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Youth, Moral Panics, and the End of Cinema

On the Reception of
Rebel Without a Cause in Europe

La jeunesse est un temps pendant lequel les conventions sont et
doivent être mal comprises.

—Paul Valéry, *Monsieur Teste*



Introduction

IN HIS GROUNDBREAKING STUDY *The Stars* (1960),¹ French philosopher Edgar Morin argues that James Dean has been a key figure in the reconfiguration of cinema, the star system, and youth culture. Following Morin, Dean incorporated the ultimate modern adolescent film star. But his death also opened an era (between 1957 and 1962) where youth

culture moved away from cinema. Dean's angst-laden movies had shown a model for tormented young heroes, which was picked up and developed further on by rock 'n' roll music and French "chanson" or dance. Dean's movies were historically important for crystallizing a new form of youth culture, including forms of counterculture and a further dissociation from adults' entertainment. Cinema continued to be a juvenile attraction, but, according to Morin, the film industry was less successful in inspiring adolescents' search for pungent role models. According to young film critic François Truffaut,² who wrote a commemorative article one year after Dean's tragic death, *Rebel Without a Cause* had been one of the last truly influential films where contemporary (French) youth found itself.

Enjoying an outstanding success at the box office throughout Europe, *Rebel Without a Cause* has also been a controversial movie. Though the historical reception of Nicholas Ray's successful picture was sensitively influenced by Dean's death (September 30, 1955), it was far from recognized as a milestone in film and youth culture history. On the contrary, as we will indicate, when the movie was distributed in Europe (at the end of 1955 and in 1956), it was rather seen as an exploitation movie explicitly dealing with contemporary problems of adolescent crime.³ Framed as another juvenile delinquency movie from the United States, *Rebel Without a Cause* helped to whip up public debate on these issues.

This chapter deals with this public controversy around *Rebel Without a Cause*, concentrating on how the movie was received in various Western European countries including France, Germany, and the United Kingdom. Inspired by a materialist approach in relation to historical reception analysis,⁴ we try to understand the different social meaning(s) of *Rebel Without a Cause*, including the struggle around those meanings. The distribution of the movie being a well-publicized event, *Rebel* quickly became the target of intense debate, (external) pressures, and censorship. We argue that in various countries the movie as it was shown to the audience lost much of its original critical edge due to the operations by the industry, the press, national censorship boards, and religious interest groups. In order to understand the controversy and pressures upon the movie, we first need to locate *Rebel Without a Cause* in the context of the wider public debate and even the moral panic about youth crime and the representation of it through juvenile delinquency movies.

Moral Panics, Youth Culture, and Juvenile Delinquency Movies

When European audiences, critics, and censors first saw *Rebel Without a Cause*, there had been a longer public anxiety about violence committed

by adolescents. At the end of the 1940s and in the 1950s, the national press in various European countries had put juvenile street gang violence, the teddy boys and rockers phenomenon, high on the agenda. One could even claim that the popular media had fuelled a wider panic around adolescents, crime, and their lack of respect for different forms of authority. Mainly through a process of stigmatization and exaggeration, the popular media identified this type of youth violence as a threat to key moral and social values (e.g., violence, risk, security, parental and other forms of authority, solidarity among generations). The new deviant “folk devils” became the object of a spiraling debate, which was later on identified from a critical sociological perspective as a moral panic.

Referring to moral panics theories and the role of the media,⁵ the latter are often identified as important catalysts in whipping up the controversy among intellectuals, journalists, public opinion, as well as interest, religious, and other groups in society (e.g., parents’ organizations). Following moral panic theories, this debate and the media representation of the folk devils ultimately influence the wider perception of the issue by these and other key social institutions (e.g., politicians, courts), often identified as moral guardians. In some cases, a moral panic even may lead to concrete actions by state institutions, such as in the United States where in 1955 a Senate Judiciary Subcommittee reacted upon wider public anxiety and decided to investigate juvenile delinquency and the role played by certain popular entertainment media.⁶

From this moral panic perspective it is not difficult to look at film criticism and censorship boards as “moral guardians,” or as social institutions reacting upon a wider debate on moral and social values. When the issue of juvenile delinquency was picked up by the film industry, European censorship and classification boards were more sensitive than ever to an ongoing debate and to the representation of crime committed by young people. Not only in Hollywood,⁷ but also in Europe and elsewhere youth violence was heavily explored (for some: exploited) through such films as *Sciuscia* (de Sica, Italy, 1946), *Los Olvidados* (Buñuel, Mexico, 1950), “I Vitelloni” (Fellini, Italy, 1953), and *Avant le Déluge* (Cayatte, France, 1953). However, when the American juvenile delinquency movies came to be perceived from 1954 onward as an identifiable wave of straight violent movies, film censors and critics reacted strongly.

The controversy around *Rebel Without a Cause* in 1955 and 1956 cannot be understood without the problematic career and historical reception of some earlier American movies, including *The Wild One* (Benedek, U.S., 1953) and *Blackboard Jungle* (Brooks, U.S., 1955) in particular. In the United Kingdom, Benedek’s motorcycle picture with Marlon Brando was rejected several times by the British Board of Film Censors (BBFC).

Referring to the “present widespread concern about the increase in juvenile crime,” the Board claimed in January 1954 that they were not prepared to pass *The Wild One*, “even with an ‘X’ certificate” given the “unbridled hooliganism.”⁸ *The Wild One* was rejected “because it was feared that the film might encourage the growth of motorcycle gangs in the country.”⁹ Columbia’s London office unsuccessfully offered a new, heavily cut version of the movie, but again *The Wild One* was banned twice in 1955 and once more in 1959. In the meantime, the juvenile delinquency movie cycle from the United States had increased with dozens of other titles,¹⁰ while in the United Kingdom violent incidents committed by adolescents gangs had received more publicity than ever.¹¹ Only in November 1967 did the BBFC finally agreed to award an X certificate to the movie.

The picture, which set the tone for the reception of *Rebel Without a Cause*, was the tough school juvenile delinquency movie *Blackboard Jungle*. In the United States, Brooks’s motion picture had already created wide controversy, while the picture was even mentioned by the Senate Committee’s report Motion Pictures and Juvenile Delinquency in March 1956 as a movie “that will have effects on youth other than the beneficial ones described by its producers.”¹² When the movie was first presented to the British censors in March 1955, the BBFC rejected the film immediately, claiming that this “spectacle of youth out of control” would “have the most damaging and harmful effect on such young people, particularly those between the ages of 16 and 18.”¹³ On MGM’s request new viewing sessions were organized and cuttings made, but the BBFC continued to be extremely sensitive to the fact that “scenes of unbridled, revolting hooliganism would, if shown in this country, provoke the strongest criticism from parents and all citizens concerned with the welfare of our young people.”¹⁴ Even after some cuttings and heated conversations with MGM executives,¹⁵ the British censors refused to pass the film even with an X rating, which “should have exposed ourselves to serious public criticism.”¹⁶ Only after additional cuttings proposed by the Board, the movie received an X certificate in August 1955.¹⁷ However, *Blackboard Jungle* continued to be controversial even before the movie was released in Britain in September 1955. At the Venice film festival in late August, the American ambassador claimed that *Blackboard Jungle* offended U.S. society and she requested the withdrawal of the movie. This incident was widely reported in the European press, while MGM even used it in various European countries as a publicity tool.¹⁸ It was clear that this all only increased the motion picture’s controversial (market) value. When *Blackboard Jungle* was shown in the British theaters, the press highlighted stories again about the euphoric and cynical reception of the picture by local teddy boys.¹⁹

In other European countries both *The Wild One* and *Blackboard Jungle* received certificates, which underlined similar public anxieties about the possible impact of violent adolescents movies. In most countries children were not allowed to see the movies. In France and Belgium for instance, *Blackboard Jungle*, released in December 1955 as *Graine de Violence* (*Seed of Violence*), was not allowed for minors under the age of sixteen. Even in 1963, when the movie was examined again by the French Commission de Classification, the movie's initial category didn't change.²⁰ Also in other countries such as the northern and Scandinavian countries, national censorship boards prevented people under sixteen or eighteen years old to see the movie. Still however, the *Blackboard Jungle* case exemplified an important shift in the historical reception of American imported juvenile delinquency movies of the fifties—announcing in some sense *Rebel Without a Cause*. What is interesting with this movie is the shift into a more positive critical attention. Among some leading French film critics for instance, Brooks was considered at the time to be a leading figure within the new generation of American filmmakers. This attitude at least opened a greater willingness to read *Blackboard Jungle* as an important manifesto or even as a courageous “sociological” study of contemporary problems with youth and violence.²¹

By this time, there had been a wider academic sociological interest in the juvenile gang and delinquency phenomenon too, mainly as part of the study of youth subcultures. During the 1950s, the teddy boys and rockers phenomenon had inspired academic research, which looked at the compensatory function of and the value system within juvenile gangs. In the United Kingdom some researchers began to link juvenile delinquency and class, as well as gang and parent culture. In his authoritative book on U.K. postwar youth culture, *Subculture*, Dick Hebdige summarized some of this early research on juvenile gangs:

... working-class adolescents who under-achieved at school joined gangs in their leisure time in order to develop alternative sources of self-esteem. In the gang, core values of the straight world—sobriety, ambition, conformity, etc.—were replaced by their opposites: hedonism, defiance of authority and the quest of “kicks.” ... It was left to Phil Cohen to explore in detail the ways in which class-specific experience was encoded in leisure styles. ... Cohen was interested in the links between youth and parent cultures. ... He defined subculture as a “compromise solution between two contradictory needs: the need to create and express autonomy and difference from parents ... and the need to maintain the parental identifications.”²²

In retrospect, these sociological descriptions of the juvenile delinquency and youth culture phenomenon in the 1950s and 1960s seem to be strongly reflected in U.S. movies on these issues. While gang violence in *The Wild One* and *Blackboard Jungle* could easily be explained by arguments based on the working-class background of the juveniles, *Rebel Without a Cause* much more exemplified Cohen's shift in understanding the phenomenon. Ray's movie went further than the class aspect and focused much more upon the subtle idea of the contradictory needs in terms of identity politics. Ray offered a more universally identifiable adolescent role model, which searched for autonomy and difference, but also maintained a hybrid relation with parent culture. This in part explains why *Rebel Without a Cause* was not only attacked on the basis of hooliganism and violence, but also for its raw depiction of the traditional values of parent culture.

Denominating, Flattening Out, and Censoring *Rebel Without a Cause*

In a critical evaluation of *Rebel Without a Cause*, George M. Wilson looked at Ray's movie as a "fundamentally reassuring contemporary morality play."²³ According to Wilson, *Rebel* operated as a classical American social problem film, ultimately rejecting the social message it seems to proclaim openly:

The social problem in *Rebel Without a Cause* is, of course, juvenile delinquency. . . . The teenagers in this 1955 film are presented as rebelling against their parents and their way of life, but, as the title suggests, not out of any identifiable cause or counterideology. . . . The film thus invokes the perception, widespread at the time, that the issue of teenage rebelliousness had an especially enigmatic character. . . . the story, at the time, hastens to dissipate any possible sense of paradox. . . . Moreover, it is designed not to be too provocative in relation to the failures of the parents.²⁴

Wilson recognized that Ray did call up notions of rebellion and a clash with parents, but *Rebel* finally analyzed the problem according to "conceptions common in the period." What appeared to be a "serious reaction to the ongoing social order is revealed to be nothing more than remediable psychological maladjustments within the family."²⁵

Looking at the historical reception of *Rebel Without a Cause* in the mid-1950s in some Western European countries, it seems that censors, film critics, and other groups in society did not consider the movie to be a "schematic," "simplified," or reassuring morality play.²⁶ On the contrary,

Rebel was, more than any other juvenile delinquency movie, able to whip up a lively debate about the social problems the movie invoked, while official film censors and religious groups active in film classification heavily indicated their anxiety about the possible impact of the movie. In some cases the latter succeeded in cutting hard into the film text in order to flatten out the movie's critical analysis of youth violence, adolescents' search for autonomy, and their estrangement with their parents' culture.

Even the translation of Ray's original provocative title for the movie, to which Wilson was referring, often lacked any sense of paradox. Looking at the European titles for *Rebel Without a Cause*, we may perceive a double move. First, in most countries the Warner's local office underlined the violence in the movie and tried to resolve the paradox of the mixed responsibility by laying it firmly on the youth's shoulders. Second, this move clearly went into moralizing the movie's content. In the Netherlands and the Flemish part of Belgium, the movie was called *Botsende Jeugd* (*Clashing Youth*), while in Italy the movie was released as *Gioventù bruciata* (*Spent Youth*).²⁷ In northern countries similar titles appeared, such as in Denmark where the movie was called *Vildt Blod* (*Wild Blood*). The French title, *La Fureur de vivre* (*Fever/Will to Live*), was heavily attacked by many film critics for just lacking the titillating, thoughtful paradox in Ray's original title.²⁸ A clear example of moralizing youth violence has been the German-language title (. . . *denn sie wissen nicht, was sie tun*, or . . . *forgive them, for they know not what they do*, [Luke 23:34]), which contains a clear biblical reference. A German film critic at the time noted that this title contained a clear weakening of the movie's critical content, while at the same time it already incorporated an "excuse" and a "forgiveness" of the youth's responsibility.²⁹

Religious Interests

A crucial step in softening the movie's message was informing parents about the dangers of watching the picture (through classification, information, and influence on film critics), prohibiting young people to watch the movie, as well as straight cutting (censorship). Before turning to official censorship, it is worth indicating that, in various European countries, the local Catholic church leaders and organizations were still very active in the film sector of the 1950s. Inspired by the American Legion of Decency, these film organizations aimed at influencing the Catholic press in their film coverage as well as putting more pressure on commercial cinemas to prohibit the programming of "unhealthy" movies. Supported by local bishops, the Catholic film organizations also installed classification boards. In general, these boards were critical toward U.S. juvenile crime

movies, including *Rebel Without a Cause*. In most countries, the local Catholic boards found the movie unsuitable for adolescents and marked the movie with the category “only for adults, with strong reservations.”³⁰ For the Catholic boards, the major problem was not only the issue of delinquent youth, but also the movie’s stress on “the failure of family life, as well as the responsibility of the parents and of the educational system”—fields where the Catholic church tried to maintain its power in the 1950s.³¹ Most boards had not only problems with the “extreme violent scenes,” but they severely attacked the movie on the basis of how the problem of the failing parents and school system was developed, that is, “in an incomplete and rather artificial form.” In the movie’s file description by the German Catholic film movement, the critic claimed that *Rebel* could be interesting material for local discussions, but finally the “German title reminds us that . . . the movie lacks a Christian answer” to the problems it portrays.³²

Official Censorship

Although in most European countries there were no close ties between these classification boards and official censorship, the latter was often congruent in its final decisions. Similar to what happened with other juvenile delinquency movies, *Rebel Without a Cause* received in most European countries the harsh verdict of no children allowed under sixteen or eighteen years (e.g., in Belgium, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden).³³ In Germany, the censorship board (the *Freiwillige Selbstkontrolle der Filmwirtschaft*, or the film industry’s voluntary self-control) stated that both the movie and the trailer could not be shown to children under sixteen. In 1972 and again in 1989 a similar decision was made, while only in 1996 was the age category lowered to twelve years.³⁴

The official censors’ power however went further than just imposing age categories. It also included the possibility to cut movies or, more elegantly formulated, to suggest cuttings. The Swedish censors decided only to award a “16 years” certificate by cutting five meters, while in Finland forty-five meters had to be removed.³⁵ The French national control commission (*Commission de Classification—CNC*) decided to grant a license for adolescents and adults (over sixteen years) only if Warners removed some minor scenes.³⁶ In the commission’s argumentation, no references were made to the parents’ culture or responsibility, but it only mentioned the “particularly violent scenes (knife fight, murders committed by adolescents, etc.).”³⁷ Some film critics supported this decision,³⁸ while others who were in favour of the movie such as Jean de Baroncelli in *Le Monde*, claimed that censors were wrong and that “parents and

people who love great movies should not miss this work.”³⁹ This point of debate within the French film press came back in 1962, when the control commission reaffirmed its original decision.⁴⁰ One decade later (October 1973) the movie was finally open for all audiences. In a letter to the local distributor, the commission’s president claimed that “the motifs which could have legitimated in 1956 a restrictive measure for minors, were certainly justified at that time given the suggestive and new character of the subjects treated in the movie,” but that now the commission had “decided unanimously that these motifs were no longer justified.”⁴¹

Referring to the censorship and release history of *The Wild One* and *Blackboard Jungle* in the United Kingdom, it is no surprise that Warners faced the BBFC with apprehension. Watching *Rebel Without a Cause* for the first time on October 14, 1955, the British censors estimated in an internal note that this “is another story involving delinquency in an American high school, this time with the accent on the sins of neglectful and quarrelling parents.”⁴² In the same note, the examiners claimed that they “did not like the film on censorship grounds and thought it would be no loss from the artistic point of view.” Hereby they explicitly referred to *Blackboard Jungle*, “a better, but also a more violent film.” In a letter to Warners, the BBFC secretary Arthur Watkins defended its policy of rejection in the following terms:

I do not have to tell you the serious view which the Board takes about any film dealing with juvenile delinquency, especially in these times when there is such widespread public anxiety about the problem. Before the Board can certificate that the moral values are sufficiently firmly presented to outweigh any harmful influence which the film might otherwise have on young and impressionable members of the cinema audience.⁴³

Watkins claimed that the film should be resubmitted and could only receive a certificate when some “primary and essential cuts have been made.” And then a long list of suggestions was formulated, mostly referring to vulgar speech, acts of violence, and the representation of the parents. In the first reel all shots of Jim (James Dean) punching and kicking the desk should be removed. In the third reel the BBFC suggested that it would be good to remove the knife fight altogether “if a way can be found . . . from the technical point of view.” The cliff top sequence was referred to as: “the less we have of this whole unpleasant idea of young people meeting together to witness a contest which could end in the death of one of the participants, the better.” Also the shots of Jim “trying to throttle his father” were asked to be removed.

Warners agreed to proceed to voluntary cuttings, including the punching and kicking scenes, the slashing of tires, as well as big parts of the knife fight. In a letter to the BBFC, a Warners representative tried to appease the censors by explaining and defending his cuttings.⁴⁴ With regard to the fight with knives, he claimed that "I have rendered this absolutely innocuous, having taken out every inch of the fight and at no time do you see knives, except a brief shot at the end when Buzz holds the handles towards Jim." The car contest scene, too, was heavily cut, reducing "Judy's actions showing unrestrained excitement down to an absolute minimum," as well as the "scene and scream of Buzz going over the cliff and the shot of the car actually crashing on the rocks below." Finally, the scene where Jim was trying to throttle his father was also removed.

However, the BBFC did not follow Warners' request for an A certificate. The new, heavily damaged version of *Rebel Without a Cause* did not yet satisfy the examiners, who continued to have problems with the depiction of the parents' shortcomings, and scenes of drunkenness and hooliganism. On November 3, 1955, the movie finally received an X rating.⁴⁵ Warners' managing director Arthur S. Abeles could not hide his disillusion and anger, and in a new letter to Watkins he wrote that "this is the first time that such a thing has happened with a Warners' film," asking him to reconsider the classification in order not to force the company "to cater to the morbid element of the population by branding it with an X."⁴⁶ Defending an A certificate, Abeles argued that Warners had not only agreed to fulfill all cuttings requests, but also that the company had put in something praiseworthy ("a line of dialogue in which the hero refuses to fight with knives").

However, again, the BBFC examiners, including Watkins and his successor John Trevelyan, were not impressed by Abeles's "naïve arguments."⁴⁷ In an internal document they claimed that they "still have a rather uncomfortable feeling that an 'X' may be heavy weather for this film as cut."⁴⁸ Again they proposed a rather long catalogue of cuts that should be made in order to "tip it over the border line into 'A.'" Some of those new suggestions were related to complete scenes (e.g., a reduction of Jim's drunkenness scene), single lines (e.g., Jim's speech beginning with "That's a Zoo"), and concrete actions (e.g., Judy's face being slapped by her father; the deletion of the shot of the mass of cars driving away from the cliff top; the kiss between Jim and Judy). The internal document did not hide the examiners' personal appreciation of the movie as "rub-bish" and "stuff for the teddy inclined adolescent."

In the meantime, Nicholas Ray was also involved in the British censorship affair. Following different sources, it is clear that Ray came over to London in order to try to work out a solution and to make the

film acceptable.⁴⁹ Watkins continued to have problems with “the behaviour of the parents in the film” and with “the irresponsible behaviour of the teenagers themselves.”⁵⁰ In an interview with *Variety*, Watkins referred to the problems that Britain had with teddy boys, “delinquents who wear zoot-suits, carry razors and knives, etc.”⁵¹

For Warners’s managing director in Britain the game was clearly over now. Abeles surrendered by claiming that “the cuts you suggest . . . would reduce the film to nonsense”:

If we don’t show the weakness of the parents we have no motivation for the unhappiness and loneliness of the adolescents. Although we are accepting an “X” for the picture, I should like to repeat that I honestly feel the way the film now stands it deserves an “A.”⁵²

By December 1, 1955, *Rebel Without a Cause* finally got its X certificate, followed by three additional cuttings in the trailer (e.g., removal of Judy’s father slapping his daughter’s face). This crude, at times hilarious, censorship history stresses not only the censors’ power in influencing the textual meaning and reducing the movie’s critical edge. Even in such a manner that we understand a British film critic’s comment indicating that “the knife fight has been dramatically curtailed . . . and becomes momentarily incomprehensible.”⁵³

But the history also indicates that the censors in some sense react upon a wider society’s anxiety, even if their evaluations seem to be highly subjective. When censors (over)react to a perceived moral panic within society, they can be seen as acting as “moral guardians.” Just calling them paternalistic is not very productive. The *Rebel* case indicates that censorship problems around troubling images are not only due to pretentious or old-fashioned censors. We might also look at the British case (as well as those in other European countries) as examples of how censorship files may be considered thoughtful indicators of shifts in core societal and moral values being (or being perceived by dominant elites as) threatened. From this moral panic perspective, it is interesting how former examiners in later writings agree upon their extreme reaction at the time. Talking about the British censorship approach to *Rebel Without a Cause*, Enid Wistrich claimed:

Possibly films which deal with disturbing social and political themes are only acceptable once the danger is felt to be past. The recent decision of the censor to reclassify for adolescent audiences without cuts *Rebel Without a Cause* . . . is a case in point. The film was cut and banned to teenagers because it was thought to sanction and

thus encourage the anti-social and rebellious behaviour of the young hero. . . . Certainly the censor was happy to reclassify the James Dean saga in 1976, but if a modern version with a different message was as challenging in the 1970s as the Dean film was in the 1950s were to appear, would the decision be any different?⁵⁴

When the movie finally got an “Adults” category without cuts in April 1976, the examiners wrote in a similar sense that earlier on the film caused the BBFC “some anxiety because of its apparent challenge to parental authority and its possible effect on the increase of juvenile delinquency.” But reviewing it all these years later, the censors now “felt that it tells a moral tale.”⁵⁵

Critical Disagreements

When *Rebel Without a Cause* was finally released in Britain at the beginning of 1956, the censors were surprised by the praise from many of the critics.⁵⁶ Also in other countries, the specialized film press and other critics were not unanimous in attacking Ray’s movie. In the United Kingdom for instance, some critical remarks did run through many reviews such as those on the sensationalist and violent character of the movie,⁵⁷ the negative image of the United States,⁵⁸ as well as the ambiguous portrayal of the parents and the delinquent youth. The *Times*, for instance, talked about a “routine of blaming the parents for the sins of the children” and a “suspect doctrine” that the last person to be held responsible for delinquent behavior was the delinquent himself. But the reviewer immediately admitted that *Rebel* was a “brilliant piece of work” and “an excitingly intelligent exploration of the adolescent mind.”⁵⁹ In *Sight and Sound*, Penelope Huston developed a fine analysis of recent U.S. juvenile delinquency movies, calling *Rebel* a social document, touching society “in its most elementary aspect, the individual’s own adjustment to the world he has to live in.” For Huston, the movie’s “basic sense of insecurity” and the “malaise” call into question the American dream.⁶⁰

In France, *La Fureur de vivre* caused a more vivid, polemical debate among critics. This had, on the one hand, to do with the success of the Catholic film organization and its classification board in influencing a more negative opinion within the conservative and religiously affiliated press. On the other hand, a group of young film critics had been admiring and defending Ray as one of the leading figures in American cinema. Calling Ray one of the major new auteurs, *Cahiers du Cinéma* critics such as Truffaut and Eric Rohmer played a key role in sanctifying *Rebel Without a Cause*. Their intellectual mentor André Bazin, who devoted several

reviews to the movie, wrote that he could not always “follow his young friends in all their admirations, even if we take into considerations the polemical margin of their actions.” But Bazin immediately confirmed that “in relation to Nicholas Ray they were clearly right.”⁶¹ This canonizing *Cahiers* attitude was strongly countered by more leftist critics, exemplified by the one of the rival film journal *Positif*.

So, at least three sorts of reviews can be identified in the French debate. One of the first articles to appear exemplified the Catholic conservative voice. In the newspaper *France Catholique* the reviewer denounced Ray’s picture in often provocative terms, calling upon parents (readers) to advise their children not to go watch this a-religious thesis film.⁶² The movie was attacked on the basis of its false moral tone, its weak script (mainly the second part), while it lacked any psychological depth in its portrayal of both parents and adolescents.⁶³

This type of criticism was quickly countered by an article in *Arts* by François Truffaut, who opened another register in the debate.⁶⁴ Rereading Truffaut’s review nearly half a century later, it is astonishing how the future New Wave filmmaker did not go into the usual criticism (i.e., the portrayal of violence, youth, parents’ culture) or defend Ray in terms of his daring analysis of the social issues treated in the movie. Instead, one is struck by how Truffaut denied the political engagement in Ray’s movie, as well as the conservative and moralistic tone of his article. Truffaut’s praise was based on Ray’s power as a cinematographic “poet,” calling Benedek a “sociologist” and Brooks a (revolutionary) “reformer.” The central reason for glorifying Ray as one of the major auteurs in Hollywood lay in his cinematographic power: he does not use a “scriptwriter’s script,” but a “scénario de metteur en scène”; Ray’s realistic style glimmers through staging, editing, use of color and Cinemascope, and acting.

Other *Cahiers* critics treated *Rebel Without a Cause* in similar terms, where the articles by Bazin go even further in denying the sociological and political force of *Rebel* and in underlining Ray’s cinematographic, poetic, and spiritual power.⁶⁵ Calling *Rebel* soon one of the postwar classical movies, Bazin looked at it as a “moral drama” too and he did not stop to locate Ray and his movie within the history of art, literature, and cinema. Completely in line with the auteur theory, he tried to compare Ray’s mood with that of Cocteau and Rimbaud, his style reminiscent of Rossellini and Renoir: “Similar to Jean Renoir for instance, the reality in the movie lies above a superficial level, it resides in what I would call the spirit of the scene (“l’âme de la scène”), or better perhaps, in its moral poetry, or at least in its lyricism.”⁶⁶ A third important *Cahiers* critic, the future filmmaker Eric Rohmer, also looked at Ray’s movie as pure moral poetry. It would be too much of a digression to analyze Rohmer’s article

in *Cabiers du Cinéma*, but he basically went on to compare the movie with the dramatic power and moral tone of ancient Greek drama. Not only the structure of the movie, but also its mood was remarkably similar to the one in Greek tragedies. For Rohmer violence is no longer to be explained as a societal phenomenon, but as a physical result of hubris and honor.

This type of analysis was strongly countered by more leftist voices. The clearest example was a review in *Positif*.⁶⁷ Inspired by the harsh (ideologically inspired) rivalry, most of the *Cabiers* critics' praise was reversed. For the *Positif* reviewer Ray's oeuvre bantered in tasteless moralistic "pathos." Openly preferring Brooks's approach, *Positif* tackled Ray's social problem analysis: "(For) Ray the key to the Problem of Juvenile Delinquency . . . : his heroes are adolescents-who-fight-to-become-men; their crisis is nothing more than the passage from childhood to adulthood."⁶⁸ In the review, Ray's style was also severely attacked, calling him an unoriginal filmmaker, whose poetry resides often in cheap effects. This extremely critical approach to the movie, however, is—as the reviewer himself indicated—highly inspired by the specific position of the *Positif* journal within the French film criticism at that time, while it is not completely representative for how the left press looked at *Rebel Without a Cause*. Similar to what happened in other countries, where quite similar conservative, religiously inspired and leftist voices were present in film criticism, in France communist and leftist newspapers saw and—sometimes lauded—Ray's critical portrayal of American capitalist society.⁶⁹

Conclusion: Loosening Authority, Americanism, and Modernization

In 1956 *Rebel Without a Cause* had been among the most popular films at the box office, while many critics choose it as one of the best movies of the year.⁷⁰ This had much to do with the Dean cult, which in Europe might have been less spectacular than in the United States, but whose long-term influence on youth culture cannot be underestimated.⁷¹ It remains difficult to speculate about the influence of one single cultural product or a star, certainly upon the audience. But it is astounding how the movie has been successfully released in the 1960s, and again in the 1970s, while Dean's mood and attributes (jeans, "blousons rouges," t-shirt, boots) were largely taken up—as well as commercially exploited.

An alternative approach in locating the movie's influence is to put it into a wider flow of cultural products. If we look at the European cultural debate of the 1950s (and later), it is astonishing how important the trope of America has been. Dean's attributes—as portrayed in its

purest form in *Rebel Without a Cause*—were often identified as another clear example of the further Americanization of Europe.

In the twentieth century, America played a key role in European cultural criticism and in its theoretical mapping of art, popular culture, and modernity. Exemplifying the wider American cultural industry, Hollywood embodied ever since the 1920s the “America-as-threat” paradigm. In many European countries, intellectuals, politicians, and cultural critics from different ideological origins were unanimous in their negative consensus around the influence of American mass culture. This debate was intensified after the Second World War and into the 1950s, when the reconstruction of Europe was accompanied by an increasing flow of U.S. movies and other cultural products and symbols.

However, in the postwar cultural debate on Americanization, some dissenting voices were raised. The latter strongly denounced the pejorative and ideologically inflected character of the traditional elitist views upon American popular culture, while for many young working-class people (and critics), American culture represented a “force of liberation against the grey certainties of (British) cultural life.”⁷² Writing about the postwar cultural development of Italy, David Forgacs argued that “from the mid-1950s rock’n’roll music . . . and films like *Rebel Without a Cause* . . . helped give shape to a new model of youth autonomy and rebellion.”⁷³ Among young people cultural symbols of Americanism were increasingly associated with modernity and a loosening of traditional authority, hence underlining its potential for models of resistance.

From this perspective, it remains interesting that throughout Western Europe, this type of controversial material from the U.S. was able to whip up a vivid debate. Not only on American social and moral issues, but also on local forms of—in this case—delinquency, juvenile rebellion, and so on. Although official censors, religious classifiers and conservative parts of the press tried to resolve the ambiguity or to flatten out the critical engagement in Ray’s movie, one is struck by the persistence of countervoices in the public debate—defending *Rebel Without a Cause* in its mood and analysis of youth’s existential rebellion and identity crisis.

It also remains astonishing how mainly European filmmakers later claimed to be influenced by this type of American movie, *Rebel Without a Cause* in particular. Especially in France, where anti-American feelings have been so high on the cultural and political agenda—sadly, up till today—it is hard to underestimate the importance of Ray’s movie. Dean’s performance in *Rebel Without a Cause* can still be admired through French popular culture such as Johnny Halliday, still France’s most popular rock’n’roll star (Chateau). But its most truthful influence has been on French cinema itself, where the young film critics were mentally becoming

filmmakers. New Wave cineastes such as Truffaut, Godard, and Rivette saw in *Rebel Without a Cause* a model for their own quest for a fresh and unspoiled contemporary cinema in which adolescents' complex "vision du monde" could play a major part.

Abbreviations

BBFC	British Board of Film Censors
CCC	Commission Catholique de Cinéma (Belgium)
CNC	Centre National de la Cinématographie (France)
FSK	Freiwillige Selbstkontrolle der Filmwirtschaft (Germany)
KFA	Katholieke Filmactie (Catholic Film Action, Belgium)
OCIC	Organisation Catholique Internationale du Cinéma

Notes

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1. *Les Stars* was first published in 1957, but Morin extended his manuscript for later reprints such as one in 1962 and another in 1972. We draw upon the latter version, published by Seuil.

2. François Truffaut. "James Dean," *Arts* (September 29, 1956). Quoted in Morin (141).

3. See Doherty.

4. See Staiger.

5. See Cohen; and Springhall.

6. Doherty (117).

7. Doherty.

8. BBFC file on *The Wild One*, quoted in Robertson (105).

9. Phelps (120).

10. Doherty (119).

11. See Robertson (107–8) and Matthews (128–29).

12. Doherty (117, 118).

13. Robertson (114).

14. Letter Watkins (BBFC) to Ayres (MGM executive), March 24, 1955, BBFC file on *Blackboard Jungle*.

15. Robertson (115).

16. Letter Harris (BBFC) to Eckman (MGM junior executive), July 18, 1955.

17. Trevelyan (1957).

18. At least in Belgium and France, MGM used the slogan: “Le film qui a provoqué un incident diplomatique” (“The movie that caused a diplomatic incident”). See Doniol-Valcroze.
19. Matthews (131–32).
20. CNC—Commission de Classification file on *Graine de Violence*.
21. See, for example, Mauriac.
22. Hebdige (76–77).
23. Wilson (111; reprinted in this volume as chapter 5).
24. Wilson (110–11; reprinted in this volume as chapter 5).
25. Wilson (111; reprinted in this volume as chapter 5).
26. Wilson (111–12; reprinted in this volume as chapter 5).
27. Also David Fogacs (311) indicates that in Italy *Rebel Without a Cause* received a “more moralistic title.”
28. Jean de Baroncelli, for example, even opened his review with: “*La Fureur de vivre* (is a) stupid title that completely ignores the deeper sense of the movie and that does not correspond to the American title . . .” (my translation). See de Baroncelli (81).
29. See Ruppert. See also the comments by I. W.
30. For data on Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, and Switzerland, see OCIC file on *Rebel Without a Cause/Fureur de vivre*.
31. See KFA/CCC file number 5843 on *Botsend Jeugd/Fureur de vivre*.
32. See: K. B. (127).
33. For the Nordic and Scandinavian countries, see Statens Filmcensur, Copenhagen, file 61469 on *Vildt Blod/Rebel Without a Cause*.
34. See FSK file number 11405 (a, b, c, and d) and file number 11755 on . . . *denn sie wissen nicht, was sie tun*.
35. See Statens Filmcensur file 61469 on *Vildt Blod/Rebel Without a Cause*.
36. Internal note, January 25, 1956, CNC—Commission de Classification file on *Graine de Violence*.
37. *Ibid.*, letter Flaud (CNC) to Warners, February 24, 1956, as well as an official CNC document, March 14, 1956.
38. See Magan.
39. De Baroncelli.
40. Letter CNC to Warners, October 9, 1962, CNC—Commission de Classification file on *Graine de Violence*.
41. *Ibid.*, internal document, October 4, 1973.
42. Internal document, October 14, 1955, BBFC file on *Rebel Without a Cause*.
43. *Ibid.*, letter Watkins (BBFC Secretary) to Abeles (Warner London), October 17, 1955.
44. *Ibid.*, letter Wackett (Warner) to Watkins (BBFC), October 25, 1955.
45. *Ibid.*, letter Watkins (BBFC) to Abeles (Warners), November 4, 1955.
46. *Ibid.*, letter Abeles (Warners) to Watkins (BBFC), November 8, 1955.
47. Robertson (3).
48. BBFC file on *Rebel Without a Cause*, internal document AW/JT, November 21, 1955.

49. See: "Cuts." See also, letter Ray to Watkins (BBFC), December 10, 1955, BBFC file on *Rebel Without a Cause* and Watkins's letter in response in which he thanks Ray for the "co-operative attitude which you showed when you were over here," *Ibid.*, letter Watkins to Ray, December 15, 1955.
50. *Ibid.*, letter Watkins (BBFC) to Abeles (Warners), November 24, 1955.
51. "Cuts."
52. Letter Abeles (Warners) to Watkins (BBFC), November 30, 1955, BBFC file on *Rebel Without a Cause*.
53. G. L. (17).
54. Wistrich (117–18).
55. Internal document NKB/RAS, April 12, 1976, BBFC file on *Rebel Without a Cause*.
56. *Ibid.*, letter Watkins (BBFC) to Mirams (film censor, New Zealand), February 1956.
57. See, for instance, Majdalany.
58. See Lejeune.
59. "The Juvenile Delinquent."
60. Huston.
61. See Bazin.
62. "La Fureur de vivre." *France Catholique* (March 30, 1956).
63. For instance, Magan. Also, "Le Malheur d'avoir de la lecture." *Carrefour* (April 11, 1956).
64. Truffaut.
65. Bazin (April 15, 1956; 44) and Bazin (May 17, 1956).
66. Bazin (April 6, 1956).
67. R. T. (38–41).
68. R. T. (39).
70. For the United Kingdom, see Thumin.
71. Devillers (74–75); Howlett (193–97).
72. Storey (12).
73. Forgacs (311–12).

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