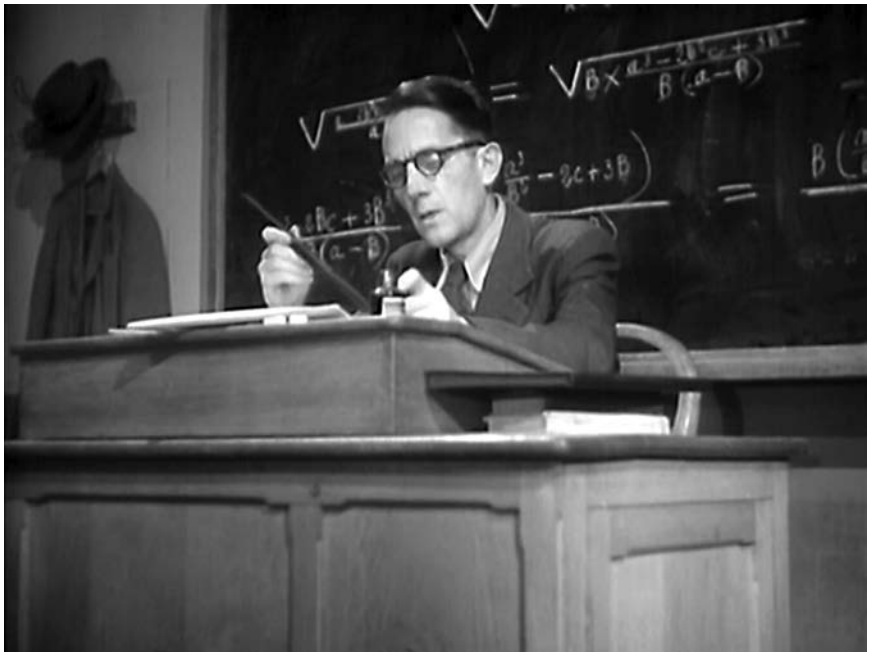

Fig. 8: Roger Leenhardt as the professor in *Les dernières vacances*

Early versions of the script suggest that the first few scenes of *Les dernières vacances* would overtly pay visual homage to American cinema. A different prop—not a photo but a broken piece of a glass orb—would trigger the flashback.[95] How another director would have handled the sequence is difficult to say, but Leenhardt, now more implicated in the development of the film's visual style, clearly sensed that such a direct reference to the snow globe that falls from Charles Foster Kane's dead hand in *Citizen Kane*'s opening scene would serve as a distraction. The finished film pays tribute to Welles, but less explicitly. Unlike the snow globe in *Kane*, the sphere is never handled by the protagonist; rather, it is rendered as an abstract vessel carried by children in a symbol of Jacques's past and perhaps of the fragility of innocent youth in a three-shot montage that takes us backward in time (fig. 9).

After this rather stylized transition—where the interstices or associations between shots also seem to evoke themes of memory and anxiety (the vessel slips from the children's hands and shatters on the ground below)—Leenhardt gives the everyday plot a sparse Wellesian handling or, alternatively, a Leenhardtian interpretation of the simple American *profondeur de champ*. A *dépouillement* of image and plot takes over in a series of wonderfully gentle static long shots of the

Fig. 9: A symbolic orb carried by children signals the flashback to Jacques's "last vacation" in *Les dernières vacances*.

film's rural setting. The apotheosis of the Leenhardt style is the second of these shots, showing a just-noticeable pond turtle—most likely a *Cistude d'Europe*, found only in Languedoc-Roussillon—slowly inching along in a patch of light in the foreground left, dwarfed by a path that stretches into a dense and tranquil forest (fig. 10). Another filmmaker might have drawn our attention there with the sound of leaves quietly rustling under the creature's feet. Leenhardt offers an elegantly spartan soundtrack, leaving it to the attentive viewer to take notice of the gentle reptile with his or her eyes alone. The same principle of displaying compositional depth inconspicuously guides the staging of the very next shot, where a miniscule hen in the background right struts about in front of the summer home (fig. 11). Like the turtle, the hen moves right to left, which creates a subtle rhyme in what might be perceived as conventional establishing shots by those unfamiliar with Leenhardt's aesthetic.

Showing his admiration for *Citizen Kane* and Wyler, Leenhardt's *style dépouillé* efficiently uses deep staging to eschew superfluous and arty effects, like excessive cutting and intrusive inserts. A child, late to one of the family's many gatherings, slinks into a room through a door in the background (fig. 12). While the patriarch of the family (Pierre Dux, at the center of the frame) is

Fig. 10: In *Les dernières vacances*, a pond turtle (bottom left) inches along from left to right in a Languedocian forest, followed by . . .

Fig. 11: . . . a hen (background right) doing the same in front of the family estate.

Fig. 12: Guided by a child's observant gaze (foreground right), our attention is drawn to the background of the shot in *Les dernières vacances*.

Fig. 13: Multiple children pick out Aunt Odette in the distance in *Les dernières vacances*.

oblivious, another boy, in the foreground right, subtly pivots his head to notice the tardy entry and inconspicuously draws the viewer's attention to this distant space. Later, during a festive evening in the estate's garden, Jacques's Aunt Odette (Christiane Barry) calls to the children from a window in the background right (fig. 13). Where he can, Leenhardt sets aside uneconomical devices, like close-ups and analytical editing, and uses pared-down images to gently present details in the foreground and background of shots.

Ever the critic and theoretician, Leenhardt used the production process to reflect on the realist implications of these visual choices. If in the mid-1930s he associated cinema's capacity to evoke the everyday with the transformative powers of editing, in the late 1940s, as he was preparing to direct his first feature, he theorized cinematic realism in terms of the camera's unique analytical potential. The prewar Leenhardt believed, as Dudley Andrew explains, that "the filmmaker operates with chunks of recorded material which he or she doesn't so much sculpt . . . as organize in relation to an idea, phenomenon or event that arises in the emptiness between and around what is shown."[96] In other words, Leenhardt located cinema's essence in ellipsis and metonymy—in the editor's ability to manipulate raw materials recorded by the camera and the gaps between shots to discover meanings and experiences not directly represented in the images. However, in the March 1947 version of the *Dernières vacances* script, Leenhardt produced a very different realist theory, in a document titled "Remarques préliminaires" (Preliminary remarks).[97] Rejecting the view that the camera merely records raw reality, this unpublished piece argues that the camera is a potent tool that allows the filmmaker to perform a type of artistic analysis of the phenomenal world unavailable to the novelist. Leenhardt stripped his subject down to "the detail," the minuscule, because "cinematic vision . . . is a concrete and meticulous form of analysis—the camera is a magnifying glass."[98] The movie camera never simply records; what it sees isn't raw. Rather, the camera studies what it shoots; it mimics the clarity and curiosity of the innocent vision of youth. In short, *Les dernières vacances* aspired to fulfill the medium's calling. The camera's eye for detail is ideal to capture the life of a child, whose energy and folly is bound up with a fascination for the facets of things, for units, for trifles—far better suited than literature at any rate since "the literary optique" is "too synthesizing."[99]

The sparse *profondeur de champ* of Leenhardt's first feature is more than a nod to American cinema. His postwar realist style is an expression of a newfound belief that if everything captured by the camera is viewed as if through a magnifying glass, then the filmmaker need not cut in to closer views to draw out the details of everyday life. The camera can be positioned at a distance with figures and objects staged on multiple planes, sometimes simultaneously. The

uniqueness of cinema rests in the camera's power to encourage the observant perception of our youth, when we picked out the little curiosities within the expansiveness of life.

Leenhardt's first feature aimed to show that it was the purview of the novel, not cinema, to tell stories that cohere as literary or intellectual wholes. *Les dernières vacances* was thus conceived as a modernist experiment in the unique capabilities of film in relation to literature. If recent cinema relied on an aestheticized style and trite characters, the challenge that Leenhardt's "first novel" posed to contemporary filmmakers rested in the attempt to innovate a transparent form parallel to the novel, one that inconspicuously presented—without synthesizing reflection or comment—both the experiences of fresh characters and the settings they inhabit. A truly vanguard film respected cinema's distinctiveness as an art by gently casting light on those aspects of modern life that often go unnoticed.

However, this challenge, at least initially, went unheard. *Les dernières vacances* had a short theatrical run, and the first reviews revealed that critics had largely failed to understand it on its own terms.[100] It had become, in other words, a notorious *film maudit.* But mere months before Objectif 49's founding, the tide began to turn. The critics of Saint-Germain-des-Prés began to make the case that audiences and exhibitors had been too hasty in their assessment of the film. Principal among them was one of the founding members of the ciné-club, Claude Mauriac, whose pedigree—his father was the novelist François Mauriac—made him an authority on cinema with literary aspirations. In a combative review for *Le figaro littéraire*, he elevated Leenhardt as a true auteur whose new style revealed just how old-fashioned aestheticized filmmaking had become: "All that interests us are the ends pursued [in cinema], which is for a Welles, a Wyler or a Hitchcock the discovery of the precise means of expression for what they have to say. . . . Of this new form of writing we have this week an explosive demonstration with a film devoid of explosive effects, a film that effectively demonstrates that virtuosity, more or less old fashioned, has no place here."[101] He concluded by comparing Leenhardt with the Hollywood filmmaker he admired most: "Believe me if I tell you that *Les dernières vacances* is a film that will set an example: Wyler's Jansenism finds its equivalent in Leenhardt's Protestantism, and with this sober rigor a new avant-garde has arrived." With critical and artistic interventions that subtly repositioned realism as a process of *dépouillement* of the image and of overall deaestheticization, and now with enthusiastic members of the cultural press throwing their rhetorical (and soon, institutional) support behind him, Leenhardt took his position as a trendsetter who had cleared a path for the bold aesthetics of simplicity central to Objectif 49's intervention.

(AESTHETIC) OBJECTIVE RUINED, THEN RENEWED: DEATH OF A CLUB, BIRTH OF A JOURNAL

> Satie teaches what, in our age, is the greatest audacity, simplicity.
>
> —Jean Cocteau[102]

In 1918, Cocteau mounted a defense of the audacity of simplicity in French music. In contrast to the excesses of Wagnerian impressionism, the new music of France—especially Erik Satie's *Socrate* (1918), a three-act symphonic drama known for its sparse orchestration—innovated by reinterpreting tradition and stripping it of excess while also attempting to capture the vitality of the everyday: "Simplicity must not be taken to be the synonym of 'poverty,' or to mean a retrogression." Rather, "simplicity progresses in the same way as refinement."[103] Satie had become "sick to death of flabbiness, fluidity, superfluity, frills and all the modern sleight-of-hand," and "though often tempted by a technique of which he knows the ultimate resources, Satie voluntarily abstained, in order to . . . remain simple, clear and luminous."[104]

Cocteau's celebration of this audacious new simplicity had a significant influence on the vanguard musical styles of the 1920s.[105] That he later praised the *nouvelle avant-garde* of postwar cinema using almost identical language is quite revealing. He clearly believed that the broad aesthetic impulse that had defined French music in the immediate post–World War I period was now inspiring the vanguard of narrative filmmaking after World War II. Similar to Erik Satie, auteurs like Roger Leenhardt were ushering in a new era of purified technique, sparse narrative, and rigorous refinement of earlier styles. The traditions that Leenhardt reinterpreted were from various media. He drew on what Stéphanie Smadja has dubbed the "style simple" of *NRF* novelists as well as the restrained *profondeur de champ* of Wyler and Welles.[106] And if properly promoted, Cocteau calculated, Leenhardt's refinements to these literary and cinematic forms would set French cinema once again on a path of discovery, in terms of realist style and psychologically nuanced and intelligent subject matter.

Simplified aesthetics, however, did not have the same influence on late 1940s and early 1950s cinema as it had in musical circles in the 1920s. In 1953, on the eve of the publication of François Truffaut's "Une certaine tendance du cinéma français" (A certain tendency in French cinema), critics like Jacques Doniol-Valcroze were still hailing *Les dernières vacances* as part of an "internal" avant-garde that challenged convention by turning cinema into a legitimate means of expression.[107] But by this time, the Objectif 49 intervention was over. As early as 1952, the ideas that drove the club's search for a *nouvelle avant-garde*

were even deemed old-fashioned.[108] What led to the precipitate demise of the club's aesthetic intervention?

As we learned earlier, some historians attribute the club's collapse to a generational shift that took place when younger cinephiles like Jacques Rivette expressed dissatisfaction over the Rendez-Vous de Biarritz festival, Objectif 49's third and final festival in 1950. But there is another side to the story, and it proves pertinent to our reassessment of Leenhardtian realism and the aesthetic history of Objectif 49.

Citing Rivette's October 1950 review of the festival as the date of the club's downfall sets the end of the historical sequence both too early and too late. Recall that in this article we have been tracing the development of Objectif's aesthetic history, that is, the evolution of artistic theories and practices that were viewed as cornerstones of the *nouvelle avant-garde*. And if aesthetics are our focus, then October 1950 is too late because one of the club's founders declared in July 1950 that Objectif 49 had failed to generate the artistic change it had promised. Other influential members of the club abandoned the movement even earlier, in April 1950, because the promotion of a stylistic and storytelling revolution based on the values of restraint and modesty figured less and less in the organization of the club's events. However, October 1950 is also too early to date the end of Objectif 49's aesthetic intervention because some of the aesthetic principles and concerns that had originally placed this new avant-garde "under the auspices of simplicity" motivated several of the club's founders to undertake a new project, the founding of a journal of screenplays and essays.[109]

Considering aesthetics then leads to an entirely different chronology for the club, one that emphasizes continuity between its prehistory and its posthistory. A number of the aesthetic ideals that shaped the club's intervention were in place in 1945 (or even in 1938, when Leenhardt first noted the virtues of Wyler's *style dépouillé*). Furthermore, the club's intervention on behalf of sparse aesthetics and the crisis of content ended slowly, in a protracted one-year period between April 1950 and April 1951, when *Cahiers du cinéma* first appeared on newsstands.

Let's briefly examine the accounts of three leading members of Objectif 49 as they take stock of the club's abating influence on postwar aesthetics, both in terms of film style and culture. Claude Mauriac's version of Objectif 49's demise emphasized its lack of influence on film style. In a January 1950 issue of *Le figaro littéraire*, he celebrated Objectif 49's short-term impact on critical discourse; it had inspired a new "creative criticism" and "launched the fertile notion of the new avant-garde."[110] But by July 1950, he was declaring the "Petite mort du cinéma" (Cinema's little death), the bold title of a piece also published in *Le figaro littéraire*. Objectif 49 had failed to launch a new avant-garde "because that new

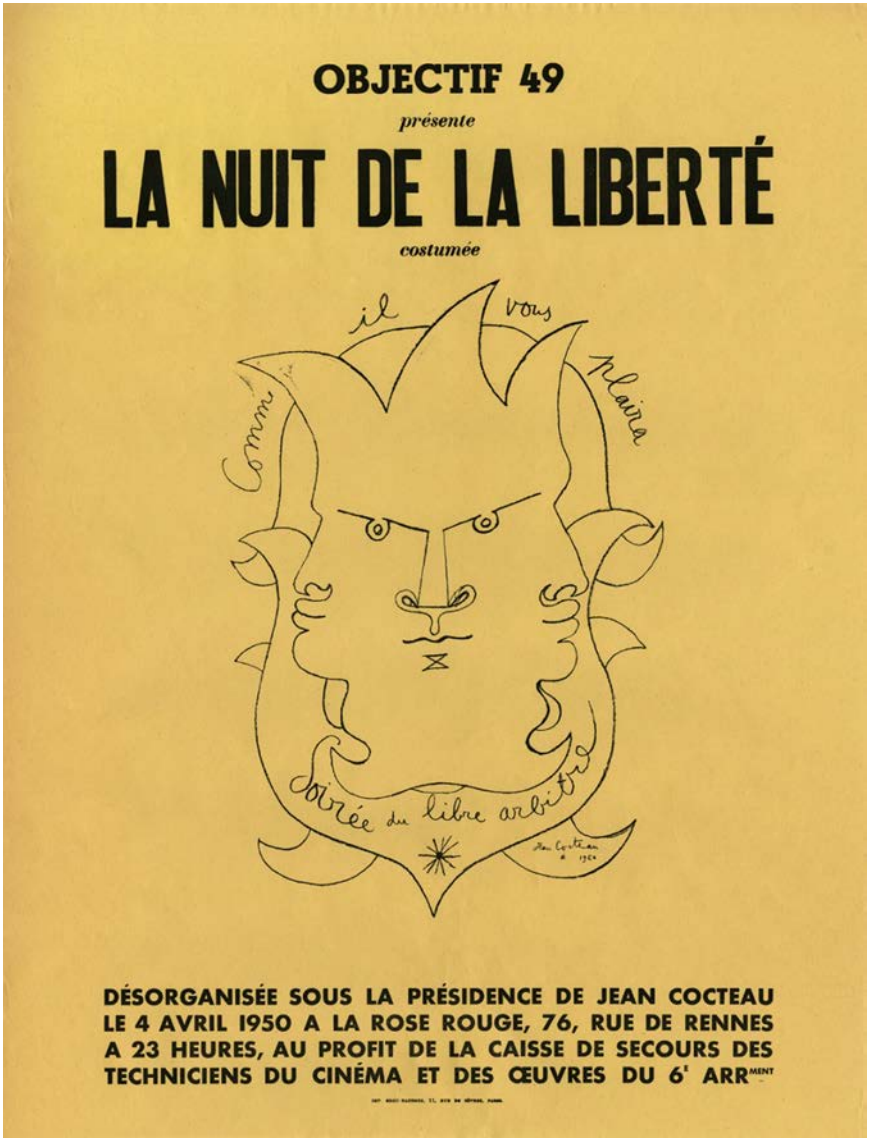

Fig. 14: Objectif 49 advertisement for the Nuit de la Liberté benefit event, April 4, 1950

avant-garde did not exist."[111] A truly "modern art" of cinema never emerged, for while "beautiful" new movies continue to be made, "they aren't doing anything interesting."[112] The reason for this was quite simple. The aesthetic theories that defined Objectif 49's original mission were ignored: "The subtle critical

constructions of Roger Leenhardt, André Bazin and your humble servant could, in the end, change nothing."[113]

Mauriac believed that the club's initial plan to define and nurture a new avant-garde had been betrayed by the summer of 1950. Other founding members held on, even as they blamed the club's woes on younger cinephiles. Jacques Doniol-Valcroze promoted the club's continued significance in a September 1950 issue of *Gazette du cinéma*. On the eve of the Rendez-Vous de Biarritz festival, he proclaimed that although the club and its "imprudent movement" had "gone dark" and presented few events in recent months, the upcoming festival would "attempt to draw the public's attention to those who move forward [*marchent de l'avant*], those who 'risk' not in order to shock or make news, but out of a passionate love for the art of cinema."[114] Still very much committed to the Objectif 49 cause, Doniol-Valcroze also penned a lengthy (and at times very personal) rebuke of Rivette's review of the festival in the November 1950 issue of the journal. He called out the "generation of Rivette and other 'cinemaniacs'" for sabotaging the Objectif 49 "adventure," especially at the Rendez-Vous festival, where they had "scribbled the words 'pornographic film' on the posters promoting certain films, to no doubt make our work easier."[115] Rivette and other festival attendees, he pointed out somewhat bitterly, had simply failed to recognize the importance of the club, for even though it had discovered auteurs like Antonioni and Ray (Doniol-Valcroze emphasizes that Rivette himself had praised the Rendez-Vous festival's schedule of films), young cinephiles had inexplicably criticized the festival's (and the club's) lack of unifying vision.[116]

However, according to Leenhardt, the club ended "somewhat pitifully" during an event held six months earlier, on April 4, 1950.[117] A promotional advertisement announced that the event, "disorganized under the Presidency of Jean Cocteau," would support a local film group (fig. 14). The ad, designed by Cocteau, includes the inscription, "As You Like It," and on the bottom edge, "An Evening of Free Will." A young screenwriter, Paul DéGauff, understood the event as an invitation to push the limits of taste, which he did by coming dressed in a Nazi uniform.[118] The spectacle alienated Leenhardt and signaled the club's collapse:

> I don't know who on the team decided to organize a costume ball with the provocative title of "La nuit de la liberté" at *la Rose rouge*. Is it my intellectualism, my puritanism? At any rate, at the time I considered it a little stupid, a lapse in taste, to mix our stylistic experiments with a ludic soirée that anticipated the happenings of the 1960s. So I tendered my resignation, and the group disintegrated not long thereafter. Cocteau, who made a drawing for the

> *La nuit de la liberté* invitation, sent me a kind letter about all of this. "I so love youth," he wrote, "that I allow myself to be drawn in by its errors."[119]

Leenhardt believed, then, that Objectif 49 folded primarily due to a collision of values—a commitment to an avant-garde of stylistic experimentation (in terms of restraint) clashing with an emerging countercultural element that wanted to stage avant-garde events that confronted bourgeois notions of decency.

Many factors appear to have precipitated the club's end: public declarations by founders that their aesthetic revolution had failed, equally public (and acrimonious) exchanges between founders and young cinephiles over the vision behind its festivals, and a collision of values that drew Objectif 49 events away from stylistic experiments and toward exhibitionist spectacles.[120]

But Leenhardt helped to ensure that the club's aesthetic ideals would survive in some form. His belief that there was a crisis in French cinema, which had motivated his search for new models of storytelling from literature and his adoption of a realist *style dépouillé*, would, for a brief time, continue to find support among the club's founders even after its demise.[121] He does not date these events precisely, but soon after the Nuit de la Liberté, he and members of the *nouvelle critique* movement embarked upon a project that would remain focused on cinema and thus avoid the trappings of elaborate balls and festivals.[122] With the recent folding of Auriol's *Revue du cinéma* in October 1949 and with *L'écran français* shifting to a stauncher Communist Party line (to the frustration of many cinephiles), the marketplace presented an opening: "With the same team, I tried to give 'Objectif 49' a serious and more enduring sequel by founding a journal."[123] "My idea was as follows," Leenhardt explains: "It was time to create a journal that . . . gave over most of its space to screenplays and reviews (or essays) on films—in short, a journal centered on cinema."[124] He does not make this point explicitly in his memoir, but it seems reasonable to suppose that he believed that publishing scripts—that is, using the journal to support the exploration of new storytelling forms, which *Cahiers* did on occasion in its first decade[125]—would contribute to alleviating the crisis of subject matter that had concerned him since 1945. So, "flanked by André Bazin and Jacques Doniol-Valcroze," he pitched the idea to Paul Flamand, editor of the Éditions du seuil publishing house.[126] Flamand reportedly saw promise in the idea, but he had recently launched two new journals and turned the project down. Nevertheless, the seeds for *Cahiers du cinéma* had been planted, and with the financial support of theater owner Léonide Keigel, its first issue was published in April 1951.[127]

* * *

As more evidence emerges about Objectif 49 and its history, we will be able to refine our sense of the role that each of its presidents and members played in the club's founding, outlook, and influence. We may one day be in a position to theorize that other factors shaped the club's aesthetics. For the moment, it seems fair, however, to conclude that Leenhardt's writings and debut feature played a substantial part in the development of the club's mission.

We can also conclude that, to an extent that has gone unnoticed so far in scholarly literature, the aspirations and the fates of Leenhardt and Objectif 49 were intertwined. Under the banner of Objectif 49, Leenhardt's art and ideas were never more recognized. However, like the club, his career as a feature filmmaker was unstable. This, along with Leenhardt's penchant for dabbling and preference for a relatively low profile in film and media culture, perhaps explains why we now view him primarily as a critic rather than as a major auteur.[128] In early 1948, he and Breuil delivered to Gérin a screenplay that adapted an innovative contemporary story with no male characters—Federico García Lorca's three-act play, *The House of Bernarda Alba* (1945). Maria Casarès was hired for a major role, but the project was scrapped after a legal dispute over rights to the property.[129] After the collapse of Objectif 49, Leenhardt returned to short filmmaking and periodically wrote essays and participated in critical roundtables. In 1957, he was one of *Cahiers du cinéma*'s "Six Characters in Search of Auteurs," a discussion in which he reiterated his concern for the crisis of content in French cinema.[130] The New Wave era benefited his independent filmmaking but only to a degree. Taking advantage of advance on receipts funding in 1962, he was finally able to complete a second feature, the stylistically eclectic (and ultimately uneven) *Le rendez-vous de minuit*.[131] Subsequently, he again returned to shorts, where he remained for the rest of his career.[132] In 1964, critic Claude Beylie included him in an article charting the prehistory of the *nouvelle vague* for the journal *Séquence*. He described Leenhardt as an auteur who sought to "*dedramatize*" cinema, to expose "a certain retrograde conception of cinematic *spectacle*."[133] But no mention was made of the importance of these aesthetic commitments to the origins of the *nouvelle avant-garde* between 1948 and 1950. Major auteurs of his generation, like Bresson, Jacques Becker, and Jean-Pierre Melville, continued to explore the *dépouillement* of image and sound in their films, but the roles that Leenhardt and Objectif 49 played in elevating sparseness to the vanguard of postwar cinema were quickly forgotten.

Notes

I would like to thank Sidney Jézéquel who generously provided me with research materials and answered all of my questions in the preparation of this article. It could not have been written without him. I also thank the anonymous *Film History* reader and Dudley Andrew for their invaluable feedback

1. Roger Leenhardt, *Chroniques du cinéma* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1986).

2. Roger Leenhardt, "La petite école du spectateur," in *Chroniques du cinéma* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1986), 37–56, translated as Roger Leenhardt, "Cinematic Rhythm," in *French Film Theory and Criticism*, vol. 2, *1929–1939*, ed. Richard Abel (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 200–201.

3. The original use of this moniker is cited in Louis Marcolles, "Interview: Roger Leenhardt with Jacques Rivette," *Sight and Sound* 32, no. 4 (Autumn 1963): 168. For an example of the Father of the New Wave trend in recent French criticism, see Michel Marie, "Les seconds couteaux de la nouvelle vague," *CinémAction* 104 (July 2002): 52.

   Some French researchers are beginning to explore Leenhardt's documentary practice; see Roselyne Quéméner, "Le romancier et son personnage: *François Mauriac* de Roger Leenhardt," in *Le court métrage français de 1945 à 1969*, vol. 2, *Documentaire, fiction: Allers-retours*, ed. Antony Fian and Roxane Hamery (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2008), 217–24. Such research is a welcome development that, in my estimation, ought to be balanced with a renewed focus on his importance to the history of narrative filmmaking. Consider, for instance, that many of his fifty-two shorts are dramas (*Le rezzou*, 1936, codirected with René Zuber) and docudramas (*La fugue de Mahmoud*, 1952), and his nonfiction works often create intriguing parallels between cinema and other storytelling forms, like the novel (*François Mauriac*, 1953) and medieval tapestries (*La conquête de l'Angleterre*, 1955). Some also contain fictionalized reenactments (*Naissance du cinéma*, 1946).

4. Dudley Andrew, "A Film Aesthetic to Discover," *Cinémas* 17, nos. 1–2 (Spring 2007): 57.

5. When he broke into the industry at Éclair studios in Épinay, Leenhardt spent four months at the side of film editor Paula Tsang (Neurisse), who was at work on the final cut of *Crainquebille* (1934). In January 1934, when Tsang was assigned to edit the weekly newsreel *Éclair Journal*, Leenhardt was brought on as her assistant. The experience proved to be formative: "I've said it a thousand times to young men and women who want to make movies that they should start out in editing"; see Roger Leenhardt, *Les yeux ouverts: Entretiens avec Jacques Lacouture* (Paris: Éditions du seuil, 1979), 68.

6. Andrew, "A Film Aesthetic to Discover," 58.

7. Ibid., 59; emphasis in original.

8. Objectif 49 did not invent the label *new avant-garde*; rather, the club appropriated it to draw attention to new forms of narrative filmmaking. In this, the club was ignoring the editors of *Revue du cinéma*, who, in the earliest appearance of the term I could find, dismiss efforts to revive the avant-garde after the Liberation; see "Editorial (à propos d'une avant-garde nouvelle)," *La revue du cinéma* 7 (Summer 1947): 3–11.

9. Richard Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave Cinema*, 2nd ed. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007), 26; and Frédéric Gimello-Mesplomb, *Objectif 49: Cocteau et la nouvelle avant-garde* (Paris: Séguier, 2014), 9.

   Gimello-Mesplomb's is the first book-length study of the ciné-club, so it deserves comment, particularly in light of our vastly different approaches. First,

Gimello-Mesplomb and I emphasize two distinct bodies of primary literature in recounting the history of Objectif 49. Primarily an institutional history, *Objectif 49: Cocteau et la nouvelle avant-garde* argues that the club's main legacy is the path it cleared for "art et essai" theaters, which sprang up between 1950 and 1955. The author also stresses that the club did not promote any single aesthetic theory (either Bazin's or Leenhardt's) (18–19); instead, Objectif 49 remained "ecumenical" and "pragmatic" (55), and notions of "quality" and "new avant-garde" varied throughout its existence. But was the club's new avant-garde therefore entirely open?

Written for the Festival of Film Maudit catalogue, Bazin's essay, "L'avant-garde nouvelle," reveals that Objectif 49's very mission was to restore "a literal sense" to the term *avant-garde*, "and from this, its relativism"; see André Bazin, "L'avant-garde nouvelle," in *Festival du Film Maudit* (Paris: Éditions Mazarine, 1949). In principle, then, the club's notion of what constituted an avant-garde film remained open. However, in practice, the club favored specific kinds of aesthetic traditions (genres, styles, narrative forms, etc.). In this paper, I therefore build on Gimello-Mesplomb's conclusions about the club's ecumenism by tracing the history of one such aesthetic and its association with the club's conception of the new avant-garde—that of a cinema of simplicity. This aesthetic trend owes much to Leenhardt's theories, which therefore play a decisive role in this aspect of the club's history.

Here is a second difference between Gimello-Mesplomb's research and my own: on page 53, he accounts for Leenhardt's copresidency by pointing to his mentorship of André Bazin and their shared passion for realism and revulsion for "ostentatious" approaches to mise-en-scène style. I do not contest these hypotheses as much as I wish to explain why the club's founders and supporters viewed this revulsion, and the oeuvre of Roger Leenhardt, as vanguard. (As it pertains to Leenhardt, one should note that on page 161 Gimello-Mesplomb offers an insightful discussion of his role as the head of a 1962 CNC commission tasked with defining the concept of "cinéma art et essai," which has, according to this historian, no connection with Leenhardt's part in the Objectif 49 movement.)

A quick word on terminology is also in order at this stage. Although I have occasionally seen the club referred to as "Objectif 48" or "Objectif 48/49" by later critics and historians—see Dudley Andrew, *What Cinema Is!* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2011), 151—all of the contemporary sources I rely on in this piece refer to it as Objectif 49. The provenance of the Objectif 48 moniker is unknown to me.

10. André Bazin, "Défense de l'avant-garde," *L'écran français*, December 21, 1948, 1.

11. Jean Charles Tacchella, "When Jean Cocteau Was President of a Cine-Club: Objectif 49 and the Festival of *Film maudit*," in *Cocteau*, ed. Dominique Païni (London: Paul Holberton, 2003), 84.

12. Bazin, "Défense de l'avant-garde," 1.

13. Ibid.

14. Jean Cocteau, "Il importe de nous expliquer sur le sens exact du terme 'maudit' . . . ," in *Festival du Film Maudit* catalogue.

15. André Bazin, "Le Festival du Film Maudit s'est terminé cette nuit," *Parisien libéré*, August 6, 1949, 2.

16. In this article, I focus on the aesthetic history of Objectif 49, by which I mean the following: those generative mechanisms that shaped period expectations about what constituted the *nouvelle avant-garde*, especially in stylistic, thematic, and narrative terms. The generative mechanisms I privilege—critical discourse (section two of the article) and

independent filmmaking (section three)—both center on Leenhardt and demonstrate the role he played in influencing the critical vocabulary and frames of reference that determined the club's effort to launch a new avant-garde between 1948 and 1950. For more on this approach, see Robert Allen and Douglas Gomery, *Film History* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1985), 79–80, 89–90.

17. Roger Leenhardt, "Malraux et le cinéma," in *Chroniques du cinéma* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1986), 96.

18. Armand Gourmelen, "Le 'Festival du Film Maudit' et le 'Rendez-Vous de Biarritz' (Biarritz, 1949 et 1950)," *1895* 29 (December 1999): 123; Jacques Rivette, "Bilan sur Biarritz," *Gazette du cinéma* 4 (October 1950): 1–2. Gimello-Mesplomb accepts this explanation as well; see Gimello-Mesplomb, *Objectif 49*, 147–50.

19. Dividing these two postwar factions into distinct generations is problematic because their age groups overlap slightly. The Objectif 49 generation was born mainly between 1889 and 1920: Jean Cocteau (1889), Robert Bresson (1901), Roger Leenhardt (1903), Claude Mauriac (1914), André Bazin (1918), Jacques Doniol-Valcroze (1920) and Alexandre Astruc (1923). The younger cinephiles were born between 1920 and 1932: Éric Rohmer (1920), Jacques Rivette (1928), Jean Douchet (1929), Charles Bitsch (1931) and François Truffaut (1932).

20. Leenhardt, *Les yeux ouverts*, 142, 163.

21. Tacchella, "When Jean Cocteau Was President," 83. Bazin claims that films like Robert Bresson's reveal the "risks" of quality cinema in "La difficile définition de la qualité," *Radio-télévision-cinéma* 64 (1951): 6.

22. Tacchella, "When Jean Cocteau Was President," 83.

23. Alexandre Astruc, "Naissance d'une nouvelle avant-garde, la caméra-stylo," *L'écran français*, March 30, 1948, 98–99.

24. Tacchella, "When Jean Cocteau Was President," 84. For more on Keigel's importance in the period, see Gimello-Mesplomb, *Objectif 49*, 50.

25. Tacchella, "When Jean Cocteau Was President," 84n1, 85. For a full Objectif 49 filmography, see appendices 1–3 in Gimello-Mesplomb, *Objectif 49*, 213–24.

26. Dudley Andrew, *André Bazin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 141. See also Gimello-Mesplomb, *Objectif 49*, 64–71, for an extensive account of the event and its implications.

27. Leenhardt, *Les yeux ouverts*, 163.

28. Gourmelen, "Le 'Festival du Film Maudit,'" 111; Gimello-Mesplomb, *Objectif 49*, 80.

29. Raphäel Dupouy, "Kaddour: Maison du marquis d'Arcangues," *Figure libre: Le petit journal du réseau Lalan* 13 (February 2002).

30. Robert Bresson, "Le festival du film maudit," in *Bresson par Bresson* (Paris: Flammarion, 2013), 43.

31. Sidney Jézéquel, e-mail message to author, June 13, 2013.

32. For a detailed institutional and reception study of the Festival of Film Maudit, see Gimello-Mesplomb, *Objectif 49*, 75–133.

33. Gourmelen, "Le 'Festival du Film Maudit,'" 112–14.

34. Cited in Gourmelen, "Le 'Festival du Film Maudit,'" 119.

35. Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, "Les yeux ouverts," *Gazette du cinéma* 5 (November 1950): 3.

36. Ibid., 3.

37. Tacchella, "When Jean Cocteau Was President," 98; Gourmelen, "Le 'Festival du Film Maudit,'" 118.

38. Gimello-Mesplomb, *Objectif 49*, 157.

39. Thomas Elsaesser, *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), 100.

40. Roger Leenhardt, "Continuité du cinéma français," in *Chroniques du cinéma* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1986), 135.

41. Roger Leenhardt, "Le cinéma et les arts plastiques," in *Chroniques du cinéma* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1986), 208.

42. Ibid.

43. Louis Daquin, *Le cinéma, notre métier* (Paris: Les éditeurs français réunis Paris, 1960), 115. The question of the relation of form to content was not only a major one in the era but was also linked to assessments of the perceived crisis in French cinema. See André Bazin, "De la forme et la fond, ou la 'crise' du cinéma," in *Almanach du théâtre et du cinéma* (Paris: Éditions du Flore, 1951), 171–77.

44. Roger Leenhardt, "Le film qu'il faut voir: *Les dames du bois de Boulogne*," in *Chroniques du cinéma* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1986), 126.

45. Roger Leenhardt, "*Sylvie et le fantôme*," in *Chroniques du cinéma* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1986), 128.

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid.

48. Roger Leenhardt, "Bilan autour d'une crise," in *Chroniques du cinéma* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1986), 141.

49. *Cinéaste de notre temps: Roger Leenhardt ou le dernier humaniste*, directed by André Labarthe (1965; Paris: Office de Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française, 1975), VHS.

50. *Cinéaste de notre temps.*

51. André Bazin, "*The Last Vacation*, or the Style Is the Man Himself," in *Bazin at Work: Majors Essays and Reviews from the Forties and Fifties*, ed. Bert Cardullo (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 145.

52. Stéphanie Smadja distinguishes between the "style simple" and "style complexe" of the *NRF* writers in *La nouvelle prose française: Étude sur la prose narrative au début des années 1920* (Pessac: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 2013).

53. *Cinéaste de notre temps.* For the Gide citation, see André Gide, *Si le grain ne meurt: Souvenirs et voyages* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 255.

54. Pamela Antonia Genova, *André Gide dans le labyrinthe de la mythotextualité* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1995), 117. The author also describes how Gide developed a sparse visual style for the set design of his three-act play, *Oedipe* (1930).

55. Roger Leenhardt, "Le baroque et le réel," in *Chroniques du cinéma* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1986), 119.

56. David Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 59; Roger Leenhardt, "À bas Ford, vive Wyler!" in *Chroniques du cinéma* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1986), 157–59.

57. Leenhardt, "À bas Ford, vive Wyler!" 158–59.

58. Leenhardt, "Malraux et le cinéma," 96.

59. Roger Leenhardt, "L'eros, la plume et la caméra," in *Chroniques du cinéma* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1986), 198.

60. Gimello-Mesplomb, *Objectif 49*, 35, 38, 45, 69, 104.

61. Antoine de Baecque, "Bazin in Combat," in *Opening Bazin: Postwar Film Theory and Its Afterlife*, ed. Dudley Andrew (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 227.

62. Jean-Paul Sartre, "*Citizen Kane*," trans. Dana Polan, *Post Script: Essays in Film and the Humanities* 7, no. 1 (Fall 1987): 64, original emphasis.

63. Andrew, *André Bazin*, 35.

64. André Bazin, "The Techniques of *Citizen Kane*," in *Bazin at Work*, ed. Cardullo, 237, 235.

65. *Ciné-Ressources-Fiche Personnalité*, s.v. "Roger Leenhardt," accessed July 5, 2014, http://cinema.encyclopedie.personnalites.bifi.fr/index.php?pk=14238.

66. Roger Leenhardt, "La génie d'Orson Welles, dans un pamphlet social d'une audace inconnue," *L'écran français*, July 3, 1946, 6.

67. Ibid.

68. Ibid.; the emphasis at the end is my own.

69. Ibid.

70. Roger Leenhardt, "La malédiction de l'intelligence," *Festival du Film Maudit* catalogue.

71. Leenhardt, "La malédiction de l'intelligence."

72. Jean Queval, "Dialogue avec Robert Bresson," *L'écran français*, November 12, 1946, 12. I omit here the interview (cited above) Bresson gave promoting the Festival of Film Maudit.

73. See the firm's website, www.frl.fr.

74. Georges Sadoul, "*La naissance du cinéma*," *Lettres françaises*, July 5, 1946, n.p.; "*Naissance du cinéma*," *L'humanité*, December 18, 1946, n.p.; "Un documentaire," *Combat*, December 21, 1946, n.p.; Jean Mery, review of *Naissance du cinéma*, *Franc-tireur*, December 21, 1946, n.p.; review of *Naissance du cinéma*, *Opéra*, January 1, 1947, n.p.; review of *Naissance du cinéma*, *Spectateur*, January 7, 1947, n.p.

75. Bazin, "*The Last Vacation*," 141.

76. Ibid., 141, 148.

77. Sidney Jézéquel, *L'avant-dernier des protestants: Roger Jézéquel dit Roger Breuil* (Paris: FRL, 2007), 692.

78. LPC's capital base was modest: 500,000 francs. According to one source, Union générale cinématographique (UGC), a vertically integrated state firm until its restructuring in 1955, was capitalized at 200 million francs when it was created in 1945; see Valérie Vignaux, *Jacques Becker, ou, l'exercise de la liberté* (Liège: Éditions de céfal, 2000), 76.

79. "Dernières vacances: Rapport," 25 March 1947, *Les dernières vacances* file, CN17-B13, Bibliothèque du film, Paris, France. Gérin borrowed 9 million francs from France's Crédit National, 3.5 million from one of the country's largest private investment firms, the Société Générale de Crédit Industriel et Commercial (currently the CIC), and advances and contributions of over 14 million from the film's distributor, Les Films Constellations, and other sources.

    It is important to note that the production of *Les dernières vacances* was undertaken in a period before the state's automatic aid (1948), quality reward (1953,1955), and advance on receipts measures came into effect, which ensured that it would remain a risky venture since Gérin had to repay the loans in their entirety at market (as opposed to state-regulated) interest rates. For a splendidly detailed overview of the state's policies after 1946, see Frédéric Gimello-Mesplomb, "La 'qualité' comme clef de voûte de la politique française du cinéma: Retour sur la genèse du régime du soutien sélectif à la production (1953–1959)," in *Le cinéma, une affaire d'état 1945–1970*, ed. Dimitri Vezyroglou (Paris: La documentation française, 2014), 57–75.

80. Albert t'Serstevens, *L'homme qui fut Blaise Cendrars: Souvenirs* (Paris: Denoël, 1972), 52.

81. Breuil's role on the *Dernières vacances* project was a substantial one. In published and unpublished accounts, Sidney Jézéquel, Breuil's son, reconstructs the minute details of the Leenhardt-Breuil partnership. Although *Dernières vacances*'s opening credits present him as *dialoguiste*, Breuil, Jézéquel reveals, is described in December 1946 financial records as the coauthor (with Leenhardt) of an "adaptation cinématographique" based on Junod's "original idea"; see Sidney Jézéquel, "Chapter 39: *Les dernières vacances*" (unpublished manuscript, 2005), 5. It would appear, then, that from a writing standpoint, the film was a team effort, even though commentary on Leenhardt tends to interpret *Les dernières vacances* as a "solitary auteur" vehicle; see Bazin, "*The Last Vacation*," 132.

82. According to Jézéquel, Leenhardt feared that the subject, set in the interwar era, was inappropriate for a period of recovery from war; Jézéquel, *L'avant-dernier des protestants*, 693. Apparently changing his mind on the matter, the final version of *Les dernières vacances* is set "closer to 1914/1918 than 1939/1940"; see Roger Leenhardt, "Remarques préliminaires," 25 March 1947, *Les dernières vacances* file, CN17-B13, Bibliothèque du film.

83. Financial records from late 1946 (which is to say, several months before the film went into production on April 24, 1947) reveal that at first Leenhardt was only slated to write the film's *découpage* and dialogues. Although the film's credits make no reference to it, he was also responsible for an adaptation. Early in the preproduction phase, the *droits d'auteur* (a term used in these records) were attributed to Maurice Junod. See "Dernières vacances: Rapport," 23 December 1946, *Les dernières vacances* file, CN17-B13, Bibliothèque du film. Aside from this, research reveals very little about Junod, and no copy of his original story has ever turned up. The mystery surrounding Junod's role in the film is explored in depth in Jézéquel, *L'avant-dernier des protestants*, 691–710.

84. Jézéquel, *L'avant-dernier des protestants*, 693.

85. I describe four creative processes and directorial management styles (laissez-faire, democratic, paternalistic, and autocratic) in Colin Burnett, "Hidden Hands at Work: Authorship, the Intentional Flux, and the Dynamics of Collaboration," in *A Companion to Media Authorship*, ed. Jonathan Gray and Derek Johnson (Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 129.

86. This was hardly a carte-blanche project that allowed the team complete artistic freedom, however. Gérin dismissed an early draft by Breuil for deviating too heavily from Junod's story, which he clearly admired. See Jézéquel, "*Les dernières vacances*" (unpublished manuscript), 2.

87. Strict French studio standards recommended a sequential approach where one version of the script would be worked on at a time to preserve an efficient division of labor in the story-development and dialogue-writing stages. See Colin Crisp, *The Classic French Cinema, 1930–1960* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 304, where we learn that the common practice of the postwar era was one "in which a scenarist was commissioned to develop a treatment and delivered it to the producer, who commissioned him or another to adapt it; this in turn was delivered to the producer, at which point it passed to a dialoguist, and he in turn worked on it for a few weeks before shooting, or sometimes phoning in the day's dialogues the night before." Jézéquel, himself a screenwriter and director, emphasizes that Leenhardt and Breuil did not divide the work as much as they set off on separate creative paths that at calculated moments converged; see Jézéquel, "*Les dernières vacances*" (unpublished manuscript), 6.

88. By March 1947 Gérin had come to recognize the extent of Leenhardt's revisions to the original story idea and, as a result, the compensation structure was altered to reflect this. He and Junod would now share the *droits d'auteur* compensation for the manuscript (75,000 and 50,000 francs apiece); see "Devis détaillé du film: Dernières vacances," 21 March 1947, *Les dernières vacances* file, CN17-B13, Bibliothèque du film.

89. Jézéquel, "*Les dernières vacances*" (unpublished manuscript), 3.

90. Cited in ibid., 6.

91. Ibid., 7.

92. Ibid., 4.

93. Ibid.

94. Early in the preproduction stage, the plan was to bring in an experienced *réalisateur* like Georges Lacombe, Henri Calef, or Jean Faurez to take on this task once the script was complete. "Dernières vacances: Rapport," 23 December 1946.

95. Jézéquel, *L'avant-dernier des protestants*, 697.

96. Andrew, "A Film Aesthetic to Discover," 56.

97. Leenhardt, "Remarques préliminaires." This document was once again inspired by Gide, who composed a similar text to accompany his 1925 novel, *Les faux-monnayeurs* (*The Counterfeiters*); see *Cinéaste de notre temps.*

98. Ibid.

99. Ibid.

100. Jézéquel, "*Les dernières vacances*" (unpublished manuscript), 8.

101. Claude Mauriac, "*Dernières vacances,*" *Le figaro littéraire,* April 3, 1948, n.p.

102. Jean Cocteau, *Cock and Harlequin: Notes Concerning Music*, trans. Rollo H. Meyers (London: Egoist Press, 1921), 20.

103. Cocteau, *Cock and Harlequin*, 5.

104. Ibid., 26.

105. Martin Guerpin, "Why Did Art Music Composers Pay Attention to 'Jazz'? The Impact of 'Jazz' on the French Music Field, 1908–1924," in *Eurojazzland: Jazz and European Sources, Dynamics, and Contexts*, ed. Luca Cerchiari, Laurent Cugny, and Franz Kerschbaumer (Lebanon, NH: Northeastern University Press, 2012), 70–72.

106. Smadja, *La nouvelle prose française*, 70.

107. Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, "De l'avant-garde," in *Sept ans du cinéma français*, ed. Henri Agel, Jean-Pierre Barrot, and Jacques Doniol-Valcroze (Paris: Éditions du cerf, 1953), 16.

108. See the editors' note that introduces a 1952 reprint of the 1949 essay Bazin wrote for the Festival du Film Maudit catalogue, where it is reported that Bazin "does not hide from the fact that [the article] has aged a bit"; André Bazin, "L'avant-garde nouvelle [reprint]," *Cahiers du cinéma* 10 (March 1952): 16. See also remarks made by Jacques Doniol-Valcroze during a 1957 roundtable to the effect that the Objectif 49's "theories" that were being introduced into the discussion—by Roger Leenhardt (who argued that the fate of French cinema is tied to the fate of the French novel) and Pierre Kast (who stated that a legitimate auteur is one who "authors" both a film's visual style and its script)—are "outdated"; André Bazin, Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, Pierre Kast, Roger Leenhardt, Jacques Rivette, and Eric Rohmer, "Six Characters in Search of Auteurs," in "The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave," ed. Jim Hillier, special issue, *Cahiers du cinéma* (London: BFI: 1985), 38.

109. Cocteau, "Il importe de nous expliquer," in *Festival du Film Maudit* catalogue.

110. Cited in Le Minotaure, "Le film d'Ariane: Avant-Garde pas morte!" *L'écran français*, August 7, 1950, 1.

111. Cited in ibid.

112. Cited in ibid.

113. Cited in ibid.

114. Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, "Au rendez-vous des amoureux," *Gazette du cinéma* 3 (September 1950): 3.

115. Doniol-Valcroze, "Les yeux ouverts," 3.

116. Rivette praises many of the films screened at the festival in Jacques Rivette, "Les principaux films du Rendez-vous de Biarritz," *Gazette du cinéma* 4 (October 1950): 3.

117. Leenhardt, *Les yeux ouverts*, 165.

118. Ibid.

119. Ibid.

120. Certainly other developments, like Bazin's serious illness at the beginning of 1950, which kept him from the Rendez-Vous de Biarritz festival, and the premature death of Jean-George Auriol, struck dead by a car at the age of forty-three, weakened and perhaps even demoralized the movement. See Tacchella, "When Jean Cocteau Was President," 86.

121. Recent scholarship suggests further ways to measure Leenhardt's influence and other continuities between pre- and post-Objectif 49 eras. Although he does not address Objectif 49, Philip Watts has convincingly demonstrated that postwar criticism was marked by a return to classical aesthetic principles of "order, simplicity, balance, restraint," and "rhetorical transparency." See Philip Watts, "Jacques Rivette's Classical Illusion," *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 9, no. 3 (September 2005): 291.

122. Two other figures shared Leenhardt's sentiment that Objectif 49 events betrayed one of the club's original causes, namely vanguard cinema. If Astruc and Cocteau felt that Objectif 49's avant-garde could launch a new milieu where countercultural iconoclasts mingled with cinephiles and members of the cultural elite, François Truffaut found all-night gatherings like the Festival of Film Maudit's Accursed Night costume ball, organized by Astruc, "too social and fashionable"; see Antoine de Baecque and Serge Toubiana, *François Truffaut: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 48.

    Henri Langlois also appears to have been dismayed with the Festival of Film Maudit. Originally a supporter of Objectif 49, he launched the Festival du Film de Demain (Festival of Films of Tomorrow) in August 1950 in the quiet old coastal town of Antibes in an effort to strip the festival experience to the bare essentials. *Gazette du cinéma* reports that the festival was conceived as a true cinephile's reply to its ritzier predecessors: "Here, one is among friends, enthusiastic followers of the same cult whose rituals are more secretive than the public imagines. It's a good thing that on occasion the most popular of the arts dons an esoteric mask, and it was not unpleasant to have once again taken in the austere and familiar fragrance of the auditorium on the Avenue de Messine." See "Le festival du film de demain à Antibes," *Gazette du cinéma* 5 (September 1950): 1.

123. Leenhardt, *Les yeux ouverts*, 166.

124. Ibid.

125. *Cahiers du cinéma* published film dialogues and screenplays many times throughout the 1950s. To cite but a few instances: Éric Rohmer, "*Présentation* (scénario original)," *Cahiers du cinéma* 12 (May 1952): 72–75; Federico Fellini, "*Les nuits de Cabiria* (extraits)," *Cahiers du cinéma* 68 (February 1957): 15–24; Clifford Odets and James Poe, "Le stylo de MacArthur (*The Big Knife*: extrait des dialogues)," *Cahiers du cinéma* 64 (November 1956): 12–15; and Jean Cocteau, "*Les dames du bois de Boulogne* (dialogue)," *Cahiers du cinéma* 75–77 (October-December 1957): 16–23, 28–35, 23–33.

126. Leenhardt, *Les yeux ouverts*, 166.

127. Gimello-Mesplomb also sees an "indirect" link between Objectif 49 and the origins of *Cahiers du cinéma*; Gimello-Mesplomb, *Objectif 49*, 110–12. His account of the links, while insightful and well researched, overlooks Leenhardt's role and the fact that Leenhardt's interest in a new publication appears to have stemmed from his concern about the crisis of content (and form), which, as we have seen, is linked to his defense of a *style dépouillé* in the postwar years.

128. I explore this side of Leenhardt's character on my blog: "Who Was Roger Leenhardt? A Conversation with Documentary Filmmaker Sidney Jézéquel," *Colin Burnett at the Movies*, accessed December 3, 2014, https://colinatthemovies.wordpress.com/2014/10/14/in-search-of-roger-leenhardt-a-conversation-with-documentary-filmmaker-sidney-jezequel/.

129. Jézéquel, "*Les dernières vacances*" (unpublished manuscript), 11.

130. André Bazin et al., "Six Characters in Search of Auteurs," 37.

131. Centre nationale de la cinématographie, *45 ans d'avances sur recettes* (Paris: CNC, 2004).

132. There is one exception; he completed his adaptation of *Une fille dans la montagne* as a feature-length telefilm in 1964.

133. Claude Beylie, "Les précurseurs de la nouvelle vague," *Séquences: La revue de cinéma* 35 (1964): 6; original emphasis. The author states that Leenhardt, Astruc, Melville, and Varda are "true 'avant-garde' creators," but the point is a generic rather than historical one.