

**Boyhood, Abuse, and Adult Intervention in *The 400 Blows* (Truffaut 1959), *Small Change* (Truffaut 1976), and *Pellet* (Mañas 2000)**  
by Erin Hogan

As dudes and daredevils and delinquents, as masturbators and mamma's boys and masqueraders, as homophobic and homophobic, as paragons of Englishness and Frenchness, Japaneseness, Chineseness, Jewishness, or Hindiness, as truant and traumatized, as colonized, exploited, feminized, and confounded, boys have populated our screens, and screens around the world, as icons of movement, potentiality, desire, achievement, and never-ending progress.  
(Pomerance and Gateward 9)

## **Introduction**

French and Spanish cinema contribute to the myriad trends and common themes across the globe, enumerated above, in the depiction of boys. Murray Pomerance's and Frances Gateward's descriptors for delinquent, traumatized, and assaulted youth pertain most directly to the current article's focus on the protagonists of select films of French director François Truffaut and Spanish filmmaker Achero Mañas. The French New Wave classic *The 400 Blows* (*Les quatre cents coups* 1959) has been influential in establishing and inspiring a certain portrayal of young men in the cinematic imaginary. The year of *The 400 Blows*' release sheds further light on the film's focus on childhood, given its coincidence with the United Nations' adoption of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child and a concentration of boyhood films through the following decade. The Spanish director's reinterpretation of *The 400 Blows* forty years later shows how pervasive the French film's impact has been. Truffaut's *The 400 Blows* and later film *Small Change* (*L'argent de poche* 1976) and Mañas's *Pellet* (*El Bola* 2000) participate in common portrayals of the impressionability and the malleability of youth to expose their susceptibility to risk. Films such as theirs deal in the adversarial and violent relationship between adults and children to reveal that the docile bodies of the young may not only be arrogantly molded and fashioned but also bruised and beaten by their would-be caretakers. Adult intervention in young lives is central to both the cinema of childhood and the models for juvenile law. Truffaut's *The 400 Blows* and *Small Change* and Mañas's *Pellet* display a tension between the models of intervention they portray and how, on a formal level, the films portray them.

The legal construction of childhood, and the lack of direct civic representation of children, underlies the depiction of delinquency in the three films. The first full-length features for each director represent boyhood and the male friendship that emerge as a response to adversity with adults. In *The 400 Blows*, Antoine Doinel's (Jean-Pierre Léaud) schoolboy mischief and petty theft lands him in a disciplinary observation center from which he will make a running escape to the seaside, ending the extraordinary film. *Small Change* portrays a cross-section of small-town childhood but shines a spotlight on the youngster Julien Leclou (Philippe Goldmann) who has suffered abuse by his mother and grandmother. Julien's story concludes when the school discovers the abuse and the state takes temporary custody of him. The classmate of Pablo "Pellet/El Bola" (Juan José Ballesta) in Mañas's film discovers that the character in the title role is being abused by his father and reacts, with the help of his own family and social welfare, to extricate Pellet from his dangerous home life. The film closes shortly after Pablo's deposition of his abuse to the camera.

*The 400 Blows*, *Small Change*, and *Pellet* display similar themes but different appraisals of adult intervention in the lives of the boys. My analysis will address the participation of the school, state, or family in causing or ending child abuse and how each institution and film casts the young protagonist in roles of disenfranchised objectivity or enfranchised subjectivity. Abuse in the films signifies extreme powerlessness thereby inviting reflection on the lack of childhood agency and the ineptitude or misdirection of child protection agencies. Before embarking on separate analysis of close readings of each film, we will first contextualize the features cinematically and critically within the cinema of boyhood followed by the legal framework that underlies the conception of childhood in the films and institutions portrayed therein.

### **Adult Intervention in the Films of Boyhood**

*Pellet* follows in a tradition of the cinematic representation of boyhood greatly championed by *The 400 Blows*. This article's trilogy of films depicts a variation on the themes of boyhood with a high degree of intertextuality. Achero Mañas's award-winning feature literally re-interprets Truffaut's critically-acclaimed classic, *The 400 Blows*, from the opening tracking shot to the protagonist's final testimony to the camera. Numerous compositions from initial tracking shots to sequences of school defacement, amusement parks, running away, and culminating confessions similarly divulge the New Wave genealogy of this Best New Director and Best Film Goya award winner. Truffaut's filmography informs Mañas's feature and transcends the final and singular homage from *The 400 Blows* to include material similar to Truffaut's episodic feature of children's daily lives, *Small Change*, in which the abuse of a child focuses the film's discussion of the rights of the young.

*The 400 Blows*, meaning "wild oats" or "to raise hell" in French (White 219), is a landmark film for the scholarship and cinema of boyhood. *Small Change* and *Pellet* follow suit dramatizing a number of the themes of boyhood that Jeffrey P. Dennis notes had emerged by the late 1960s. According to Dennis, Truffaut's treatment reflects a motif in the cinema of boyhood: "*Les Quatre Cents Coups* itself belongs to a long tradition of movies centering on adult intervention into boyhood, often in orphanages, boarding schools, or juvenile detention centers, where boys are neglected or brutalized by the adults and can survive only by forming their own alliances and strategies of resistance" (106). Additionally, Patrick E. White assesses: "Truffaut's films are central to a study of boyhood in film because he probes the conventional view of boys as rowdy, undisciplined, and rebellious troublemakers" (218). Truffaut challenges the common construction of boyhood by delving into the latent causes of delinquency. It is apparent that minor law breaking on the part of the twelve year-old characters Antoine, Julien, and Pablo stems from unloving home environments and precipitates public and private intervention on their behalves. While Dennis identifies five main themes of the cinema of boyhood, we will focus on the single motif of adult intervention.

*The 400 Blows* is one of the most studied motion pictures in film history on account of its break with previous cinematic conventions whereby it forges a new and more experimental direction—the New Wave—in French cinema. Studies focus on formal elements, with special attention to the sequence shot of Antoine's escape, and the depiction of boyhood. However, the criticism of *The 400 Blows* and *Pellet* does not typically conduct legally-contextualized readings of the construction of childhood in these films. Furthermore, critical studies of Mañas's film are

largely comparative and bound either by language (Spanish) or origin (Spain). For instance, Paul Begin examines voyeurism in *El Bola* and *Los olvidados* (Buñuel 1950); Santiago Fouz-Hernández studies masculinity in *El Bola*, *Barrio* (León de Aranoa 1998), and *Krámpack* (Gay 2000); Eduardo Ledesma compares focalization in *El Bola* and *Rodrigo D: No futuro* (Gaviria 1990), and Matthew Marr concentrates on boyhood friendship. French language articles do not mention Truffaut's classic either: Nancy Berthier focuses on violence and voyeurism in *El Bola* and *Tesis* (Amenábar 1995) while Jacques Terrasa explores the imagery of child abuse and train tracks in Mañas's film.

The presence of *The 400 Blows* in *Pellet* does not escape Dagmar Schmelzer, however, whose article provides the exception to Spanish-language cinema comparative studies by identifying Mañas's quotation of Truffaut in the testimonial sequence: "The situation repeats a similar one in *The 400 Blows* by François Truffaut, in which young Antoine answers the psychologist's questions directly to the camera" (83).<sup>1</sup> Shared themes of the cinema of boyhood and similar philosophies of childhood explain the intertextuality of Truffaut's cinema in Mañas's work. Additionally, the Spanish director's film exhibits an understanding of children that is analogous to that which Georgiana Colville recognizes in the French director: "His crusade on their behalf was not one of radical rebellion, but a strong plea to adults to respect, accept and love them" (445). Truffaut's and Mañas's films are both inspired to a great extent in the autobiographies of their directors and are highly sympathetic to their beleaguered protagonists but have mutable relationships with the representation of the boys as objects of protection versus subjects with rights.<sup>2</sup> Their sympathetic cameras at times showcase and at others eclipse the subjectivity of their main characters.

*Pellet's* treatment of boyhood and child abuse is the offspring of a marriage of the narrative structure of *The 400 Blows* and the thesis of *Small Change*. Each film slowly reveals the underlying causes for the misbehavior of its young protagonist, namely the truancy and petty theft of *The 400 Blows's* Antoine Doinel and *Small Change's* Julien Leclou followed by the absenteeism and the dangerous fast lane pastime of *Pellet's* Pablo. The three protagonists are victims of inhospitable environments in the form of family, school, or state institutions. While Antoine is the undesired son of his biological mother and stepfather, Pablo is physically abused at the hands of his biological father. Working independently or in conjunction, schools, parents, and state institutions save or meddle with the afflicted youths of the three films.

### **The Punishment, Protection, and Prerogatives of Children: Three Models of the Construction of Childhood in Western Law**

Intervention is not only central to the cinema of boyhood but also the legal system for minors. As a historical overview, Western law has addressed children as property, perpetrators, victims, and rights-bearing subjects. More specifically, the construction of childhood in France and Spain transformed significantly after World War II and particularly as a result of the Declaration of the

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<sup>1</sup> "La situación repite otra parecida de *400 coups* de François Truffaut, en la que el joven Antoine contesta a las preguntas de la psicóloga dirigiéndose directamente a la cámara que se le enfrenta" (Schmelzer 83).

<sup>2</sup> *The 400 Blows* and *Small Change* display autobiographical elements from Truffaut's youth (see White). Similarly, *Pellet* also incorporates childhood autobiography. Mañas engaged in the same mischief at the age of twelve in Carabanchel (Pando n. pag.).

Rights of the Child, adopted the year *The 400 Blows* was released. Discussion of the rights of the child and the legal system for minors manifests in three primary models. The alliterative title of this section makes reference to the three main judicial models of children's law—judicial (punishment), welfare (protection), and rights-based (prerogatives)—that are underpinned by clearly delineated conceptions of childhood. Each conception differs with respect to the subjectivity, or enfranchisement, of the child. The construction of childhood in the law demonstrates Western society's understanding of childhood agency and has bearing both on the context of Truffaut's *opera prima* and the representation of childhood delinquency in *The 400 Blows*, *Small Change*, and *Pellet*.

John Tobin's history of the legal construction of childhood, with primary examples from the United States, traces three approaches: proprietary, welfare, and rights-based. The proprietary model, the most ancient, stemmed from the Roman doctrine of *patria potestas* on the basis of which the father maintained ownership and control of the child (Tobin 56). Children, evidently, were the property in the proprietary model. Subsequently, the welfare model understood children as "vulnerable and immature" and therefore lacking "the capacity and agency to protect themselves against harm or make decisions in their own best interests" (Tobin 58). In this model, children shift from objects of ownership to objects of protection.

In the context of France, there was no specialized legal system for minors until 1912; although, this system was greatly improved upon with the creation of Children's Judges in 1945 (Blatier 146-147). Spain, on the other hand, did not have a "child protection system" until the middle of the twentieth century (De Paúl and González 209). Additionally, France established measures for the judicial and administrative protection of children in 1958 and 1959 (Taub 125). Within the French juvenile legal arena, Catherine Blatier identifies a similarly-flawed welfare model but discusses contrasting judicial models as well (156-159). Blatier illuminates the conception of childhood that underlies this approach:

He or she is not really considered as guilty but as needing assistance. The only concerns are the needs of the child. In some cases, a welfare measure may be imposed. This model has been called paternalistic, placing little priority on the children's rights. (156)

The child is cast as a victim of his or her social, economic, or domestic environment. As victim, the youth is not considered responsible for his or her criminal behavior and, surprisingly perhaps, he or she is absolved of agency. This conception underlies *Small Change*'s sympathy towards Julien Leclou, for instance.

Blatier's exposition of the judicial model reveals it as the opposite of the welfare model. The judicial and rights-based models recognize childhood agency while the welfare model diminishes it, as we will see. Punitive in its conception, the judicial model does not consider the child delinquent a victim. Thus, the child's (unlawful) agency is recognized and duly punished. Blatier explains:

The main ideas in this model are as follows: 1) delinquency is not an unavoidable, pathological state, but the result of a personal choice; 2) though adverse circumstances

can influence this choice, the delinquent is responsible for the consequences of his actions; and 3) judicial action consists of punishment according to the law rather than welfare care. (156)

While Sarah Fishman attributes to nineteenth century France children's portrayal in juvenile law as that of victim or villain, the welfare and judicial models that Blatier examines in the twentieth century share the same foundational beliefs (212).

The school, police, and observation center of *The 400 Blows* subscribe to the judicial model. We ought to keep in mind that Truffaut's first film is both inspired by his own experiences with the law as a minor in the forties (Truffaut was born in 1932) and set in contemporary France, whose system shows continuity with the nineteenth century's approach to juveniles. For a child like Truffaut or Antoine, the Children's Judge could rule in a number of ways, he could:

...admonish the child; return him or her to a parent, guardian, tutor, or other person 'worthy of confidence,' with the option of probation to the age of twenty-one; request further social or medical studies; place the minor in an observation center for an in-depth examination; or send the case to another investigating magistrate for further investigation of the crime. (Fishman 202).

Antoine's interview with the psychologist at the observation center, such institutions were created before and after World War II (Fishman 34 and 208), suggests that he was placed in the center for "in-depth examination." These institutions are reminiscent of French historian Michel Foucault's discussion of the carceral system's culmination in the nineteenth century with the opening of the Mettray facility, as we will see during our analysis of *The 400 Blows*.

The rights-based model represents a break with protective welfare and punitive judicial approaches. The weakness of the welfare model consists of its reliance on disinterested adults to determine what those interests may be. To remedy this drawback, a certain milestone in the history of childhood contributed to a reframing of the conception of child agency and adult responsibility. The Declaration of the Rights of the Child, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1959, put greater emphasis on children as rights-holding subjects rather than as worrisome charges for well-meaning citizens and institutions. The content of the Declaration summarizes the trajectory from the protection of children to children's rights. According to Tobn: "the new way of judicial thinking in which children are conceived of as independent subjects with rights and entitlements as opposed to mere objects in need of protection and charity" (56). The Declaration serves as a blueprint for another conception of childhood by orienting the discussion of children largely on the basis of their rights. Truffaut's filmography, with a focus on delinquent boys, reflects the concurrent development of children's rights.

Nevertheless, the Declaration, adopted without the force of law, did not irrevocably turn paternalism towards nor punishment of the youngest citizens into an anachronistic practice. Four of the ten rights put forth in 1959's Declaration are those of protection, two of which state: "The child shall enjoy special protection, and shall be given opportunities and facilities, by law and by other means to enable him to develop physically, mentally, morally, spiritually and socially in a

healthy and normal manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity” and “The child shall be protected against all forms of neglect, cruelty and exploitation” (Redman and Whalen 165-168). The violation of these two rights of protection is apparent in *The 400 Blows*, *Small Change*, and *Pellet*. The films thereby address the protection of children and their selfhood. As we will see, *Small Change* makes explicit the problematics of children’s representation as a social group.

Spain belatedly adopted the United Nations’ provisions. Its system dating from 1948 worked poorly (De Paúl and González 210) and was not revised until after Francisco Franco’s dictatorship (1939-1975). Joaquín De Paúl and Olayo González trace the foundations of the child protection system to the Constitution of 1978:

By the incorporation of the entire international legal wealth concerning human rights, the publication of the Spanish Constitution changed the Spanish child protection system. Until 1987, however, and the publication of the 21 Act for Child Protection, the current child protection system had no clear rules for the development of actual practices and resources. (220)

The stipulations put forth by the United Nations, Spain’s Constitution, and Spanish Act 21, are the backdrop for intervention on behalf of Pablo in *El Bola*. The film’s situation in the late eighties or early nineties also informs the challenges in succoring Pablo; “During the 1990s, despite these new resources, it has been difficult to achieve the act’s legal requirements” (De Paúl and González 214). The dilemma of Alfredo’s parents, who are counseled by their social worker friend, dramatizes the limitations of the Spanish child protection system and the obstacles to intervention.

We will examine how public institutions embody the judicial model in *The 400 Blows* and, while *Small Change* overtly discusses children’s rights, the feature errs on the side of the welfare model’s paternalism towards Julien Leclou. To which model does *Pellet* correspond? *Pellet* fuses the welfare and rights-based approaches of *The 400 Blows* and *Small Change*, on the levels of plot and cinematography, respectively.

### ***The 400 Blows*: State Intervention and the Judicial Model**

Antoine is the most complex of the protagonists of the three films and *The 400 Blows* is the most rich on a formal cinematic level. *The 400 Blows* portrays the judicial model as represented by the school, the police, and the observation center with remarkably little sentimentality. Antoine Doinel is very much at odds with these public institutions because they punish his attempts at self-expression. We will consider Antoine’s creative writing-related activities as declarations of his selfhood upon which disciplinary institutions intervene in order to render Antoine, per Michel Foucault, docile. The boy’s characterization, and the film’s formal affinity for his subjectivity, prove that Antoine is the judicial model’s villain but neither victim nor villain for Truffaut’s film.

Antoine lives with his mother and stepfather in Paris and is amongst the troublemakers attending a disciplinary-style Parisian school. The film’s chain of events shows how Antoine’s alienation progressively worsens. The boy’s mother and stepfather are fairly emotionally distant, absorbed in their own lives, consumed by financial worry and a struggling marriage, and

frustrated by Antoine's incessant mischief. Antoine skips school for carnival rides, ambles the streets of the city, and steals his stepfather's office typewriter to make some cash. A truant Antoine finds that he is not the only family member to transgress when he stumbles across his mother in the street kissing another man. This discovery further strains the boy's relationship with his mother and possibly explains why Antoine unremorsefully invents his mother's death as an excuse explaining his absence from school. Antoine's theft of his stepfather's typewriter coupled with the falsehood regarding his mother, lead Antoine's parents to turn custody of the boy over to an observation center following the theft. The film ends with Antoine's lengthy running escape from the center to the peaceful solitude of a nearby beach.<sup>3</sup> The boy's freedom resides in nature, and thus beyond the confines of society.

Civil society first abandons Antoine and, finally, the boy spurns social institutions by virtue of his flight. Antoine's condition as a repressed subject at school and the observation center can most clearly be explicated with the aid of Michel Foucault's conception of the docile body and history of the birth of the modern prison. The French historian's study of discipline in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries expounds the production of docile, or useful and instrumental, bodies:

What was then being formed was a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviour. The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it. (Foucault 138).

Foucault finds this machinery of power in the military, the school, the hospital, and the factory where punishment, physical force, and regimented exercise serve to reformat the pre-docile body. Truffaut's film features the three aforementioned methods. Furthermore, Antoine's observation center recalls the Mettray prison, which opened in 1840 and interned condemned and charged delinquents in addition to boarders "as an alternative to paternal correction" (Foucault 296). The youths interned in Mettray, "individuals who resisted disciplinary normalization" (Foucault 296), were much like Antoine. Foucault's theorization reveals Antoine's opposition and the cause for his rebellion.

*The 400 Blows* clearly establishes a parallelism between the school and the observation center. Both provide a model that Antoine wholly rejects. *The 400 Blows* dramatizes Antoine's resistance to disciplinary normalization when, for instance, the bird's eye shot of the boys' jogging class through the streets of Paris reveals that Antoine and René (Patrick Auffay) are amongst the truant students who gradually separate themselves from the pack. The sequence additionally foreshadows Antoine's final escape from an interns' soccer match rather than a jogging excursion. The school is a legal, although unjust, sphere. René, Antoine's partner in crime in *The 400 Blows*, reveals his lack of legal recourse. He protests punishment out in the

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<sup>3</sup> The characterizations of the child protagonists of Truffaut's *The 400 Blows* and *Wild Child (L'enfant sauvage, 1970)* display similar resolutions. *Wild Child* relates the education of an eleven or twelve year old boy discovered in 1798 who had grow up entirely isolated from society in the wild. The film is based on the 1806 account by Dr. Itard's *Mémoire et rapport sur Victor de l'Aveyron* (Colville 448). After an arduous and abusive experiment in education, the boy escapes from his observation center to nature just as Antoine Doinel flees at the end of *The 400 Blows*. Truffaut ambiguously plays Dr. Itard, who socializes the "savage" boy with force and cruel coercion.

cold: “That isn’t legal!” The instructor throws out the boy, arrogantly retorting: “I make the law here!”<sup>4</sup> There are no rights-holding subjects in this school. As per the judicial model, these schoolchildren are subject to the full extent of the law. There is no mention of children’s rights nor questioning of the teacher’s authority. Punitive sentences dominate the school sequences in *The 400 Blows*.

Antoine is the most prominent student of the film to refuse to submit to the discipline of the docile body. We may understand his theft of a typewriter (*machine à écrire*) as an act of protest that exhibits his conflicted emotions towards docility attempted through writing, mechanization, and mechanized writing.<sup>5</sup> In the opening school sequence of the film, Antoine is punished for original poetic expression, albeit on the classroom wall. The boy’s selfhood is quelled by virtue of the punishment of his expression. Doinel’s handwriting on the wall of the classroom would not qualify as good handwriting and proper mechanized gesture according to Foucault’s Lasallian primary source (152). Antoine persists but varies his approach in his next attempt at artistic expression. When Doinel plagiarizes Balzac’s *Le recherche de l’absolut*, the boy’s mechanical reproduction proves too precise. Antoine’s faithfulness to reproduction makes a mockery of compliance. Antoine undermines his schooling only to set him on a course to more severe juvenile detention. His observation center, where the boy is slapped for not awaiting orders to eat, is more oppressive, disciplinary, abusive, and ineffective than his school.

On the formal level of this New Wave film, marked moments of the feature emphasize Antoine’s subjectivity. Antoine’s rebelliousness and complexity make him an excellent poster child for the New Wave given that both he and the film movement defy conventions. In general terms, Richard Neupert notes that: “France’s cinematic revival came at first from a handful of young directors who found novel ways to fund and shoot their movies, often in direct defiance of commercial and narrative norms” (xvii). While Antoine is a repressed subject, he is not entirely innocent: “It is precisely because Antoine is never reduced to being a simple or weak victim that he is a fascinating and unusual young character” (Neupert 184). The use of the point-of-view shot and violation of the fourth wall (by virtue of Antoine’s direct gaze into the camera) reveal the delinquent boy’s defiant subjectivity during and after his break from confinement. A very peculiar point-of-view shot in extreme close-up of the eyes and hat of Antoine’s mother, during her visit to the center, suggests the boy’s emotional detachment. This technique diffuses any potential for a melodramatic reception of the dialogue that would cast Antoine as a victim. Mrs. Doinel coldly and vindictively declares that Antoine’s father, having been upset by the manipulative letter the boy sent from the center, has washed his hands of Antoine. Antoine’s gaze into the camera after his escape expresses the violation of his internment and that of cinematic convention. His visual address of the camera equates to the boy’s most-successful moment, for its directness, of self-expression of the film.

#### At the Observation Center for Delinquent Minors (*Centre d’observation de mineurs*)

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<sup>4</sup> René, Antoine’s partner in crime, protests about punishment out in the cold: “Ce n’est pas légal!” The instructor throws out the boy, arrogantly retorting: “C’est moi qui fais la loi ici!”

<sup>5</sup> White offers another interpretation of the theft: “Antoine’s taking a typewriter from his father’s office, is grounded in Truffaut’s past, but accentuates the emblematic nature of the theft: the snatching of the word machine is almost a Promethean act for the young writer/filmmaker. In fact, young Truffaut stole the machine from his father’s office and sold it for 4,000 francs to support his film club” (222).

*délinquents*), Antoine's session with the psychologist is one of the very few occasions in which an authority figure listens to Antoine. In an earlier police interrogation, Antoine does not verbalize. However, this interaction is the legacy of a documentation system that Foucault observes in the Mettray model. An intern's stay at Mettray began with an entry interview on the subject of his family and criminal history (Foucault 294). Daily surveillance continued in a similar fashion: "Training was accomplished by permanent observation; a body of knowledge was being constantly built up from the everyday behaviour of the inmates; it was organized as an instrument of perpetual assessment" (Foucault 294). Another intern's warning to Antoine about his meeting with the psychologist serves to corroborate the inheritance of the Mettray system. Kanayan explains how the center and female psychologist amass information on the interns: "If she drops her pencil, pick it up, but don't look at her legs. If not, it will be marked down in your dossier. [...] Your dossier contains all that is known about you, what the doctor thinks, what the judge thinks, and even what your parents' neighbors think."<sup>6</sup> The intern, who boasts that he has been labeled "unstable with perverse tendencies/instable psychomoteur en tendances perverses," reveals the system's intricate documentation and its interest in sexual deviance. Furthermore, Kanayan's words testify that surveillance extended beyond the walls of the observation center.

Despite Kanayan's warnings, Antoine is quite forthright in his interview. Antoine reveals in his session at the center with an off-screen psychologist, what the spectator may take for cause, that he knows that his mother had wanted to abort him. The psychologist's questions seem to get at the cause of Antoine's delinquency. The female psychologist, whose voice is dubbed over Truffaut's take with Léaud (Veillot 53), asks Doinel questions related to the roots of his delinquency such as returning the stolen typewriter, taking money from his grandmother, and lying. She also inquires into his relationships with females, which may presumably explain his law breaking. The psychologist asks why Antoine lacks affection for his mother and if he has ever slept with a girl. Doinel's response to the first question reveals to the spectator that his grandmother saved him from abortion and that he was first raised by a wet nurse and then his grandmother until he was eight years old.

Antoine's psychological evaluation sequence identifies the family, the school, and the observation center as the villains of *The 400 Blows*. For this reason, the only recourse amenable to Antoine appears to be self-reliance in nature. Nevertheless, the blurring of the final freeze frame casts doubt on Antoine's future. The film portrays the judicial model but undercuts the punitive construction of childhood by allowing Antoine punctuated moments of rebellious selfhood.

### ***Small Change: School Intervention and the Rights-based Model***

*Small Change* displays a very different tone from that of *The 400 Blows*'s gray and desolate Parisian city streets and oppressive institutions. To the contrary, the film begins at the small-town geographic heart of France. The filmmaking process, the audience, and the historical moment of the film also differ; Truffaut shares that the feature was a collaborative project between himself and his pre-adolescent actors for the benefit of young spectators (McBride and

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<sup>6</sup> "Si elle laisse tomber son crayon, ramasse-le, mais regarder pas ses jambes. Si non, c'est marqué sure ton dossier. [...] C'est ce qu'on sait sur toi, ce qu'il pense le docteur, ce qu'il pense le juge, en fin, même ce qu'ils pensent les voisins de tes parents." All translations are mine.

McCarthy 105). At its onset, *Small Change* is a composition of light-hearted tableaux of children's daily lives and ordinary hijinks. It seems as if children in this ensemble cast are very safe in their tight-knit community and nothing could go wrong; even when a toddler falls out of a high window, he is unharmed. On the subject of this accident, the pregnant wife of the schoolteacher delivers the film's central postulation: "Children are very solid [...] they have thick [*dure*] skin as well."<sup>7</sup> Up to this point, *Small Change* has only presented the spectator with images of the resilience of children. Yet, the arrival of the unkempt "social case/cas social" Julien Leclou suggests that life in the small town is not as universally idyllic as first described. His story is the basis for the teacher's rights-based discourse that is in discord with the film's proclivity for adult intervention and child protection.

Julien's vignette belies the confident and optimistic affirmation of the schoolteacher's wife. Truffaut's film begs the comparison of the toddler and Julien, by dressing them in blue and white striped shirts, to reveal a stark contrast. Julien does not have, for instance, a doting mother like the younger boy. He is unbathed, often sleeps in class, plays in on-coming traffic, and steals. His dilapidated dwelling on the outskirts of town differs from the apparently more comfortable homes and housing projects (*Habitation à Loyer Modéré*) of his classmates. The boy also harbors a secret. Upon a mandatory medical inspection at school, which Julien attempts to evade, the teachers and nurses discover that Julien's undressed body is covered in scars, bruises, and burn marks. The boy's mother is arrested for child abuse and the minor becomes a ward of the state. Truffaut's film reminds spectators of the vulnerability, physical in its Latin etymology for wound, of children.

Mr. Richet's (Jean-François Stévenin) speech to his class on the subject of Julien's case is a declaration of the rights of the child and an articulation of the thesis of *The 400 Blows* and *Small Change*. The teacher offers his difficult childhood as the impetus for his career choice and laments the lack of representation of children in politics. Mr. Richet, a mouthpiece for Truffaut, expounds:

I had a terrible childhood. Well, less tragic than Julien's but terrible. I was very impatient to grow up because I felt that adults had all the rights and that they could lead their lives as they wished. [...] Life is not easy. It is hard. It is important to learn to become strong in order to confront it. Notice that I did not say that you should harden but rather become strong.<sup>8</sup>

Mr. Richet offers a caveat to his wife's words. He observes that children are in fact physically and socially vulnerable. Mr. Richet recommends that his students become strong (*endurcir*) rather than harden (*durcir*). The shared root of *dure*, *durcir*, and *endurcir* denotes a hardness that children, according to the film, may or may not exhibit. The concept is central to *Small Change*, so much so that Truffaut in fact summarized his feature as: "the idea that kids are thick-

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<sup>7</sup> On the subject of this accident, the pregnant wife of the schoolteacher remarks on the resilience of children: "Les enfants sont très solides [...] ils ont la peau dure aussi." The French continues the subject of hardness (*dure*).

<sup>8</sup> "J'ai eu une enfance pénible. En fin, beaucoup moins tragique que celle de Julien mais pénible. J'étais très impatient pour me grandir parce que je sentais que les adultes ont tous les droits et ils peuvent diriger leurs vies comme ils entendent. [...] La vie n'est pas facile. Elle est dure. Il est important d'apprendre à vous endurcir pour l'affronter. Attention, je ne dis pas de vous durcir mais à vous endurcir."

skinned” (McBride and McCarthy 113). To qualify Truffaut’s assertion, *Small Change* aims to challenge this misconception.

The school of the film, almost twenty years after *The 400 Blows*, represents a very different educational system and shows that maltreatment and the abuse of power are still to be found in the family while public institutions of the school and state are instrumental in liberating the mistreated child rather than responsible for the maltreatment. Truffaut speaks to the striking dissimilarity between the schools in *The 400 Blows* and *Small Change*: “the teachers are changing. They’re younger. They’re more liberal, politically, than they use to be. It’s not so oppressive. There’s a much better relationship between the kids and the teachers today than there was then” (quoted in McBride and McCarthy 110).<sup>9</sup> The teacher is central to the distinction in the two films. Antoine’s instructor invests himself in immense power while Mr. Richet informs his students of their rights. As Antoine and his classmates have no rights, they could not offer a greater contrast from *Small Change*. Rather than abandoning the students, Mr. Richet’s school in *Small Change* shelters them and removes them from harm.

Antoine’s and Julien’s classmates register differently in terms of the judicial, welfare and rights-based models and thus child subjectivity. The school in *Small Change* discovers Julien’s abuse and advocates for children’s rights, but the feature does not give Julien the opportunity to vocalize his experience as does *The 400 Blows*. Patrick E. White notes that the roles reverse between *The 400 Blows* and *Small Change*: “Julien is finally saved not by his own flight to the sea or his own lies and imagination but by the intervention of the teachers and police, the very people who oppress Antoine” (231). While the school has greater concern for students’ wellbeing, the film ultimately errs on the side of paternalism towards Julien by not allowing the boy to speak for himself. As a consequence, the feature privileges Mr. Richet’s and its own lesson over the boy’s subjectivity.

*Small Change* structurally undermines its own didactic purpose by virtue of the schoolteacher’s prominence. Mr. Richet instructs that children are subjects with rights but without political representation:

There does not exist a political party that truly works for children’s interests. [...] There is a reason for this: children do not elect. If we were to give the vote to children, you could demand more or better day care, welfare, or whatever you want! [...] Congressmen would want your votes.<sup>10</sup>

Mr. Richet acknowledges the challenges that challenge children’s civic representation. However, I find fault with the articulation of Mr. Richet’s message, destined for a child audience both on and off screen, as it does not entail listening to the child subject. The schoolteacher’s monologue undermines the focus on child subjectivity in *Small Change*. Richet explains that Julien has the

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<sup>9</sup> Although Truffaut notes the improvement in the schools, he is unsure of Julien’s welfare in a state institution: “He may be better off than he was, but I don’t think it will go too well for him. He’ll be in a public institution. There are problems with places like that as well. The children are unhappy there because they don’t have enough money and there aren’t any comforts” (McBride and McCarthy 112).

<sup>10</sup> “Il n’existe aucun parti politique qui s’occupe réellement des enfants. [...] Il y a une raison à cela: c’est que les enfants ne sont pas des électeurs. Si on donne le droit de vote aux enfants, vous pourriez réclamer davantage de crèche, davantage d’assistance sociale, davantage de n’importe quoi! [...] Les députés voudraient avoir vos voix.”

right to testify against his abusers and to have a say in his future, but Truffaut's film hardly grants Julien the rights of voice and vote. It is noticeable that, once he has been taken into custody, Julien is off-screen and no longer visible. The schoolteacher's discursive intervention diminishes its own message.

What explains the change in Truffaut's optics between *The 400 Blows* and *Small Change*? The twenty-year difference between the two films prompts, Colvile suggests, Truffaut's identification with the adult rather than the child protagonist. Colvile notes that Truffaut's maturation informs *Small Change*: "the gaze has grown up and the filmmaker has irrevocably entered the logocentric adult world" (450). The director now verbalizes his opinions through Richet:

They're my ideas. In France, a lot of people criticized the speech he makes to the kids. They liked the movie but they didn't like the speech. But they never made very intelligent criticisms of it. I think it's the truth, line by line. The leftists think it's too conciliatory. The people on the right think it's too left-wing. I thought it was a necessary scene, to have the thoughts expressed. (McBride and McCarthy 110)

My criticism of the speech is not on the basis of its content but rather on account of who delivers it, that is to say the sequence's politics of subjectivity. As Richet declares that Julien is a subject with rights, the film wrestles the word from Julien, co-opting the boy's voice.

The paternalism of the new father, Mr. Richet, is evident in *Small Change*. While he verbally advocates for the direct civic representation of children and the rights-based approach to juvenile law, his words supplant those of his child audience. The maturation of Truffaut since *The 400 Blows* and the fact he made *Small Change* for a juvenile audience with the collaboration and input of his young actors, explain the teacher's exposition. The schoolteacher's lesson is as much for his on-screen class as it is for the film's audience. The rights-based model would be more effectively expressed in Julien's own words.

### ***Pellet: Family and State Intervention and the Welfare Model***

*Pellet* continues the subject of the hardening of a child by means of abuse but its structural inspiration from *The 400 Blows* allows for greater subjectivity of the child. While Antoine Doinel is a more complex character that defies reductive definition—as either a victim or a villain—Pablo is the victim to his father's villain. The feature, dedicated to the director's daughter, portrays the shortcomings of the child protection system and advocates for intervention. In Mañas's film, new friends Pablo and Alfredo are about twelve-years-old, meet at school in the Carbanchel neighborhood of Madrid in the late eighties or early nineties, and come from very different families. As a newcomer to Pablo's school, Alfredo and his family break the complicity with his friend's abuse practiced by the victim's mother, classmates, and school. It is significant that the school and Pablo's classmates ignore rather than discover *Pellet*'s abuse. By contrast to Truffaut's films, a family lends a helping hand to the abused boy in *Pellet* while their social worker friend Laura (Ana Wagener) advises against the family's participation in the welfare-inspired intervention. *Pellet*'s depiction of intervention couples that of *The 400 Blows* and *Small*

*Change* with the addition of peer and parental aid.

Mañas's title indicates the materiality and objectivity of its protagonist. "Pellet" refers to the protagonist's nickname after the rigid ball that Pablo carries. It is likely that the hard pellet symbolic of Pablo's abuse comes from his father's store in order to tie the maltreatment to its perpetrator. For Santiago Fouz-Hernández and Alfredo Martínez-Expósito: "The pellet (the small metal ball that he carries around as an amulet) symbolizes Pablo's being kicked around and abused by his father and his school friends, his lack of control over himself and his destiny" (52-53). I agree with both critics but believe that, since physicality is central to the film's dissertation on abuse, a symbolic interpretation of the pellet must also incorporate the object's material properties. Pablo's emblem and namesake is hardened, inflexible, and does not rebound, whereby Mañas, as Truffaut had in *Small Change*, brings into question the resilience of juveniles. The importance of impressions in *Pellet* is evident in the ink-stamped credits that open the film; these are super-imposed on images of the boys' dangerous game of crossing the regional train's tracks inches from on-coming locomotives in order to visually associate imprints and violence.

Family, although not his own, is Pablo's salvation. Pablo's friend Alfredo is first to uncover the abuse and show concern. Alfredo does so from the security of his loving and unconventional family. The boys come from contrasting families. While both fathers, Mariano (Manuel Morón), the hardware store owner, and José (Alberto Jiménez), the tattoo artist, manipulate cold, metallic tools, they do so for different ends. Mariano destroys with his hands whereas José creates. The inken black and blue bruises on Pablo's body, garnered from his abusive father Mariano, contrast the tattoo artwork that Alfredo's father José etches into his son Alfredo's pre-adolescent body. Alfredo's parents incarnate the chummy, comprehensive, egalitarian spirit of Mr. Richet's characterization. While Pablo's school is useless in shielding him from domestic violence, the effectiveness of Spanish child protective services appears to be more promising. For this reason, *Pellet* closes with the destructive force of the train, which ultimately crushes Pablo's ball to symbolically free the boy from his abuse. Thereby, Mañas's film champions intervention.

While Mr. Richet is key to *Small Change*'s conception of the child, the minor character of Laura is significant in *Pellet*'s representation of the Spanish child protection system. Her knowledge of such procedures suggests that she may be a social worker or perhaps a lawyer, although her profession is never known. Laura's primary concern is that Alfredo's parents get into legal trouble for sheltering the boy who fears for his life. Matthew Marr astutely notes that Alfredo's father: "espouses an ethics of intervention—if not for the sake of the reckless lads themselves, then for the sake of their loved ones" (44). Nevertheless, Laura suggests that child protection law might incriminate José for kidnapping rather than support the intervention. In the face of this doubt, the boys unite against the adults so that Pablo will not be returned to his abusive father. Laura's function in the film is to alert her friends to the potential risk of their involvement (and create suspense thereby). Although it would be naive to read the obstacles in Pablo's intervention without consideration for their dramatic effect, the film does reflect a few of the strengths and weakness of Spain's child protection law in the nineties.

Pablo's case illuminates the defects of the 1987 Act 21 for Child Protection. Spanish law would most likely consider Pablo a victim of both physical and emotional abuse. Physical abuse

after 1987 was determined by documented injuries (De Paúl and González 213). De Paúl and González summarize that emotional abuse is constituted by: “chronic verbal hostility from any adult in the family, such as insults, scorn, criticism, threats of abandonment, and a constant blockage of a child’s interaction with others (ranging from avoidance to reclusion or confinement)” (213). Pablo’s case exhibits physical and emotional abuse coupled with isolation as a result of the visibility of his injuries. Presumably on account of the freshness of his bruises, Pablo must work in his father’s hardware store (instead of attend school) on repeated occasions. Although it provides for dramatic tension, it is unlikely that the law would require that Pablo return to his family. The 1996 Legal Protection of the Minor Act aimed at the preservation of the family unit but had “not intended to return a child to (or to keep a child in) a maltreating family” (De Paúl and González 214).

While *Pellet* shares the theme of child abuse with Truffaut’s *Small Change*, the Spanish feature recuperates the child’s voice from *The 400 Blows*. *Pellet* surrenders to Pablo’s testimony in the only direct camera address of the feature.<sup>11</sup> Camerawork in this scene is a clearer indication of what Marr sees as Mañas’s privileging of the boys’ selfhood through friendship: “Mañas’s movie counters a unilaterally adultist vision of boyhood identity, positioning Pablo and Alfredo as a dyad who occupy a kind of affirmative masculine space apart” (50). As is the case throughout *Pellet*, Mañas’s camera literally or more directly interprets Truffaut’s first film; even here, Mañas’s camera shoots Pablo head-on while Truffaut positioned his off to the side. No off-screen voice interjects nor guides Pablo’s testimony. In *Pellet*, Mañas’s lens incorporates the spectator into the diegesis by casting the audience in the role of child protective services. To a presumed representative of child welfare rather than the psychologist of a juvenile detention center, Pablo recounts a litany of abusive acts and recites a series of expletives that reveal the horror he was living.<sup>12</sup> Juan José Ballesta masterfully performs the monologue with sadness and shame rather than anger.

*Pellet* makes a case for adult intervention on the basis of the protection of an abused minor. While the film portrays the welfare model, and its obstacles, Mañas’s camerawork tells a different story. The pivotal sequence of Pablo’s testimony consists of the camera’s surrender to *Pellet*’s voice and subjectivity. *Small Change* does not grant Julien the same opportunity. Mañas’s cinematography in the penultimate sequence articulates a more compelling perspective on rights-based discourse than does Mr. Richet’s speech. Pablo’s monologue has the weight and credentials that Mr. Richet’s lacks.

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<sup>11</sup> This filming invokes *The 400 Blows*, in Schmelzer’s view (83), while Begin observes that Pablo gives his deposition to the spectator (272).

<sup>12</sup> “He used to kick me and pull my hair. He burned me with cigarettes and he made me drink my pee. Before going to bed he used to give me a laxative. When I misbehaved, he locked me up in the dark in my room or in the closet; and he would say that he wouldn’t let me out until I said I was sorry, and that he would leave me there until I died. He wouldn’t let me hang out with my friends and he made me work in the hardware store. He insulted me. He spit at me. He said that I made him sick, and that I should have died instead of my brother. Should I say it? Son of a bitch, bastard, shit, asshole, pig, fag./ Me daba patadas y me tiraba del pelo. Me quemaba con los cigarrillos y me hacía beberme el pis. Antes de irme a la cama me daba una pastilla para hacer caca. Cuando me portaba mal, me encerraba en la habitación a oscuras o me metía en el armario; y me decía que hasta que no me arrepintiera no me iba a sacar, y que me dejaría hasta que me muriera. No me dejaba ir con mis amigos y me hacía trabajar en la ferretería. Me insultaba. Me escupía. Decía que le daba asco, que me tenía que haber muerto yo y no mi hermano. ¿Lo digo? Hijo de puta, mal nacido, cabrón, mierda, gilipollas, cerdo, maricón”

## Conclusion

François Truffaut's first film sets the standard for the cinema of boyhood across languages and borders. A comparison of *The 400 Blows*, *Small Change*, and *Pellet* shows that schools, state agencies, parents, and peers play a variety of roles according to the judicial, rights-based, and welfare models. The rights-based model is implicit in Antoine's and Pablo's testimonials in *The 400 Blows* and *Pellet* but, paradoxically, where this approach is explicit, *Small Change* undermines its thrust. The inquisitive cameras of Truffaut and Mañas intervene to invite the spectator to dispute or promote the efficacy of intervention and the resilience of youth. *Small Change* encourages children to steel themselves while *Pellet* reveals the steely impressions on the bodies of an abused and a tattooed boy. Mañas follows the French filmmaker by rendering his interpretation of Truffaut's first film as the 400 physical blows to Pellet.

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