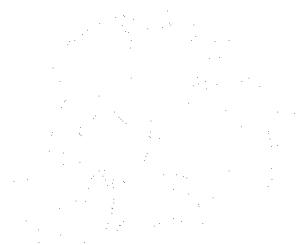


**I N T R O D U  
C T I O N T O  
A T R U E H I S  
J E A N - L U C  
G O D A R D  
S T O R Y O F  
C I N E M A  
A N D T E L E  
V I S I O N**

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'Theory and Practice'

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# A True Story of the Movies



I  
**NO LONGER HAVE**  
**ANY HOPE**  
**THE BLIND**  
**SPEAK OF A**  
**WAY OUT**  
**BUT**  
**I SEE**

MOI  
JE N'AI PLUS  
D'ESPOIR  
LES AVEUGLES  
PARLENT P<sup>E</sup> D'UNE  
ISSUE  
MOI  
JE VOIS





translated by Timothy Barnard  
with an essay by Michael Witt

# Introduction to a True History of Cinema and Television

Jean-Luc Godard

preface by Serge Losique  
caboose Montreal



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## Preface

In the fall of 78 Serge Losique, director of the Conservatory of Cinematographic Art in Montreal, which had hosted Henri Langlois the year before, suggested that I continue the work Langlois had begun.

Rather than giving a course like those found in every university in the world today, I proposed to Losique we look at the affair as a business affair, as a kind of co-production that would be a sort of script for a possible series of films entitled: introduction to a true history of cinema and television. True in the sense that it would be made out of images and sounds and not texts, even illustrated ones. All the more so because I had had this project with Langlois.

The script was thus divided into several chapters or voyages (ten) with a budget of 10,000 Canadian dollars per chapter, divided between the Conservatory and the film company I am a part of, Sonimage.

On each trip I brought with me a little of my story and plunged back into it at a rate of two of my films at the end of each month. But often the bathwater brought out something other than what my memory had recorded. The reason for this was that in the morning we screened pieces of films from the history of cinema which back then were connected for me with what I was doing. And I commented on it all on the spot in front of three or four Canadians who were just as lost as I was in this history.

Then everything came to a halt, as Losique had financial difficulties and was writing Sonimage rubber cheques and then none at all. But just the same, he was bold enough to break new ground, and *nobody's perfect.\**

Jean-Luc Godard  
1980

\* In English in the original—Trans.



# Preface to the English-language Edition

In Jean-Luc Godard's 1963 short film *Le Grand Escroc*, a character asserts that 'cinema is the most beautiful fraud in the world', and it is this sense of paradox that has shadowed his work and career—a marvellous amalgam of splendour and swagger that is unmatched even in an art that is chock-full of them.

Few filmmakers beyond the early pioneers have had so profound an effect on the development of the cinema as Godard. First as a critic and theorist in the pages of *Cahiers du Cinéma* and other publications, then as a practitioner during the heady days of the New Wave in the 1960s, he redefined the way we look at film. A philosopher of the cinema, Godard is also its great artist; he made film language an integral part of his narratives and liberated the cinematic image in ways we had never quite witnessed before, interjecting himself between the spectator and the screen and in a large sense doing for the movies what the Beatles were doing for music. Championing the misfits of Hollywood (Nicholas Ray et al.), Godard and his fellow critics-turned-auteurs dethroned the 'quality' directors of the established French cinema and instituted what is arguably the most important watershed in the history of cinema after the advent of sound.

Among other achievements, Godard devised a modern hero for the urban environment. In American films and in the French cinema that preceded Godard the contrast between the good guy and the bad guy was clear and evident. Godard erased this distinction. Belmondo is a thief (in *À bout de souffle*), but we are on his side, not the side of those who are pursuing him. The revolt of 1968 wasn't far behind. Like his own characters, Godard's influence on French cinema was paradoxical, at once liberating and destructive. By assailing its 'tradition of quality' or academicism and proposing Hollywood action films as a model, he hastened the demise of the French studios.

There are many Godards, but two of them are defined by his 1971 motorcycle accident. Though always intensely political, the pre-accident Godard remained accessible to ordinary movie-goers; after his accident, Godard transformed himself into a philosopher of the audiovisual for whom cinema's revolutionary potential assumed vital importance.

It was not too long afterwards that I was first privileged to have Godard's path cross mine. He had always entertained an intense interest in explaining cinema's evolution and when he asked me in 1976 for the opportunity to elaborate on the history of the seventh art in a series of joint public talks and discussions at the Montreal Conservatory of Cinematographic Art (talks which evolved in turn out of lectures given earlier at the Conservatory by Cinémathèque française founder Henri Langlois), I was delighted to accept. His 'History of the Cinema' was essentially born in Montreal and I am proud to have assisted in its birth.

Serge Losique  
Founding President  
Montreal World Film Festival  
October 2011

# Archaeology of *Histoire(s) du cinéma*

Michael Witt

The years 1998–2001 saw the completion by Jean-Luc Godard of his long-cherished, monumental experimental historical project, *Histoire(s) du cinéma*. This offers simultaneously a reflection on a range of interrelated topics: the history of cinema and television; Godard's life and his place within that history; the history of cinema in the context of the other arts; the history of film-thinking; the history of the twentieth century; the interpenetration of cinema and that century; and the impact of films on subjectivity and memory. It also constitutes an implicit critique of the longstanding neglect by historians of the value of films as historical documents and of the narrow scope and limited ambition of the type of history often produced by professional film historians, while proposing and demonstrating a 'theorem' regarding cinema and history.<sup>1</sup> This theorem is premised on two main assumptions: first, that the cinema, a product of the inventions and discoveries of the nineteenth century, assumed the role of historian of the twentieth, documenting it from beginning to end; and second, that every moment of the past remains potentially available to history. If the fundamental challenge facing all historians is that of bringing the past to life, Godard's response to that challenge – the central tenet of his theorem – is to apply a cinematically-inspired method of fabricating history based on the principle of the montage of disparate phenomena in poetic imagery. 'Bring together things that have as yet never been brought together and did not seem predisposed to be so', as he summarises his method, quoting Robert Bresson.<sup>2</sup>

The polysemic terms 'histoire' (meaning both 'history' and 'story') and 'du' ('of' and 'by') in the title *Histoire(s) du cinéma* are key. Their combination suggests not only a project about both cinema and history, and about all the stories told by cinema, but also the principle of a form of history derived from the very stuff of cinema: images and sounds. One could be forgiven for assuming from this

that *Histoire(s) du cinéma* would be an audiovisual work, and to an extent this is correct: one of the objects designated by this title is the four-and-a-half-hour, eight-episode video series released by Gaumont as a VHS boxed set in November 1998 (subsequently re-issued by a number of companies, including Gaumont, on DVD). Materially speaking, this audiovisual version is a labour of love, involving the painstaking orchestration of thousands of clips from films, television and radio; details of drawings, paintings, photographs, graphic novels and texts; extracts of songs and music; and a number of recitations and staged sequences. Through the weaving and layering of what are, for the most part, unprepossessing scraps of reproductions, Godard has produced an audiovisual tapestry of astonishing sumptuousness.

Far from being solely an audiovisual project, however, *Histoire(s) du cinéma* in its final manifestation is a much more complex integrated multiform artefact. Thus '*Histoire(s) du cinéma*' is also the title of a four-volume set of art books published by Gallimard in October 1998 in their prestigious *Blanche* collection (republished in a single volume in 2006) and of a boxed set of five audio CDs, together with four multilingual books, released by ECM Records in December 1999. These three versions of the project are all organised into the same eight parts, or, more precisely, the same four two-part chapters, which are numbered from 1A/1B to 4A/4B. Two years later, in November 2001, Gaumont exhibited an 84-minute 35mm 'best of' compilation/remix of fragments from the video series designed for theatrical distribution, *Moments choisis des Histoire(s) du cinéma* ('Selected Moments of *Histoire[s] du cinéma*').<sup>3</sup> For this abbreviated version, Godard reordered the source material significantly and added a small number of new elements.<sup>4</sup> In addition, in the late 1990s he expressed an interest in pursuing the project in a number of further directions. He talked, for instance, of staging *Histoire(s) du cinéma* as a play, and, interested by Chris Marker's *Immemory* (1998), of the possibility of making a CD-ROM.<sup>5</sup> He also indicated that he regretted not having mounted an exhibition to accompany the release of the videos and books, as a means of demonstrating what he described as 'the different modes of entering and leaving what one can call History',<sup>6</sup> although the exhibition he subsequently staged at the Pompidou Centre in May–June 2006,

*Voyage(s) en utopie: JLG, 1946–2006, À la recherche d'un théorème perdu* (*Travel[s] in Utopia: JLG, 1946–2006, In Search of a Lost Theorem*) constituted in some respects the partial belated realisation of this ambition.

The eight episodes of the three main versions of *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (the videos/DVDs, books and CDs) differ considerably from one another in theme, density, mood and tone. The first two-part chapter, made up of episodes 1A and 1B, is the series' cornerstone. Episode 1A, whose title *Toutes les histoires* (*All the [Hi]stories*) derives from a comment made by the art historian, novelist, filmmaker and politician André Malraux about the early achievements of photography, presents in condensed form the principal lines of thinking that run through the remainder of the series, especially in relation to Hollywood and World War II.<sup>7</sup> In episode 1B, *Une Histoire seule* (*A Solitary [Hi]story*), Godard examines his own place within film history and pursues a number of theoretical reflections on what he considers some of cinema's defining characteristics. The subsequent six episodes are what he has termed 'localised case studies'.<sup>8</sup> Episode 2A, *Seul le cinéma* (*The Cinema Alone*), develops the metaphor of 'projection', which he had already introduced in 1B; and episode 2B, whose title *Fatale beauté* (*Fatal Beauty*) recalls that of the French release version of Robert Siodmak's *The Great Sinner* (1949), *Passion fatale*, explores the relationship between cinema and the expression of beauty.<sup>9</sup> Episode 3A, whose title *La Monnaie de l'absolu* (*Aftermath of the Absolute*) Godard borrowed from the third volume of Malraux's philosophy of painting, *Psychologie de l'art* (*Psychology of Art*, 1947–49), focuses on cinema and the representation of war in the context of the Western pictorial tradition, through particular reference to Italian neo-realism;<sup>10</sup> and episode 3B, *Une Vague nouvelle* (*A New Wave*), offers a personal account of the French New Wave. Episode 4A, *Le Contrôle de l'univers* (*The Control of the Universe*), reflects on cinema as art through the example of Alfred Hitchcock; and episode 4B, *Les Signes parmi nous* (*The Signs Amongst Us*), which derives its title from a fable by the Swiss author Charles Ferdinand Ramuz, is less a further case study than a combination of sombre, intimate self-portrait and meditative stocktaking in relation to the series as a whole.<sup>11</sup> Running throughout is a three-way tension between a bleak overarching narrative of cinematic decline, the vitality of the crystal-

line forms through which that narrative is expressed and a recurrent thematic emphasis on artistic metamorphosis and renewal.

If we take a step back from the expanded artwork described above and consider it within the context of Godard's wider oeuvre, two things become clear. First, the organic relationship between the different manifestations of *Histoire(s) du cinéma* is echoed in the relationship between the project and his prior and parallel output, and indeed between each of his works. Every film by Godard, as Jacques Doniol-Valcroze observed perspicaciously as early as 1965, is 'to be continued' in the next.<sup>12</sup> Or, as Jean-Louis Leutrat put it well recently, Godard's output as a whole constitutes a sort of infinite 'protoplasmic oeuvre', which is characterised above all by the constant circulation of matter from one constituent work to the next.<sup>13</sup> The second important realisation is that Godard has been patiently developing his historical project since the late 1960s, and that one could easily apply the title *Histoire(s) du cinéma* to the entirety of his output since that time. In the context of this extended timeframe, one period played a decisive role: the seven months between April and October 1978, when he delivered a series of talks on cinema history in Montreal, which provided the basis for his 1980 book, *Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma* ('Introduction to a True History of Cinema'). It is the original video recordings of these talks that Timothy Barnard has meticulously re-transcribed and translated for the present volume. In what follows, I shall trace the genesis of *Histoire(s) du cinéma* from the late 1960s onwards, paying particular attention to the significance of the Montreal talks.

### *Prehistory of the Project*

Looking back on the early stages of his film history project from the perspective of 1979, Godard suggested that his desire to actively investigate cinema history had originated in a growing confusion he had experienced around 1967 or 1968 regarding how to proceed artistically, a realisation that what he needed to sustain and renew his creative practice as a filmmaker was a deeper and more productive understanding of the relationship between his own work and the discoveries of his predecessors, and a thorough dissatisfaction in this regard with written histories of cinema:

Little by little I became interested in cinema history. But as a filmmaker, not because I'd read Bardèche, Brasillach, Mitry or Sadoul (in other words: Griffith was born in such and such a year, he invented such and such a thing, and four years later Eisenstein did this or that), but by ultimately asking myself how the forms that I'd used had been created, and how such knowledge might help me.<sup>14</sup>

His approach to making history by bringing together disparate phenomena to create poetico-historical images can be traced back as far as the late 1960s. In the course of a televised discussion in 1967 of the relationship between people and images, for instance, he was already starting to think about cinema from a historical perspective, and to formulate the central principle of his later historiographic method:

I'm discovering today that Griffith was the contemporary of mathematicians such as Russell or Cantor. At the same moment that Griffith was inventing the language of cinema, roughly the same year, Russell was publishing his principles of mathematical logic, or things like that. These are the sorts of things I like linking together.<sup>15</sup>

The earliest concrete trace of Godard's film history project dates from 1969, when he and Jean-Pierre Gorin sketched a brief history of cinema through a collage of images, quotations and handwritten text as part of an abandoned book project entitled ‘Vive le cinéma! / À bas le cinéma!’ (‘Long Live Cinema! / Down with Cinema!’).<sup>16</sup> This was also the year of *Vent d'est* (*Wind from the East*), which, as Alberto Farassino has suggested, can be read not only as an experimental political film, but also as a historical interrogation of the western genre, the costume drama, Hollywood and the birth of photography.<sup>17</sup> Godard's drive to investigate cinema history was fuelled in the early years by an acute awareness of the profundity of the changes to cinema being brought about by the spread and effects of television, coupled with a concern for what he considered growing amnesia in relation to cinema's past artistic achievements and a loss of understanding regarding the methods and techniques

that had made them possible. As he observes in his second talk in Montreal, for instance, while shooting *Tout va bien* (*All's Well*) in 1972 he and Jean-Pierre Gorin discovered, when they attempted to model a shot on the sequence depicting Vakulinchuk's death in Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1926), that the secrets behind the insights of the great poet-filmmakers of the silent era, in areas such as framing, montage and rhythm, appeared to have been forgotten, and that attempts to reproduce them resulted in a sense of ungainly imitation: 'We realised something quite simple, that we didn't know how to do an angle like Eisenstein. When we tried to film someone with their head tilted a little to look at a dead person, we had no idea, what we were doing was grotesque'.<sup>18</sup>

By 1973, Godard's venture, known at that point under the working title 'Histoire(s) du cinéma: fragments inconnus d'une histoire du cinématographe' ('[Hi]stories of Cinema: Unknown Fragments of a History of the Cinematograph'), already included a spread of themes, debated with Gorin over the preceding four years, that would recur throughout much of his ensuing work:

How Griffith searched for editing and discovered the close-up; how Eisenstein searched for montage and discovered angles; how von Sternberg lit Marlene in the same way that Speer lit Hitler's appearances, and how this led to the first detective film; how Sartre made Astruc wield the camera like a pen so that it fell under the power of meaning and never recovered; true realism: Roberto Rossellini; how Brecht told the East Berlin workers to keep their distances; how Gorin left for elsewhere and didn't come back; how Godard turned himself into a tape recorder; how the conservation of images by the board of directors of the Cinémathèque française operates; the fight between Kodak and 3M; the invention of Secam.<sup>19</sup>

Throughout the 1970s, we find regular allusions to the embryonic *Histoire(s) du cinéma* in interviews and working documents, including the script of his major abandoned project of this period, 'Moi je' ('Me I'), the closing five pages of which are presented as 'a few as yet very incomplete fragments' of 'a true history of cinema', and include what would become over the ensuing decades a central strand of

reflection on Eisenstein's and Vertov's montage theories.<sup>20</sup>

The most important early document to have come to light to date relating to the origins of *Histoire(s) du cinéma* derives from the archive of the producer Wilfried Reichart. It is a twenty-page English-language collage made by Godard in the mid-1970s under the title 'Histoire(s) du cinéma et de la télévision/Studies in Motion Pictures and Television' which is reproduced as an appendix in this book. Although undated, this document probably dates from between 1974 and 1976, as it employs a number of images also used in *Ici et ailleurs* (*Here and Elsewhere*, co-directed by Anne-Marie Miéville, 1974) and *Six fois deux* (*Sur et sous la communication*) ('Six times Two [On and under Communication]', co-directed by Miéville, 1976). In any case, the final page suggests that it was produced while Godard and his long-time companion and collaborator Anne-Marie Miéville were still based in Grenoble, rather than in Rolle, Switzerland, where they moved in 1977.

This document gives a good deal of precise information, not only about the organisation and contents of the proposed series, but also the budget and technology they planned to use. It envisages ten one-hour video cassettes (masters to be produced in 2-inch NTSC), each one budgeted at \$60,000–\$100,000, with a proposed sale price of \$250–\$500 each. The whole series was to be completed in two phases over two years, with the fabrication of five cassettes in the first year and five in the second. The main organising principle was that of a division between silent and sound cinema: 1 Silent U.S.A., 2 Silent Europe, 3 Silent Russia, 4 Silent Others, 6 Talking U.S.A., 7 Talking Europe, 8 Talking Russia, 9 Talking Others. Cassettes 5 and 10 are described not in thematic terms, but rather as an introduction and summing up. Despite the relatively conventional organisation of this early prototype compared to that of the final versions of *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, it nevertheless points to significant continuity in certain areas. Cassette 2 (Silent Russia), for instance, presents in synoptic form, through reference to the celebrated sequence depicting the apparent rising up of the stone lions in *Battleship Potemkin*, a line of thinking that culminates in 1A and 3B of *Histoire(s) du cinéma*: Godard's thesis that Eisenstein discovered, not montage, but rather the effects that can be achieved by combining different angles through editing.

*Two Key Guides: André Malraux and Henri Langlois*

The thinking and work of two figures guided the development of Godard's project from the outset: André Malraux and the film collector, curator and co-founder of the Cinémathèque française, Henri Langlois. Godard's first love, he has stated, was for literature, through which he discovered painting, essentially via Malraux's philosophical studies of art, at roughly the same time he was beginning to engage seriously with cinema, between the ages of 20 and 22.<sup>21</sup> His debt to Malraux is multifaceted and profound. Indeed, in the mid-1980s, he considered developing a film project on Malraux under the title *La Métamorphose des dieux* (*The Metamorphosis of the Gods*), a reference to the latter's three-volume philosophical reflection on the visual arts, which had appeared between 1957 and 1976.<sup>22</sup> Although he did not pursue this project, *Histoire(s) du cinéma* is in many ways its partial realisation. Godard inherited from Malraux an inclusive, global vision of art and an associative, non-chronological, visual, poetic and philosophical approach to the task of making history. In his philosophies of art, Malraux ranges freely across time and place, leaping to and fro across the centuries and moving from Europe, Asia, China and Africa to Polynesia, sometimes in a single long, rich sentence.<sup>23</sup> Godard pursued a very similar approach to cinema history, and adopted three Malravian ideas: first, a conceptualisation of the artist as the *rival* of reality, rather than its transcriber, and of the function of art as that of the transfiguration and *replacement* of reality, rather than of its mere emulation or representation; second, the idea (succinctly encapsulated in the title of the third volume of Malraux's philosophy of painting, which, as noted above, Godard appropriated for use in *Histoire[s] du cinéma*) of art as the 'aftermath' of the Absolute, in the sense of a by-product of humanity's never-ending struggle against the human condition, the passage of time and death; and third, the principle of metamorphosis, wherein the art of the past is seen to be remembered, destroyed and reinvented in that of the present.

Just as important, in particular in the early stages of Godard's project, was Malraux's methodological example: following the pioneering comparative use of pictorial reproductions and details in art history books by the critic and historian Élie Faure (see in particular

Faure's five-volume history of art published between 1909 and 1921), Malraux pursued a remarkable experiment in iconographic history in his two three-volume studies, *Psychologie de l'art* and *Le Musée imaginaire de la sculpture mondiale* (*The Imaginary Museum of World Sculpture*, 1952–54), which not only deployed a highly lyrical style of writing, but also explored the creative and critical potential of the juxtaposition of images, of the passage to and fro between reproductions of whole works and details, and of shifting image-text relationships on the page. Through his use of photographic reproductions, he drew connections between details of paintings and works in their integrity reproduced on facing pages (e.g. a detail from Frans Hals' *Women Governors of the Haarlem Almshouse* [1664] and Daumier's *The Chess Players* [1863]). He also juxtaposed classic paintings and later copies (e.g. Sebastiano de Piombo's *The Descent of Christ into Limbo* [1516] and Cézanne's *Christ in Limbo* [c. 1867]), compared contrasting treatments of the same motif (e.g. Rembrandt's and Chaim Soutine's renditions of beef carcasses painted in the seventeenth and twentieth centuries respectively) and highlighted stylistic affinities between works produced in very different contexts (e.g. a fourth-century Gandhara Buddhist head and the thirteenth-century 'smiling angel' at Reims Cathedral).<sup>24</sup> Malraux talked in this context, in vocabulary adopted by Godard, of the *rapprochement* (bringing together, or combination) of photographs, and of having discovered and demonstrated through the use of visual *rapprochements* 'an intelligence of images, which is faster than that of ideas'.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, Malraux was fully conscious of the quasi-cinematic nature of his use in his books of techniques such as montage, rhythm and reframing:

They [the photographic plates] scarcely belong to what historical studies call illustration; they do not accompany the description of works but replace it and, like the shots in a film, are intended on occasion to convey a suggestion by their content or by the order in which they occur.<sup>26</sup>

Although the smaller-format reissues of the *Psychologie de l'art* books retain a sense of the originality and power of Malraux's project, only the beautifully-produced original outsize editions published by Skira, which were lavishly illustrated with large colour plates

and black-and-white reproductions throughout, convey the sense of poetic visual thinking that informed Godard's experiments in Montreal (where he invokes both Faure and Malraux) and underpin the conception and compositional method of the videos and books of *Histoire(s) du cinéma*.<sup>27</sup> As Godard put it simply in 2000, the stunning first edition of the first volume of *Psychologie de l'art*, published by Skira in 1947, 'showed me the way'.<sup>28</sup>

No less significant than Malraux in the genesis of *Histoire(s) du cinéma* is Henri Langlois, whom Godard considers a 'discoverer' and 'instigator' on a par with celebrated literary figures such as Gaston Gallimard and Bernard Grasset, but whose contribution to twentieth-century art and culture he deems to have been seriously and unjustly undervalued by comparison.<sup>29</sup> Godard's profound esteem for Langlois is inspired by two principal convictions: first, simply that the latter, in collaboration with Georges Franju in the early years, saved and showed large numbers of films; and second, that the Cinémathèque française, under Langlois' stewardship, fulfilled the function of what Godard has described variously as a film museum, the 'University of Cinema' and an 'atelier of the great Masters', where the New Wave filmmakers discovered the masterpieces of a near-invisible art form.<sup>30</sup> In an address at the Cinémathèque française in 1966 entitled 'Grâce à Henri Langlois' ('Thanks to Henri Langlois'), Godard declared his boundless admiration and friendship, acknowledged the extent of his personal debt to his mentor and guide, and stressed the significance of Langlois' single-mindedness and 'titanic efforts' in the realms of film collection and curating for future generations of filmmakers and filmgoers.<sup>31</sup> In subsequent interviews, he would often point to the originality and significance of Langlois' conceptualisation of the role of cinematheques in terms not just of preservation, restoration and projection, but also of production. As he put it in 1979, Langlois 'produced production' by nurturing a curiosity and a love for films and inspiring a desire to make them.<sup>32</sup>

Godard came to view Langlois as an innovative visual thinker and poet-historian, for whom 'showing was a form of thinking' and who pioneered an exploratory form of visual cinema history through the Malraux-inspired art of comparative projection.<sup>33</sup> Langlois delighted in creating imaginative, provocative film programs at the Cinémathèque française, where one might encounter one after the

other a film by Griffith, a mediocre French film of the 1930s and a recent Warhol. 'It was fabulous', observed Jacques Rivette, 'precisely because one could see Griffith and Warhol together on the same night. Because it was then that one realised that there are not two or three kinds of cinema, there is only one cinema. It was the perpetual interaction of the present and the past of the cinema that was so exciting.'<sup>34</sup> Similarly, Langlois discovered that the order in which he showed individual reels from different films while teaching was sometimes highly revealing, overturning received wisdom and casting in relief the significance of hitherto neglected filmmakers:

Two years ago people often said 'Mizoguchi and Kurosawa are geniuses, but Ozu, well maybe'. And it wasn't uncommon to hear 'To hell with Ozu'. The proof is that every time we showed one of Ozu's films, there were only ten or twenty people in the cinema. It's only thanks to a certain stubborn insistence on showing his films and the homage we devoted to him that people realised he was an extraordinary filmmaker. I was captivated by his genius while I was lecturing on contemporary cinema. I was talking about Japanese cinema, and selected some reels as usual to show to the audience to illustrate my argument. And that's when I suddenly realised that what I was saying no longer matched what I was seeing. When I showed the Mizoguchi, Kurosawa and Ozu clips, I began by praising the first two at the expense of the latter, but realised that Ozu outshone them completely. A reel by Ozu sandwiched between Kurosawa and Mizoguchi made me understand his genius.<sup>35</sup>

It is with these practices in mind that Godard has often described Langlois not just as a curator and programmer, but as a *filmmaker*, who composed great experimental film collages through the juxtaposition of the works of others in his projectors.<sup>36</sup> Dominique Paini has described Langlois well in this regard as a conceptual collage writer whose Malravian programming practice – he proposes the suggestive Eisensteinian term 'programming-attraction' – constituted a pioneering practical experiment in cinematic figurability, which simultaneously invented 'a veritable method of mnemo-technical "conservation"'.<sup>37</sup> In the course of a conversation

with Freddy Buache about Langlois in 1990, Godard also likened the latter to Eisenstein: 'He conjured up a history of cinema that much later made me want to learn. . . . A history he put together [*montait*] the way that Eisenstein edited [*montait*] his films, by hand, with just a pair of scissors and a splicer. It was astonishing'.<sup>38</sup>

This characterisation of Langlois as a historian who operated through montage not only provides a suggestive conceptual model but is accurate at a literal level too: besides juxtaposing films in his projectors, and creating thought-provoking *rapprochements* between disparate images and objects in his museum, Langlois pursued a comparatively little-known career as a compilation filmmaker. Striking new negatives from existing prints (or having new prints laboriously struck frame by frame from existing shrunken negatives), he used these as a means of reprinting selected clips, which he then edited together to produce montage films. He made at least half a dozen of these in the 1960s and 70s, devoted to topics such as the Lumière brothers, early silent French cinema, the French avant-garde of the 1920s, experimental German cinema of the 30s and the work of Gloria Swanson. Indeed in March 1974 he attempted a vast twelve-hour non-stop montage of clips from two hundred films devoted to 'Paris through the cinema from Louis Lumière to Jean-Luc Godard', which was shown at the Palais des Congrès. Installed in the projection booth, armed with glue and scissors, he frantically composed the film about to be shown moments before it was projected.<sup>39</sup> Together with Malraux's art books, Langlois' curatorial project generally, and his compilation filmmaking activities in particular, are among the most direct and significant forerunners both to Godard's Montreal talks and to his finished *Histoire(s) du cinéma*.<sup>40</sup>

### Montreal

In December 1976, Langlois and Godard announced a joint project for an audiovisual history of cinema, which they would co-write and co-direct for release on film and video cassette.<sup>41</sup> It was to be financed and produced by Jean-Pierre Rassam, whose position at Gaumont in the early 1970s had already been instrumental in enabling Godard and Miéville to experiment with video technology. In the late 1960s and early 70s, Langlois had been lecturing widely,

having first accepted an invitation from Serge Losique in April 1968 to commute to Montreal from Paris every three weeks from the autumn of that year for a period of three years. Losique, who went on to found and run the Festival des films du monde de Montréal/Montreal World Film Festival, was a professor in the French department at Sir George Williams University (one of two institutions that merged in 1974 to form Concordia University), where he taught French film.<sup>42</sup> In 1968, Losique had founded the Conservatoire d'art cinématographique/Conservatory of Cinematographic Art as a film archive and repertory cinema under the auspices of the university, which was housed in a university building in downtown Montreal (1455 Boulevard de Maisonneuve Ouest) until the university, during a period of budget cuts, closed it down in 1998.

It was here that Langlois embarked on his now legendary 'anti-lectures', during which he would project reels of films and deliver semi-improvised three-hour talks to students.<sup>43</sup> These anti-lectures were followed by similar engagements in Washington D.C., Harvard and Nanterre, France. The 1976 prototypical vision of *Histoire(s) du cinéma* conceived by Langlois and Godard was almost immediately abandoned, however, due to the former's untimely death in January 1977. In March 1977, Godard travelled to Montreal to present a season of twenty-two of his films, which ran at the Conservatory from 5 to 17 of that month. The program of this retrospective, together with video recordings of the five evening question-and-answer sessions with Godard that took place from 9 to 13 March, is held in the Concordia University archives (although the screening schedule differed in the end from the program announced).

On 9 March 1977, at a widely-covered press conference held during the retrospective, Godard announced that he would be returning in September to deliver a series of talks on cinema history, thereby continuing the lecturing work initiated by Langlois at the Conservatory in the late 1960s and early 70s.<sup>44</sup> According to Losique, in his preface to the current volume, these discussions had been underway since the previous year, when Godard had first approached him with the idea.<sup>45</sup> On this occasion, he made clear a number of things: that he would be approaching the task of delivering the course less as a teacher than as a student of cinema, albeit 'a student who has decided to be paid as much as possible'; that the

course would be a ‘co-production’ between the Conservatory and his and Miéville’s production company, Sonimage; that he would be treating it as preparatory research for a longer-term audiovisual study of the history of cinema and television; that he considered the course as an extension of Langlois’ anti-lectures; and that the entire proceedings would be videotaped.<sup>46</sup> ‘What we’ll try to do’, he suggested, in what would become something of a refrain in his public pronouncements during this period, ‘is to see what happened, and how it happened, so as to show that in general it happened differently to how people say it did’.<sup>47</sup> At this early stage, it was envisaged that the course would run over two semesters; that a limited number of students would be able to take part in unspecified ‘practical exercises’; and that additional students might be able to sit in on the lectures.<sup>48</sup> Although the proposed practical element of the course remained vague, and later fell by the wayside, Godard nevertheless gave an indication at this early stage of the types of approaches and tasks he had in mind:

I’m thinking of using a Beaulieu to speak about Griffith or Eisenstein. We can use equipment as a trace of a moment of production, and do the work, say, of an ethnologist, entomologist, geologist, philosopher, and ultimately of a producer. We can examine a cheque from a producer’s assistant, or from a director, and consider the stage at which it enters the production and distribution system. . . . That’s what I’d call practical courses. Sometimes, we’d invite witnesses, as if it were a trial [*procès*]. But in the sense that Marx understood it too: process [*processus*]. We’ll have to try to do practical courses using anything and everything. Use a Sony camera or a shot of Marlene Dietrich as our point of departure, and then, I don’t know, shoot all that differently.<sup>49</sup>

At the time of the inaugural edition of Losique’s World Film Festival, which ran from 19 to 28 August 1977, Godard returned to Montreal with a view to taking forward their plans for an unorthodox film history lecture series. As Losique recognised, Godard’s presence at the festival lent the event a certain prestige, and helped to generate valuable media interest.<sup>50</sup> It also served, Godard observed, to pub-

lise his and Losique's forthcoming 'co-production'.<sup>51</sup> At the press conference he held towards the end of the festival, which again attracted widespread media attention, Godard indicated that his course would be a continuation of his earlier collaborative plan with Langlois, and outlined his 'research project' as follows:

I'll soon be 50, which is generally the time that people write their memoirs and recount what they've done. But rather than writing those memoirs, and saying where I come from, and how it is that I've happened to take the journey that I have in this profession of mine, the cinema, rather than doing that, I'd like to tell my stories, a little like tales about cinema. And that's what I'm intending to do. There will be a dozen courses, which will lead to a dozen cassettes, and, perhaps later on they will produce some more elaborate works.<sup>52</sup>

So began Godard's film history experiment in Montreal, which laid the foundations for *Histoire(s) du cinéma*.

The initial idea was that Godard would start delivering his talks in September 1977, that there would be four per month, and that they would run in the first instance until October the following year. In spring 1977, however, he and Miéville accepted a major commission (a television adaptation of G. Bruno's celebrated nineteenth-century school textbook, *Le Tour de la France par deux enfants: devoir et patrie* ['A Tour of France by Two Children: Duty and the Homeland']), which would eventually become the television series *France tour détour deux enfants* (*France Tour Detour Two Children*, 1979).<sup>53</sup> Work on this vast project took longer than anticipated (it was finally completed in March 1978), and as a result Godard ended up pushing the start of his talks back to the spring of 1978. In April, he started commuting regularly from Rolle to Montreal, and delivered fourteen of a proposed twenty talks on consecutive Fridays and Saturdays at various points throughout the year, ending in October. In fact, a report in the Montreal press suggests that by the time the lecture series began in mid-April, Losique and Godard may have already attempted to launch it once, but that it had been 'interrupted for a certain period due to conflicts of an administrative nature' and was now restarting in a different format.<sup>54</sup>

In his opening remarks during the first of the talks transcribed in this book, Losique evokes and brushes aside reports of any administrative conflict.<sup>55</sup> He also indicates here, however, that Godard had been in Montreal the previous month, and alludes to an earlier abandoned format of the course that appears to have involved attempts to work with video technology on the Loyola College campus of the university.<sup>56</sup> Certainly, Godard refers during several of his talks to a different conception that he had originally had of the course from the one that took shape from April. According to press reports, students wishing to enrol on the course had initially been asked to pay a hefty fee (a figure of \$500 for students and \$1,000 for non-students is mentioned), but when it started in earnest on 14 and 15 April (the dates of the first two talks transcribed in this book), any such proposed fee had been scrapped.<sup>57</sup>

The talks presented here took place on 14/15 April, 5/6 May, 9/10 June, 16/17 June, 6/7 October, 13/14 October and 20/21 October. The dates and times of the screenings that accompanied the talks, together with the details of the films to be shown, were sometimes announced in advance in the press.<sup>58</sup> Two concluding trips (comprising four talks) were planned for December (they are referred to on a number of occasions, including at the end of what turned out to be the final talk in October), but did not take place. This is perhaps because – at least, it is what Godard claimed in his preface to *Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma* – Losique had run into financial difficulties, and the cheques he received from the latter started bouncing, then stopped altogether.<sup>59</sup> Besides any such possible financial considerations, however, one senses that towards the end the project was losing momentum, at least in the format that he and Losique had devised. Indeed Godard admits as much during what turned out to be the penultimate talk, when he states that ‘we’ve kind of run out of ideas for the end, which is coming up all of a sudden’.<sup>60</sup> By that stage, they had already screened a wide selection of his 1960s feature films. He also indicates that he would find it difficult to situate his films of the 1970s such as *Numéro deux* (*Number Two*, 1975) in relation to cinema history in the way that he had sought to do with his 1960s work; and although he expresses an interest in showing some of his and Miéville’s television programs, this would have presented major technical hurdles at the time.

(which he and Losique discuss) due to the problems of screening European video in North America, and the high cost of transferring from one format to the other.<sup>61</sup>

The break in the course from July to September reflected the university summer holiday. It also allowed Godard and Miéville to settle into their new Rolle studio and to develop some of the other large-scale projects they were working on during this period. Foremost among these were a feature film devoted to the role of the mafia in the construction of Las Vegas and the birth of Hollywood, and an ambitious collaborative project with the Mozambican government. Neither of these ultimately came to fruition, but both demanded considerable time, effort and international travel over the course of 1978, whilst Godard was also going and flying to Montreal. The first project, inspired by Henry Sergg’s 1978 biography of Bugsy Siegel, *Bugsy Siegel: le syndicat du crime à Las Vegas et Hollywood* (‘Bugsy Siegel: The Crime Syndicate in Las Vegas and Hollywood’), was to star Vittorio Gassman and Charlotte Rampling, or as the project developed, Robert De Niro and Diane Keaton. As is clear from some of his comments during his talks, Godard occasionally came to Montreal via California, and according to Serge Losique, at one point the two of them travelled together – at Losique’s expense – to Los Angeles to conduct preliminary research for the project.<sup>62</sup> Godard also alludes in one of his talks to his negotiations with De Niro.<sup>63</sup>

The second major project was a proposed series of five films, or ‘TV-cinema’ programs, commissioned by the government of the People’s Republic of Mozambique under the title ‘Nord contre sud’ (‘North against South’), or ‘Naissance (de l’image) d’une nation’ (‘Birth [of the Image] of a Nation’), which was to explore the nascent nation’s construction of a national television infrastructure and the function of that infrastructure in relation to Mozambique’s formation of a post-colonial national identity. In his comments at the beginning of the first talk, Losique indicates that Godard would be visiting Mozambique in May, and we know from the extensive documentation relating to the project later published in *Cahiers du Cinéma* that Godard and Miéville travelled there again from 24 August to 4 September.<sup>64</sup> Unsurprisingly, this project was at the forefront of Godard’s mind whilst he was commuting to Montreal, and is a recurrent reference in the talks.

Godard envisaged the course as the first concrete step on an open-ended journey into what he termed, early in his first talk, the ‘completely uncharted territory’ of cinema history.<sup>65</sup> He characterised his aims – in line with the gardening metaphor that runs through them – in terms of preparing the ground for a much larger, longer-term project: ‘That’s what I told Losique, it’s a little like—even before planting a tree, which will be our history of cinema, for the moment we’re weeding the ground, which we’re not even sure is ours’.<sup>66</sup> He anticipated this exploratory research culminating in a visual study entitled ‘Aspect inconnu de l’histoire du cinéma’ (‘Unknown Aspect of Cinema History’), to which he was already planning to devote the rest of his working life.<sup>67</sup> The talks were part of a co-production deal designed to lead to a video series, with the participation of the Conservatory as partner and co-producer.

According to Godard, in his preface to *Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma*, the \$100,000 budget was split equally between the Conservatory and Sonimage. Losique paid Godard \$5,000 per ‘voyage’ to Montreal, during each of which the latter gave two talks.<sup>68</sup> Sonimage’s contribution to the budget is less clear, but presumably was to take the form of the work and expertise required for the production of the videos. The two-page contract between the Conservatory and Sonimage, signed by Godard, Miéville and Losique, included a clause specifying a 50/50 split of production costs and revenues for the videos; it also indicated that Losique would retain the rights to the series in Quebec, while Godard would own those for France and Belgium.<sup>69</sup> During the talks, he and Losique refer several times to their plans for a clip-based compilation film, the latter suggesting optimistically at one point that the students will ‘see the whole thing within two years’.<sup>70</sup> Godard alludes periodically during the course to his intention to return to Montreal and pursue his work with the students there over the course of a number of years. From the beginning of the fall sessions, he also starts raising the possibility of publishing a book with Losique based on the talks, suggesting that the types of links he is seeking to establish during the screenings and discussions will be clearer when presented on the page with the aid of still images.<sup>71</sup>

Prior to embarking on the Montreal venture, Godard had previously attempted to develop an autobiographical film project

under the working title 'Mes Films' ('My Films'). Commissioned by the Société Française de Production (SFP), this was to have been an investigation of and reflection on his many uncompleted films. After grappling with the project for three years, however, he was ultimately overwhelmed and conceded defeat, refunding the development money: 'I had no idea, I was going off in every direction, it had become a 200,000-hour film and there wasn't enough time left in my life to shoot it'.<sup>72</sup> Although 'Mes Films' foundered, its auto-biographical focus remained a constant throughout his work on *Histoire(s) du cinéma*. As he made clear in 1989, his aim from the outset had been to approach the task of recounting the history of cinema from the perspective of his own experience as a filmmaker, and to 'explore what was impersonal in this first-person novel, and personal to everybody'.<sup>73</sup> He was motivated, he suggested, by a need to express his gratitude towards an art form that 'has allowed me to exist, and given me the desire to do things, and to continue to exist'.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, he considered what he was doing – in the lineage of 'Moi je' – as a kind of public 'psychoanalysis of myself and of where I am in cinema'.<sup>75</sup>

It was with these aims in mind that he approached his earlier films in Montreal as documentary glimpses of his past life.<sup>76</sup> The end result, *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, like Marcel Duchamp's portable museum, *Box in a Valise*, is a distilled summation of Godard's art and thought since he began writing about and making films. Indeed the series is explicitly informed not only by a re-engagement with his own films, but also with his early critical texts: many of the clips he samples and treats videographically, until they glow with an almost radioactive intensity, are precisely the same sequences he had described in his writings in the 1950s. While he was working on the series, he later observed, these half-remembered images and sounds functioned in a manner analogous to that of the pebbles in the tale of Tom Thumb, providing a trail that enabled him to retrace his footsteps and piece together an account of his life, and of cinema, through fragments of the films he had loved.<sup>77</sup> Following the pebbles through the forest in the manner of Tom Thumb, he suggested, led him in turn to larger questions regarding cinema history and history, such as 'What forest are we in?' and 'What is the history of the forest?'.<sup>78</sup>

In June 1978, during his fourth trip to Montreal, he outlined plans for an eight-part video series lasting a total of four hours, to be organised principally by national cinema and by a separation between the silent and sound periods (e.g. one episode on 'Silent America', one on 'Talking America', and so on).<sup>79</sup> The next month, in the course of a lengthy interview conducted in Rolle by two journalists from the French magazine *Télérama*, he sketched out an alternative model, very close in structure to the ten-episode series discussed earlier, which envisaged five episodes on silent cinema and five on the sound period.<sup>80</sup> This, he anticipated, would be produced or co-produced – like his and Miéville's two television series, *Six fois deux (Sur et sous la communication)* and *France tour détour deux enfants* – by the Institut National de l'Audiovisuel (INA).<sup>81</sup> The principal outlet he envisaged at this point for the series was television, although he also anticipated a potentially vast videotape market among the burgeoning academic film studies community, especially in the United States. If nothing else, he suggested in a gentle jibe back in Montreal, it would give university professors something visual to show and discuss in their seminars, and perhaps serve to stimulate new ways of thinking about the investigation and communication of film history.<sup>82</sup> One idea he advanced, for instance, was that of giving video cameras to students and setting them the task of reproducing certain angles or scenes from classic films. Another, inspired by one of the Montreal screenings, when one of his films arrived from the distributor minus one of its reels, involved removing an entire reel from a feature film and challenging the director whose film it was to reconstruct the reel from memory with the assistance of the students.<sup>83</sup> At that time, the main drawback to such a use of remaking and pastiche in a cinematic context, as Jean Mitry noted in 1979, in an otherwise enthusiastic response to Godard's advocacy of its potentially productive application in the field of cinema history, was that of cost.<sup>84</sup>

Godard's talks were organised around the projection in the morning (from ten o'clock to twelve o'clock) of a film, or of selected extracts from several films, which he felt resonated suggestively with, or he recalled having helped him at the time that he had made, the example of his own work that was projected in the afternoon (at two o'clock). The talks had a guiding theme, such as 'women',

‘revolution’, ‘films about filmmaking’, ‘music’, ‘war’, and so on. The first film preceding the talks was almost always from the silent era, and this played a defining role in relation to the whole session, providing what Godard termed the ‘heading’ of the day’s screenings and the overarching framework within which to consider those that followed, including his own.<sup>85</sup> As early as the first talk, he raised the possibility of juxtaposing individual reels from different films, rather than screening films in their entirety, but indicated that he had decided against trying this on this occasion because it would be somewhat arbitrary, given that he did not know one of the films well (Otto Preminger’s *Fallen Angel*, 1945), or have a clear sense of alternatives if its *rapprochement* with *À bout de souffle* (*Breathless*, 1960) yielded little or nothing.<sup>86</sup>

From the third talk onwards, however, he and Losique settled on a method: screening individual reels of three to five films in the morning, followed by one of his own in its entirety in the afternoon. Thus the morning session acquired ‘a kind of montage quality’, as Godard put it, in which he sought to create ‘a connecting thread, like a film, a musical theme’.<sup>87</sup> This montage of different reels, followed by one of his own films, paved the way for the improvised talk/group discussion, which started between three-thirty and four o’clock and lasted between fifty minutes and a little over an hour and a half.<sup>88</sup> Godard selected the films, but warned against reading too much into his choices, since these were often dictated by what was available in the Conservatory collection, or what Losique could get hold of reasonably easily from elsewhere.<sup>89</sup> Indeed during his talks, he frequently evoked the titles of other films that he would have preferred to have shown had they been available, or had he thought of them in advance. He even admits at one point to having requested the wrong film (Bergman’s *Persona*, 1966, rather than *The Silence*, 1963).<sup>90</sup> These films that he indicates would have been just as good as, if not better than, those that were actually screened, form an important parallel corpus in the talks, and many of them came to occupy prominent or strategically important positions in *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, such as *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958), *They Live By Night* (Nicholas Ray, 1949), *Johnny Guitar* (Ray, 1954), *People on Sunday*, *A Film Without Actors* (Robert Siodmak and Edgar G. Ulmer, 1929), *Freaks* (Tod Browning, 1932) and *Earth* (Aleksandr Dovzhenko, 1930).

The Montreal experiment constituted Godard's practical quest to establish a workable image-based method, rooted in the comparison of films, which might lead to the production of a new form of cinema history. From the beginning, he noted that he had 'an idea of the method', but not the means.<sup>91</sup> Although he clearly valued the way that the questions posed by Losique and the audience members enabled him to think out loud, and to formulate his own questions by way of a response, he frequently made clear his frustration at having had to fall back on a conventional screening/discussion format: 'So we were reduced to having discussions like in a film society, seeing a film and then talking about it, meaning if anything is visible during the screening to blind it with words afterwards'.<sup>92</sup> His initial hope had been to conduct practical visual experiments with the students by juxtaposing film clips or still images on two screens simultaneously: 'when I arrived here I thought I could carry out experiments in seeing in front of you: project films, put little pieces of film beside each other'.<sup>93</sup>

An ideal tool for doing this, of course, would have been video, and Godard was all too aware of the irony of the fact that in Rolle he had most of the necessary equipment he required to conduct such experiments, but not the films, whereas in Montreal he had access to the films, but Losique 'didn't have the equipment, or the equipment is nearby and not set up in a way we can use it'.<sup>94</sup> The result, he suggests simply in his opening talk, is that 'we can't work'.<sup>95</sup> Despite his reservations, however, he appears to have resigned himself quickly to the fact that his conception of how the task might be approached differently could not be realised immediately, and he therefore contented himself with continuing his transatlantic commute and seeing the first phase of the experiment to the end as agreed, with a view to tackling the technical issues in time for the second series of talks planned for the following academic year.<sup>96</sup> These technical challenges included not only obtaining the necessary technology, and setting it up in a way that would be conducive to collective work, but also – as noted above – the significant problems posed by the incompatibility of European and North American video formats at the time. It should be stressed, however, that Godard was certainly not wholly dismissive of what he and Losique were achieving in Montreal; on the

contrary, from time to time he expressed considerable satisfaction with the 'historical montage' method they had ended up devising, which he felt served occasionally to generate some productive questions and insights.<sup>97</sup>

Godard's Montreal talks provide an initial map of many of the themes that he would subsequently pursue in *Histoire(s) du cinéma*. From time to time, however, he broached topics in the talks that he would later only touch on in passing, such as acting or the economic history of cinema.<sup>98</sup> He also toyed with historiographic methods that he would subsequently leave far behind, such as the inclusion of the date of a film's production, together with key background information relating to the year in question.<sup>99</sup> For the most part, however, from the beginning of the first talk onwards, he expressed little interest in chronology, or in the ordering of 'landmark' names, dates and masterpieces, preferring instead to present his venture through reference to the disciplines of archaeology, biology, geology and geography.<sup>100</sup>

In an important passage towards the end of the eighth talk, he suggested that a genuine history of cinema would need to adopt three separate perspectives on its object of study: first, examination of a given filmmaker and his or her work (he gives the example of Griffith); second, analysis of the film in question (here, *The Birth of a Nation*, 1915); and third, the history of a viewer who saw the film when it was first shown.<sup>101</sup> Although this might look initially like a conventional context/text/reception approach to cinema history, Godard's key point here, which is clear from the wider discussion of which it forms part, is that the majority of cinema histories seldom go far beyond context, and that even that, in his view, is generally poorly done. Contrary to this, his own approach is weighted heavily towards the second and third parts of this triumvirate, especially the last, which he conceives less in terms of empirical audience research, or of quantitative reception studies, than of a history of mentalities, of the emotional and imaginative investment of spectators in films, and of the effects of this investment on subjectivity. In *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, this emphasis on the viewer generally, and on the issue of the absorption and internalisation of films in particular, became central to Godard's concerns. In the videos, the idea of the inscription of films in the human psyche, and of individuals as being

inhabited and animated by half-remembered clips, is conveyed simply and effectively via the superimposition of film imagery over the human face, including Godard's own.

### *Lausanne*

In June 1979, at the invitation of Freddy Buache, Godard delivered an important address on the relationship of film archives to cinema history at a symposium at the Cinémathèque suisse in Lausanne. This event formed part of the 1979 annual congress of the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF). Buache justified Godard's presence at the symposium, which was ostensibly devoted to independent and avant-garde film at the end of the silent era, by arguing that such an event should look not only to the past, but also to the future, and that Godard embodied the continuing spirit of avant-garde independence. Here, in front of an audience that included historians, critics, curators, filmmakers and archivists such as Jean Mitry, Claude Beylie, Robert Daudelin and Ivor Montagu, Godard took stock of the Montreal experiment, pursued cherished themes such as the creative nature of seeing and provided the most detailed account available of the state of his thinking up to that point about his film history project. He also made clear the difficulties he had encountered when attempting to generate interest in his idea among American universities, television production companies and film archives, all of whom appear to have viewed his venture, with its absence of script and mind-boggling copyright implications, with arch scepticism:

They always said to me: 'the originality is that it will be visual!' And then they'd add: 'can you tell us how it will be visual?' So I'd say: 'No! I can do it, but not tell it. Help me make a start, and then you'll have an idea!' And they'd say: 'Can you tell me the start . . .?' In other words, I was dealing with what I'd call scribes rather than photographers. And the only person I found was Losique.<sup>102</sup>

He proceeded on this occasion to signal the central role that Buache himself – co-founder of the Cinémathèque suisse in 1948 and its

director from 1951 to 1996 – would come to play over the ensuing years: ‘The last times I saw him [Langlois], I was counting on him to guide me through cinema history. From now on, I’m counting on you’.<sup>103</sup>

By the time of the Lausanne symposium, Godard was convinced that the way forward was video and that a true audiovisual investigation of cinema history could only come into being through a marriage of video, telecine equipment and the collections of film archives. Specifically, he argued that archives should bring together projection and production and that researchers attached to each archive should have access both to the collections and to appropriate technical equipment so as to facilitate the regular production of historical films using archival material.<sup>104</sup> The key problem of the film society model that had frustrated Godard in Montreal – i.e. the sequential projection of films or clips, followed by discussion – is that it entails a delay between seeing the material on the screen and the production of critical thought. Rather than letting the viewer sense and trace connections at the moment of projection, it obliges the historian-researcher to resort to memory and language:

What one termed seeing a film was simply projecting a film. And then, doing cinema history, or film criticism, consisted of reorganising one’s memories in a certain way, and saying what one had seen. . . . And films, in my opinion, are hardly seen any more, since for me ‘seeing’ means ‘the possibility of comparing’. But comparing two things, not comparing an image and the memory that one has of it. Compare two images, and at the moment one sees them, trace certain relationships. But for this to be possible, the technical infrastructure that exists today needs to make it possible. Certainly, in the past, one could say ‘OK, let’s project!’ If one says ‘Eisenstein, in such and such a film, adopted the parallel editing theoretically inaugurated by Griffith’, one would need to project Griffith on the left, and Eisenstein next to it. One would then see straight away, as in the judicial process, that something is true and something is false. And one would be able to have a discussion. But having two cinema theatres next to one another would be a bit difficult. Today, however, video exists. Films can be put on video

and compared. One might think that this ought to be the first task of the cinematheques or film schools. Alas, it appears to be the last, and that precisely the only history that could be written, that of cinema, is not.<sup>105</sup>

What Godard could not know, as he uttered these words in 1979, was that he was speaking on the cusp of a technical and cultural revolution that would fundamentally alter both the situation and his method: the rapid proliferation of domestic video technology; the commercial release of many films on videotape; and the possibility of recording material off-air by anyone in possession of a VCR. As Dominique Païni later observed, from this point on, the relationship between film and spectator was irrevocably altered: copies of films were now at the mercy of the viewer, who was able to take control of them through interventions such as pausing, rewinding, fast-forwarding, copying, re-editing and other forms of manipulation.<sup>106</sup>

The main initial hurdle facing the audiovisual historian seeking to work directly in images and sounds, rather than with pen and paper, is that of access to the films. The relatively low cost, and ease of copying and manipulation, opened up by video technology completely altered the situation, but at a high aesthetic cost: films on video (or television, or DVD), as Godard has consistently argued, are not the films themselves, but copies ('let's not/exaggerate/not even/copies/of/reproductions', as he describes films on television in the opening episode of *Histoire[s] du cinéma*).<sup>107</sup> As a result, he goes on to lament in episode 2A, his project involves an unavoidable two-fold compromise: he must work with poor quality, miniature copies of the original films; and the end result will end up being distributed for domestic consumption via the small screen, whether through television broadcast or on video. He had already indicated in Montreal that he was fully aware of the scale of the challenge facing him, and of the inevitable compromises he would have to make along the way as a result of the unavailability of certain films, the scaled down proportions of the image (assuming, that is, that the project was to come to fruition on video through television co-production in the way he then envisaged, rather than on 35mm, which he considered unrealistic), and reduced image and sound quality. These are some of the senses of his rather melancholic observation during his fifth

talk that 'in the end, the history of cinema you make will be a trace, like a regret that it isn't even possible to make the history of cinema. But you'll see traces of that history'.<sup>108</sup>

Reprising this point a decade later in a filmed conversation with the critic Serge Daney, parts of which Godard subsequently integrated into the fabric of episode 2A, he distilled his regret into the distinction between cinema, which he associated with projection, and television, which he linked to transmission: 'My goal, therefore, alas, [laughter] is like that little poem by Brecht: "I examine my plan carefully; it is unrealisable". Because it can only be done on TV, which reduces. . . . But we can make a memento of this projectable history. It's the only history that projects, and it's all we can do'.<sup>109</sup> Ultimately, however, like comparable video-based essays on film history, such as Mark Rappaport's *Rock Hudson's Home Movies* (1992) and Chris Petit's *Negative Space* (1999), *Histoire(s) du cinéma* ended up integrating the diminished, murky quality of the image, mediated through electronic reproduction and repeated copying, into its discourse on technological change.

#### *Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma*

In 1979, Godard approached Joël Farges, who at the time was co-editor with François Barat of the 'Ça/cinéma' book series published by Éditions Albatros, which had established itself in this period as an important outlet for intelligent books on film history and theory. Previous books in the series, for example, included Nicole Lise Bernheim's *Marguerite Duras tourne un film* (1974), Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier and Pierre Sorlin's *Octobre* (1976), Jean-Louis Baudry's *L'effet cinéma* (1978) and Jacques Aumont's *Montage Eisenstein* (1979). Godard offered Éditions Albatros a five-year contract for the book, and gave Farges audio recordings of his Montreal talks.<sup>110</sup> From the beginning of his ninth talk onwards, Godard had started audio taping himself using a cassette recorder at his side, and after the course ended Losique sent him audio tapes of the spring sessions.<sup>111</sup> Farges commissioned Line Gruyer, a young Canadian who had previously worked for Losique, to transcribe them. By this stage, Godard appears to have severed links with Losique, possibly because – as he alleged in his preface to the book when it appeared

– Losique had failed to honour the financial side of their deal.<sup>112</sup> Whatever his reasons, he apparently approached Farges and set up the book project with Albatros without informing Losique.<sup>113</sup> Farges, however, did contact Losique while he was working on the project.<sup>114</sup>

According to Jean Antonin Billard, a now retired Montreal-based film studies instructor, who was close to Losique at the time and attended most of the Montreal talks in the company of another prominent member of the Quebec cultural scene, the now deceased writer and critic Patrick Straram, Losique was furious when he found out about the Albatros book and considered a lawsuit.<sup>115</sup> Before discovering that Godard had begun pursuing the book project on his own, Losique had asked Billard to transcribe the first of the talks with a view to gauging how they would look in written form and sending Godard a copy.<sup>116</sup> In the light of the news of Godard's agreement with Albatros, however, this transcription was clearly redundant, so after completing the first talk Billard abandoned the task. Meanwhile in Paris Gruyer produced a full transcription. Once this was complete, Farges and Godard met five or six times to go over and edit the manuscript of what would become *Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma*. Godard retained editorial control throughout, driving the project and taking all the key decisions, including that of cutting out the questions from Losique and the students.

Godard insisted, in line with his vision of the book from the outset, that it contain a large number of images. The unimaginative use of images by critics and historians in film magazines and books had been a recurrent theme in Montreal. There he had argued that images used in film publications are generally redundant, that they are selected arbitrarily and that their placement on the page is banal: ‘. . . film criticism is done by literary types. Writing film criticism means writing: “This is good”; “what’s-his-name acts well”; “what’s-her-name acts badly”; “extraordinary spectacle”; “lovely colours”; that sort of thing. Then they put a photograph so that the newspaper reader can be certain that this is the film they’re talking about. [Laughter] But the photograph has no other purpose; critics don’t use photographs, they don’t need them’.<sup>117</sup>

What he was striving towards, by contrast, and pursued from the mid-1970s onwards in his work as a graphic artist, was a simul-

taneously creative and critical use of still images on the page. To facilitate his experimentation with stills, Godard had invested in the early 1970s in a good-quality photocopier.<sup>118</sup> In one of his large-scale graphic collage works of the late 1970s, the special issue of *Cahiers du Cinéma* that he guest edited in 1979, he outlined his approach to the blank page not as a space necessarily to be filled with writing, but as a screen: 'an example, which isn't unique, but solitary, of a piece of film criticism, which takes vision as its point of departure, which doesn't start by lavishing adjectives across the celebrated white page, but which uses this page as a screen to . . . SEE'.<sup>119</sup>

It is against this backdrop that we might best appreciate Godard's disappointment with the visual dimension of *Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma* when it first appeared. Once work on the text was complete, he gave Farges a list of titles, and the latter sourced three or four relevant images per film, mainly from the Cinémathèque française collection. From these, Godard selected one image for each film, occasionally substituting a photograph of his own, and placed them in the order in which he wished them to appear. He then gave Farges the green light to publish, and the book was printed in an initial run of 2–3,000 copies. Within a week or so of the book's appearance in March 1980, however, Godard called to say that he was unhappy with it. He was particularly dissatisfied with the way in which the images had been reproduced. What he wanted, he insisted, and demonstrated using the photocopier in the Albatros office, were not illustrations reproduced in conventional greyscale on glossy paper, but high-contrast black-and-white photocopied images on matte paper. Moreover, he was unhappy that the sets of images had been integrated in each instance into the transcription of the first of the two talks that comprise each 'voyage', which had resulted in a mismatch throughout the book between the films discussed in the text and the accompanying images, together with corresponding lengthy passages of text where there were no images at all. He wanted the images redistributed more fully throughout the book, and, in particular, the relevant images placed within the talk to which they related. To demonstrate his precise wishes, he gave Farges a copy of the book, which he had physically taken to pieces and put back together as he wanted it, changing the order of some of the images, adding in the process four handwritten poetic

commentaries relating to the themes of some of the talks and removing eight of the original images.

Two or three months after its initial appearance, Albatros discarded what remained of the first printing and reprinted the book in line with Godard's wishes. While the body of the text remains identical in the two versions, the format of the table of contents and the manner in which the 'voyages' and film titles are rendered at the beginning of each talk was altered, and the book was repaginated. The publisher subsequently issued several further reprints of this second version. Godard was apparently content with it. Bookstores, however, were far less enthusiastic, finding the quality of the illustrations to be substandard, and indeed many of them complained and some even returned their copies to Albatros.

The Albatros versions of *Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma* have long been an important reference in Francophone film studies, and shortly after the book was published it was translated into a variety of other languages, including Spanish (1980), German (1981), Japanese (1982) and Italian (1982). It also subsequently appeared in Portuguese (Brazil, 1989) and Chinese (1993), but inexplicably was never translated into English. The present volume does not just make the substance of Godard's talks available to an Anglophone readership; even for readers familiar with the Albatros transcription, or the translations based on it, it is a revelation. By retranscribing the talks in their entirety from the original video recordings, rather than simply translating the French text, Timothy Barnard has reinstated a wealth of previously unpublished detail relating to their organisation and running, to the Canadian context in which they unfolded, to Godard's working methods and to how he envisaged the project developing in future. In particular, the inclusion of the questions from Losique and the students reveals the fundamentally reactive, dialogic nature of his method, and his need for an audience to bounce ideas off and respond to as a means of testing his hypotheses and furthering his thinking.

The biggest difference between the Albatros edition and the present volume, however, which has altered the nature of the book, is the reinsertion of Serge Losique's contribution. It is unclear why Godard should have chosen to excise Losique's comments and questions so completely from the French edition, where he acknowledges

the latter’s role in his preface in distinctly ambivalent terms (as someone who was bold enough to break new ground, but then failed to meet his financial commitments), then largely sets him aside. One can understand why Godard should have opted to exclude the students’ remarks, since on the tapes these were often inaudible, the microphones in the auditorium having been removed after the first two sessions; the same does not however apply to Losique, who shared a microphone with Godard. It is striking in this context that in his editor’s preface to the Albatros book, Farges offers a rationale for the decision to cut certain types of material (e.g. partially inaudible sentences, incidental information and the students’ questions), but does not mention Losique at all. This marginalisation of Losique in the book was perhaps down to contractual or financial disagreements, to a souring of relations generally, to a desire on Godard’s part to downplay the collaborative nature of the venture, or to a combination of these and other factors.<sup>120</sup> Whatever the reasons, the new transcription reveals the closeness of Losique’s collaboration with Godard during the talks and the extent and significance of his input in his capacity as interlocutor and chair as they unfolded.

#### *Rotterdam*

In the early 1980s, Godard occasionally mentioned in interviews that he was now pursuing his film history project in the form of a two-year Dutch-backed venture in association with the Rotterdamse Kunststichting (Rotterdam Arts Foundation). The Foundation was closely linked to the Rotterdam film festival, Film International, which had been founded in 1972 by Huub Bals at the initiative of the Foundation’s director, Adriaan van der Staay. In 1980, Bals’ assistant, Monica Tegelaar, who by that point had come to occupy a key programming and acquisition role alongside Bals at the festival, convinced the Foundation to make a substantial financial investment in Godard’s film history project.<sup>121</sup> This was with a view in particular to enabling him to buy the telecine machine he had long coveted, which would allow him to transfer films (or clips) onto video and to then combine and manipulate them videographically.<sup>122</sup> In exchange, Godard was to deliver a further series of lectures on cinema history in Rotterdam.

Prior to this, in 1978, Tegelaar had visited Godard in Rolle to discuss acquiring *France tour détour deux enfants* for Film International's distribution arm, and showing it at the festival itself (where it received its world premiere in January 1979); she also subsequently pre-bought the distribution rights to *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* (*Every Man for Himself*, 1979) and *Passion* (1982).<sup>123</sup> As Jan Heijs and Frans Westra have documented in their biography of Bals, following Godard's appearance at the 1979 event, he came again on the last day of the 1980 edition of the festival to announce that he would be giving a course on film history in Rotterdam over the next two years, starting in September 1980.<sup>124</sup> These plans were reported quite widely in the press.<sup>125</sup> The idea was that he would deliver eleven two-day sessions during 1980–81 to a select group of participants, made up mainly of Dutch filmmakers and critics, and that these would lead to the production of ten videotapes, to be co-produced by Film International and Sonimage.<sup>126</sup> The conception of these videotapes, like those envisaged in Montreal, appears to have been reasonably conventional: a combination of Godard's recorded responses to the 'students' with relevant archival film clips.<sup>127</sup> In September, the participants were sent a letter, together with what Heijs and Westra describe as 'a sort of course pamphlet', which appears, on the basis of their description, to have been made up of a selection of the pages from the English-language outline of his project that he had produced in the mid-1970s (see above). On 23 October 1980, Godard gave his first talk, which was by all accounts shambolic.<sup>128</sup> According to Heijs and Westra, it took place in the Faculty of Medicine at the Erasmus University, where the participants found themselves joined by approximately forty additional students, who had elected to attend it as part of their General Studies program. Godard proceeded to play them a recording (in French, without translation) of a discussion between himself and Freddy Buache (probably a recording of his talk in Lausanne, which had taken place the previous June), and left the class half a day earlier than scheduled. 'The people left behind', report Heijs and Westra, 'were flabbergasted and wrote to complain about the "organisational chaos" that same afternoon'.<sup>129</sup>

Godard postponed his next scheduled lecture (20 November 1980) until 4 and 5 December, when he pursued the method he had

established in Montreal: screening one after another a selection of reels from different films, with a view to exploring potential affinities and correspondences between them (on this occasion Resnais' *Last Year at Marienbad* [1961], Ozu's *Tokyo Story* [1953] and Renoir's *The Rules of the Game* [1939]). The next class, which took place two months later, during the 1981 edition of the Rotterdam festival, included the most imaginative and interesting montage experiment he had attempted since embarking on the Montreal lectures three years earlier. For this occasion, he prepared a 'special edition' of *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, re-titled *Sauve la vie (qui peut)* ('Save Life [If You Can']'), which was made up of five ten-minute extracts from his own film interspersed with four ten-minute extracts from a selection of others in the Film International collection (making ninety minutes in total).<sup>130</sup> The films he cut into his own were (in this order) *The General Line* (Sergei Eisenstein, 1929), *Cops* (Edward Kline and Buster Keaton, 1922), *The Earth Trembles* (Luchino Visconti, 1948) and *Man of Marble* (Andrzej Wajda, 1977).<sup>131</sup> The result, which according to Jean-Claude Biette was remarkable, nonetheless generated a degree of hostility on the part of some of the journalists present, and confusion among the students, who remained unclear about their precise role in the production of the videotapes.<sup>132</sup>

The next 'projection-discussion', chaired by Monica Tegelaar, took place on 19 June 1981. Here Godard juxtaposed extracts from three silent films and three sound films, including *The General Line*, De Sica's *Umberto D.* (1952), Mizoguchi's *Ugetsu* (1953) and Antonioni's *The Cry* (1957). Unfortunately, the selection of films available had been severely limited due to a fire the previous year in the archive of the Dutch Film Museum.<sup>133</sup> The post-screening discussion was apparently rather fruitless, partly, one assumes, because of the language barrier (everything had to be mediated via an interpreter), but also because Godard had envisaged having access to basic video editing equipment to allow him to work practically with the students, which was not provided. At the end of the session, it was agreed that for the next talk, which was scheduled for September, the students would select and debate the films in advance, and so bring concrete points and questions to the discussion. It was also hoped that by then the video equipment that Godard had requested would be in place. This proposed September slot was presumably

cancelled, since it is not mentioned again in any of the reports on the course, and there would be no further sessions. Reflecting back on the venture from the perspective of the 1990s, Tegelaar expressed her disappointment as follows:

Godard is incredibly knowledgeable about films, he's a real talker, and is an unbelievably good salesman, especially in selling himself. We didn't really know him very well then. He wanted to get a 'télécinema', a relatively new machine in those days, which you could use to transfer film onto video. We went along with it. Once he had the apparatus he only turned up in Rotterdam once or twice and messed the project up completely.<sup>134</sup>

At the end of the following year, on 22 December 1982, Godard finally informed the Rotterdam Arts Foundation that he was unable to complete the project to his satisfaction and offered to repay their 150,000 guilder investment in six monthly instalments.<sup>135</sup> The then director of the Foundation, Paul Noorman, contested Godard's figures and demanded repayment of a much larger sum, which took account of both Godard's failure to honour the contract and the interest due on the original investment.<sup>136</sup> It is not clear how this dispute was resolved; what is certain, however, is that the funds from the Foundation, and the telecine equipment that Godard was able to purchase with them, were instrumental in enabling him to work in earnest on the series in the early 1980s. He did not forget the extent of his debt to the Foundation generally, and to Monica Tegelaar in particular: he thanked the former, alongside Losique's Conservatory, in each of the *Histoire(s) du cinéma* books; and he co-dedicated episode 1A to Tegelaar (together with Langlois' companion and collaborator, Mary Meerson, to whom he had previously co-dedicated *Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma*).

### The 1980s

Asked following completion of *Histoire(s) du cinéma* how he had set about preparing for it, Godard replied that he had done two simple things: first, he began recording lots of material from television, and buying and classifying commercial videotapes; and second, he

opened around a dozen or so files – one per episode, and a series of sub-folders devoted to topics such as ‘Men’, ‘Women’, ‘Couples’, ‘Children’ and ‘War’ – in which to collate and categorise still images such as photographs, pages from books and magazines, and book covers.<sup>137</sup> By the time of the project’s completion, Godard’s audio-visual archive held approximately 3,000 videos.<sup>138</sup> In the finished series, the televised origin of some of this material is occasionally visible in the form of the logos of the channels from which it had been recorded. Thus one can clearly make out the word ‘Arte’ over archival footage of an airplane dropping bombs in episode 1A, for instance, or the ‘Planète’ logo over a clip from Alain Resnais’ *Night and Fog* (1955) in 1B.

As for his paper archive, Godard presented and discussed some of his colour-coded files in the course of an episode of the television program *Cinéma cinémas* devoted to his work in 1987.<sup>139</sup> Here he spread out a dozen or so files on his desk, including three entitled ‘Episode 5’, ‘Shadow and Light’ and ‘Montage’ respectively, from which he took various photographs, and proceeded to suggest possible connections between them. In an exemplary demonstration of his historical montage method, he took a picture depicting Anna (Lillian Gish) on the ice floe in Griffith’s *Way Down East* (1920) from the ‘Montage’ folder and held it up next to a photograph of the director and his production team taken during the making of the film. He then went on to compare it with a photograph of a patient, Augustine (it is in fact the cover of Georges Didi-Huberman’s study of Charcot’s investigation of hysteria at the Salpêtrière hospital in Paris in the nineteenth century, *Invention of Hysteria*), and commented ‘close-up of one, followed by a close-up of the other: it’s the same image’.<sup>140</sup>

In the 1980s, Godard referred at times to his project under the title ‘Splendeur et misère du cinéma’ (‘The Splendour and Poverty of Cinema’), a reference to Balzac’s *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* (*A Harlot High and Low*). This was doubtless in part a nod to the monumentality and panoramic ambition of the series to which this book belongs, *La Comédie humaine* (*The Human Comedy*). A trace of this abandoned working title is visible in the on-screen announcement at the beginning of episode 1A of *Histoire(s) du cinéma*: ‘Canal Plus présente Histoire(s) du cinéma splendeur et misère’. We also

know from longstanding observers, such as Freddy Buache and Alain Bergala, that by the middle of the decade Godard had already generated extensive exploratory drafts of certain episodes, which would ultimately bear little resemblance to the final versions.<sup>141</sup> In 1987, during the special edition of *Cinéma cinémas*, Godard also presented a carefully prepared display of the type of visual montage he had dreamt of in Montreal and Lausanne. His juxtaposition on this occasion on adjacent monitors of clips from Santiago Alvarez's *79 Springs* (1969) and Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) constituted a remarkable audiovisual critique of the two filmmakers' respective uses of slow motion and provided as eloquent a demonstration of comparative visual criticism as that to be found anywhere in his work since *Ici et ailleurs* and *Numéro deux*. He subsequently extended and reworked this experiment, using the same source material, in a lengthy passage in *Les Enfants jouent à la Russie* ('The Kids Play Russian', 1993).

Sections of early working versions of episodes 1A and 1B were previewed out of competition at Cannes in 1988, where they were accompanied by Godard's first official press conference devoted to the series. Complete drafts of these episodes were broadcast on Canal Plus in May 1989 and projected at the Vidéothèque de Paris in October the same year. The contents of these drafts, however, continued to change substantially over the ensuing years up to the time of the release of the video boxed set in 1998, Godard finding them a little weaker than the others, having had the opportunity to hone his practice in the interim. While the underlying structure and principal themes remained the same, and the soundtrack was left comparatively untouched, the quantity of black screen was increased. This has the effect of slowing the pace, and also brought these episodes in line formally, stylistically and rhythmically with the remainder of the series. Visual effects and vision-mixing techniques deployed more fully in the later episodes were introduced. A portion of the names of people and films given on-screen in the 1989 versions was erased. A significant number of still images were substituted or dropped. New still and moving images, sounds and recitations were added. The size, style and colour of the on-screen text was occasionally altered. Episode 1A acquired a new ending, and the closing credits used in the 1989 version of this episode were

removed. The most striking change to episode 1B relates to the use of a production still depicting a scene from Ingmar Bergman's *Prison* (1949, first distributed in the United States as *The Devil's Wanton*). Glimpsed in the 1989 version of 1B, this image, which in its original context represents a touching moment of human contact within an otherwise extremely bleak narrative, reappears throughout the final version, colourised and repeatedly reframed, as a central motif, and fulfils a rich polysemic function vis-à-vis Godard's life and career and the process of the fabrication of history.<sup>142</sup>

Over the ensuing years, the early versions of episodes 1A and 1B were presented at numerous festivals and broadcast on German, Swiss and British television. At this point, Godard was fully aware that he would require approximately a further decade to bring the project to completion.<sup>143</sup> Looking back from the perspective of 1997, he emphasised the difference between the conception of 1A/1B and that of the remainder of the series.<sup>144</sup> While he had developed these two complementary halves of the foundational chapter as audio-visual illustrations of pre-existing written texts, he observed, he went on to compose the subsequent episodes in a more exploratory, intuitive manner, using a handful of titles as more or less fixed conceptual and thematic armatures around which to weave and layer the fabric of the text.

In 1997, he suggested that the episode titles had been firmly established from the outset.<sup>145</sup> This is partially true. In the late 1980s, however, he was still talking of a number of episodes which would ultimately fall by the wayside, or end up spread across several others. These included an episode devoted to 'all the films forgotten by history' and another that would explore 'the story of the death of one of the greatest creators of forms in the modern era: Hitchcock', provisionally to be entitled 'L'Industrie de la mort' ('The Industry of Death').<sup>146</sup> Although he dropped these episodes, the latter title is used in the final version of episode 1B in a short passage on Hitchcock, and it plays an important role in episode 2B in the context of Godard's reflections on the centrality to cinema's development of narratives concerning death. In fact, Godard had been nursing the idea for a long time of a sequence devoted to Hitchcock's ability to successfully combine popular filmmaking and genuine poetry, but could not decide where to place it.<sup>147</sup> In the end, it came to occupy a

central position in the final version of épisode 4A, where Hitchcock is the subject of a lengthy study and homage. Although it is true, therefore, that the episode titles used in the definitive version had all been in place since the late 1980s, several others were dropped, and Godard's plan during the majority of the project's gestation had in fact been for a series of ten (five times two) rather than eight (four times two) episodes. Another abandoned episode still apparently part of his overall plan as late as the early 1990s was called '*La Réponse des ténèbres*' ('The Reply of the Darkness'), a title reminiscent of one of the chapters of Jean Louis Schefer's *L'Homme ordinaire du cinéma* ('Cinema's Ordinary Man'), '*La Leçon des ténèbres*' ('The Lesson of the Darkness'). According to Godard, it was, like episode 3A (*La Monnaie de l'absolu*), conceived under the direct influence of Malraux, and intended as that episode's complementary half. In his 1988 dialogue with Daney, he indicated that the long sequence devoted to cinema and national identity in the final version of episode 3A was in fact originally designed for use in '*La Réponse des ténèbres*'. He then proceeded – in the most detailed discussion of this abandoned episode available – to summarise it as an exploration of the cinematic representation of war which, broadly speaking, would have examined the proposition that cinema has essentially been a Western art form made by white men.<sup>148</sup> Even in 1997, when the final version of the video series was virtually complete, Godard was still appearing to suggest that '*La Réponse des ténèbres*' existed as a separate entity, whereas in fact it is clear that over time he collapsed *La Monnaie de l'absolu* and '*La Réponse des ténèbres*' into a single episode, which, for the sake of the argument, we might say is entitled *La Monnaie de l'absolu* and subtitled '*La Réponse des ténèbres*'.

The other abandoned episode was to have been called '*Montage, mon beau souci*' ('Editing, My Beautiful Care'), the title of one of his key early critical texts.<sup>149</sup> This was provisionally planned as the second part of chapter 4, a complement to what he was then envisaging as episode 4A, *Une Vague nouvelle* (which would ultimately become 3B). Its focus, as the title suggests, was to have been the history, theory and practice of editing and montage. In the final version of the series, an important sequence devoted to editing and montage, introduced by the title '*Montage, mon souci*', appears in

episode 3B. Confusingly, in the final series a residue of the planned ten-part structure is retained in the roll-call of the episodes, including 'La Réponse des ténèbres' and 'Montage, mon beau souci', that is incorporated into the opening stages of the definitive version of each episode.<sup>150</sup> The titles of these abandoned episodes also function as reference points – as virtual episodes, almost – in the images derived from the videos that are reproduced in the book version of the series. This is one of the ways in which the series is left open as a work in progress. Indeed Godard has often suggested that numerous other episodes could still be added to it, and that ideally it should be around a hundred (or even two hundred) hours long and include a similar number of appendices, perhaps under the generic title *Nouvelles histoire(s) du cinéma* ('New [Hi]stories of Cinema').<sup>151</sup>

#### *Completion*

Work on the remainder of the series fell roughly into two-year cycles for each pair of episodes: 2A/2B, 1992–93; 3A/3B, 1994–95; 4A/4B, 1996–97. When working on these episodes, Godard drew on several sequences involving actors reading texts (Sabine Azéma, Juliette Binoche, Alain Cuny, Julie Delpy, Maria Casarès, Denis Lavant, Mireille Perrier), which he had filmed in 1988 and stockpiled for later use. In August 1995, drafts of episodes 1A, 1B, 2A and 2B, together with *Les Enfants jouent à la Russie* and *Deux fois cinquante ans de cinéma français* (2 x 50 Years of French Cinema, 1995, co-directed by Miéville), were shown at the Locarno International Film Festival. Near-final drafts of episodes 3A and 4A were screened in the 'Un Certain Regard' section at Cannes in May 1997, where they were accompanied by a letter-size press book made by Godard entitled *Histoire(s) du cinéma: extraits*. In September that same year, the entire series was projected at the Ciné Lumière in London, although it would continue to change over the ensuing months. The version of episode 2A shown on this occasion, for example, although very close to the final video release cut, acquired (like 1A and 1B) more black frames throughout, and numerous new still images. Its ending also underwent a significant re-edit, which included the addition of a coda from the water taxi sequence in Rob Tregenza's *Talking to Strangers* (1988), accompanied by Meredith Monk's 'Walking Song'

(1993). Above all, the version of 4B shown at the Ciné Lumière in 1997, which was organised almost entirely around further lengthy extracts of Godard's conversation with Daney, had virtually nothing in common with the final release cut, on which Godard was evidently still working at the time.<sup>152</sup> At twenty-seven minutes long, it was also a good deal shorter than the final version. In August 1998, the complete series was screened in the Cerisy-la-salle château during a conference devoted to the topic of 'Godard et le métier d'artiste' ('Godard and the Artist's Craft'), and in November the same year the videos and books were officially launched at a press screening at the Hôtel Montalembert in Paris.<sup>153</sup>

In practical terms, completion of the initial versions of episodes 1A and 1B became possible following the signing of an agreement for ten fifty-minute episodes with Canal Plus at the time of the launch of the new pay channel, which had begun broadcasting in 1984.<sup>154</sup> The project was also aided by the support of Georges Duby, chair of medieval history at the Collège de France and a key member of the influential Annales School of history, who was one of the only leading historians of his generation in France to venture seriously into television. He took up the chair, for instance, of the new cultural and educational channel, the Société d'édition de programmes de télévision (La SEPT), from 1986 to 1991. For Duby, television had the potential to be a 'remarkably effective communication tool, which could multiply the audience for good history many times over'.<sup>155</sup> His involvement with the medium went back to the early 1970s and included adapting his own study of French art and society from 980–1420, *Le Temps des cathédrales* (*The Age of the Cathedrals*), which has since become something of a classic of audiovisual history in its own right.

As Christian Delage has noted, Godard's idea of an audiovisual history of cinema, combined with a history of the twentieth century through cinema, doubtless corresponded well with Duby's vision of an 'audiovisual pleiad'.<sup>156</sup> Ultimately, however, it was only when Gaumont, with the personal backing of its president, Nicolas Seydoux, agreed to produce, clear rights for and distribute the series that completion of the project became possible. Godard thanked Seydoux publicly at the 1998 Césars ceremony, along with André Rousselet and Pierre Lescure, whose support at Canal Plus had

allowed him to work in earnest on the series during the 1980s. On 3 April 1990, Godard signed an agreement with the French national film school (La Fémis) and the Centre National du Cinéma (CNC) for the creation of *Périphérie*, a ‘Centre de Recherches Cinéma et Vidéo’, which was to be linked to La Fémis and based in the Palais de Tokyo.<sup>157</sup> The idea behind *Périphérie* was that it should combine a research function with the provision of access for Fémis students to all stages and aspects of the filmmaking process. At this point, Godard envisaged episodes 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 5A and 5B (as noted above, he was still planning to make ten episodes at this point) as co-productions between JLG Films and La Fémis, and integral to the 1990 agreement was a project described simply as ‘*Histoire(s) du cinéma: suite et fin*’ (i.e. concluded). Although refurbishment of the Palais de Tokyo meant that *Périphérie* was unable to move physically into the building as planned, the deal was instrumental in allowing Godard to complete the project, and the final versions of episodes 2A, 2B, 3A, 3B, 4A and 4B are all billed as ‘presented by Gaumont and *Périphérie*’ and co-produced by Gaumont, the CNC, La Fémis and *Périphérie*.

Once the series was finally complete, Godard asked Bernard Eisenschitz to assume the Hitchcockian role of Mister Memory and to draw up an inventory of all the visual materials he had used. These lists provided the basis for those given at the end of each of the *Histoire(s) du cinéma* books, and were used by Gaumont as their point of departure for the task of clearing the rights for the voluminous quantity of items sampled in the series.<sup>158</sup> Godard had of course been fully aware of the potential scale of the copyright issue from the outset, and had argued as early as 1979 for a number of complementary approaches to the problem: the use of re-enactment as an interesting alternative to found footage, especially if the original material was lost or unavailable; the illegal pirating of prints (‘albeit pretending that one isn’t doing it . . .’); and the granting of rights to film archives to make video copies of their holdings.<sup>159</sup> Once Gaumont had committed itself to the project, however, and agreed to take responsibility for the rights clearance process, Godard was ultimately able to use virtually everything he had selected, apart from a handful of paintings, for which the rights holders refused their permission. He was therefore obliged to pursue the re-enactment

option, not, as he had originally anticipated, in relation to films, but in the case of a number of paintings by Henri Matisse and Nicolas de Staël, which he recreated himself for the purposes of the final version of the series.<sup>160</sup> With these pastiches, a project imagined three decades earlier, and doggedly pursued since, was brought to completion and launched into the public domain.

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#### Notes

1. Jean-Luc Godard, 'Godard fait son cinéma', interview by Pascal Merigeau, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 29 October 1998, 76–77.
2. Robert Bresson, *Notes on the Cinematographer*, trans. Jonathan Griffin (London: Quartet, 1986 [1975]), 41. Godard quotes this phrase frequently in interviews, and it features in the final episode of *Histoire(s) du cinéma*.
3. *Moments choisis des Histoire(s) du cinéma* was screened once at the Pompidou Centre in November 2001, but then not distributed until December 2004, when it was shown for several weeks at the same venue.
4. Although the film is divided into eight numbered sections bearing the titles of the original episodes, the sections are of variable length, and do not follow the original order. On several occasions the material included under a given heading derives from a different episode altogether, and 1B does not feature at all.
5. Jean-Luc Godard, 'Des traces du cinéma', interview by Michel Ciment and Stéphane Goudet, *Positif* 456 (February 1999): 50; Jean-Michel Frodon, 'Jean-Luc Godard, maître d'ouvrage d'art', *Le Monde*, 8 October 1998, 33.
6. Godard in Jean-Luc Godard and Youssef Ishaghpour, *Cinema: The Archaeology of Film and the Memory of a Century*, trans. John Howe (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 48.
7. Godard attributes the title to Malraux in 'The Future(s) of Film' interview by Emmanuel Burdeau and Charles Tesson, trans. John O'Toole, in Jean-Luc Godard, *The Futures of Film: Three Interviews*,

- 2000/01 (Bern: Gachnang and Springer, 2002), 26.
8. Jean-Luc Godard, 'Dialogue entre Jean-Luc Godard et Serge Daney', *Cahiers du Cinéma* 513 (May 1997): 53.
9. For a discussion by Godard of *The Great Sinner* in relation to the title of 2B, see Jean-Luc Godard, *À voix nue: grands entretiens d'hier et d'aujourd'hui*, interview by Noël Simsolo, France Culture, 28 November 1989. I am very grateful to Nicole Brenez for having made available to me a transcription of the ten-part series of conversations between Simsolo and Godard about *Histoire(s) du cinéma* of which this forms part. They were broadcast daily on France Culture from 20 November to 1 December 1989.
10. Malraux's study was published initially in three volumes: *Psychologie de l'art*, vol. 1, *Le Musée imaginaire* (Geneva: Skira, 1947); *Psychologie de l'art*, vol. 2, *La Crédation artistique* (Geneva: Skira, 1948); and *Psychologie de l'art*, vol. 3, *La Monnaie de l'absolu* (Geneva: Skira, 1949). It appeared in English translation in 1951, and was republished in French by Gallimard the same year in a revised, less expensive single volume under the generic title *Les Voix du silence*, which included an additional section, *Les Métamorphoses d'Apollon*. This expanded version was published in English as *The Voices of Silence*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (London: Secker and Warburg, 1954).
11. Charles Ferdinand Ramuz, *Les Signes parmi nous* (1919), in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 10 (Geneva: Slatkine, 1986).
12. Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, 'Jean-Luc Godard, cinéaste masqué', *L'Avant-scène cinéma* 46 (1 March 1965): 6.
13. Jean-Louis Leutrat, 'Retour sur *Histoire(s)*, 3', *Trafic* 72 (2009): 108–9.
14. Jean-Luc Godard, 'Les cinémathèques et l'histoire du cinéma', *Travelling* 56–57 (1980). In *Jean-Luc Godard: documents*, eds. Nicole Brenez, David Faroult, Michael Temple, James S. Williams and Michael Witt (Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 2006), 287.
15. Godard on Civilisation: *l'homme et les images* (Éric Rohmer, ORTF, 1967, 34 min).
16. See Antoine de Baecque, *Godard: biographie* (Paris: Grasset, 2010), 483–84. Although this journalistic biography contains a good deal of new information such as this, it lacks rigour and is at times highly derivative.

17. Alberto Farassino, 'Introduction à un véritable historien du cinéma', in *Jean-Luc Godard: un hommage du Centre Culturel Français et du Museo Nazionale del Cinema de Turin*, ed. Sergio Toffetti (Turin: Centre Culturel Français de Turin, 1990), 52.
18. First Voyage, Part Two, 35–36. (This is the format I shall use when quoting from the present volume.)
19. This document, read by cinematographer Armand Marco to David Farout in the course of an interview on 2 August 2002, is quoted in the latter's doctoral thesis: 'Avant-garde cinématographique et avant-garde politique: Cinéthique et le "groupe" Dziga Vertov' (Ph.D. diss., Université de Paris III – Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2002), 147. Godard's critique here of Sartre through reference to Astruc returns in virtually identical terms in episode 2B of *Histoire(s) du cinéma*.
20. Jean-Luc Godard, 'Moi je', in *Jean-Luc Godard: documents*, 238.
21. See Jean-Luc Godard, 'Le bon plaisir de Jean-Luc Godard', interview by Jean Daive, France Culture, 20 May 1995; and 'Les livres et moi', interview by Pierre Assouline, *Lire* 255 (May 1997). In Jean-Luc Godard, *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, vol. 2, ed. Alain Bergala (Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma, 1998), 313, 432.
22. Godard, 'Des traces du cinéma', 50.
23. For further discussion of the connections between Godard and Malraux, see Michael Temple, 'Big Rhythm and the Power of Metamorphosis: Some Models and Precursors for *Histoire(s) du cinéma*', in *The Cinema Alone: Essays on the Work of Jean-Luc Godard, 1985–2000*, eds. Michael Temple and James S. Williams (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2000).
24. Malraux, *The Voices of Silence*, 60–61, 100–1, 578–79, 612–13.
25. André Malraux, *La Métamorphose des dieux*, vol. 3, *L'Intemporel* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 357.
26. André Malraux, preface to *Saturn: An Essay on Goya*, trans. C.W. Chilton (London: Phaidon, 1952), 5.
27. Godard suggests in Montreal (Third Voyage, Part One, 137) that Faure's and Malraux's principal innovation, which in his view also accounted for their popularity, lay simply in the fact that they used lots of images.
28. Jean-Luc Godard, 'Jean-Luc Godard: "La Nouvelle Vague, c'était

l’ivresse du possible”, interview by François Gorin and Jean-Claude Loiseau, *Télérama*, 4 October 2000, 21.

29. Jean-Luc Godard, ‘Préface – Entretien entre Jean-Luc Godard et Freddy Buache’, in *Musée du cinéma Henri Langlois*, eds. Marianne de Fleury, Dominique Lebrun and Olivier Meston (Paris: Maeght Éditeur, 1991), 6.

30. Jean-Luc Godard, *À voix nue: grands entretiens d’hier et d’aujourd’hui*, interview by Noël Simsolo, France Culture, 31 March 1998 (this is one of a further five-part series of dialogues between Godard and Simsolo devoted to *Histoire[s] du cinéma*, broadcast on France Culture from 30 March to 3 April 1998); ‘L’art de (dé) montrer’, interview by Alain Bergala and Serge Toubiana, *Cahiers du Cinéma* 408 (January 1988) (in *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, vol. 2, 134); Godard interviewed by Paul Amar at the Cannes Film Festival on 20h, Paris Première, 10 May 1997 (in *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, vol. 2, 414).

31. Jean-Luc Godard, ‘Grâce à Henri Langlois’, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 12 January 1966. In *Jean-Luc Godard, Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, vol. 1, ed. Alain Bergala (Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma, 1998).

32. Godard, ‘Les cinémathèques et l’histoire du cinéma’, 289.

33. Godard, ‘Le bon plaisir de Jean-Luc Godard’, 305. As Dominique Paini has stressed, Langlois’ use of the Cinémathèque française as a sort of laboratory for the comparative projection of films was itself underpinned by Malrucion principles: ‘The Cinema Museum and Aura’, *Art Press* 221 (1997): 32. See too on this subject Laurent Mannoni, *Histoire de la Cinémathèque française* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), 263.

34. Jacques Rivette, quoted in Richard Roud, *A Passion for Films: Henri Langlois and the Cinémathèque Française* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1983), xxvii.

35. Henri Langlois, interview by Rui Nogueira, *Zoom* 25 (June–July 1974). In *Henri Langlois: trois cents ans de cinéma*, ed. Jean Narboni (Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma/Cinémathèque française/Fondation Européenne des Métiers de l’Image et du son, 1986), 90.

36. Jean-Luc Godard, ‘Se vivre, se voir’, interview by Claire Devarieux, *Le Monde dimanche*, 30 March 1980, Radio-télévision. In *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, vol. 1, 405.

37. Dominique Païni, *Le Cinéma, un art moderne* (Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma, 1997), 169–84.
38. Godard, ‘Préface – Entretien entre Jean-Luc Godard et Freddy Buache’, 6.
39. See Michel Delain’s report on this event for *L’Express*, which is reproduced in Georges P. Langlois and Glenn Myrent, *Henri Langlois: First Citizen of Cinema*, trans. Lisa Nesselson (New York: Twayne, 1995), 302.
40. Malraux and Langlois remain key references in the final versions of *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, where they are joined by an array of further historians and philosophers of history, such as Jules Michelet, Charles Péguy, Walter Benjamin and Fernand Braudel. For a fuller discussion of Godard’s engagement with these and other figures, see my *Jean-Luc Godard, Cinema Historian* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).
41. Roud, *A Passion for Films*, 199. See also Godard’s preface to *Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma*, reproduced in the present volume, where he also alludes to this collaborative plan.
42. I am indebted to Timothy Barnard for providing me with this information, and for generously sharing with me other important details and primary research materials relating to Godard’s Montreal talks. This essay has benefited greatly from his input.
43. For an account of Langlois’ Montreal anti-lectures, which draws heavily on the testimony of Serge Losique, see Roud, *A Passion for Films*, 161–63.
44. ‘Des cours de cinéma’, *La Presse* (Montreal), 10 March 1977. In his preface to *Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma*, Godard suggested that Langlois had been lecturing at the Conservatory in 1977. Given that the latter died in January of that year, this is clearly incorrect, as is his statement that Losique had suggested to him in the autumn of 1978 that he take over from Langlois (by which time Godard’s talks were in fact coming to an end).
45. It is difficult to be sure who first approached whom regarding the project, since Godard’s and Losique’s respective prefaces contradict one another on this issue. According to Losique, Godard contacted him, and the latter appears to confirm this in his opening talk. In his original preface, however, and at various other points during the

talks, Godard suggests that it was Losique who had proposed the idea to him.

46. Jean-Pierre Tadros, ‘Un cours pratique de cinéma dès septembre’, *Le Devoir* (Montreal), 10 March 1977, 15.

47. *Ibid.*

48. *Ibid.*

49. ‘Jean-Luc Godard: le vouloir, le pouvoir et la liberté’, interview by Serge Dussault, *La Presse* (Montreal), 12 March 1977.

50. Losique in Jean-Pierre Tadros, ‘Godard à Montréal’, *Le Devoir* (Montreal), 25 August 1977, 1.

51. ‘Jean-Luc Godard nous parle: Euh! Oui . . . non . . . bof !’, interview by Gérard Boulad, *La Presse* (*Perspectives* section) (Montreal), 1 October 1977.

52. Godard in Tadros, ‘Godard à Montréal’, 6.

53. G. Bruno, *Le Tour de la France par deux enfants: devoir et patrie* (Paris: Eugène Belin, 1878). Bruno’s real name was Augustine Tuillerie, and then (following her marriage to the historian and philosopher Alfred Fouillée) Madame Alfred Fouillée. She wrote numerous school textbooks, including this one, which proved hugely and enduringly successful. It was adapted as a film in 1923 (by Louis de Carbonnat), and for television in 1957 (by William Magnin and Robert Valey). A further television version was made in 1996 (by Jean-Claude Giudicelli) for La Cinquième under the title *Détours de France*.

54. ‘La Boîte à échos’, *Le Devoir* (Montreal), 12 April 1978.

55. First Voyage, Part One, 5.

56. *Ibid.*

57. See ‘La Boîte à échos’. See too André Charron, ‘Jean-Luc Godard prof à Concordia’, *Montréal-Matin*, 7 June 1978. In a recent interview with Timothy Barnard (8 April 2011), however, Losique denied that any such fee was ever planned.

58. See for instance ‘Jean-Luc Godard de retour à Montréal’, *Montréal-Matin*, 4 October 1978.

59. Losique has contested this version of events, claiming that there was only ever one bad cheque (the last one), which he had failed to have countersigned by mistake, and that it was replaced and cashed.

Interview by Timothy Barnard, 8 April 2011.

60. *Seventh Voyage*, Part One, 367.

61. *Ibid.*, 367–68.

62. *Fourth Voyage*, Part One, 180; Serge Losique, interview by Timothy Barnard, 20 June 2011. Losique also claimed during this interview to have invested \$15,000 in the Bugsy Siegel project, which he never saw again.

63. *Sixth Voyage*, Part Two, 347.

64. *First Voyage*, Part One, 6. Godard published a good deal of material relating to ‘Nord contre sud’/‘Naissance (de l’image) d’une nation’ under the title ‘Le dernier rêve d’un producteur’ in *Cahiers du Cinéma* 300, ed. Jean-Luc Godard (May 1979): 70–129. It is reproduced in English in ‘In the Poem About Love You Don’t Write the Word Love’, ed. Tanya Leighton (Berlin and New York: Sternberg Press, 2006). For an overview of the project, see Daniel Fairfax, ‘Birth (of the Image) of a Nation: Jean-Luc Godard in Mozambique’, *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies* 3 (2010).

65. *First Voyage*, Part One, 10.

66. *Fourth Voyage*, Part Two, 212.

67. *First Voyage*, Part One, 7, 9.

68. Serge Losique, interview by Timothy Barnard, 8 April 2011. This chimes with the information given by Godard in his preface.

69. Losique showed this contract to Timothy Barnard in the course of an interview on 20 June 2011. Unfortunately our knowledge of its contents remains limited, since he did not permit the latter to study it in any detail.

70. *Fifth Voyage*, Part Two, 293.

71. *Fifth Voyage*, Part One, 245; *Seventh Voyage*, Part One, 367.

72. *Fourth Voyage*, Part One, 202. See too the *Seventh Voyage*, Part Two, 402.

73. Godard, *À voix nue*, 20 November 1989.

74. *Ibid.*

75. *First Voyage*, Part One, 8.

76. See for instance the *Fifth Voyage*, Part One, where he describes his films of the 1960s as ‘bits of my past’ (p. 245).

77. Godard, *À voix nue*, 30 March 1998.
78. Ibid.
79. Fourth Voyage, Part Two, 217.
80. See Alain Rémond's introduction to his and Jean-Luc Douin's seven-part interview with Godard in the summer of 1978: 'Godard dit tout', *Télérama*, 8 July 1978, 4.
81. Ibid.
82. Fourth Voyage, Part Two, 217.
83. Ibid.; Sixth Voyage, Part Two, 330. Langlois had employed practice-based tasks with his students in Montreal, sending them off, for example, to shoot the arrival of a train at Montreal station in the manner of the Lumière brothers. See Roud, *A Passion for Films*, 162.
84. Jean Mitry in 'Les cinémathèques et l'histoire du cinéma', 281.
85. Third Voyage, Part Two, 154.
86. First Voyage, Part One, 10.
87. First Voyage, Part Two, 34; Third Voyage, Part One, 126.
88. Details of the timings of the screenings and talks are mentioned at various points as they are unfolding. See too Charron, 'Jean-Luc Godard prof à Concordia'; and 'Jean-Luc Godard de retour à Montréal'.
89. First Voyage, Part One, 27; Fourth Voyage, Part Two, 211–12.
90. Third Voyage, Part Two, 153.
91. First Voyage, Part One, 9.
92. Fourth Voyage, Part Two, 210.
93. Ibid. See also the Fourth Voyage, Part One, 195, where he suggests using photographs rather than clips.
94. Fourth Voyage, Part Two, 210. See also the First Voyage, Part One, 10.
95. First Voyage, Part One, 10.
96. Ibid.
97. Godard described his method in terms of 'historical montage' in the Sixth Voyage, Part One, 296–97. In this same talk, he commented enthusiastically (p. 319) on what he and Losique were achieving, and expressed particular satisfaction with the montage of films he

had created on this occasion (p. 296). He reiterated this sentiment when reflecting back on his work in Montreal the following year: 'Les cinémathèques et l'histoire du cinéma', 288.

98. Second Voyage, Part One, 76; Sixth Voyage, Part One, 307–8.
99. First Voyage, Part Two, 34.
100. First Voyage, Part One, 7, 9.
101. Fourth Voyage, Part Two, 211.
102. Godard, 'Les cinémathèques et l'histoire du cinéma', 287.
103. Ibid., 288.
104. Ibid., 289–90.
105. Ibid., 287.
106. Dominique Païni, 'Faire violence: à propos du *Trafic des cassettes vidéo*', *Cahiers du Cinéma* 524 (May 1998).
107. Jean-Luc Godard, *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), 70–71.
108. Third Voyage, Part One, 135.
109. Godard recorded a lengthy discussion with Serge Daney in his Rolle studio in 1988, which was conceived originally as a possible future pedagogical complement to *Histoire(s) du cinéma*. An initial version of this conversation appeared as 'Godard fait des histoires' in *Libération*, 26 December 1988 (anthologised in *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, vol. 2), and was published in English as 'Godard makes (Hi)stories', trans. Georgia Gurrieri, in *Jean-Luc Godard: Son + Image, 1974–1991*, eds. Raymond Bellour and Mary Lea Bandy (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1992). It was subsequently re-transcribed (by Pauline le Diset and Alain Bergala) and republished in French in *Cahiers du Cinéma* (no. 513, May 1997) as 'Dialogue entre Jean-Luc Godard et Serge Daney'. The passage from this conversation quoted here comes towards the end of episode 2A. The Brecht poem is 'Sorgfältig prüf ich' (1931), which Godard had previously used on screen in *Jean-Luc*, episode 2b of *Six fois deux* (*Sur et sous la communication*).
110. Joël Farges, interview by the author, 13 September 2011. Unless otherwise indicated, all the information that follows regarding the genesis of *Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma* is from this source.

111. Losique, interview by Timothy Barnard, 8 April 2011.
112. According to Losique (interview by Timothy Barnard, 8 April 2011), it was Godard who failed to honour their agreement. He nevertheless stressed during this interview that he forgives Godard everything, since he considers the latter a genius, and ‘you don’t argue with geniuses’.
113. Ibid. During this interview Losique indicated that when he gave Godard the audio recordings of the spring talks, he did not know that the latter was going to proceed with the book project without telling him.
114. Farges, interview by the author, 13 September 2011.
115. Jean Antonin Billard, interview by Timothy Barnard, 16 January 2012. Godard lunched regularly with Billard and Straram during the talks. According to Billard, Straram acted as Godard’s unofficial guide to film culture in Quebec during the latter’s visits. For a discussion of Straram, and of certain affinities between his and Godard’s work, see Michel Larouche, ‘Godard et les Québécois’, *CinémAction* 52 (special issue: *Le cinéma selon Godard*), ed. René Prédal (1989): 158–64.
116. Billard, interview by Timothy Barnard, 16 January 2012. Billard had previously also started to transcribe the recordings of Langlois’ anti-lectures, but had had to abandon this project when the tapes could apparently not be located among the latter’s belongings following his death.
117. Third Voyage, Part One, 126–27.
118. Sixth Voyage, Part Two, 349–50.
119. Jean-Luc Godard, letter to François Albéra, in *Cahiers du Cinéma* 300, ed. Jean-Luc Godard (May 1979): 39.
120. It is worth signalling in this context that Godard and Losique appear to have nevertheless maintained good relations in the years that followed: Godard attended Losique’s festival again in the early 1980s, and was announced to attend in the early 2000s but cancelled for health reasons. Let us note too Losique’s stipulation, in response to Timothy Barnard’s invitation to him to contribute a preface to the present volume, that he would do so only on condition that the book be ‘objective and not anti-Godard’. E-mail from Serge Losique to Timothy Barnard, 26 September 2011.

121. Monica Galer, interview by the author, 1 September 2011. Monica Galer (Galer is Tegelaar's maiden name, to which she has reverted) went on to become a prominent television executive. She is currently CEO of Fremantle Media France.
122. Ibid.
123. Ibid.
124. Jan Heijs and Frans Westra, *Que le Tigre Danse: Huub Bals, A Biography* (Amsterdam: Otto Cramwinckel, 1996), 135.
125. See for instance Richard Roud, 'Celebrity Hour', *The Guardian*, 27 February 1980.
126. Heijs and Westra, *Que le Tigre Danse*, 135.
127. Jean-Claude Biette, 'Godard et son histoire du cinéma', *Cahiers du Cinéma* 327 (September 1981), 'Le Journal des Cahiers du cinéma', v.
128. Heijs and Westra, *Que le Tigre Danse*, 136.
129. Ibid.
130. Martyn Auty, 'First of the Festivals', *Time Out* (London), 27 February 1981, 21.
131. For a detailed description of the structure of *Sauve la vie (qui peut)*, see Charles Tesson, 'Rotterdam 81', *Cahiers du Cinéma* 322 (April 1981): 46.
132. Biette, 'Godard et son histoire du cinéma', v.
133. Ibid.
134. Monica Galer (formerly Tegelaar), quoted in Heijs and Westra, *Que le Tigre Danse*, 136. This book includes a number of further highly critical commentaries on Godard's failure to honour his commitments in Rotterdam by figures such as Dicky Parlevliet, who worked for Film International and the Rotterdam Arts Foundation at the time, and Piet Barendse, the then vice head of the Foundation.
135. Heijs and Westra, *Que le Tigre Danse*, 151. 150,000 guilders was worth approximately US\$56,000 at the time.
136. Ibid, 136, 151. It is unclear precisely how much the Foundation invested in Godard's project in total. Although the initial figure was 150,000 guilders (the sum given by Heijs and Westra, and confirmed to me by Monica Galer), Bals indicated that by August 1981

the figure stood at 250,000 guilders (about US\$94,000 in 1982). Noorman apparently demanded repayment of 321,760 guilders (just over US\$120,000).

137. See Jean-Luc Godard, 'J'ai fait une échographie', interview by Pierre Murat and Jean-Claude Loiseau, *Télérama*, 11 November 1998, 36; 'La légende du siècle', interview by Frédéric Bonnaud and Arnaud Vivant, *Les Inrockuptibles*, 21 October 1998, 23; and 'The Future(s) of Film', 26.

138. Jean-Luc Godard, 'Parler du manque', interview by Alain Bergala and Serge Toubiana, October 1996, *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, vol. 2, 374.

139. *Cinéma cinémas*, Antenne 2, 20 December 1987.

140. Georges Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière*, trans. Alisa Hartz (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003). Godard's comparison of the 'symptoms' displayed by Anna and Augustine respectively can be read in part as an extension of Didi-Huberman's thesis regarding the theatricality of the hysterical body, and the transformation via photography of the doctor into an artist, and of the patient into an actor.

141. Bergala and Buache discussed these early versions at the conference organised by the former on the topic of 'Godard entre terre et ciel: les limites du sacré' at the Centre Thomas More, La Tourette monastery, L'Arbresle, in November 1998.

142. Besides signalling Bergman's formative influence on his early work, this film still evokes the magic of cinematic projection, the research necessary for the making of history, the historian's role as witness to the human condition, Godard's earlier work (the actor in the still, Birger Malmsten, went on to play the role of the man in the pornographic film-within-the-film in *Masculin Féminin*, 1966), and his long collaboration and relationship with Anne-Marie Miéville.

143. See Colette Mazabrand, 'Histoires du cinéma sur Canal+: Godard revigorant', *Cahiers du Cinéma* 419/420 (May 1989), 'Le Journal des Cahiers', vi.

144. Jean-Luc Godard, 'Une boucle bouclée', interview by Alain Bergala, 1997, *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, vol. 2, 17.

145. *Ibid.*, 16.

146. Ibid., 15; 'Godard makes (Hi)stories', 164.
147. Godard, 'Une boucle bouclée', 17.
148. Godard, 'Dialogue entre Jean-Luc Godard et Serge Daney', 51, 55.
149. Jean-Luc Godard, 'Montage, mon beau souci', *Cahiers du Cinéma* 65 (December 1956). In *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, vol. 1. This article is available in English under the title 'Montage my Fine Care' in Jean-Luc Godard, *Godard on Godard*, eds. Jean Narboni and Tom Milne, trans. Tom Milne (London: Secker and Warburg, 1972), 39–41.
150. The full list of titles is not given in 1A and 1B. Episodes 3B, 4A and 4B give all the titles, including 'Montage, mon beau souci' and 'La Réponse des ténèbres'. Episodes 2A, 2B and 3A give all the titles, including the two additional ones, except for those of 1A and 1B.
151. See Godard, 'Une boucle bouclée', 15; 'La légende du siècle', 26; *À voix nue*, 1 April 1998; *Cinema: The Archaeology of Film and the Memory of a Century*, 5, 18; and 'Le cinéma me reste comme espérance', interview by Jean-Pierre Dufreigne, *L'Express*, 3 May 2005.
152. This alternative early version of 4B was constructed around the exchange between Godard and Daney in 'Godard makes (Hi)stories' from Daney's 'With the triumph of the audiovisual media . . .' (159) to Godard's ' . . . because it needed a public immediately' (161). It also included lengthy passages not available in either transcription, together with the opening of the exchange transcribed in 'Dialogue entre Jean-Luc Godard et Serge Daney', 49 (from the beginning of the text to Daney's 'Est-ce que tu dis que tout cela est beau?').
153. For an account of the press launch, see Godard, 'J'ai fait une échographie'.
154. See Daney's introductory comments to 'Godard fait des histoires', 24. These are not reproduced in the versions of this interview subsequently republished in French and English.
155. Georges Duby, *History Continues*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994 [1991]), 109.
156. Christian Delage, 'Librairie: le vaste appétit de l'histoire de Jean-Luc Godard', *Vingtième siècle* 64 (1999): 145.
157. 'Un centre de recherche pour Godard', *La Croix*, 5 April 1999.

See also Jean-Luc Godard, 'Rapport d'inactivité: les mésaventures du centre de recherche sur les métiers de l'image et du son', *Le Monde*, 8 October 1991. In *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, vol. 2.

158. See Bernard Eisenschitz, 'Une machine à montrer l'invisible: conversation avec Bernard Eisenschitz à propos des *Histoire(s) du cinéma*', interview by Charles Tesson, *Cahiers du Cinéma* 529 (November 1998). Eisenschitz was assisted in his work by Laurie Bloom, who was tasked with identifying the paintings.

159. Godard, 'Les cinémathèques et l'histoire du cinéma', 290.

160. See Jean-Luc Godard, 'C'est le cinéma qui raconte l'histoire. Lui seul le pouvait', interview by Jean-Michel Frodon, *Le Monde*, 8 October 1998.



# A Note on the Text

*Timothy Barnard*

'Studies in Motion Pictures and Television'; 'A True Story of the Movies'; *Introduction to a True History of Cinema and Television* ('Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma et de la télévision'); 'Aspect inconnu de l'histoire du cinéma' ('Unknown Aspect of the History of Cinema'); *Histoire(s) du cinéma* ('[Hi]stories of Cinema'): these are some of the names – others in Italian and Spanish may have circulated at the time – playfully alluded to on the cover and opening pages of the present volume, used by Jean-Luc Godard to describe various incarnations of a film history project sporadically revisited over a quarter century and involving actual and projected books, educational video cassettes and audio CDs, concluding eventually with a series of video essays and, a few years later, with a feature film distilled from that series. The reader is referred to the more in-depth essay by Michael Witt elsewhere in this volume for a discussion of these different projects and the evolution of Godard's thoughts on film history. My goal here is to provide some context for Godard's visits to Montreal, Canada, where the talks translated here were delivered; to discuss the conditions under which the talks unfolded; and to outline some of the editorial work of preparing this volume which the reader may find of interest and wish to keep in mind while reading it.

## *Genesis*

The talks translated here were given as a non-credit course on film history at Concordia University in Montreal in the spring and fall of 1978. Jean-Luc Godard was invited to the city by the Conservatoire d'art cinématographique/Conservatory of Cinematographic Art, a repertory cinema and film archive housed by the University and founded in 1968 by Serge Losique, a tenured professor in the French department at Concordia who also founded the city's Festival des films du monde/World Film Festival in August 1977, with Godard in attendance to lend a helping hand. Earlier, both Godard and Losique

were involved in projects for the study of film history involving Henri Langlois, founding director of the Cinémathèque française and an early mentor to the New Wave filmmakers of Godard's generation and to the young archivist and impresario Losique (one year younger than Godard), who had been one of Langlois' volunteer helpers in the 1950s. At Losique's invitation, Langlois had lectured at Concordia (then Sir George Williams) University in the late 1960s and early 1970s and, according to some accounts,<sup>1</sup> planned to return during the 1977–78 school year as part of a video history of cinema he was to work on with Godard. Everything came to naught, however, with Langlois' sudden death in January 1977 at the age of 62. On a visit to Montreal in March 1977 for a retrospective of his work at the Conservatory, Godard announced to the press that he would be offering there a course on film history beginning in September of that year. Not just a course, however: as he remarks in his Preface and throughout these talks, the project was conceived as a film production, with videotapes of him speaking serving as raw material for the history of cinema video project that had been aborted with Langlois' death and which he now intended to continue alone, with Losique as co-producer. At the same time, this project was taking fundamentally new shape in his mind: initially conceived as didactic in nature and aimed primarily at the English-language educational market (see the prospectus for such a series prepared by Godard before Serge Losique entered the picture, included as an appendix to the present volume), it was shading into experimental hues as Godard sought to tell a paradoxical 'histoire sans paroles' – a history/story without words – as he eventually came to describe it. How, concretely, this was to be achieved, Godard evidently had only a dim idea by the time he finally arrived in Montreal to teach his course in the spring of 1978.

At the beginning of these sessions Godard is heard to remark with regret – and perhaps with a push in this direction by Serge Losique – that the idea of producing videos on the history of cinema in the experimental form Godard was groping towards had been put off until a later date, when a solution to the technological and other problems the project presented could be found. The talks thus reverted to a more conventional format, intended to provide voice-over commentary to film clips for an educational video cassette

market. Judging from his remarks as the talks progressed, it appears that even this idea was put aside for the time being, with a book drawn from the talks taking its place in the short term. This book had various projected titles, the most apt of which, the present publisher believes, is *Introduction to a True History of Cinema and Television*, as Godard refers to it in his Preface. The intention was for Losique to be involved in editing and publishing this volume, although it is unlikely this aspect of the project figured in the original contract between Losique's Conservatory and Godard's company Sonimage,<sup>2</sup> and later for him to co-produce the projected history of cinema on video. After the premature conclusion of the talks in the fall of 1978, however, Godard arranged for the volume, now announced as the first in a series of three, to be published in France. Appearing in 1980 and out of print since the last reprint in the mid-1980s, it was edited by Godard and the publisher in Paris and at Godard's home in Rolle, Switzerland, on the basis of an often-faulty transcription of Godard's incredibly dense remarks. This edition included none of Godard's interlocutors' questions and comments (except when these were occasionally reformulated to appear to have been spoken by Godard in an attempt to make sense of his reply). The original French edition excised other material as well, as a comparison between it and the present volume will show.

The present edition has restored, to the best of our ability, everything recorded during the talks. The audio on the videotapes was re-transcribed in its entirety before translation, correcting countless errors in, and restoring what had been left out of, the original. For those familiar with the French edition, or the Spanish, German, Japanese, Italian, Portuguese or Chinese editions based on it, these are the reasons for the numerous and oftentimes significant discrepancies to be found between them. The present English-language edition must therefore now stand, unfortunately for French speakers, as the only complete and reliable version of these talks.

### *The Sessions*

Jean-Luc Godard's fourteen Montreal talks and accompanying screenings took place on intermittent Fridays and Saturdays in the spring and fall of 1978 in a 675-seat auditorium – home to regular

repertory screenings at the Conservatory and at the time the only University facility equipped for 35mm projection – on Concordia University's downtown campus (the third session was held in a smaller classroom in the same building because the films shown that day were in 16mm; the fourth session's discussion was also held in this room after 35mm screenings in the main auditorium). The Conservatory had a large store of classic films for Godard to draw on and others were rented for the occasion, but not all the films he sought could be located (Godard mentions some of these during the talks). Screenings of films by other directors – initially a single complete film per session, soon shifting to the fragmentary excerpts Godard describes – took place in the morning, and one of his own films was shown in its entirety after lunch. Godard's comments and the time available indicate that a single twenty-minute 35mm projection reel of each of the morning films was shown, by all indications most often in chronological order. No document exists to tell us which reel of each film was shown. A discussion, from fifty to eighty-five minutes in length (but usually just a few minutes over an hour), then took place with the mixed student/cinephile audience. Any changes to the titles or screening order of films in individual chapters with respect to the French edition are footnoted and explained in those chapters. The illustrations were left unchanged even in the case of changes to the titles or order of the films.

One thing that Godard hints at once or twice, or which becomes apparent from certain circumstances – waiting in the lobby for his own film to finish before entering for the discussion, for example – is that his own viewing habits tended towards fragmentation. Although in many cases he was watching his own films from the 1960s for the first time since they were made, and had clearly forgotten many of them and expressed curiosity in seeing them, it seems he did not watch them from start to finish in the Conservatory auditorium, whose vastness would have afforded numerous dark corners in which to hide (and to smoke, as smoking was allowed in University classrooms and lecture halls at the time). Instead, he appears to have slipped in and out, watching bits and pieces of his own and others' films in a way that mirrored the fragmentary nature of the morning screenings. Fragments were enough to show him what he needed to see.

At various times Godard makes reference to the number of people in the audience, never with any degree of accuracy. It has also been reported that there were never fewer than 800 students present for each session.<sup>3</sup> In fact, there were generally fifteen to thirty students and film buffs in attendance (Serge Losique is heard mentioning an enrolment of nine students), with more on Saturdays than on Fridays. (Where possible, we identify participants when they pose questions during the sessions.) Godard and Losique sat on a very low riser at the front of the hall, sharing a hand-held microphone; Losique moderated the proceedings and Godard improvised his replies or, in the frequent absence of any question, simply extemporised, sometimes at considerable length. (By restoring his interlocutors' questions, and indicating points where an inaudible question was posed, we have made it possible for the reader to grasp something of the rhythm and logic of his remarks.) On a few occasions Serge Losique was absent, no doubt travelling on behalf of his new film festival. For the first weekend audience members spoke at two microphones in the aisles of the auditorium, but despite Losique's insistence on their use during those two sessions they inexplicably disappeared for the remainder of the talks, unfortunately rendering many of the audience's questions and comments only partially audible at best. The reason for the microphones' removal is unclear. Serge Losique, whose memory of events has perhaps faded after so many years, insists, against the evidence of the videotapes, that the microphones were used throughout the talks, leaving us to speculate as to the reason for their removal.<sup>4</sup> There was no technical obstacle to recording the students' questions. One might suspect that the decision to remove the microphones was more likely made by Godard than by Losique. What might have prompted this decision? Perhaps it was felt that the microphones in the aisles detracted from the spontaneity of the discussion. Or perhaps Godard had been put off by the prolonged and bizarre exchange late in the second session, even though he seemed nonplussed at the time. (The third and fourth discussion sessions took place in a much smaller classroom, where it may have been felt that an aisle microphone would have been out of place or unnecessary, although the audience's comments are no more audible in these sessions. By the time discussions returned to the main Conservatory

auditorium for the fifth session, the audience microphones had definitively disappeared.) Or perhaps, despite his repeated declarations that his film history project called for a collaborative group method, Godard was convinced that these questions were superfluous. As Michael Witt remarks in his essay, the book's initial French publisher reports that the removal of the audience's remarks, and indeed those of Serge Losique (speaking into the same microphone as Godard), was done at Godard's instruction.

### *The Tapes*

The sound and image were recorded onto sixty-minute reels of half-inch black-and-white 3M Scotch videotape, a brand which luckily is not prone to the kind of degradation of magnetic tape known as sticky shed syndrome. The image quality of the video varies from good to poor, with most of it being only fair, while the quality of the audio is similar, sometimes with a low hum or loud feedback, in addition to the only partially audible passages spoken off-mike. The image is fuzzy and often dark, and there are occasional signs of other kinds of degradation (ghosting of the image). Sometimes the video camera is stationary for the entire session, framing Godard and Losique in medium shot; at others we get occasional pans of the audience or images of a questioner. Most tapes have a brief break late in the proceedings, caused by manually changing the 60-minute videotape in the recorder, giving rise to interruptions in the transcription and translation of the spring sessions. (For the fall sessions, the proceedings were also recorded on a portable audio cassette recorder at Godard's side, providing us with this lost material via the French edition. As those cassette tapes are now lost, these passages could not be revised against the source audio for this volume.) Two tapes have much longer silences. The *Alphaville* session, one of the most interesting, is unfortunately silent for the initial nine and final ten minutes. By enhancing the sound (something also done for sizeable sections of the *Masculin Féminin* session) we were able to recover most of the final section, but the initial section is dead silent. The sound was also laboriously enhanced for the partially audible audience comments throughout the talks, allowing us to grasp many of these remarks in whole or in part. Together, these

enhancements account for further discrepancies between this and the original French edition of the talks. Yet additional differences arise from the fact that for the autumn sessions the French publisher was working from the audio cassette tapes mentioned above, which Godard brought back with him to Europe (for the spring sessions the publisher worked from audio tapes provided by Serge Losique). Godard would continue to talk while changing cassettes, however, making his comments while so doing unavailable to the French edition's transcriber. The original videotapes are housed in the Visual Media Resources centre of Concordia University and are unique; for this volume, VHS consultation copies of these tapes were used, apart from those sections where the sound was enhanced, which was done directly from the original tapes.

### *Chapter Titles*

The initial printing of the French edition in 1980 was divided into seven chapters for the seven trips, each made up of two sessions (separated in the book only by a blank page). These chapters were entitled *PREMIER VOYAGE*, *DEUXIÈME VOYAGE*, etc. For the second printing in 1981, Jean-Luc Godard assigned titles to each chapter, employing the first few words of each chapter as its title, as follows:

- 1<sup>er</sup> VOYAGE, *je prépare* [I'm preparing]
- 2<sup>e</sup> VOYAGE, *c'est trop loin* [it's so long ago]
- 3<sup>e</sup> VOYAGE, *le seul intérêt* [my only interest]
- 4<sup>e</sup> VOYAGE, *c'est une adaptation* [it's an adaptation]
- 5<sup>e</sup> VOYAGE, *ça me fait drôle* [it's a little strange]
- 6<sup>e</sup> VOYAGE, *il y avait une erreur* [there was an error]
- 7<sup>e</sup> VOYAGE, *c'est assez évident* [it's fairly obvious]

With the present edition's new transcription of the tapes and the inclusion of Godard's interlocutors' questions, these are no longer the first words the reader encounters in each chapter. The publisher thus feels no obligation to retain these titles after providing them here for the historical record. What, then, to call the chapters?

Godard himself provides the answer by assigning each session a theme, in any event once he found the format of screening excerpts on his second voyage. Thus *La Chinoise* is about 'Forms' and *Week-end* about 'Monsters', for example, and these have been retained as the titles of those chapters. In some cases, however, the talks take a more interesting turn than the announced topic, some of which include 'War', 'Music', 'Young People's Films', etc. Instead, Godard zeroes in, most often spontaneously and without prompting, on themes of a different order, more filmic than sociological, to which he had evidently given considerable thought. I have thus taken the liberty of identifying some of these themes and have provided a more evocative title for each of the fourteen sessions (not just the seven voyages), as follows:

#### First Voyage

Part One: Freedom (*À bout de souffle*)

Part Two: Fascism (*Le Petit Soldat*)

#### Second Voyage

Part One: Actors and Audiences (*Vivre sa vie*)

Part Two: Myths (*Le Mépris*)

#### Third Voyage

Part One: Words and Images (*Alphaville*)

Part Two: Fragments (*Une Femme mariée*)

#### Fourth Voyage

Part One: Between (*Pierrot le fou*)

Part Two: Television and Video (*Masculin Féminin*)

#### Fifth Voyage

Part One: (Hi)stories (*Made in U.S.A.*)

Part Two: Forms (*La Chinoise*)

#### Sixth Voyage

Part One: Monsters (*Week-end*)

Part Two: Documentary and Fiction

(*Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle*)

## Seventh Voyage

Part One: Return to Zero (*One plus One*)

Part Two: The People and Their Leaders (*Les Carabiniers*)

### *Editing and Chapter Presentation*

For easy visual identification, in this volume Jean-Luc Godard speaks in roman type and his interlocutors in italics. Serge Losique and those members of the audience familiar to us are identified by name before every comment; other audience interventions are unattributed. When Godard utters a few words in English, these appear in italics (a footnote makes this clear for the initial occurrence in each chapter), and when his interlocutors speak in English, this appears in roman type (no footnote is provided). To avoid confusion lengthier statements in English by Godard appear in roman type (and by Losique and the others in italics) with a notice in square brackets that the comments were spoken in English. (A few other words spoken by Godard appear in italics for emphasis, but it should be apparent that these were not spoken in English.) A few minimal 'stage directions' are indicated here and there in square brackets, such as audience laughter, Godard's motions with his hands, etc.

Faced with talks of generally more than an hour in length, sometimes only intermittently punctuated by audience questions, the publisher was faced with the dilemma of how to present them on the page. Godard's ideas are dense and his arguments sometimes a little hard to follow at first; presenting his remarks unbroken on the page might discourage readers and inhibit comprehension of these complex ideas. Nor could he be said to speak in paragraphs; to arrange the text in such a literary form would be out of keeping with their nature. The publisher has thus broken up this sometimes torrential flow of words into thematic capsules, generally half a page to a page and a half in length and separated by a small blank space, believing this will render Godard's remarks more accessible and comprehensible than a solid block of text running in many instances several pages in length. Indeed once this decision was taken and the task of carving up the dense and sometimes labyrinthine transcription begun, these capsules fell into place almost magically, like sections of an orange; no contortions were required.

In this way, should readers find that a particular discussion does not interest them, they may skip ahead to the next capsule without having to worry about where to pick up the text: a new capsule opens a new topic, or a shift of focus within a larger topic. If the present translator's own experience as a reader of the French edition of the talks over many years is anything to go by, this is also the manner in which this very long text will be consulted after being read once, or perhaps will be read this way from the outset. Although the translator is in no way a Godard scholar, before embarking on preparing an English-language edition of these talks he returned again and again for pleasure and ideas to the French edition, sitting on his bookshelf dog-eared and stuffed with bookmarks and slips of paper. It is hoped that the capsule structure will facilitate similar return visits by other readers of this 'veritable' *Arabian Nights* of cinema stories.

The cost of this measure has been to break up somewhat on the page – although it is to be hoped not in the reader's mind – the extraordinary rhythm and fluidity of Godard's speech. Indeed we are in the presence here of a true outpouring of ideas, made all the more remarkable by the unexpected associations and transitions between them. Just the same, however, as the task of dividing the text into capsules confirmed, Godard does work his way through a major idea before turning to another; the capsule structure simply helps isolate his arguments, identifying coherent ideas and bringing them to the fore out of the sometimes seemingly erratic flow. At one point Godard compares his filmmaking practice to a jazz ensemble starting with a theme and developing it – the point he is making is that as a filmmaker he is unhindered by cumbersome shooting scripts – and the same can be said of his way of developing an idea verbally. It is fascinating to watch and listen as he takes a question and works through his response, like a musician handed a few bars of music and asked to improvise a tune. In addition, a single word will often serve him as a leitmotif, and he will return to it and its various meanings again and again in his response. As we watch and listen we are certain at times that he is going to slip and fall flat, or just fizzle out, but he almost always pulls up with a flourish at the end, leaving us with both a complete and usually quite novel idea and a record of how he improvised and reasoned his way towards it.

Godard's next extraordinary move, when an idea has been worked to its conclusion, is to shift immediately to the next – often without taking a breath. This, as the saying goes, has to be seen and heard to be believed; replicating it on the page would only produce a jumble of text and ideas. He often stops for breath, and to quickly collect his thoughts, not at the conclusion of an argument, but mid-sentence soon after launching into the next topic. The conclusion of one topic and the beginning of the next are thus jammed together in the same sentence, the same breath. This is fascinating to listen to but would fail miserably on the printed page. Not to break up the text in a misguided attempt to faithfully reproduce such marvels would end up obscuring Godard's ideas.

To compensate for the anonymity of most of the audience and to preserve the oftentimes one-on-one aspect of Godard's discussions with them, follow-up questions by the same questioner follow immediately upon Godard's reply without a 'capsule' break between them, as there is between questions by different audience members. (If Godard's reply is lengthy, it will be broken into capsules, but any follow-up question by the same individual will follow hard upon the conclusion of his response.) In this way, readers will at least know that certain questions are follow-up questions by the same person, delineating the full exchange between them and Godard and imparting a sense of how the session unfolded.

Questions by audience members and by Serge Losique, when these seemed somewhat long or roundabout, were occasionally trimmed and condensed. This liberty was not taken with Godard's remarks. Thus, while it is only natural that nearly twenty hours of improvised public talks will contain passages of lesser interest or coherence than others, nothing of substance has been cut from Godard's remarks. Indeed there were remarkably few places where I was tempted to cut any of his remarks, which are consistently original and compelling. In my view, only a few brief discussions in these enormous talks – over 160,000 words in the French – merited excision, but in order to maintain the integrity of the volume no substantive cuts were made (see below for a discussion of minor stylistic editing). In this I took as my guiding principle Henri Langlois' dictum that it is impossible to know what will be of interest to future generations.

Because the integrity of the document is guaranteed in this way, readers need not wonder where deletions may have been made or whether the train of thought represented on the page is faithful to the event. Given the almost performative interest of these talks, this simple editorial decision thus reliably preserves the sometimes astonishing thought processes and verbal and mental associations at work in Godard's improvised discussion, even as these are sometimes interrupted on the page by breaks between the thematic capsules when in reality the transition between topics was often seamless. There remain enough displays within capsules of Godard's rapid shifts to give readers more than a sense of this.

The illustrations accompanying the chapters are facsimile reproductions from the second printing of the original French publication of these talks; that is, the high-contrast photocopies of black-and-white film stills discussed by Michael Witt in his essay on the genesis of Godard's historical project. The present book's dimensions were chosen to enable us to preserve, within a millimetre or two, the content of these images as found in the original French edition (for which they had been cropped to fit the book page) on a very slightly reduced scale.

### *Translating Godard*

As the above comments suggest, transcribing and translating Jean-Luc Godard has presented numerous challenges and dilemmas. Like many people when speaking spontaneously in public, in Montreal Godard spoke in run-on sentences, often at breakneck speed. Where possible, these utterances have been cut up into sentences of more normal length. So too Godard would change course, trail off, not finish a thought, mumble, speak ungrammatically, misspeak, fill his sentences with verbal ticks and generally create a mess should these things be transposed whole cloth onto the printed page. While striving to retain the spoken and spontaneous quality of the talks and something of Godard's idiosyncratic language, I have quite simply cleaned all this up and produced a text of fairly standard appearance. To avoid marking up the text with annotations, a few conventions were employed which are set out here for the reader's benefit, along with a discussion of some of the challenges encountered.

Perhaps even more than the rest of us, Godard often begins a sentence and then heads off in a different direction. An example of this can be seen in an early comment in the book about his desire to ‘make’ (*faire*) a history of cinema using video fragments: ‘[I]nstead of talking like today what’s needed is to be able—and Serge and I realised this was not possible, so I had to start from the very beginning’. When, as in this case, the initial sentence fragment cannot be dropped without a loss of meaning – Godard has something in mind other than talking, but this other thing is not spelled out before changing course – it is retained and a long em dash, as shown in the sentence above, is inserted into the sentence. (Shorter en dashes – like these – are used where an em dash would normally be employed, to place an interjection in a sentence.) When the initial fragment has no meaning or significance on its own and contributes nothing to the path he eventually chooses to go down – a made-up example would be ‘I’ve always thought that—one day Anna Karina said to me . . .’ – it is simply dropped from the text without a trace. A more gradual trailing off of a sentence or idea is indicated by an ellipsis, which is also used to indicate when one speaker has been interrupted by another (the context should be enough to indicate whether the reader is in the presence of a trailing off or an interruption; when unclear the stage direction ‘Interrupts’ is given).

Ellipses are also used to indicate where a questioner’s words are inaudible. When a single word or two of importance in the middle of a sentence is inaudible in Godard’s or Losique’s remarks on microphone, this is indicated by inserting [inaudible] into the sentence. This same [Inaudible] appears at the beginning of an interlocutor’s question when none of it can be made out. Godard’s frequent word play – beginning with the word *histoire*, which can mean both story and history – is discussed in the translator’s footnotes or indicated by inserting the French word in question into the text in italics between square brackets.

Jean-Luc Godard speaks a language all his own. He routinely refers to himself using the impersonal third-person pronoun *on*. The equivalent term in English, ‘one’ (e.g. ‘one wonders where Godard gets his ideas’), is less common, and it is impossible to use it comprehensibly for the first-person singular. In such instances Godard ~~is translated~~ translated using the first-person singular ‘I’. But this is just the

beginning: sometimes, in the same discussion or even in the very same breath, he also appears to employ the term in one of its accepted senses, the first-person plural ‘we’. (The word already has various meanings without Godard adding to them, including ‘we’, ‘they’, ‘people’ [as in ‘people say’], etc., depending on the context.) This occurs in particular during discussions of his relationship with François Truffaut and their common history as film critics and aspiring filmmakers; in comments about his work with Jean-Pierre Gorin; and when he speaks about his ambitions in light of his current ideas and work, the latter now often carried out with his companion Anne-Marie Miéville. How are we to tell whether he is continuing to speak only of himself or whether his comments now include the person who shared his experience and outlook? At times there is no definite answer to this question, and I have tried to supply the pronoun which best seems to suit the circumstances.

In these talks Godard remarks that he mixes up periods of film history, and the same can be said of his verb tenses. Whether this is a result of improvising and speaking quickly or is connected to this famously elastic conception of historical time at the very root of his project can only be conjectured. In addition, French and English verb tenses do not always align: English, for example, rarely uses the ‘historical present’ tense, which abounds in French. Beyond such differences, however, reading and listening to Godard one sometimes encounters unexpected verb tenses. One arresting example occurs early in the first talk, when Godard remarks that ‘Henri Langlois is dead; I was supposed to do [this] with him. . . . He has a great memory and knows film history very well’. Here the present tense ‘has’ and ‘knows’ have been allowed to stand to suggest to the reader early on that Godard’s manner of speaking is not always straightforward. Later examples have mostly been corrected; what the ear glides over the eye stumbles on, and while we forgive speakers their lapses we are less kind with respect to the printed word. Like Godard’s pronouns, then, for ease of comprehension Godard’s verb tenses have sometimes been modified to best suit the context.

Godard’s sometimes plebeian language and tone fit his remarkably unguarded, gracious and conciliatory manner towards his audience, his frequent insistence that artists are not a special breed and his refreshingly candid willingness to say what others only think

and to ask almost childlike questions about the ways of the world. At the same time, his remarks consistently display immense intellectual rigour and an uncommon mastery of the language, all the more remarkable for being improvised and of unfailing interest and originality session after session. No undue effort was made to find the translator's 'equivalent' of this heady blend. To arbitrarily render Godard's remarks in an English idiom such as that of a working-class Brit, and moreover of an intellectual member of that class, would be grotesque and risible. Instead, he is translated here in what is hoped to be a neutral and universally comprehensible spoken English that will stand the test of time across regional dialects while still conveying some of the colloquial qualities and simple and direct immediacy of his French. His talks having taken place in Montreal, where the present volume is published, the vocabulary and style used is that of Canadian English. If this idiom strikes British or American readers on occasion as slightly odd, this would not be out of keeping with the strangeness the Swiss Godard and his Quebec audience would have found in each other's language and accent.

At the same time, strictly correct English grammar often ignored in everyday speech (of the dangling preposition variety) is not used here at the expense of naturalness and immediacy. Every effort was made, in addition, to have Godard speak gender-neutral English, even though French uses only masculine pronouns to speak generally, unless doing so seemed historically inaccurate or the stylistic contortions required, particularly for spoken remarks, were simply too great. Godard's 'ums' and 'ahs' have been removed and his frequent 'I don't knows' retained only in rare instances to indicate true hesitation and reflection.

As mentioned, Godard not only speaks in run-on sentences like most of us; he often begins a new idea without marking the end of his sentence by taking a breath and reflecting for a moment, which would also allow his audience to digest his thought. He will run a new idea into the last without taking a breath, leaving less 'space' between the two ideas than between clauses of one and the same sentence, which is where he takes a breath and reflects. This demanded special care when parsing the meaning of his remarks. The tapes revealed numerous instances where the French edition

misattributed a word or a phrase: meant to start an idea, they were transcribed as completing the previous one, or vice versa, sometimes to significant effect.

In sum, readers familiar with Godard's films – with their overlapping and incomplete dialogue, narrative disruptions, sound and image montage and other techniques for making the film denser and more opaque than commercial cinema – would be surprised to find his manner of speaking any more straightforward or transparent. Indeed in these talks he has accomplished the considerable feat of spontaneously creating something akin to the many-layered textures and meanings of his films through his voice and ideas alone: as he himself remarks at one point, these videotapes are a Godard film. Readers will thus quickly perceive that it is necessary to do some occasional filling in of the blanks. Like viewers of one of his films, they will become active participants in the work before them. I did not want to deprive the reader of this pleasure, or risk mistake by filling in these blanks myself. At the same time, readers will find in Godard's ideas, despite their complexity and the great swirl of language that envelops them, an astonishing lucidity and clarity, in addition to their unmistakable ring of candour and sincerity.

### *Titles and Indexes*

Films by other directors Godard chose to screen each week are identified at the beginning of each chapter by both their English and original-language titles; thereafter only the English is used. The original and English titles of Godard's films are also given initially but thereafter only the original is used. The reasoning here is that these are generally well known and easily recognised; in many cases the English titles of Godard's films are also by turns inadequate or inelegant. With people of many different languages reading this volume, it seemed more appropriate to use French as the lingua franca for Godard's work. For all other films mentioned by Godard or his interlocutors in the course of the talks the English title alone is given, with all foreign-language films cross-indexed at the end of the volume by their original and English titles. When Godard abbreviates or slightly confuses a film title in his remarks, this is generally allowed to stand with the proper title noted and indexed.

A name index is also provided. Neither this Note nor Michael Witt's essay is indexed.

### Footnotes

No one individual would be able, moreover in a reasonable amount of space, to provide footnotes to a volume such as this which would document, corroborate, contradict or expound the myriad recollections and arguments presented in these talks. (In a few obvious cases where Godard misspeaks – declaring at one point for example that Galileo discovered that the earth does not rotate around the sun – or slips up on the production date of one of his films, a [sic] has been inserted to indicate that the transcription and translation are faithful but that Godard's statement is erroneous.) Readers may very well come upon instances where they believe the author's memory of events to be at variance with the historical record or with other protagonists' accounts, or where he may be passing on erroneous second-hand information, and are advised to verify the comments found in this volume the same way they would those of any witness to or commentator on a historical event. In the course of reading this volume it will even become apparent that its author regularly contradicts his own comments elsewhere in these same talks regarding, to take just one example, the relative merits of the principal subjects of his investigation, cinema and television. This might be seen as no more than a healthy ambivalence towards each medium and recognition of their respective virtues and faults – the sort of relationship we all maintain with the things to which we are closest. In these pages, as the reader will discover, Godard goes a step further and declares himself devoted to contradiction as an intellectual principle. Also, it sometimes seems that one thing is always a reference to another, that everything Godard says is a quotation of something else. It would take a team of experts to decode this and a separate volume to document it.

Footnotes in the present volume have thus been limited to the following three categories:

1. Questions of language, such as explanations of Godard's extensive and often untranslatable word play in French and other translation issues and dilemmas;

2. Clarification when a speaker's memory of a film is mistaken in such a way as to require correction or when their allusions to a film or other artefact or event require amplification for their point to be understood by the average reader;
3. Bibliographical information and if necessary rectification when speakers make reference to a published source (a literary quotation in a film, published film criticism or other published writings).

I have thus avoided the temptation to footnote, debate or correct every intriguing remark, every seeming inaccuracy, every controversial interpretation of events and every historical reference, accurate or not. This debate with Godard is the task of the readers of the present book, and we all look forward to reading the results of their work.

Despite a few shortcomings – the talks' premature conclusion, the audience's sometimes inaudible questions and, perhaps most disappointing of all, the missed opportunity of seeing and hearing Godard at work at the editing table, discovering traces of film history 'with and in front of others' – these talks will stand, I hope, as a remarkable document of the singular, generous and provocative thoughts of one of the most significant figures in the history of cinema as he set out on his odyssey of 'making' that history in words and images. These are the words, of no less value than the images.

#### Notes

1. Richard Brody, *Everything is Cinema: The Working Life of Jean-Luc Godard* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2008), 393. Serge Losique, however, in an interview with the present author (6 October 2011), denies that any such resumption of Langlois' courses was ever planned.
2. In the course of an interview with Serge Losique in his office on 20 June 2011, this contract was briefly put under the present author's gaze without his being allowed to inspect it closely or to take notes from it.
3. A figure attributed to Serge Losique in Richard Brody, *Everything is Cinema*, 409.
4. Serge Losique, interview with the author, 8 April 2011.

# Unknown Aspect of Film History



for Mary Meerson  
and Roger Viguier



# Freedom<sup>1</sup>

1

## À bout de souffle

1

*Fallen Angel*

Otto Preminger (U.S.A., 1945)

À bout de souffle (*Breathless*)

Jean-Luc Godard (France, 1960)

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SERGE LOSIQUE: [In medias res] . . . has gone to see a film. [Laughter] Yes, he's a true cineaste, he watches films. First of all I have to explain myself. People are calling me on the phone, people are talking nonsense in the newspapers, saying there were administrative conflicts around this research course, that it is starting late. I'm going to tell you quite frankly that there is no conflict or anything of the sort. First of all, we have always called this film research.<sup>2</sup> We are going to try by every means possible to discover the true history of cinema from a practical perspective, by which I mean through images and thanks to Godard's genius. But research is research, it's like a baby, no doctor can tell you in advance, even if you made the baby, whether it will be a boy or a girl. So if, as I mentioned to someone, it is simply a question of transmitting: 'Here, we're going to show Griffith, we're going to show Eisenstein', let's say to look for editing, this is easily done. At that point it becomes an idiotic university course; at that point you can open any book. And what will it give you? This is why we are going to try all kinds of experiments; we've already set up the dates for this first year.

And I have to tell those of you who want to attend Godard that you must be patient, because Godard is a fellow in great demand—look, there's someone here from New York [gestures off-screen] because he loves Godard, he's patient. You must be patient. I've been patient with Godard for ten years. It's taken me ten years to establish contact – it's true – and I want him to feel at home here. I wasn't about to bother him with contracts

or anything else. Cinema is an irrational thing, so accept the irrational and Godard will be here. He was already here a month ago, he's come back, he's promised to return before he goes to Mozambique in May, and that's how things will proceed.

Now, why then, we changed our minds, we had nine students, or nine fanatics, we realised that even the equipment we had at Loyola<sup>3</sup> or here was simply plagiarising television, playing with toys. Where is film history in all that? Nowhere. You might as well go to a junior college and play with their machines; you'll get absolutely nothing out of it. This is why today—I discussed this with Godard, I barely slept, we were up all night cooking something up, first of all for the first stage, the gardening stage, to obtain a true history of cinema. When I say gardening, I think the best thing is to begin with the films that influenced Jean-Luc Godard, who brought about the revolution in film you are familiar with, the French New Wave. And what influenced him, as you are no doubt aware, was American cinema, crime films. That's why today, while he is watching another film, he's asked you to watch two films, Fallen Angel by Preminger and then his first film, *À bout de souffle*. And after that you can ask him anything you want.

We'll do the same tomorrow, we're going to show M, it's going back in time, you see, it's like cutting into film history, and his own film *Le Petit Soldat*. [To New Yorker] How does that sound? Yes, you see, some people are happy. So Jean-Luc Godard will be here immediately after the films, take from them whatever you want, you'll see how he came to make *À bout de souffle* under the influence of American cinema. That's what we're proposing for today. And it may be that after this weekend we'll find something, we'll head for a different kind of gardening. Today we're going to start with potatoes, tomorrow or in the coming months it will be green beans, I don't know. We're searching, no more and no less. The first stage will be a kind of psychoanalysis of cinema taking Godard as its starting point and heading off in every direction. And maybe next year—because this is a long-term project, I'm telling you, it took ten years to get him here, and now he's here and he'll be back. He told me when he landed at Mirabel that the weather was fine but that it was snowing in Geneva. And I said that's nice to hear for a change. OK? So now you're going to see Fallen Angel and immediately afterwards *À bout de souffle*. Try to see if there is something in common between the two films and then you can put intelligent questions to Godard. OK? Thank you very much.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *All right, it was long. I make no apologies, it was meant to be. But tomorrow we are going to show just one film in the morning and another in the afternoon. That will give you a chance between twelve o'clock and two o'clock to have a sandwich or a coffee, which I never touch. So, if you have any questions about Preminger and Godard, but if you do, because we're recording everything, for the history of cinema of course, I'm going to ask you to go to the microphones back there.*

JEAN-LUC GODARD: But maybe I should explain a little what has happened, that at first—I came here, I have an agreement with the Conservatory . . .

SERGE LOSIQUE: *I already explained that.*

You explained it? All right, we'll—oh, maybe I can explain it. I might explain it a little differently.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *If you like, by all means, you're the head gardener.*

You spoke about gardening?

SERGE LOSIQUE: *Exactly.*

When I came here, I thought—I'm preparing for my own use a sort of history of cinema and television that I am going to call 'Aspect inconnu de l'histoire du cinéma' ('Unknown Aspect of Film History'). Then I realised that first I had to be able to see films, which for me was difficult. It was something I was going to do with Langlois, but even in Paris this was difficult. Here it's quite easy to see films, I don't know how Serge does it but you ask him for a print of a film and there it is. Obviously it's a little far for me to come from Europe, and then we realised the last time I was here to see a film—to do research and work. My idea was—I would like to recount the history of cinema not only chronologically but rather archaeologically or biologically. To try to show how changes came about. Like in painting, if you had to recount its history: how perspective was created for example, the date when oil paint was invented, the date something else was invented, or the history of music if you do it a little differently. In cinema too things didn't just happen. Cinema was made by men and women living in society who at a given moment express themselves, and impress this expression, or express their impression in some way. And this creates geological layers, shifts in the cultural terrain. To do this, you need the tools to screen films and analyse them, not necessarily very powerful tools but well adapted.

These tools don't exist, however, and I realised that—I'm 50 years old and I feel like I've finished my life, that I have maybe thirty years left and that I am going to, well, live off the interest of my life, if you like, like a fifty-year investment. Now I am going to start receiving interest. And what interests me, precisely, is to look at what I've done, and in particular, because I made a few films, to take advantage of this and try to—I said to myself that this should be easier. Someone who had not made films and wanted to look back over their life, their family life, they might have some photographs, if they kept any, but they won't have everything. Their work life, for example, I don't think they would—if they worked on a General Motors assembly line or in an insurance company or as an airplane pilot. Or simply as a housewife, I don't think that a woman, for example, who has worked twenty years as a housewife, raising children—she'll have a few pictures of her children, but I don't think she'll have a lot of pictures of the work she has done, simple things like doing the dishes, washing clothes, going shopping. There won't be a lot of pictures of that. No images for her to look back on. Sounds, even fewer sounds I think.

And so I had the idea that in cinema – and I'm discovering that this is an illusion – it would be easy – because I made films, because making films consists in recording a series of photographs – to watch them again and that I could at least start out from that past to look back over my own. A little like a kind of psychoanalysis of myself and of where I am in cinema. And I realised that the very history of cinema, which should be the easiest thing in the world to do and see, is absolutely impossible to see. You can see a film and then talk about it, which is what we're doing here, but it's a pretty poor work method. We have to try to do something else. But we may not be able to do this right away.

I realised when I came here with Serge that I had planned in fact on carrying out a kind of research. I had a few themes: the idea that the main thing in cinema was what is called editing, although people don't know what this is. Compared to music and painting or literature, editing is something different and unique to cinema and, today, to television also. This editing has to be hidden, because it is quite powerful, it places things in relation to each other and

makes people see things. An obvious situation: a man whose wife is cheating on him, as long as he hasn't seen the other guy his wife is seeing, that is to say doesn't have two pictures, of the man and his wife, or the man and himself, he hasn't seen anything. You always have to look twice. That's what I call editing – simply bringing things together. This is the extraordinary power of the image and the sound that goes with it, or of sound and the image that goes with it. In my view the history of that, the geology and geography of that, is to be found in the history of cinema, but it's invisible. It's essential, I think, that it not be shown. In fact I think I am going to spend the rest of my life, or the rest of my working life in cinema, trying to see this—first of all to see it for myself and to see where my own films fit into it.

What I mean is, before diving into and seeing how Griffith, Eisenstein and Murnau, to take the most well-known examples—it's very difficult because there are no—the material means to do this exist: for example showing a film, slowing it down, seeing what happened at specific moments, how Griffith or someone else moved closer to an actor and, if not invented, then systematised the close-up and made it a stylistic device, discovering something the way writers invented conventions. Then to compare this device to Eisenstein you need the film by Griffith, you have to take the time to find the place in Griffith's film where you think something is happening, and this something, if you think for example that what happened is similar to yet different from something that came later, the heir or cousin or complement, in Russia for example, you have to find the Eisenstein film that did that, you have to take the time to find where and then show the two moments. And you have to do this with people and not alone, if you are to see whether there really is something there. If there is nothing there, well, you look elsewhere. Exactly like scientists in a laboratory. But this laboratory does not exist. The only research taking place is in pharmaceuticals and a little bit in medicine, or scientific research, or in universities, but this research is closely connected to the military system. There you find a little research, they give you the tools. In film, there is none.

Here, if you wanted to do that—so Serge—I have an idea of the method but I don't have the means. Henri Langlois is dead; I was

supposed to do it with him. He could have pointed out to me with certainty; he has a great memory and knows film history very well. He could have said: 'Ah, for that, you have to look at such-and-such a film in such-and-such a period'. Then I asked Serge, who has copies of films or can find them. And then we have to set up somewhere. But then suddenly there is nothing. You have to be able to show the film—not project it, because once you project it you have to talk, to say: 'Ah! You remember, forty-five minutes ago, we saw . . .' But this is not interesting. What is interesting is to see something and then to see another close-up, but at the same time. Today for example—but I didn't dare do this today for the first time. It might have been more interesting – but I don't know the films well enough to dare do it – to show you a reel of *Fallen Angel* and then a reel of *À bout de souffle*. It's a little arbitrary, but it might be interesting to try it just a little, because after twenty minutes<sup>4</sup> we might see that there is nothing there. At that point, we go and get another film. But getting the other film takes maybe ten minutes, a day, two days, and if we don't have the rights or we don't have a print, we have to ask.

In fact the history of cinema, once you want to do it, is completely uncharted territory, buried who knows where. It should be the simplest thing in the world, because it's just images, like a photo album. This photo album exists, but the means for flipping through it aren't possible. The telecine machine,<sup>5</sup> if we need it, is in a room upstairs; the analytical projector<sup>6</sup> is over there—so we can't work. This is why, in talking with Serge, I have given up the idea for the time being, until next year perhaps. But next year means setting up somewhere here, and we can't count on the university to finance the project, we have to do it ourselves. We have to set up here some of the equipment we have put together for ourselves but which works for two or three people. We don't have room for twenty, and then we're back in Europe, where I don't have access to films.

So all that is very difficult. So I said to myself that the first thing to do, in the end, is to see the films again, to take advantage of this support, of this agreement with the Conservatory, for my own use, and if other people are interested, it doesn't bother me to speak out loud in front of them because it's a form of self-psychanalysis, psychoanalysis of my work. To watch again, in front of and with

other people, not my past but my twenty years in cinema. And to try to see those years just a little bit differently, somewhat idiotically, somewhat systematically, each time with one of my films. To take advantage of the opportunity to see again – or to see for the first time if I have never seen it, or haven't seen it for so long I forget – a film or the kind of film that I remember as being what my film was referring to. And to start from the beginning.

And today, well, I went and had a coffee a moment ago and I was a little—it was like going to see a psychiatrist for the first time, or going for a job interview. I was a little embarrassed; I didn't want to see too much. I wanted to see *Fallen Angel* again, but I watched it a little in my own—I was afraid to see more than half an hour. I came and caught a peek, half an hour, and said to myself: 'So that's what I liked so much twenty, twenty-five years ago, that's what I wanted to do, that was my model'. It was like leafing through a family photo album and being a little embarrassed, especially in front of other people. There was a sense of looking back over your family album and being amazed in the end at being a part of such a family. In fact I don't see these two films very clearly, today it's almost as if I were outside a little. But that's kind of where I want to be.

So in the future this will all be done in a more systematic manner. Starting tomorrow I'll come at fixed dates between now and December and carry out this work in front of people, meaning to research what happened. So I need your questions. The only thing I can do is to show the places where these things happened, and to begin at the beginning. Each time we'll show two films: tomorrow morning will be my second feature, called *Le Petit Soldat*, which is about the Algerian war and France. And I chose a film that isn't connected in any real sense to that period but which today—I don't think I thought about it in particular at the time, but it was one of Lang's last films before he left Germany. It is also a very individualistic film. So there may be a connection. The reason I chose *M* to show with *Le Petit Soldat* is in connection with me today, by saying to myself: 'Isn't there something about these two films that could make me see something today?' This is why I chose them, if anyone asks why I chose one film over another: they give me something to say.

The situation with *Fallen Angel* and *À bout de souffle* is quite different, because before I shot *À bout de souffle* there was the whole period in the United States known as film noir, when Gallimard began publishing its *Série noire* in France. Even before the founding of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, Bazin, Doniol-Valcroze and a few others started a film society, which they called *Objectif 49*<sup>7</sup> and which introduced all the films known as American film noir: *Gilda*, *Crossfire*, all those sorts of films. So I chose *Fallen Angel* because Serge had it; I had asked him for another film I remember, called *Where the Sidewalk Ends*, which also had Dana Andrews in it. Crime films, in other words, and I remember when I made *À bout de souffle* I thought I was making a film like that. When I saw it afterwards, I realised it was something different. Today I wonder what these films were and what my film was. Back then they were standard little films that still show up today on television at ten o'clock in the morning or three o'clock in the morning. For me this film was a model. They were films we admired and which we even launched as *auteur* films. We said: 'These are great filmmakers, they're authors, they're artists', but they weren't seen that way at the time. Today I think I see things a little differently, but this was the idea behind putting these two films together.

**SERGE LOSIQUE:** We're ready for your questions.

*Mr Godard, you mentioned the problem of intentionality: you made a film and thought you had made another. So my question is the question of psychoanalysis as such and . . .*

But psychoanalysis, I don't know if you've done psychoanalysis, I haven't, perhaps when I say psychoanalysis I mean with respect to the screen; that may be of interest to you. Psychoanalysts, when you go to a psychoanalyst they don't talk. When I say I'm in psychoanalysis, I mean speaking out loud in front of people, so for me there are a thousand psychoanalysts here. Your question was . . .?

*My question is what your intention was. Two little images in the film struck me. You appear in the film and you turn in your film's hero. My second question is about Humphrey Bogart saving your hero's life. He was looking at a poster right at the moment when the two police officers leave the travel agency, his back was turned, they didn't see him, we could almost say that Humphrey Bogart saved his life, and that you turn him in. I wonder if there isn't something to explore in that direction.*





I don't know exactly. I remember that back then we were cinephiles, if you like. Sometimes we simply liked to mention our friends and put in a film poster. I remember putting in a poster for an Aldrich film whose subtitle was *Vivre dangereusement jusqu'au bout*,<sup>8</sup> simply because at the time Aldrich was a part of this school of cinema that we [inaudible]. The reference was purely that, a wink. As for my own role, I don't know. That must be it. You'd have to ask Dr Freud why, because I couldn't care less. I think it was more a provocation, but what amazes me is that anyone even noticed, because a lot of filmmakers have played small roles in their films for a little fun. Hitchcock did this quite often; lots of filmmakers have done it. But no one has ever said that there was any precise intention if Hitchcock played a milkman or something in a film. So the fact that I play the role—I said to myself that I will be the one to play the dirty trick on purpose: the informer, the stool pigeon. And stool pigeons are always detested, so I'm going to confuse things on purpose, because of a taste for contradiction or I don't know what. Because it's my film and I'm going to do this on purpose so that people will ask questions which have no need of an answer.

OK, I won't ask myself that question . . .

It was more like that. And I took as my principle, precisely, to say: informers inform, curators [*conservateurs*] preserve [*conservent*], lovers love, etc. There was no intention. I don't think it's very—what is more interesting, watching *Fallen Angel* again, was this attraction. What I find interesting seeing *Fallen Angel* again – and this will be one of the chapters or places in the history of cinema if we get to it in a year or two – is the crime film [*policier*]. We live in police systems; there are a lot of more or less developed police systems. We can ask ourselves what the ingredients of the crime film are. I'd like to approach them with reference to light, for which I have a fairly precise method, and today I was interested in seeing a film I thought of as a crime film, a classic crime film, like television series. Because today these films by Preminger or Dmytryk – there were hundreds and they've been systematised – take the form of television cop shows, there are practically no more films like that properly speaking. But they abound in the form of series, there are four or five per day on every television network in the world. *Mannix* and company are the direct descendants, the grandchildren of Dana Andrews.

There is a cartoonist called Gébé who works for *Charlie Hebdo* in France, he created a little graphic novel<sup>9</sup> based on a cop character, like the private detective novels of Chandler and Dashiell Hammett. And he explained their success, because normally people are afraid of the police. If a police officer walked in here suddenly, we'd think he was different, even if he had done nothing particularly mean. Generally speaking, people don't like the police, even if they support them against extremists and things like that. Let's say that people don't feel the same way towards them as they do towards—if you put a police officer and a baker side by side, people will feel that the police officer is not a part of their world exactly. Yet despite this crime films, which people shouldn't like precisely because they feature or tell the story of characters they wouldn't like to—someone you would be a little uneasy about having a coffee with straightaway. If a police officer asked you in the street: 'Would you like to have a coffee?' you'd be more distrustful than with anyone else, for no reason. Yet crime films and cop shows are extremely well liked and very successful; they've become our daily bread. We can't say the daily bread of success, but they're the prime ingredient just the same.

And Gébé's graphic novel explained this somewhat paradoxically, but I think it's quite right. It's that in the West a policeman, a private detective—for women I don't know, but for guys he represents the highest degree of freedom. He's a guy who doesn't give a damn, who walks into a bar whenever he feels like it, who drives a big heap, who lights a cigarette, who can come up to people and ask them questions or send them packing if he annoys them. In other words, he represents freedom in a kind of stupid sense: doing whatever you want. His hands are in his pockets; he doesn't get dirty, he's not a manual worker. He's not an intellectual either. He's a free man, or what people in the West must imagine freedom to be: doing whatever you want, going to Caracas to investigate, seeing pretty girls, going into bars with smoke and music, going anywhere you like, travelling. And this is why people like him so much. In the end, I think, seeing these two films again I unconsciously said to myself—these two films which don't have much in common. What I must have been attracted to in crime films was this character which Gébé explained to me in his graphic novel twenty years later. Meaning that the true cop in *À bout de souffle*, if you like—the

characters played by Belmondo and Dana Andrews are somewhat alike. They're people who, in my opinion, must have represented for me at the time a certain ideal of freedom, meaning doing whatever you want without anyone bothering you. In fact, doing not much at all, because you're hemmed in on all sides and you don't see the overall structures that make you move from right to left. But this is a strictly individualistic level, which is precisely what a lot of people reproached me for: someone who is amoral, who is neither for nor against, and who does whatever comes into his head. Freedom in an anarchical sense—but a non-political anarchy, not anarchy in the political sense of anarchists.

And I think that this must have been what fascinated us, and must fascinate everyone about crime novels, which today have become quite coarse and trashy, but where this kind of freedom still reigns. They weren't as coarse at the time, but it's the false freedom of the bad boy who at the same time is on the right side of the law, and thus has every advantage. This I think is what there is in common between these two films. And our taste, or my taste at least, for American film noir, which we might say came from Europe, because American film noir – and this will be one of the things we will demonstrate in the history of cinema – was invented by Europeans, by exiled Europeans. Germans especially: Preminger was from Vienna, Lang was German. They were the ones who invented the gangster film and perfected the crime film.

SERGE LOSIQUE: Sternberg. Are there other questions? You can ask questions; you have to challenge him too. He may mix up his geography; when he says 'pretty girls in Caracas', he should have said Rio and not Caracas. Anyway, are there other questions?

LUC BOURDON: What was the reaction to *À bout de souffle* when it was released?

For its day the film was a great success. The budget was very small because it cost half the average film of the time. It cost 100,000 dollars when the average film in France cost 200 or 300,000 at the time. All of a sudden it was a big success. It was very difficult to make because I could have made it—I had the support of Truffaut and Chabrol, who had just had similar successes and who lent their names to it. The technical aspect is interesting, because it's a film I

wanted to shoot in a studio. The reason I shot outdoors was because we were forbidden from shooting in a studio. There were quite strict union and technical rules that completely prevented me from shooting in a studio. So I shot outdoors grudgingly, without any theory on my part. My only theory, since I didn't know anything, was to try to avoid what I shouldn't do. I was happy to have Raoul Coutard as the cinematographer because he hadn't done anything; he had only made a colour documentary beforehand. So I said to myself: 'Well, at least he's never shot in black and white'. And I asked if we could shoot outdoors without lighting, like in early cinema, and when we shot indoors we had to use a sensitive film stock which didn't exist yet at the time except in the form of—it was Ilford film, in rolls for still cameras, and all the night scenes were shot with rolls of three—that's why the night scenes are shorter, because we loaded the camera with rolls of still film because it didn't exist in any other form. My idea was that the cinematographer would not use lighting. That way I was sure no one would force me to light in a way I wouldn't have liked. Because I didn't know my way around technically, I couldn't interfere by saying: 'No, we have to do something else'. So at least do nothing. And what became my rule of thumb, which is simpler and lets you do something else, is to do what you can and not what you want. To do what you want out of what you can, to do what you want out of what you have and not dream about doing the impossible. If you have fifty million francs<sup>10</sup> and no lighting, you shoot with fifty million francs and no lighting. And something else arises. You do what you can and try to make the best of it. I think this was what made it a success. I've always done that. This is my only film that was really successful and made money, which made money for the producer. A fair bit of money: ten, twenty times over. Not a huge amount, given that there wasn't—but he made money. On all my other films, by and large, the producer lost money.

**LUC BOURDON:** *But this idea of freedom is what made the film work the way it did.*

I think it's a film—today I no longer have the means, I keep my distance, because I'm not able—but at the time this film, given that it was made more intellectually and sensitively, it's exactly like, I don't know [to Serge Losique: What was the title of that film we were talking about?], *Saturday Evening*<sup>11</sup> with John Travolta, which must

have been a sudden success. After seeing *Star Wars*, after seeing *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, they must have put them into a computer and the computer said: 'Listen, you should make a film for ordinary people' and then they made a film like that.

I came along at a moment when people said 'you can't'—we said that French cinema didn't say certain words, it didn't shoot in certain places, and we did. So I took a classic schema, the crime film, which was also a real story by the way. Suddenly people had the impression of seeing reality a little, and it was done wholeheartedly, trying to express myself. In general, all first films are made late. I made my first film at the age of 30. Before, in Hollywood, people made their first film earlier. When I see the age of successful filmmakers today—the other day I read an article about Cuba, I saw that the first films by Cuban filmmakers, even today they make their first films when they're 35, 36 years old. I said to myself: 'What's this country that calls itself socialist? They make films even later than we did back then'. I mean really, making your first film at the age of 30—people should make their first film at 12 or 13 years, or 15 or 16 years of age, when people write their first novels or first poems. Making your first film at 30 is quite late. Even today at 50 I sometimes think of myself as a young filmmaker, which seems to me completely aberrant. I can think of myself as young in cinema. But at the same time, there's something very abnormal about cinema, which has always been made by old men, except at certain—Lumière himself began a little late. And Hollywood was founded by thirty- and thirty-five-year-olds: relatively late. At 30 you're an adult; it's kind of strange to begin expressing yourself when you're an adult.

LUC BOURDON: You said you would have preferred to shoot in a studio. Was this preference purely technical or was something else involved?

I like working in calm. I find I work well when it's calm. I don't like working in the street very much. I'm always afraid that something is going to go wrong, that the cars will start up when the light is red. I'd like to have a big studio or an entire town. The Russians did this for some of Eisenstein's films; for *October* an entire section of Leningrad, the entire population of Leningrad was used in certain shots. In a case like that, it's all right, there is calm, you have time. Indoors or out, it's a question—I prefer the studio or even postcards

because at least you have time to think. It's too bad, but in the street, you can't—television could work more in the street, but that's precisely the point, you'd have to work differently, or you'd simply be transmitting what's happening. And then it's not really a film shoot, there is nothing in particular you have to do. So I don't like it very much. Generally speaking, people shoot quite poorly in the street. Big films, the Germans, people like Murnau, a film like *Sunrise* was shot in the street, but the entire street had been made in the studio. But the Germans knew how to do this and had the money to do it. Today there is no more money. Generally speaking, films shot in the street are pretty poor. They're made up of short little shots; you see neither the crowd nor the individual. You can't do it, it's absolutely impossible. Television is even less capable; it no longer even knows how to shoot live. You only have to watch how they film a visiting head of state getting off an airplane; it's completely useless, even on a technical level.

I think this must be due to the fact that you're shooting in the midst of a bunch of strangers. The strangers don't care what you're doing and I don't see why they should. For *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory*, Lumière chose a prudent spot, and even then it was his own workers. But he chose a prudent spot. If he had to shoot workers leaving a factory—if you're not a worker yourself, it seems to me almost impossible. Sometimes what makes me nervous is that I get anxious in the midst of people who don't care what you're doing. I don't see why they should. And I don't care about their lives or the place I'm in, or I say things like: 'Hang on, that idiot over there, can't she cross the street a little quicker, because she's in the field of vision and spoiling the shot?' In other words, things that three-quarters of the people couldn't care less about but if you're taking a shot and you want it to turn out well you have to think about. So there is too great a contradiction. You can't do shots of streets, or things that happen in the street. Today I'd like to, but it requires a great deal more care and work than—whereas back then I was a little naïve. In fact we had the nerve to shoot in the street when it was forbidden, if only for legal reasons. For a long time in the United States — this came to an end with television — they didn't shoot in the street simply because if someone passed by, they could later sue by saying that you didn't have the right to film them. And the Supreme Court agreed

so it was only on account of big money that it was like that. Today that doesn't happen.

In the street I always felt that I was something of a colonialist, like those European or American films they used to make in Africa. You still see this in advertising photos; in a Coca-Cola ad there will be pretty girls and handsome boys in a dugout canoe with two blacks paddling. I've always had the feeling with people in the street that I was in the canoe and they were the blacks walking by. It always bothered me a little, so that I usually prefer—in the end I got away from the street even when I moved to—I'd like to go back, but how? In a different manner—it's very complicated. And there have to be at least five or six of you around the camera, truly concerned by or interested in these problems. You're rarely in synch or have the same ideas. There are hierarchical work relations, so that one person gives orders and things like that which complicates things a lot.

Back then I was completely naïve or half-crazy. At the time this film was made—I think in the end what interests me, I feel that—the films from the great era that captivated me—but it was a dream. Our dream was always to make a film in Hollywood, but when I saw what Hollywood was—I never went, I only saw it from a distance. I would never have been able to. I would never have accepted to live the life Preminger and filmmakers like that must have led at the time. But at the same time, there was something I never found again, which we had somewhat at *Cahiers du Cinéma*: an industrial aspect, where people saw each other and talked about film. That's where their strength came from. The strength of our films at the time they were made and were successful is that they were films that were made – Truffaut's first films or my first films, or first film, because afterwards they no longer had – they were made by people who talked about film amongst themselves and criticised each other's work a little. When I saw *Fallen Angel* again, I was sure that the scriptwriter, the director and the cinematographer had—in the United States the real filmmaker is the producer, that has always been the case. The others were executants. But these executants talked amongst themselves. The cinematographer must have said: 'In this shot, the framing is no good', and the director's pride wasn't wounded if someone told him that. Today, directors can't even speak

to each other, that doesn't exist. I think the strength of the New Wave back then, like the strength of the new, of a few American directors working at a much higher level today, is that the people involved knew each other. This moment no longer exists. But when they made their first film, or their second film, there is something in the fact that they simply talked about cinema with each other. Otherwise, film people don't talk with each other, and especially not about what they're doing.

**LUC BOURDON:** *When you make a film, what kind of relationship do you have with the cinematographer with respect to composition? Do you convey your idea to him or is it simply technical, do you say 'Frame this scene like this'?*

It's hard to say just like that. You have to know what the working relationship is. Then you can say: where is the labour in a film? What is a composition? Today I no longer have any idea what it is, at least not like that. I'd have to—you have to recover—not recover, know what composition is. For a long time I filmed postcards. These past few years it's made me rethink composition. Why did the frame become square, why are lenses round? It's a lot to think about. In the end if you want to make films you have to go back to mathematics. You don't have the knowledge. You have to find it yourself starting from mathematics, you realise this reminds you of school, which reminds you of children, which reminds you of parents: you see, to do the history of cinema there are—these are the questions I ask myself. Composition, precisely—I see what captivated me in a film like *Fallen Angel*. It's quite musical, you can see that these are people who come—Preminger was a Viennese who came out of music and had a very supple style with very economical means. And, little by little, today I have honestly begun to ask myself—but you can't answer with words. You could answer with—if the words came after an image and then again before another image—that's why I think the work we wanted to do here may be possible in a year's time, but it has to begin with something like this. We have to do this for a year, if you follow it a little you'll see that we can't do much. But we have to do something just the same. I chose one of my films because I'm here, and another film I had a connection to, [not] in a technical or financial sense but in a cinematic sense. But what we would have to do in order for me to be able to answer your question would either be

to stop the film there, put it on video, project it on a screen, and then say to you: 'There, you see this composition?' Even if I didn't use an old film, if I took a recent example, a video camera filming you, you talking and me replying, or vice versa, and then say: 'If you had to frame what is happening, how should you frame it? Should you put the camera there and frame everything together? Should there be a close-up of you? Of me? Or what?' You have to know where you're going to do that, but—well, at that point I could answer you with a precise example, you would have an idea of what a composition can be and what it can do. Then there are other things. In French a *cadre* [frame, composition]—I don't know about here but in France we say a *cadre de vie* [milieu, lifestyle], and then some people are *encadrés* [supervised, overseen] and a boss is called a *cadre* [manager].

SERGE LOSIQUE: *There's something I'd like to ask, for the benefit of our viewers and friends. In every book of film history, when they talk about you and especially about À bout de souffle, the first thing they say, which has always irritated me, is that you reinvigorated what they call film language. I'd really like to know what you yourself think of this theory, this statement, the film that truly launched the New Wave.*

In fact this film came at the end of the New Wave. It was a film without rules and whose only rule was that the existing rules were false or misapplied. It was a film with no rules. I remember something Astruc, I think it was, said to Vadim: 'In your film, be careful, in general people's first films rarely have close-ups. They always go wrong. They're like amateurs, they think that if they film someone standing up that will suffice, but usually they aren't close enough.' So what I did, systematically, to be prudent but also thinking 'there must be something to that', but without knowing, I said to myself: 'All right then, every day, every time I do a shot, if I do two shots one of them in any event has to be a close-up.' But I said this to myself like an idiot, without having any idea. It was as if someone had said to me: 'If you go to England, every time someone speaks to you, you absolutely must say "yes"' or something stupid like that.

There was another thing like this: first films are usually very long. Because after thirty years people try to put everything into their first film. So they are always very long. And I was no exception to the rule: I made a film that was two and a quarter, two and a half hours

long. And that was impossible; it could be no longer than an hour and a half, by contract. So I remember quite clearly how that famous editing or who-knows-what was invented, which today is used in advertising. We simply did it by taking all the shots and systematically cutting what could be cut while maintaining the rhythm. For example, there was a sequence between Belmondo and Seberg in a car. It had been made using the 'shot of one, then a shot of the other' technique as they were talking to each other. So when we came to this sequence, which we had to shorten like the others, rather than shortening each of them a little—I remember, I flipped a coin with the film editor. I said: 'Rather than shortening one a little and then shortening the other a little and making short little shots of the two of them, well, we'll cut four minutes simply by removing one or the other entirely, and then we'll edit the shots together as if it were just one shot but it will be made out of several shots'. So we flipped a coin between Belmondo and Seberg and Seberg stayed in. That's how we did it. It was neither better nor worse, that's not the point. The principle enabled us – and this is what I find interesting – to do what we wanted with what we had. When you have four francs in your pocket, well, you make do with four francs to eat. Every unemployed person does that. Everyone does that, even the rich do that, Rockefeller does what he can with four billion. That's the reality: you do what you can, not what you want. On the other hand, you try to do what you want with what you have. There had to be an hour and a half. Rather than bemoaning the situation and saying: 'No, no, I won't cut anything', I had to see what to cut, yes, but to see if there was a way for it not to be forced. Because where does rhythm come from? It also comes from an obligation and from fulfilling this obligation in a certain period of time. So rhythm comes from style, your style against the obligation. There are people who escape from prison in great style. Fidel Castro escaped and then made it back to Havana with a kind of style, a kind of rhythm and a kind of obligation in a certain period of time. He didn't say: 'Batista has sixty thousand men waiting for me in the coves, so I'll only come back in a hundred and fifty years, when I have two hundred thousand men at my command'. There was an obligation. That's what creates style and rhythm. I've known very few people like that. It doesn't all mean caving in; on the contrary, it means strengthening your

position and being flexible. And rhythm comes from the places where you have succeeded in being flexible, not from the places you refuse to be flexible because you think you're fighting for your life. So in this film the editing was found solely this way. I think it's one of the best things about the film, it gives it great stylistic freedom. There was an obligation and great stylistic freedom in meeting it.

*There is the history of cinema and your history as a filmmaker. Last year you came and showed Bande à part (Band of Outsiders) and the first question was about how you no longer like this film very much. It has the look of a Truffaut film for one thing. It's a film you would not do again. Now, to take up your history a little, there is a film like Le Gai Savoir (The Joy of Learning), a film about film, a humorous film that was shown here recently on television. It's a very beautiful film, a humorous film, a didactic film. And most recently, Numéro deux (Number Two) and Tout va bien (All's Well). It seems to me that there are films you are ready to forget and films you are ready to accept. You certainly adopt the more militant films. Are you going to be able to compare certain films, to connect them to a history of cinema?*

No, I don't regret anything I did at all. In any event I will never redo what I have done. Or when I tried to redo it – for example Numéro deux – that was done from the start. I needed money to begin to set up the atelier I mentioned to you which would allow me to work something like a novelist. But like a novelist who also needs a library to see what is being done, to receive books by other people, so as not to have to read only his own books. And, at the same time, a library that would also be a print shop [*imprimerie*], to know what it is to print [*imprimer*].<sup>12</sup> For me an atelier, a film studio is both a library and a print shop for a novelist. And, by chance, to begin to find money for this other kind of print shop, this other kind of library in order to make other novels, I bumped into Mr Beauregard, who produced *À bout de souffle* and several of my other films. I said to him: 'I have different work methods today, and now I'm proposing to you' – this was when, 1975, fifteen years later – 'I propose to make a film for you...' [Break in tape]

It's a financial remake, an intellectual remake, and it gives you a different product. I have never remade—that's what I'd call 'remake the same thing'. But of course, after fifteen years—if the Americans

started the Vietnam War all over again today, in fifteen years I don't know where they'd end up.

*I find it rather facile to say—you're not just the filmmaker who made À bout de souffle. When you made À bout de souffle you were a writer, a journalist, a film critic, so . . .*

When I made *À bout de souffle*, for me it was the culmination of ten years of cinema. I had made cinema for ten years beforehand without making films, by trying to make them. When I say trying to make them—I came from a large bourgeois family with which I broke off at a very late date but definitively. So compared to a few friends I have today the only difference is that when I go on vacation I have no one to visit. I'm always surprised that people—in general students and those sorts of people, at Christmas and during the summer holidays you don't see them, they're always with their parents. And entering the cinema was something like wanting to join the circus. It too had a very bad reputation and was in addition closed tight. Amateur filmmaking wasn't as widespread as it is today. Cinema was a very professional world, very exclusive. We didn't really know how. Everyone knew who Gabin was, things like that. But how a film was made, how an image of Gabin was put on film, they didn't have the slightest idea. In addition it's true that it was very exclusive because of the law. In France, even to buy film stock, the law, given that the Germans had occupied France, buying film stock was prohibited because it was seen as strategic material. So everything was highly codified, it was not at all open. I think it's still fairly closed today, but before it was shut up tight like a citadel. You needed a union card, you had to go to school; it was handed down from father to son. I got into it gradually, because when I was in my cradle I didn't say: 'Let's see, I'm going to make films when I . . .' I thought I was going to—I had some talent for mathematics, I thought I was going to become an engineer or something like that. Then when I was 20, 21, 22 years old, at loose ends in Paris, because I came from Switzerland and Paris was a bit like New York for people in Quebec, or people in Toronto, it was the bright lights and off you went. Not having succeeded in doing anything in Switzerland, I returned to Paris. Then, gradually, I got closer, I wrote a few articles for the newspapers. I began in cinema around 20, 21 years of age without making films, just in my head—reading magazines, thinking

like that, the way a young man is crazy about one thing or another. I believe I made *À bout de souffle* after ten years of cinema which weren't really cinema. But it was already ten years of cinema.

SERGE LOSIQUE: All right, that's enough for today, because we're showing other Godard films to the public in a few moments, at seven o'clock. Thank you very much; we'll see you at ten o'clock. But I'd like to ask you to limit yourselves to the film we show, because we're going to be showing all of Godard's films in our program. Tomorrow, for example, I'd like to talk about *Le Petit Soldat* with respect to *M*, questions about those two films. That will help us avoid a lot of work in the editing.

We could talk a bit about the little program Serge and I have drawn up. [Takes a sheet of paper out of his pocket] If we stick to it this time, tomorrow we'll show *M* and *Le Petit Soldat*, for the reasons I vaguely explained. *M* is a film that was made in a certain political climate, by a filmmaker I admired also, and *Le Petit Soldat* was also made at a certain time and in a political climate. I didn't think about that at all at the time; I chose *M* because Serge has it, that's all, there's no need to look any further than that. After that, on 5 and 6 May, we'll show Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* and then *Vivre sa vie* (*My Life to Live*). We'll show one film in the morning and talk about it for half an hour and then you'll see my film in the afternoon and we'll talk a little longer. Then, if Serge finds a print, I'd like to show Cukor's *A Star is Born* before *Le Mépris* (*Contempt*). Why? Because they're films about the entertainment business, and each time we'll show a film that impressed me a lot at the time. Then, with *Alphaville*, we'll show Anthony Mann's western *Man of the West*; with *La Femme mariée* (*A Married Woman*) we'll show Rossellini's *The Flowers of St Francis*; with *Masculin Féminin* Bresson's *Pickpocket*; and with *Pierrot le fou* Hitchcock's *Vertigo*.

Then we have to find ideas for each. We'll show my few films and I'll always try to show a film that was either made under the same conditions—I'd like to show a Russian film with *La Chinoise* for example, to show two conceptions of political cinema. One made by the young bourgeois I was at the time I made the film and a more classic Russian film. So it's true that it is better to use the films to try to see what was going on at the time, in two films which—I'm trying to say they resemble each other a little. So today, with *Fallen Angel*

and Belmondo it's pretty much the same character, it's a private—it's private life, completely free but falsely so. People accused me at the time – especially people who saw themselves as further to the left, if this word has any meaning – they accused me of making fascist films. That was said especially about *Le Petit Soldat*, but certain left-wing publications in France also said that a lot about *À bout de souffle*. That always shocked me, and at the same time I think there's a degree of truth in it. But what I can say is that afterwards, rather than saying: 'No, it's not true', I tried to get past that. I prefer to say that the film represents a large degree of fascism that was in me and which I didn't hide. But here I would find it more interesting if other people said so too and to try to say about others what is—saying someone is fascist or reactionary is easy to say, it's not that simple. To say that capital is bad, it's not that simple. It would perhaps be better to say something else or see things somewhat differently. So in the end what I find interesting is that the only point in common with the detective – the typical detective in American literature, which still dominates the world today – is people coming and going who have no connection to anything. This is what I found so captivating, and which is what is captivating also in *À bout de souffle*. Just the once, like an explosion, whereas it's still captivating people on a regular basis in American television series today. So that you turn on your TV, children in particular, and for five minutes watch this freedom that comes from nowhere. And a child who spends eight hours a day at school or an employee who spends eight hours in a factory or an office, they're fascinated by someone, whether in jeans like Clint Eastwood or like Dana Andrews [draws a hat around his head] who comes and goes, who doesn't have any financial problems. It's a dream, to be sure.

SERGE LOSIQUE: There you go. Tomorrow at ten o'clock, the head gardener will be here waiting for you with his assistant.

Friday 14 April 1978

#### Notes

1. As described in the translator's 'Note on the Text' elsewhere in this volume, the chapter titles have been supplied by the publisher of the English-language edition.

2. In the context in which it is used here, the French word *recherche* also carries with it a sense of open inquiry and experimentation.
3. Loyola College is the suburban campus of Montreal's Concordia University.
4. Twenty minutes is the standard length of a projection reel of 35mm film.
5. Telecine devices are used to create video versions of films for broadcast on television or screening in video format.
6. An analytical film projector makes it possible to slow down the projection speed of a 16mm film without damage to projector or film in order to analyse its sequences more closely.
7. When it was founded in 1948, this film society took the name Objectif 48. It changed its name to Objectif 49 in the second and final year of its existence.
8. 'Live Dangerously to the End.' The film is *Ten Seconds to Hell*.
9. The term used is *bande dessinée*, which is difficult to translate in part because it can mean both comic strip and comic book. In addition, France has a longer tradition of *bandes dessinées* produced for an adult readership than English-speaking countries. Precisely around the time of these talks, the term 'graphic novel' was entering the English language to describe this kind of comic book for grown-ups, although its use was far from widespread at this early date. At the risk of anachronism, and of sacrificing the Pop Art 'comic strip' quality immediately called to mind by Godard's references to the *bande dessinée*, the term graphic novel is usually employed throughout this volume to cover the range of meanings understood by the French term, which will be unfamiliar and confusing to many readers.
10. About \$100,000.
11. Spoken in English. The film is *Saturday Night Fever*.
12. The French verb *imprimer* has a variety of meanings, including to print, imprint or impress (in a printing sense) and to impart or communicate. Godard contrasts this term in his talks, and on many other occasions in his work, with *exprimer*, to express. Elsewhere in this volume *imprimer* has been translated as 'impress' to maintain this contrast, but this was not possible in the case of 'print shop' (from the noun *imprimerie*).



# Fascism

1

## *Le Petit Soldat*

2

M

Fritz Lang (Germany, 1931)

*Le Petit Soldat*

Jean-Luc Godard (France, 1960 [released 1963])

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SERGE LOSIQUE: Before we begin, I'd like to ask Jean-Luc Godard a question. I'd like to remind you that yesterday we saw *À bout de souffle* (Breathless) and before that the film *Fallen Angel*. And now I'd like to ask Jean-Luc, we discussed this a little yesterday, we know that he showed this film because it influenced him a little, but what is the difference between your film *À bout de souffle* and American film noir? What was new in what you did? And how do you see your own film compared to American film?

JEAN-LUC GODARD: I still don't know to this day, because I'm always surprised to see what I do. With *À bout de souffle* I think the difference was that I was speaking a language that was completely—watching *Le Petit Soldat* what strikes me, and what frightens me a little also – thankfully I made it a long time ago, because if I had to put my name today to a lot of things that are said in it – it frightens me a little that I could have written those things and have them said. But at the same time, I think that the difference with American films, or the contribution of the New Wave compared to other French filmmakers, was that we claimed the right to speak in the first person, perhaps me more than any of the others, meaning that I couldn't write things—I wrote what I was thinking or saying and then put these lines in situations that were not my own. The whole thing was a fairly incredible blend that at times must have rung completely false and at other times completely true. Because I didn't hesitate

to say something I was thinking, no matter what it was. Just like that, to have a girl speak a boy's line of dialogue. And I don't think that salaried filmmakers, if you will, saw themselves—I think the real difference, it sounds strange, but the real difference — I suddenly realise now that I think about it — was that I didn't think of myself as an employee when I made this film. And I still don't today. I think we were more like painters or musicians. And that was a mistake I think. It was a mistake because it encourages the idea that we were *auteurs*, which makes you feel you are above the law. A kind of king, working for other kings but a king just the same. This gave rise to a truth but at the same time to a lot of falsehood. I think that the real difference between Preminger and me was that I didn't see myself as an employee whereas Preminger saw himself as an employee of Fox. I didn't see myself as an employee of Mr Beauregard, even though I was happy to have him pay me and later pay me more and more, or after a while to have control of my own budget. In the end, I think that the only difference is that I have never seen myself as an employee. That gave me the status of a novelist, but even a novelist has a relationship with a publisher. I think that's the real difference.

I think the film's language has to do with that. Because Preminger, or a lot of traditional filmmakers, those who worked for the studios the way one works in television, the filmmakers we admired, we said: 'Fine, they're employees, but at the same time they're more than that. They have talent; some of them are even geniuses'. But all that was completely untrue at the time. So why did we say it? We said it because we believed it, but in fact underneath it was a way of making ourselves heard, because no one wanted to listen to us. The doors were closed. So we had to say: 'Hitchcock is a greater genius than Chateaubriand'. Then people said: 'You're joking. Are you crazy?' But at the same time it was so outlandish that we got ourselves heard. If not, no one would have listened to us. But to have people listen to us meant, for us, to make films. I think the difference between me and the others at the time was that when I wrote film criticism, for me it was—I never saw the difference between talking about a film and making one. This also meant that when I made films I didn't hesitate to talk about them or about something else. And today, strangely enough — not strangely but naturally enough —

I'm taking a turn around myself, it's either a vicious circle or a spiral as Mao Zedong would say.<sup>1</sup> If you manage—either an entire society or an individual—it's a way for me to be heard in the cinema, because my films are seen by too few people. I do this to communicate but I see that I am communicating even less. When one of my films is shown, there is complete silence, and that frightens me a little.

Yesterday for example I went to see a film by Brian De Palma<sup>2</sup> at the At – how do you say that? – the Atwater cinema. The audience liked it a lot, they applauded at the end. Me too, I was happy with it, I thought it wasn't badly done for once; it's rare to get your three or four dollars' worth. But at the same time something appalled me, and that's that there was absolutely no communication between the people who had made—there was and at the same time there wasn't. There were the people who had made the film, who were now hundreds of kilometres away doing something else, and the people who had done something other than make films during the day and who had come to see it in the evening. Then there was the film itself, the point where the two groups met, but at the same time it was like a train station, both completely deserted and full of people. I navigate in this space, I ask myself questions, I want to make films and supply answers. So I think the difference between me and people like Preminger is that he must not have thought all these sorts of things! [Laughs]

*SERGE LOSIQUE: All right, today we're going to start with this second theme, and we'll see what there is in common. This is the way we'll always start . . .*

I think in the future we'll have a better system. The next time we'll show several excerpts in the morning and then in the afternoon one of my films from—what interests me in this project is to look back at where I am, and truly try simply to show films I was thinking about or which today I feel might have some connection to the films I made. It's a little like revisiting a landscape or walking through train stations where I once was. Thus simply to name names. But rather than seeing just one film in the morning—it would have been better this morning if, rather than watching *M*, we had seen fifteen or twenty minutes and then watched other films with a connection at the time. At the time I didn't think of *M* at all, but I think alongside

*Le Petit Soldat* it's interesting because sometimes I ask myself certain questions. I ask myself how to address one's personal fascism, and impersonal fascism, and for Fritz Lang this film made at a certain moment in Germany must have been similar to something that happened with me, even though I didn't think that. So it would have been better this morning if we had seen four or five excerpts, and this is what I'll try to do next time in the morning with Serge: show four or five talking films and silent films with something in common between them. And this point in common will be shared by the afternoon film by me. This will give the morning session a kind of montage quality, and a historical and geographical overview as I mentioned yesterday, and I think it will be easier to follow than today.

**SERGE LOSIQUE:** *So on 5 May, that's a Friday, we'll start at ten a.m., we'll show five or six excerpts, and in the afternoon we'll show, at two o'clock again, one of Jean-Luc's films. The same thing on Saturday. That way we'll start out from that theme, from those historical references, with the hope of piecing together, one day, the history of cinema. Now, I'll ask you to speak at the microphones back there, we're recording everything. To get things started, I'll ask the first question myself. Why did you choose M and *Le Petit Soldat*? Why M and what is there in common between M and your film *Le Petit Soldat*?*

It must be malediction. It must be fascism, troubled times. And it helps me when looking at *Le Petit Soldat* and the period in which it was made to think of another film, one also made in a very troubled time, although I couldn't tell you the year it was made. And when we show these films, obviously we should at least indicate the date and recall some of the major historical events going on at the time. *Le Petit Soldat* was shot from late 1959 to early 1961 [sic], before *À bout de souffle* was even released. For me, it was a question on the one hand of making a film right away because the other one hadn't yet been released. It had been criticised very harshly within film circles because of its so-called new methods, and so I really had no idea. I was afraid of never being able to make another film and I pestered the producer so he would find not even fifty million francs but twenty million, or 40,000 dollars, even less than the first one, but enough to do something. The only idea I had was to do something about torture. Why? I don't know, I don't remember my life at the time in enough detail to say why. At the same time – because

they were accusing young filmmakers, especially people like Vadim and others, of doing stories about sex, about the bourgeoisie and things like that, of not daring – the Left accused us of not dealing with contemporary problems, like the war in Algeria. I've always tried to do what no one else is doing, to say: 'Well, if no one is doing it, I will'. Good or bad, it doesn't matter. But to do something that isn't being done. It's not hard to have ideas. It's like in industry; to earn money, it's enough to look at what others are doing and to do what they aren't, to do what isn't being done.

So it was a question of making a film about—and it was banned simply because someone in it said the word 'Algeria' and in France censorship is very strong. Even today, much less so in cinema but on television, people don't talk about reality in a completely normal way like they do in other countries, which hide things in a different manner. So for me, it was a question of saying the word 'Algeria' in a film and of doing so in my own way, what I was at the time, the son of—in other words to tell my truth. Clearly, there are enormous—today, when you see—a large part is . . . fascist I don't know, but it's completely reactionary and enormously confused. But it argued for this confusion. It's more interesting to see these films ten or twelve years later, when you can see that some of the things that are said are true but which shouldn't have been said like that. And if things were done differently, well, it doesn't matter. The difference is that I still think—I've always blended the two and that's where the ambiguity lies. I made films both somewhat objectively—today I do this better, but at the time nobody had taught us how to make films, we had to learn on our own. To learn that the film language you're using—I realised quite quickly, at least, thanks to *À bout de souffle* and the success of *À bout de souffle* and the fact that I thought I had made something like *Fallen Angel* or that I wanted to make something like it. I realised that I had made something else, that I was incapable, that I wasn't in control of myself at all, that I didn't know how to do certain things. That if I wanted to create lighting like I had seen in a Fritz Lang film, well, I didn't know how to do it. If I wanted to shoot a close-up or a certain angle—I realised this again quite recently when I made *Tout va bien* (*All's Well*) with Gorin five years ago, he wanted to redo the death of Vakulinchuk in *Battleship Potemkin*. We realised something quite simple, that we didn't know

how to do an angle like Eisenstein. When we tried to film someone with their head tilted a little to look at a dead person, we had no idea, what we were doing was grotesque. All that takes a long time. You can't learn to make films just like that. Take literature; it takes a long time to read and write. There too, I don't think I know how to speak. When I have little to say I talk a lot, for example, and people think you have a lot to say when it's the opposite. I'm like television, if you like, I talk a lot and say very little. And this film shouldn't have been made like that. That's what I take away from it today.

And when I see the Fritz Lang film, what I find interesting, the thing I find they have in common—Fritz Lang was seen as—he was a filmmaker who fled Germany like all the others. I think the Nazi leaders offered him a job, it didn't interest him and he left. But when you see a film like *M*, the least you can say is that it's extremely confused and ambiguous. I don't have a very good idea who was who or what he was trying to say. Today I see a few more things, I say to myself: 'So then, you can make a film like that'. That's what truly happened, it's not at all a stupid film because today, with all the terrorists about, that's pretty much what is happening: there is an alliance between the mafia and the police, because the terrorism carried out by small groups of senseless people really gets in the way and the police and the mafia end up coming to an agreement. Peter Lorre's character seems to me to be someone extremely ambiguous who is not well analysed, not shown very clearly. There's too much going on also.

And what is dramatic in films and what people aren't taught when they start out—they're told that they can express themselves and that it's easy. And people believe it. I've spent a lot of time, I know how to do very few things. Some things I do a little better now, I mix in fewer objective things, but in *Le Petit Soldat* I mixed the two things up completely. I asked questions of someone who wasn't there, I had them say lines of dialogue in a form which might lead people to believe that they were speaking for me, but half the sentences don't come from me. Except that I didn't hesitate at all to mix them up. Whereas in employee-made films, there isn't a word in Dana Andrews' dialogue that represents an idea of Preminger's, for example. Later he would make different films.





SERGE LOSIQUE: So, who's going to take a chance? Is there nothing in this film you saw that struck you?

Lots of things struck me, but what struck me the most—I'd like to know how you work, do you prepare a very precise script or do you also improvise? Because I get the impression that the actors . . . we have the impression of always being in the presence of truth. The dialogue makes us believe in the characters.

I've always worked in a very prepared fashion, but more prepared in my head and then afterwards more improvised. For me, what people call improvisation is almost the opposite of improvisation. After *À bout de souffle* I wrote very few scripts. For that film I started by making a script. I began writing, but had more and more difficulty, and the time to shoot the film grew nearer. That's how it happened, and I think that's what happens in every film today: people write—they decide to make a film, they find money and hire actors, and then all of a sudden they decide to shoot and before that they put on paper what they are going to shoot. Then they copy, more or less, adding to it with what is called the film, and afterwards they assemble all that.

I remember that for *À bout de souffle*, because I didn't know how, I made it the way I saw other people make films. But after a while I was thrown into a complete panic from writing. I remember very clearly, one day I said: 'All right, I'm not writing any more, I'll go with what I've got and we'll see'. It was completely impossible, I was in a panic for nothing because I was telling myself: 'I can't do it, I don't know how', and it became clear that with a pen and paper you can't find something that should be done differently. It's not that a pen and paper are no good, but what's bad about films the way they are made is that the pen and paper always come first. I find it is better to work a little beforehand and a little afterwards, not all the time. Since then I have not written a script. I've always taken notes and tried to organise these notes in a fairly simple way, with a beginning, middle and end when there is a story, or with a subject that unfolds logically, trying to follow a kind of logic. Then to call it to mind a little, like a musician humming a tune. To try to remember the shots by heart, so that if there is nothing on paper you can still do the shot. Obviously, that set me quite apart from the others. Because there were no longer the means—people didn't know what they were

doing, and at times, depending on the individual in question, things went well and at others, depending on who it was, things went poorly. With a cinematographer like Coutard, who was a pretty regular fellow, who listened, things worked out pretty well because he didn't ask a million questions. He understood and didn't get annoyed.

I made films more the way two or three jazz musicians state a theme, they start to play and the piece takes shape. Today, depending on the situation, I do less of that perhaps, but I wouldn't really know how to work with actors and all that. Because you have to organise that according to an economic system, and what I tried to do was to change the economic system a little and find something else. But the economic system rests on everything, on the society in which you live and which won't change just like that. So today I'm a bit stuck because of that. Naturally I've always tried to take advantage of—recently I made some television programs. I remember a shot in a café; I knew what I wanted to do. I wanted to film a song by Léo Ferré called 'Richard', with a customer in a café and the song. I had hired extras and they came and we got into position. There was a customer in the café and we asked him if he would stay, he fit the character in the song exactly. He was absolutely perfect. I couldn't have found him by looking. So we got rid of the extras, we paid them and took him. He was perfect; I couldn't have found better. So I said to myself: 'All it would have taken would have been to arrive in the café an hour later or an hour earlier and he wouldn't have been there. What would I have done?' And so I tell myself: 'You shouldn't ask yourself those sorts of questions'. You work with what you have and things work out more or less. But if you organise what you do well, it will always work out well. There would have been someone else who would have been a little different. And, if need be, if we hadn't found anyone, well, we might have waited until the next day until someone good came along, or one of the extras would have been good. It's like life, there are no rules.

*The dialogue in Patricia's room, for example, between Jean Seberg and Jean-Paul Belmondo, did you write that or was it improvised?*

No, it was always written in advance, but in advance on the spot.

*Did you rehearse a lot?*

Back then, no, we rehearsed very little. Oh, I don't remember ver-

well. We didn't shoot with direct sound, it didn't exist yet. I remember that we shot silent and post-synchronised later. I remember that we prompted the actors. We prompted them all the time. That's why we were able to shoot the film so quickly; the actors didn't learn their dialogue, we prompted them as we went along and we rehearsed that a little. If they seem quite natural—you couldn't have done that with theatre actors, and practically every actor today acts a little like a theatre actor. For them, however, Belmondo at the time and Seberg too, they were happier, they felt as if they were freer, they had the impression they were play-acting. For them acting [*jouer*] was playing [*jouer*] if you like. I prompted them with the text I had just written, or written the night before. I've always done that; I look for a situation and then—it's as if you rehearsed the meeting you're going to have with your lover, your banker or your child in advance. Do you rehearse it in advance and then do it? No. You know the situation, you know the setting, you know you're going there. But can we say that the dialogue you have with your lover is improvised? It's both rehearsed and improvised.

I find it more normal to do that because it places you in real conditions. You find what you need on the spot or you modify. But you can have thought about it beforehand, or you can have prepared it very carefully, and then modify it completely on the spot. I've always worked according to the conditions. I always shot a scene according to what I found, the true reality, and if that changed the film, well, that changed the film. Then the film was born or continued on from there. And that's true montage: the film was also being edited at that moment, and it changed; or it began to exist rather. I remember that seeing a shot after it had been filmed—that's why I like video, because you see it beforehand, right from the start, rather than on paper. People should write scripts on video rather than—seeing a shot would help you decide how or how not to shoot it. And maybe you should be doing something completely different. But you have to see this rather than writing it. Today, I think all films are monstrosities because they were written beforehand. Even on screen, filmmakers find it noble to write: '*Written and directed*'.<sup>3</sup> What's more, they're illiterate, so saying '*written*'—they'd be better off claiming their status as illiterates. Antonin Artaud, moreover, said: 'I write for illiterates'.<sup>4</sup>

SERGE LOSIQUE: *If you want to use video, well, do like Buñuel. He's deaf and his last film was done with the exact same technique you have just described, because the only way he has to communicate with actors is through gestures and video. But let's look at this dialogue, because she brought it up and a lot of people, I've even read articles in which people reproach you for not being a true revolutionary. Because in this film you say that the nationalists are fighting over territory and not for an ideal. Was this your conviction or did you just copy these words from somewhere?*

I've always copied words. I don't know, the first words I must have copied were 'mommy' and 'daddy', like everyone else. And the history of the copy and of impression is something that interests me. I'm beginning to see a difference that other people haven't seen yet, I think, between 'impress'<sup>5</sup> [*imprimer*] and 'express yourself' [*s'exprimer*]. I think there is a big difference. People think they are communicating when they take turns talking, for example. With music, you don't communicate much; that's why it's so popular, more popular than it used to be. In the Middle Ages people had very little music, except perhaps at dances, or a little flute music, or music in nature; animals communicated amongst themselves in a completely different manner than today. Today, people think they are communicating but they aren't. The places people communicate are the means of communication. On an airplane, on a train, in places where people gather, people don't talk to one another. Yet they're in the midst of the means of communication. When they're in a cinema, they clam up. There are people on the screen who talk. When they leave, no one dares say something to their neighbour if they don't know them. That doesn't happen. And they confuse this with expression. I think there is a difference between 'expression', which is 'to go out' – we need look only at simple things – and 'impress', which is 'to go in'. There is a connection between them. And what makes communication possible is bringing something back out that had gone back in. This is something I do today more consciously and more visibly. And I notice, in general, that it interests very few people. They'd rather express themselves. If the other person doesn't understand, well, too bad for them. If it's your lover, too bad for them. People say 'You're an idiot', or they argue. Like politicians: 'Let me speak'. But there is also: 'Let me be quiet'. These are pretty complex questions.

and I don't know how I got onto this topic. You were saying? What was the question?

SERGE LOSIQUE: Your profound conviction . . .

No. *Le Petit Soldat* was a dreadful hold-all.

What I find interesting, for me I was interested in placing it, in seeing *M*, which I saw a long time ago, I'm not even sure I saw it, sometimes you read about films and think you've seen them. I think I'd seen this film. Peter Lorre's speech when he defends himself in front of the beggars, when he speaks in an extremely confused way, is a little like what Subor says in his long monologue in the bedroom. What he says is true, but something else should have come afterwards. Because at the same time what he says is completely false. But in the end I find that, very often people on the Left—they lost the elections in France simply because they're liars, they don't know how to speak. The others at least are craftier than they are. I'm beginning to think that the only people who tell the truth about you are the people who criticise you, when they say something you don't believe. When someone says to you: 'You're a jerk for having done that', that's when you should say: 'Well, that's not completely true, but surely there's some truth in it'. But that's up to you to say, because the other person won't say it. That's the only true thing. I think in this film there are some things that are completely false, but if we can bring them back afterwards to their proper proportion, in this falsehood there is a truth that can come out in another way. In this sense, I completely accept today that *Le Petit Soldat* is a quite fascist film. But what's interesting about it is that there is a way out. There is an easier way out than from a speech; take the famous speeches of Himmler or Hitler, for example, which moreover are not seen or analysed. The true history of the Jewish people has never been told, not even by the Jews. It's extremely interesting, but it has to be told as it really happened. But if they told it as it really happened, their entire house of cards would collapse. They would also have to change their lives. But what people aren't prepared to do is change their lives, to change their place in life.

I think cinema is extremely interesting because it enables you to show this. It enables you to impress an expression and at the same time to express an impression. On television there are both, but an

image. And an image, especially when it can be mixed with a sound, is much more democratic than music, which is much more dangerous. Music is more pleasurable too, but it is much more dangerous because of this pleasure, much more enchanting. An image is past, you can't—music immediately becomes something enchanting, which is why it should be accompanied by something else and today it isn't accompanied by anything.

On the topic of big hits, I'm happy not to have had—sometimes what strikes me are rather idiotic things. I come to Montreal and I'm amazed that there are five people who come out to hear me speak. I ask myself what they're looking for, what they have. And I was always happy never to have made a big hit. I told myself: 'Well, if I've had a certain degree of success, it must be something else, and that's interesting'. But don't make a big hit. Yesterday coming out of the De Palma film there was an enormous line-up. At the same time it's rather sad that films—in economics, people line up in front of stores when there is a shortage or a lack. So if there are line-ups outside the doors of cinemas it's because there is an enormous lack. It's true, there is an enormous lack, and there is a dreadful scarcity: of what, how and who is responsible? These are things that television can tell us and show us but it does neither. We don't see the line-up in front of the TV because each of us is alone in front of our TV set. But that line-up is there too.

SERGE LOSIQUE: Yes? I don't want to be the one to talk all the time. Is there anyone else who would like to . . . there, yes.

What is cowardice? To be afraid of being a coward?

What is the verb 'to be' also? Why must we answer the question 'to be'? I find the question 'to have' more interesting. To have fear—cowardice, I don't know, it's a moral phenomenon, obviously. Why is it that we behave . . . I don't know. I was asking myself these questions at the time and uttered these words in this film, but simply the same way I learned to say 'mommy' and 'daddy'. Those aren't words I learned, they are words I was taught, words I was made to believe in. There is certainly something in the manner in which I was made to believe—today, I prefer not to take a chance. I prefer to say 'I'm afraid' on certain occasions and have people tell me: 'You're an idiot to be afraid'. For example, I made films and continue to try to make

films simply because I'm afraid that no one—I don't count on anyone to give me work and I'm afraid I won't have any tomorrow. I don't see myself as any different from a manual labourer and at the same time I do, because I feel that the means labourers have aren't the right ones because they increase their panic or increase their security, and the way in which they increase their security ends up creating even greater panic. It would be better to have a little fear each day than to want to be secure for life. Trade unions and the Church have a lot in common; one wants security on earth and the other later on. But it's pretty much the same thing. What you need to do is to be aware of the danger. I prefer to say: 'I'm afraid of not knowing where I'll be tomorrow'; to have a vague idea so I can think about it and improvise and not get stuck. And I prefer to use the verb 'to have' rather than the verb 'to be'. 'To be', I think, is French. Americans are more pragmatic, to a certain extent the verb 'to have' has had more importance there. Today they use the verb 'to be'; they try to answer the question 'What is this?' All right, in order to dominate the world culturally after dominating it economically. But it was Europeans and the Greeks who posed the problem of being. The philosophers who posed the question of having were less well liked. Someone like Socrates never asked the question of being, he always asked very practical questions. He had no method and as a result he was driven out, forced to kill himself because he irritated them to no end.

*It seemed to me that in the two films we saw yesterday the woman speaks less than the man . . .*

Oh yes, that's true.

*. . . and that she seems more determined and seems to know her mind better than the man. I'd like to know what this means for you, did you have the man speak more on purpose?*

At the same time I think there's a kind of honesty in the film, a quite natural honesty on my part to make the boy talk more, simply because I had no idea what to have the girl say and I didn't even realise it. Today if I had to have a female character speak in a film I wouldn't know how, I would prefer to present it in the form of an interview so she could answer on an equal footing, or tell me that she doesn't want to answer or something like that. Otherwise I would have no

idea at all. That must come from my upbringing and everything, my early life in a large, well-off family, which I left and then fell into the world of film, which is an extremely imbecilic world if you like; it cuts you off from reality completely. People there live entirely amongst themselves, with their machines, their Oscars; they live in a village. When they're rich they live in villas, when they're poor they live in maids' rooms. I spent fifteen years getting out of that and when I see this film—sometimes when I see old films I'm struck by their extreme imbecility, their lack of reality, and the story they tell. But this is where we have to start. If films were made by different people and differently, that would be another matter. People live different lives, and when you look at someone, anyone, they are always full of things that they themselves don't see and no one is going to look at them or see them, so you have to start with that. It's like language, you have to rework language a little in order to speak a little differently.

As for women, I'd like to, if I were a billionaire, I don't know, I'd—it's hard to say much of anything, isn't it? If I had the power I would put them on television, on television newscasts and sports programs, so that little by little – and this would probably mess them up – so that little by little things were done differently and people simply heard a different sound, and then it would become something different. I think that if you told a woman that she had to do sports on television she would say: 'But I'm not going to do it all the time like it is today'. Some completely true things would happen. There wouldn't be sixty television channels going twenty-four hours a day. They'd talk about simpler things. In *Le Petit Soldat*, some of the things said about women are quite harsh. They're completely imbecilic remarks, which come from me also. But I don't really feel like the guilty party. I think it's a bit like Lang's film, where there are some completely fuzzy things. To what extent can we say that it was an anti-Nazi film? When you look at what Germany has become today, we could say that today it would be Andreas Baader<sup>7</sup> instead of Peter Lorre and that it would be pretty much the same thing. Lang, moreover, saw quite clearly the whole system where the general public is asked to collaborate, things like that. On the topic of Baader I saw something quite funny recently. It turns out they had given everything to a computer and the computer knew all along where

Schleyer was being held, it's just that when there are a thousand answers to provide, the computer itself chooses and it chose to give the correct answer last about where in Germany Schleyer was being held. The computer said this four months afterwards; it could have said it four months earlier. There is a certain justice in that I think.

*In fact what I wanted to know, I may be wrong, but it seems to me that the women in the two films we've seen have a better idea of what they want whereas the men seem more lost.*

Of course, but I was a boy and I showed more of myself. Certainly, it would have been more interesting at the time for a woman to make a film about the war in Algeria. She would have done things differently. And who starts wars? Rarely women. It's men who fight wars, for pure pleasure, because they're bored. I'm a deserter, I don't know if the boys here have done their military service. I've always thought not doing your military service was pretty elementary. Yet people do it. Today it seems to me elementary not to go to school. I see my daughter go and I haven't even talked with her to try to prevent her. And I would be wrong to try. But at the same time, I ask myself: 'How can this be changed?' That's why in my latest films I prefer to approach strangers, I try to approach children in places where other people don't approach them. Animals too, or things in nature, and to try to make films with that. In stories or scripts, to make the actors and actresses act, to repeat things, not be afraid to have them speak a text. But still today, I can still have a boy speak a text because if people say to me—if he's a jerk, I can feel responsible. It's my hand as a boy that wrote that text. I find that girls are completely different, they're both similar and at the same time so much in another space and time that I'd like to—what I try to do is to organise a room or machinery or production space where, if she felt like it, she could contribute. Because in cinema I've seen that women can't contribute simply because they are terrorised by the way men have organised the machinery. With a movie camera, or tape recorder—or even a still camera: they take very few photographs. When there's a battery of machines they feel quite terrorised, I think. There are few films made by women. Or they recycle literature. There are few newspapers made by women, or when there are they are made quite similar to those made by men. They don't see any differently. But to see differently... .

**SERGE LOSIQUE:** Women may not wage war, but a lot of wars have been waged over women. Sir, you wanted to speak, go ahead, you have the floor.

*For the person who wanted to know what cowardice is, À bout de souffle is a film that talks precisely about this. You see cowardice. I can understand asking what cowardice is, but if you watch the film you see what it is. When the woman tells the boy: 'I'm afraid to love you, that's why I called the police, to give you up', she's afraid. And he's the 'private' who's always afraid. Everyone's afraid.*

I think she was right to do that. I think if I were to do *À bout de souffle* today, if the true story of the girl were told, it would be more interesting than the boy's.

*She was right to call the police?*

She's more practical, more courageous in her own way. In general, divorces demand much more courage and steadfastness on the part of the woman than on the part of the man. It's only after a long period that women accept a divorce. If you were to compile statistics on all the couples who have divorced, it will always be the woman who waits until the last moment for the guy to change just a little, for him to do something. For her it's often harder because of the child, the alimony, the wage system, the work system. Statistically, I think women have a tougher time of it than men. By accepting divorce they make a much bigger effort than guys.

*Agreed, but you still say she was right to get rid of the guy like that?*

She got rid of a problem that gave her no way out. And the boy gets off a little easily by saying: 'You're despicable' [*lâche*]<sup>8</sup> on the basis of a romantic code that comes from our culture. As if there was an attitude to have, as if there were good things one should do and bad things one shouldn't do, as if there were an honest way to behave in love and a dishonest way. Sometimes I think films can't be made by men, who are in charge in too many other areas to be able to say anything that has a kind of moral sense. We all have one. But where does it come from? I have no idea. The fact that something is good, or not good—the fact that you no longer want to see a friend, you say: 'No, I won't forgive him for what he did to me' or something like that, is . . .

*That seems a little 'beyond good and evil'. I find that a bit metaphysical*

*It's all well and good to try to overcome something. I find your films very metaphysical.*

A little too much. But it was also because I wasn't afraid to make films that weren't like what Hollywood was doing. Because today, if you see a film like *Star Wars* or *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*—to me they're much more metaphysical, and pretty bad metaphysics at that. I went to see *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, for example. What I wanted was to see an encounter of the third kind. But you don't see—the film ends right there. [Laughter] I'd call that 'cowardly', for example, if you had to put a name to it. It's fifteen million dollars of cowardice.

*And illiterate . . . Spielberg . . .*

No, Spielberg believes he's a cultured man, he went to university. That's the kind of cinema they teach in universities, that's all.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *And he's not a model.*

But if I could say something to him, it would be: 'Well, that wasn't very courageous'. It wasn't very courageous because if he encountered an alien he wouldn't know what to say to it. [Laughter] Whereas I would have all kinds of things to say, being an alien myself. But Spielberg takes the cake. You can't even call him a coward. More like a swindler. At the same time, I admire his cunning. It's a fine fifteen-million-dollar swindle that brought in eighty million. I always admire things like that, because a lot of work goes into it, in its own way. So I can't really despise him either. What I despise him for is for not telling things like that.

*His films are boring too. I saw two of his films on television, I couldn't bear it.*

A little boring, yes. If it lasted a little longer and we could climb on board ship. But then he'd have to create an indoor set, he'd have to have a few ideas. Instead it comes to a halt.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *The result is that all cinema is metaphysical. Besides, cinema doesn't tell the truth.*

I think some of my films were realistic and took on—I had no problem saying all of a sudden 'God exists' or something like that while drinking a cup of coffee. I have always made films the way I—I don't make any distinction between: 'From twelve noon to two o'clock I don't make films' and 'at two o'clock I shoot a film'. I don't have

the sensation of entering into a different period. I have the sensation—and this is the difference between me and Preminger or even Spielberg if you like. When he made his film he was like Preminger with Dana Andrews. Fine, he doesn't put on a smock, a blue collar or a pair of overalls like a manual worker, but in fact he does. Either because he's paid a salary or because of his mental attitude. Whereas with me there isn't much of a difference. This is the reason for my success at times and at other times for my great failure.

Recently I did six hours for French television, which I did like cinema and where I talk with children.<sup>9</sup> I talked with children because they were the only ones who agreed to talk for fifteen minutes. I spoke to them about their problems, which interest me. And they answered. They didn't give long answers, but—I didn't say to them; 'Oh! Nice little girls and boys!' I spoke to them in a way I wouldn't even speak with you. I saw them as people from another world with whom nobody speaks about the things I spoke with them about: their way to school or when they're in school or the moment when they go to bed. Times when their mommy and daddy never come to see them. That's all I said. I asked them questions according to the way my film was organised and they answered quite honestly. I wasn't shy; I asked them about real problems and metaphysical problems. 'How much money do you have? Do you think that light goes in a straight line or is it curved? How many metres do you think you walk to school? Four hundred. And how tall are you? One metre, forty centimetres. Do you think that 400 metres are a multiple of one metre forty? Can length be a multiple of height?' Other people might ask different questions. But they have no desire to go talk to a child at moments like those. I do what I feel like doing, just like that, and then I impress it as best I can, so that people can see things. Perhaps afterwards, when I do a fiction film, I'll be able to talk to men and women a bit differently, something today I still wouldn't be able to do very well. Without being too boring. A film shouldn't be something awful to do, either because there is Hollywood machinery and a lot of money or on the contrary because there is too much solitude. Like in this film, *Le Petit Soldat*, where I spilled my guts, as the saying goes. And what you have in your gut isn't necessarily meant to be spilled like that. So in the end there is a lot of truth but a lot to vomit also, and it shouldn't be like that. But it was because there wa

no dialogue, either before or after. And because a film is still seen as a magical exercise instead of something very simple.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *Are you satisfied?*

*Satisfied? As much as one can be.*

SERGE LOSIQUE: *You're usually philosophical. That's good. But are you satisfied? With the answer I mean.*

*Yes, yes. Can I ask another question?*

SERGE LOSIQUE: *But of course, you're in a free country. Go ahead.*

*When I say metaphysical I mean that it is a film of ideas, your films are films that provide ideas.*

Yes, but for me an idea—I must be somewhat special. I have too many ideas and I think that other people don't have any fewer; they just don't show it enough. I have very little contact with very few people as a result. An idea is a part of the body, it's just as real as—it's hard to say. Sometimes there is no difference between intellectual and manual. When I move my hand—whether it's a worker tightening a bolt on a Ford, caressing the shoulder of the woman he loves or cashing a cheque, it's all movement. I often try to think of my body as being something outside me; my body as being outside me, because it's an envelope. An envelope is a boundary, inside the body it can be inside or out, or both. But they've got it into our heads that what we call the body is what is inside and what is outside is no longer a part of it. But it is so much a part of it that we move only in relation to what is outside. And we think of our inside as more a part of us than the outside, if you like. I don't know, things like that. Call it intellectual if you like, but I don't see any difference between an idea and what people call not an idea, moreover. There is no opposite of an idea. So an idea goes everywhere.

*So an idea is a very material thing.*

*It's not material but it's a moment of the body, just like the body is a moment of an idea.*

*The body is a moment of an idea?*

*Well, I don't know, when a child is born, it's the expression of an idea that existed only as an idea beforehand.*

*That's getting very metaphysical.*

*I don't see how it's very metaphysical to make babies, or not to make them.*

SERGE LOSIQUE: *There are accidents . . .*

It's striking the way there are few children's films. They're the thing that should interest people more than anything else in the world because children are something they make more of than anything else. There are very few children's films. We know absolutely nothing about them. The part of you that was a child, at a certain point it's all over and then you start over in a different fashion. It's all very strange.

*Yesterday in À bout de souffle, it's almost too fine an idea, the young journalist asked the novelist what he wanted most and he replied: 'To achieve immortality and then die'.*

That's all just talk, glittery talk. A little too much at first, given the culture I was brought up in . . . [Break in tape]

Because there is a possibility of seeing my own past in a story in which I myself have a story, something that couldn't happen in other places. That's because it's easier here to have films at your disposal and to see them and talk about them a little. Then afterwards, having done that, to develop a more precise project, because this is an opportunity to do something I couldn't do elsewhere. And your good work is always done elsewhere, in exile. I couldn't do this in the United States, so I'm not surprised to find myself in Quebec. And Quebec, or Canada, is a country, a territory, that's a little like an ice floe that has broken off. It's a part of America but is a bit adrift from America. Canadians are exiles too, they just don't know it. This is the source of their problems and this is why – perhaps Quebec especially – in my opinion, they aren't exiled from Europe, they're exiled from America. Speaking as an exile myself. It's only possible to do something if there are two of you. Sometimes, when you're all alone, you have to be in a situation of being double, either to be a traitor to your fatherland or with dual citizenship or in a dual situation. All of Lenin's ideas came to him when he wasn't in Russia. Afterwards he had all kinds of work to do, he was wrong half the time and then he died. But his most creative period was when he was in exile in Switzerland. While there was a famine in Russia he was going on bike rides in the mountains overlooking Zurich. That's where he had his best ideas, when he was in two places at the same time. What's interesting about cinema or creating images is the possibility

of sharing with others the fact of being in two places at once. This is much easier—at least it should be much easier than in industry. I don't know, I've never worked in a factory, it should also be a place for communication, and it is but in such a way that it prevents all communication.

*I think you still have false ideas about Quebec.*

SERGE LOSIQUE: Listen, let's leave Quebec now. In any event I will have to cut this out when we do the history of cinema. So do you have something to contribute to this research project? We'll come back at the end to his complete impression of Quebec, he doesn't have one yet.

*I believe that Quebec is in exile within Canada, and Concordia University too. Quebec is in exile here.*

That I don't know. Universities have always seemed to me to be strange places, full of crazy people like prisons or military installations, and after all—well, that's their culture, I'm a part of it, it doesn't bother me as much. But they're places completely exiled from reality which sometimes produce the possibility of the unemployment that comes afterwards. But they're pretty strange places. It doesn't bother me to be here but I don't see much difference with a hospital. You're both sick and well, that's where that happens. Therefore they are extremely powerful places. It's more interesting to speak in an American university, or one modelled on an American university, first of all because they can pay you a little. Because it's true, if I wasn't paid, if my project with the Conservatory wasn't a production project that should lead to a history of cinema with the Conservatory as a co-producer, I wouldn't be here. And I told Losique that I wouldn't come to speak unless I could see myself as a co-producer of something to be done as best we can, even if it means starting from way back. And we saw that we had to start by seeing my films, mixed in a little bit with others, before undertaking the real work. Because the university isn't providing the possibility of doing this work, that's why I came to Quebec. Then I'll try, not to explain it to myself—I'm not trying to explain everything, to know how and why. But I say to myself: 'Well, it's not by chance this isn't being done in the United States'. I wouldn't have found these conditions there. Why not? Because there is no one there who makes film both a pleasure and a business like Losique, who I see as a producer.

I've always got along well with producers, and leave it at that. And I find that Losique is a more interesting producer than what you find in Hollywood, or like one or two I know in France with whom, precisely, you can do a few things beyond being paid just to write a script and then coming up with *Fallen Angel* or *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, which is a little simplistic. And, especially, the life around that kind of film is not very interesting.

These days I travel a little. It's not all grand; you see a few things. But we all have our lot in life. It's a huge factory; I use means of communication. Communication interests me, so I say: 'Well, Canada, first of all it's a language I'm familiar with, if I had to do this in English there's no way I would be able. I'm not going to undergo psychoanalysis in a language I don't speak'. At the same time it seems to me the country is exiled from something. From what? From its own identity, in a sense. And a country like that interests me a lot because I have always held dual citizenship. I've lived in two countries very close to one another, Switzerland and France. For you they are similar, but for me they're completely different. I earn my living in French francs, which I have to change into Swiss francs, and the Swiss franc is very expensive because of the weakness of all the other currencies that take refuge in it. Well, you see the communication.

SERGE LOSIQUE: OK, I'm cutting you off. The next question? Yes, go to the microphone. No, because we're recording.

While we're waiting for her to come to the microphone . . .

SERGE LOSIQUE: No, I'm sorry, you've had enough for the moment.

You'll cut this out, you'll cut this out. I'd like to talk about work, is that possible? Isn't that what we're here for? Or . . .

SERGE LOSIQUE: I'm not interested in such idiocy.

You're the one who is stup . . . an idiot.

SERGE LOSIQUE: I'm doing the history of cinema.

You're stupid and an idiot and a fascist. And Concordia University is an English university, Mr Godard. That's your mistake. Think of Losique as a producer, bravo, I hope you really exploit him. Screw him as much as possible. Make money from him.

SERGE LOSIQUE: It's not a question of money.

I do what I can, but that's not the point. A producer is someone

who produces, who provides. You choose your producer also. I see myself as a producer. I have an agreement with Mozambique, for example, to study what television images might be in a country that doesn't yet have television. Mozambique is a country that lives by selling half of its electricity to South Africa, a country with which it is forced to cooperate. It's another kind of producer. I find these kinds of realities much more interesting. I don't have the freedom, whether it's a university or not, I don't have the freedom to choose. You accept an offer that comes along. I'm quite interested in hearing you argue or not argue; that's part of the place I find myself in. I can tell you my opinion; I don't know, there's something I wonder about for example. Who decided—on automobile licence plates it used to be written *La belle province*. And now it says *Je me souviens* [I remember]. Who decides that?

SERGE LOSIQUE: *The government.*

No, the government, that's who? The person who says: 'Now I'm going to write *Je me souviens* instead of *La belle province*'. Remember what? *The belle province?* [Laughter]

SERGE LOSIQUE: *No, I remember.*

Yes, but how is that done?

Since the Parti Québécois<sup>10</sup> came to power . . .

SERGE LOSIQUE: Whoa, now I'm cutting you off, I'm throwing you out. First of all, it's not Concordia University, it's Serge Losique. And given that this is being recorded, you'll answer to the courts for the word fascist. You can leave right now; if not, this fascist is going to call the security guard to have you thrown out and you'll never step foot back here again. I'm telling you publicly.<sup>11</sup>

You're still a fascist.

SERGE LOSIQUE: OK, that's recorded, I have evidence, it's on the video cassette.

You want to know why you're still a fascist?

SERGE LOSIQUE: Sir, let us do the history of cinema.

Your history, get stuffed.

SERGE LOSIQUE: Oh, I don't know, all right . . . [Gets up and leaves]

[Unquestioner] No, stop. That's not an insult, why is fascist an insult? [Inaudible]

Because you said it as an insult. If you had called him a Catholic he wouldn't have got upset. [Laughter]

*I would like to know whether you have the impression when you're making a film of being objective, socially committed, political or completely apolitical. In the sense of simply wanting to make a critique.*

I'm not sure I understand.

*You spoke about reality earlier. I'd like to know when you're making a film whether you have the impression of giving us something objective about yourself, or about ourselves, or if you see it as political or simply apolitical.*

No, today I think everything is political. From cooking an egg, because it costs a certain amount and can be done in different ways, to so-called political discourses, which I see as being more of a show. As for what is objective, I don't really know. I think that what is objective, to speak in simple terms, is the screen, it's flat, it's objective. A movie theatre, people watch—we can think of ourselves as subjects watching an object, and that this object reflects other aspects of the subject. There is a lot of subjectivity in what I do and then I try to render this subjectivity a little more objectively if you like. Sometimes I find music and song interesting as well because subjectivity there can be much more complete, and a little less objective. For example, when you listen to music—or you dance, you're embarrassed if everybody doesn't dance with you. There too I'm not sure what you'd like to know. Well, if there are one or two more questions, and then we'll see each other next time.

*DANIÈLE CAUCHARD: You said with respect to scripts that you work with a sort of very simple canvas instead of an elaborate script. I think that raises the issue of the relationship between the producer and the director. In a case like that personal contact has to be established between them. I mean, it doesn't work for a young filmmaker with little experience in whom a producer may not have a lot of confidence.*

Right, absolutely. In general, I find any producer more interesting than directors because they have more practical and real problems even if they're—there is a line in the 'Internationale' that says: 'Producers, save yourselves'.<sup>12</sup> Losique for example is more interesting than many others because he has a business, he works in both film

as art and film as industry. So he has problems that are more real and more complex; and in such cases the personal qualities of the individual come into play. True enough, if a young filmmaker arrives with only a piece of paper or an idea he believes to be a masterpiece, how do you expect the other person, who may have a little money, who managed to obtain a little money by himself, how do you expect him to see anything? He can only take the filmmaker at his word and it isn't worthwhile taking someone at their word. At a minimum you have to work together a little.

And so I find it more interesting to have a canvas which enables someone to talk about it if they feel like it or even to get involved in it because at that stage the film has not yet been formed. If, on the contrary, it has been formed, it can only be accepted or rejected. It's the all or nothing method, which is not possible for me and not at all viable because afterwards the work merely consists in making a copy. And copies are monotonous. Because they're monotonous, people put a lot of shine on them, with millions of dollars in the United States to mask the unbearable monotony. And the real work in a film is seen in the lab, or in the offices, or in places like that. A secretary who types up a film budget and a secretary who works in an insurance company, they both put in their seven or eight hours. Still, film and even television has so much magic about it that a secretary who types: 'Alain Delon, three hundred million francs; costumes; this and that' feels like she is less of a secretary than a secretary in an insurance company. For me it's exactly the same thing. But then afterwards you go to the lab and there you find what they call the workers, who develop kilometres of Alain Delon or Steve McQueen for so many cents per hour. They don't see any difference between that and building Ford automobiles at General Motors. Because it's hot, it's noisy. That too is film and television.

The way films are made is so monotonous that this is masked through artifice, by many people being bored together, who don't know what to do with their time. Luckily one of them has an idea, which people call fantastic because if people called it idiotic no one would dare say: 'I do idiocies'. They say: 'I'm working on a fantastic film', and for three months they get together. They have to talk, everything was organised by some guy who—and in the end they

argue, because to live together—but only for three months. Afterwards they look for something else. Obviously it's a completely false life that is sustained by the lack in people's lives and people's lack of imagination—people who have a lot of imagination, but who, I don't know why, don't succeed in recognising it. They need to see less imagination on the screen and they find that wonderful. Any film is less imaginative than anybody's life, but this anybody finds the film they have watched, for which moreover two dollars have been coaxed out of them, they find this film more wonderful than their own life.

These are all very strange phenomena, but it doesn't bother me to—but to experience it like that, otherwise normal productions are pretty boring. And I'll say it again, a relationship with a producer is more interesting because you have to be a producer yourself and not just have dialogue. But you also have to force the producer to write a little dialogue instead of simply saying: 'This dialogue is bad'. The only time I worked with Carlo Ponti<sup>13</sup>—it didn't last long, because he said to me: 'This dialogue doesn't work, Jean-Luc'. So I said to him 'You're quite right. So change it, Carlo, and I'll film it. Write it if you like. Write "I love you", for example, and Brigitte [Bardot] will say "I love you" if that's what you think she should say. Go ahead'.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *Are there any more questions? That sicko just said that you're a fascist too.*

He knows me a little. I think we'd be better off if we said these things. I find that we don't look at the past enough, or we don't see it well. But the way history is told, the way historical films are made—I lived through the war. I realised afterwards, I was a child at the time—my parents came from a family of collaborators. My grandfather was fiercely, not just anti-Zionist, but anti-Jewish. I'm anti-Zionist, but he was an anti-Semite. So today for example I've read a lot of books about Hitler, about the concentration camps, about a lot of things, more than any Jewish child for example, although I have no personal connection with those problems. Quite simply—sometimes I find big stars like Nixon for example, or the story of Watergate, which was quickly forgotten except as a way of making money for its actors, I find big stars interesting. This is something we'll have to discuss and will be one of the things to come out of

the history of the close-up, because the close-up was something that was invented. But the big stars of the Middle Ages—Louis XIV has nothing in common with Hitler or Nixon, his image was—the image of Louis XIV was conveyed to people solely on coins. It was the only image of him that people knew. There weren't a lot of other images in circulation apart from one or two pious images. But people knew Louis XIV because they saw him every day on their—that's the story of the iron mask; there couldn't be two Louis XIV, because his brother resembled him, so he had to wear a mask or he would be recognised immediately simply because people knew Louis XIV's profile through coins.

And so the history of the big star, today the close-up—which was invented by cinema, it wasn't invented by painting in at all the same manner. In painting there was the portrait, but a portrait was not a close-up. It wasn't movement coming together and on which you shine a spotlight. You shine a light on it the way you do in a police interrogation. And light is an angle that illuminates, that makes a circle, and then you put something—it creates a spot of light that you make stand out [*mettre en vedette*]. The history of the big star [*vedette*] and the star system came out of the close-up and then appeared in politics, because television is the principal medium of political actors. All politicians, moreover, act like actors, and actors act like little politicians too. I find these things very interesting. To connect this history to fascism for example, because Hitler was quite consciously—there was no television, but there was radio, and he said this right away, without—he used his voice and radio, and in his rallies a certain kind of lighting. To see that as part of the history of cinema, which translated it into images; there are quite glaring connections to be made. I find stars are quite interesting at times because they are kinds of phenomena, like cancer, a kind of proliferation of the individual, who suddenly becomes enormous. But either we don't see this because we don't know how to look at it if we want to show it, or we know how to look at it but don't show it. At that point we can see things like we do in a microbiology slide where all of a sudden you see how an illness takes form. We can see in stars a phenomenon, like Watergate or Hitler—we can see how that happened. It's easy to see why they don't want you to show this, because once people see it, it's been seen, and as long as it isn't seen . . .

It took forty years for newspapers around the world to show photographs of the Gulag, an image of the Gulag. Everyone knew that it existed, but once people saw it the game was up. Even the communist parties in Europe knew television viewers had seen it. Then they could no longer say: 'But, just the same . . .' They were forced to say something different, once something had been seen. Television is so powerful precisely because everyone can see, because everyone has a TV and can see at the same time. They have to make people forget that it can be used to see. There's a latent danger there, and that's what is interesting. It's a place that interests me because this is where sickness and good health can be seen. That's what's curious and amusing about it.

SERGE LOSIQUE: [To Godard] You'll be seeing more sickness yet. [To audience] Are there any other questions? All right, it's five past five, we'll be back on 5 May. At ten o'clock we'll show excerpts from five or six films and then in the afternoon we'll show one of Jean-Luc's films. Then the same thing Saturday morning, 6 May. At ten o'clock we'll show excerpts, in the afternoon we'll show his film and then there will be a discussion about the connections between them. I hope the gardening will bring things to light and I apologise for today's incident, but what can I do, I can't control every sicko in Montreal. OK? Thank you.

Saturday 15 April 1978

### Notes

1. In a text entitled 'Some Questions Concerning Methods of Leadership', dating from 1943 and included in the 'Little Red Book', Mao wrote: 'And so on, over and over again in an endless spiral, with the ideas becoming more correct, more vital and richer each time. Such is the Marxist theory of knowledge'. Quotations from Mao Tse-Tung (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1966), 129.
2. *The Fury*.
3. Spoken in English.
4. Artaud wrote: 'Ce qui veut dire que j'ai toujours écrit pour des analphabètes' ('Meaning that I have always written for illiterates'). 'Préambule' (1946), *Oeuvres complètes* vol. 23 (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), 47.

5. ‘Impress’ in the sense of imprinting or printing, not of producing a deep effect on someone. See note 12 to the chapter on *À bout de souffle* for a discussion of this term.
6. In French to be afraid is expressed ‘to have fear’, the way one ‘has hunger’ instead of ‘is hungry’, etc.
7. Godard is referring to the left-wing terrorism of the Red Army Faction in West Germany in the 1970s, including the kidnapping and assassination of Hanns-Martin Schleyer in 1977 by Andreas Baader and others.
8. Throughout this session, participants mostly employ the term *lâche* in the sense of cowardly, but the word also means ‘despicable’, which is the more appropriate meaning here.
9. *France tour détour deux enfants* (*France Tour Detour Two Children*).
10. Sixteen months before Godard’s talks began, the Parti Québécois was elected in Quebec provincial elections for the first time on a platform of seeking independence for Canada’s French-speaking province, causing panic across the country and especially among Quebec’s large English-speaking minority.
11. The individual in question can be observed at later sessions of these talks, asking questions.
12. Godard says ‘Producteurs, sauvez-vous vous-mêmes’. The line he is referring to, in the second stanza of the ‘Internationale’ (1871), is ‘Producteurs, sauvons-nous nous-mêmes’ (‘Producers, let us save ourselves’).
13. *Le Mépris* (*Contempt*).



# Actors and Audiences

2

## *Vivre sa vie*

1

*Greed*

Erich von Stroheim (U.S.A., 1924)<sup>1</sup>

*Nana*

Jean Renoir (France, 1926)

*The Passion of Joan of Arc (La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc)*

Carl Theodor Dreyer (France, 1928)

*Vampyr*

Carl Theodor Dreyer (Germany–France, 1931)

*Carmen Jones*

Otto Preminger (U.S.A., 1954)

*Vivre sa vie: film en douze tableaux (My Life to Live/It's My Life)*

Jean-Luc Godard (France, 1962)

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[In medias res] I felt that the woman, even though she could take her fate into her own hands, was manipulated by the people around her, the way Joan of Arc was hounded by . . . She wants her freedom; in the end she's caught in a trap . . . There is a kind of, not hopelessness, but desperation. What's interesting about *Vivre sa vie* is the way we see the woman's inner consciousness develop, but she's somewhat boxed in by the situation. It becomes a little pessimistic. I compared it to *Tout va bien* (*All's Well*), a film you made a long time ago, in which Jane Fonda played a role. There was something peculiar about her role. Today the woman, when she expressed herself in the film, played a role that exists in real life I think, a role we can identify with from outside. At the same time, I experience, I pass my time here, I have a whole backdrop of ideas in my head. I live on two levels, the inner and the outer, which are not always the same. I felt this in your film, I wondered if it was intentional.

JEAN-LUC GODARD: It's so long ago. I don't remember a thing. What strikes me when I see my old films is how much they—I'm beginning to separate now, like two different processes, what we might call expression, which consists in bringing something out, and impression, which consists in putting something in. In general I think producers impress [*imprimer*] a film the way one does a book.<sup>2</sup> It's a job where you try to impress something. Moreover we say 'impress' people, or that we get an impression of a landscape or a film. So at first you think you're expressing yourself and you don't realise that within this expression there is a great process of impression that doesn't come from you. In my case, all my work in film, or all my pleasure in working in film, has been to try – and for me at least this is not easy – to conquer my own impression.

When I see *Vivre sa vie*, I think I was expressing myself a little, but I was impressing in practically every direction in a completely uncontrolled way. This creates enormous, terrible weaknesses, and then suddenly something good or not bad. But I didn't know the difference between a good and a bad shot for example. I'm beginning to understand today, but only by telling myself: 'There I placed one shot after the other, but in fact it wasn't me, it was the cinematic process and the society I lived in at the time, what I was at the time, which made me put one shot after another like that.' I'm struck by my desire to make gangster films, even today. For example, nowadays I like reading historical books on the mafia, what's known as the *milieu* in France, or on more historical and political topics that interest me, whereas in this film I was trying to copy something. Well, that was my style, and three-quarters of the population likes crime films. In my own way I liked them a lot too. But I wasn't aware of the process I was involved in. The result is that I find the scene between the gangsters and the girl fairly ridiculous. Even a Clint Eastwood film today is better made than that. When I go to see a Clint Eastwood film, sometimes they have sociological interest, because they are average American films, *B features*<sup>3</sup> everyone watches, and which are a kind of—not an expression of Clint Eastwood's, who's a complete idiot, but precisely the fact that this complete idiot impresses and pleases people, myself included, because I spend five dollars to go see it. So the film is the expression of a certain world . . .

*I sense that you like to show unpleasant things in the sense that you don't avoid them in order to make an attractive film.*

It's hard, because someone like Clint Eastwood—I say that because I saw a film by Clint Eastwood recently in Paris. Just to see what an average film is, that isn't a television series, and the fact that he became a director himself, to save money or something. But the result is that I wonder how someone like that can say: 'Let's see, put the camera here, I'm going to film myself like this, and then I'll play such-and-such a role'. These are the questions I ask myself too, so I go see it. And sometimes I'm more interested in these sorts of films because they have a certain kind of audience and you can see a little of the world you live in. And true enough, the average American life is a world where people say: 'Let's put the camera here and film a cop saying such-and-such to a girl'. And I think that's much more real than it is in my films. The result is I've kind of stopped doing that because I don't know how. But, like the average member of the public if you like, I have always been fascinated by crime films and crime novels. They have both the individual side and the social aspect.

*In your film, you had an idea you wanted to express, come what may, you put it on the screen and wanted to see people's reaction, if they were able to absorb it. I think in *Tout va bien* for example you showed a certain insistence in touching the tender spots of a couple's relationship. In other words a certain perspective on reality we can't escape from . . .*

At first you're subjective and then you realise that your subjectivity is controlled by something else. So you try to take control of it until in the end you are objectively subjective, you control what is objective so that your subjectivity can run free. You express a situation, but a situation that is shared by other people. And filmmakers give themselves up to their subjectivity, the same way as a viewer. I have my own subjectivity, but I'm able to recognise and become aware of it through images. For example, the beginning of *Greed* is absolutely perfect: there are seven or eight shots and then—the use of intertitles by Stroheim this morning was interesting, as it was by the Russians. The intertitle was a part of the shot and sometimes silent cinema spoke much louder than talking films. Because if you removed the intertitles it wouldn't make sense, but if you removed the titles in Dreyer's film, which uses them completely differently—the titles had no cinematic length so to speak. And Stroheim was one of the

first, and later the Russians, to give the shot a quoting aspect. There are seven or eight opening shots showing someone doing something and then there appears 'Such was McTeague' and then there is his mother, there are three shots and 'Such was his mother'.<sup>4</sup> That was an incredible power that cinema had and which it lost. Here, literature or language sometimes worked well with film, it seems to me.

*If I were to retain an impression of the presence created by the image, it would be the person speaking to herself in voice-over, saying what she is thinking, everything that passes through her head . . . the ideas she has or are related to her personality, or which complement her personality and don't detract from the image.*

SERGE LOSIQUE: It's good you raised that. [To Godard] You mentioned the power of the intertitle in Stroheim and the Russians. Weren't you, directly or indirectly, influenced . . . In your films you used quite brief and powerful dialogue. Wasn't that a way of substituting for the intertitle in a sense?

Historically, it was a reaction to—it was a kind of naturalism. It was a reaction to the way films were made and especially to their dialogue. Before *À bout de souffle* (*Breathless*), when I was writing for a newspaper called *Arts*, for a few weeks in a row I wrote articles in which I identified some of the clichés spoken in films.<sup>5</sup> And I said: 'No one in this situation would ever say that'. As an example, there is a scriptwriter still working today whose name is Michel Audiard, who goes to listen to—even Prévert was somewhat false, because he listened to how people spoke in cafés, but people spoke the way Prévert speaks in his films. So at a certain point—it worked well the first or second time, but not the tenth time. So we said: 'Hold on there!'—we were film critics, and that's why people hated us at the time, just like today. The same way even a friend hates me if I say: 'Instead of saying that in your film, you should have written this'. He's not happy, he says: 'Just come out and say that I don't know what I'm doing', and I say: 'Sure enough'. [Laughter] And at the time we said: 'In such-and-such a film, Bardot shouldn't have said that, she should have said this'. And there were quite a few I've forgotten them now—so the simple fact of pointing out how people spoke and how we wanted to speak was enough, because we said everything that came into our heads without worrying about it.

*... I liked the way the film wanted ... by women ... the explanation that is given of each scene. I don't know if you did that to have more impact, and to make the visual aspect more difficult ... literary ... I wonder how the film was constructed, if there was complete control.*

I've always been annoyed at having to do what people in the film industry or in real life call 'telling a story', meaning starting at zero hour, creating a beginning and then arriving at an end. This is something the Americans do very little but, I don't know why, people think they do. For other people this isn't allowed, but for an American—in every western, someone arrives from nowhere, no one knows why, he swings open the doors of a saloon and then suddenly at the end he disappears. And that's it. Fine, it's a slice of his life, but the strange thing is that people think they've experienced an entire story. That must be these films' strength. No one else can do this: they're obliged to have a beginning and then a middle and an end. This has always bothered me. I've never been able to do it.

I began simply by taking bits and pieces and then afterwards—I only ever use bits and pieces, and sometimes I'm even happier to work in television, where bits and pieces are allowed. They give you a piece on Monday, a piece on Tuesday, a piece on Wednesday. If you make seven, that's a series. At least try to do that. There you have the time to come up with a story. But in an hour and a half or two hours—why an hour and a half, two hours? No one knows. So in this film I worked with bits and pieces, which enabled me to redo—I think I had an unconscious desire to work a little like a painter or a musician if you like, where there are rhythms, variations, pieces. In music, moreover, you say 'a piece of music'.

In this film I was freed somewhat from the story and then tried to find one; I looked for a connecting thread, a theme or rather several themes. But you seek; here I was seeking. I merely started with a book written by a judge about the conditions of prostitutes.<sup>6</sup> The outline simply tried to show what wasn't being shown. Even for me, so that people could speak to me by saying: 'You can't do that'. But simply describe, and afterwards something may come out of it. Once you have described a situation, you can follow someone who has experienced it; you can invent a character or scenes. This is the pleasure of filmmaking rather than doing something else.

*But earlier you spoke about controlling your subjectivity.*

No, letting your subjectivity go once you have better control over something objective. Here again censorship was different than it is today. I would have needed a lot more texts than images. Simply to recount what a ten-minute or fifteen-minute session with a prostitute is I would have had to show the various—but the real duration, ten minutes, just like that, then you might have an idea afterwards for the preceding shot, a shot of someone saying that; to decide if you're going to choose the prostitute or the customer. In other words, to have a film idea, but to have it on the basis of something you've done. So I started with something documentary. I've always started with an idea that was not my own, because it's not possible—at least it gives me a shot. Today I try to start with images I've made so that I can put others before or after them.

*What did Anna Karina contribute to the film? Did you discuss . . .*

Oh, nothing. She was furious because she thought I had made her look ugly, that I had done her a great wrong in making this film. That was the beginning of our—but I was interested in seeing it again because there must have been an unconscious desire on my part to try to imitate—I think that all filmmakers, all film people, the story of Sternberg and Marlene Dietrich, the history of the big star. As future filmmakers, we had our stars. And, as cinephiles, our stars were filmmakers. I admired other filmmakers the way one admires a demigod, who may have replaced the parents I couldn't admire. Well, lots of things like that. So to have a relationship with an actress with whom I was also the customer and she the prostitute—clearly, acting is something we will have to study, but I have always had a problem, I wasn't able—when I separated from Anna Karina, for her part it was because of all my faults, but for my part I know quite well why. It was because I couldn't talk about film with her. I don't see how we could have like that. There would have to be another kind of society. I think she's a pretty good actress, she had a lot of good qualities. She was rather Nordic. I think she acted a little like Greta Garbo, both dramatically and at times there was no need to be dramatic. But that was her style, it was rather plant-like or . . . not even animal-like, more plant-like. She was Danish, so it wasn't surprising she would act like that.













But speaking about Anna is difficult because today I see that I am quite alone in wanting—if I try to talk to a cinematographer about something other than the photography, to talk a little—I carried out an experiment in television once. I had worked with a cinematographer for a while, we made a film with interviews of children. I said to myself: ‘It’s quite simple; he has children, he’s more frank than some, from time to time during the interview or dialogue I’m doing with the little girl or little boy he’ll say to me: “Listen, in my opinion, it’s clear you don’t have children, you shouldn’t ask them those questions”’. Not even. There is so much respect, or such a hierarchy, or such specialisation – everyone in their place – that this is not possible. This is what happened with Anna Karina; no dialogue was possible. I think, given what I was, I shouldn’t have accepted this, but she was not capable of fighting for it. I don’t think there is an actress in cinema who is. Jane Fonda was always an activist outside cinema, never within it. That was the big difference, and the arguments we had when we made the film. I wasn’t interested in Vietnam. I said to her: ‘If you act poorly in this shot, when you go to Vietnam you’ll act just as badly. But who will write your lines for you?’

*... starting with the moment you take a person and in the end you make ... an object ...*

But cinema isn’t a factory either. It’s not General Motors. I’m not Ford or the director of the CIA. If someone wants to take a swing at me, it’s easier. It’s easier to take a swing at me if they want when I make a film. It’s easier for you up there to take a swing at me than for a worker at General Motors to take a swing even at his foreman. The fact it’s not done like that, that it’s done verbally, by speaking ill of someone, there’s a reason for that. In cinema, Sternberg didn’t shoot Marlene Dietrich with a pistol. Which doesn’t mean that what you say didn’t exist, that I didn’t use her as an object. Agreed. But today, supposing that you use someone as an object, and you’re trying to work with others, and to show how objects are placed, and to show yourself as an object, it’s not that simple.

Recently I saw a film by Delphine Seyrig, which is a number of interviews with famous actresses who denounce women’s roles in film.<sup>7</sup>

And every actress said: ‘No, I’m not free; I don’t do such-and-such’. At the same time I thought that this is not very serious, in the first

place as a film because you don't even see excerpts of the films they were in, to see what kind of object they had been made into. Also, they should be able to say afterwards: 'I think a part of me accepted that'. Because it's not factory work after all. Then they could have interviewed all the women who work in cinema who aren't movie stars: extras first of all, because there are so many of them, and then the workers, the secretaries who type up film budgets, or women working in labs and other places who aren't at all—this is another aspect of cinema if you like.

So for me an actor is someone who wants to express—they're both a sick person and someone both special and rare, but the situation they are in is too particular because all they can do is express and the work of impressing doesn't concern them. In the same way that it is not possible to be solely behind the camera, neither is it possible to be solely in front of it, any more than always beside it. Today in fact I don't think this is possible. Because it's quite true that at times, in order to play a role, you need certain qualities. It's like singing, if you like. But singing, I don't know, you quickly fall under the sway of a manager and then—fine, you have a nice voice, I find someone like Barbra Streisand for example has a fabulous voice and uses it the way silent cinema actors like Greta Garbo or Jannings or others in talking cinema used their bodies and gestures. On the other hand, she clearly doesn't write her own lyrics, so they have no connection with her voice. So how can two people talk about these things and do something? You can't. Society is too strong at that point. Even between people who are in love at the beginning. Anna Karina and I were in love with each other; we each had our faults, but afterwards all one can say is that the cinema completely separated us. I think she always regretted not making films in Hollywood. I think she would have been happier there, but if she had been born twenty years earlier and had the chance to land in Los Angeles one day.

Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle . . . *I'd like you to compare . . .*

No, we'll show it in the fall. We'll show *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle* (*Two or Three Things I Know about Her*) too. It's a film that is much more—it's something of a follow-up to this film, it's much more complete; both simpler and more complex. Better developed and which deals with the same situation, but with a broader scope.

and which is concerned with both the landscape and the person in the landscape. I try to describe people's relationships, and I find it much—it's a film I still like quite a bit. I'm not sure how to express this, it's more com—it's a little richer.

*The print of The Passion of Joan of Arc this morning wasn't so great.*

It was a 16mm print. We had to make a print, a good print. We purchased the right to copy five or six minutes. They made a good print that goes pretty well with the film. It was the beginning of panchromatic film stock, which was much more sensitive, so the actors weren't made up. That was a great novelty at the time; it was the beginning of black-and-white panchromatic film, which was much more sensitive. Before there was orthochromatic film, which had far fewer shades of grey. But this morning it was because it was in 16mm. In my film I probably used a 35mm print and we tried to make it look like it was a new copy.

*How do you work with actors now?*

Today I work mostly without actors. I'd like to start again, I'm going to try, but beforehand I had to experiment a lot to try to make films a little differently and to live off it. And live well, like a normal person, meaning having enough money for a flat, a car, a bathroom, holidays, making films you like. Without having to do advertising or porn films or political films, which are what most people do. And without having to work in the United States like three-quarters of Europeans. I'm almost there, but it's been very difficult, it's placed us in such solitude that I say to myself: 'It's not normal, when all the while I have better means for making films'. But then you realise that people don't really want to change. Or the world either.

I've always thought that cinema was pretty special. It came along very early and at the same time the overall impression in something popular like television—it represents a society's sickness more than its good health, or the sickness of a people or something human. It shows something unlimited and at the same time limits a lot. Images and sounds are not quite enough. If our bodies were made only of our eyes and our ears, that wouldn't be enough. So it's very limited.

At the same time, this 'very limited' gives the impression of being unlimited. It goes from zero to infinity without stopping. It shows a

process, which can also be impressed like a postcard or something. I have always thought that cinema today is a bit like music was in earlier times. It shows in advance, it impresses in advance the great changes that are going to take place. This is the sense in which it shows sickness beforehand. It's an exterior sign; it's something a little abnormal. It's something that is going to happen, like an eruption. I'm not sure how I got to this point . . .

SERGE LOSIQUE: Actors.

Actors . . .

[Inaudible]

I think that it's a process, it's the death of life, but the death of life, if it's only—it's interesting as a way of knowing life and not dying, in fact. An image can be more interesting. People should make war movies, not war. Coppola's film<sup>8</sup> should have been made twenty years ago, but he made it afterwards. An image is not at all dangerous—it's interesting, you can put anything in it. I think it's interesting for criticising myself, but often I argue—I have trouble making myself understood by friends when I tell them: 'I show myself; you can criticise because I show myself enlarged in an image'. You have to show yourself and show how you see other people. Then these other people can say to you: 'But that's not me'. Then you can understand each other a little, there is a middle ground between you. In a more visible manner also; more interesting, more directly accessible. When children are born or old people die, they don't speak, they see things. And I think literature is more like the enemy of cinema, because it makes you see things in a way that's too rigid. Everyone knows what the law is.

*Just like [inaudible], isn't that so?*

No, I don't think so, because it's a fleeting impression, moreover you see that it's heavy to move around, it enters and exits, it's less rigid.

SERGE LOSIQUE: You said a moment ago that people don't change . . .

Because within cinema, precisely, which is where you can change things most easily—in the film industry itself, much more easily than in literature, in the arts, what people call the arts, because there are fewer films made than books printed. It's easier to change how

you make a film simply because there are fewer. There are fewer people making films in France than people writing. It should be easier to change the relationship between a camera and an editing booth than it is to change a relationship with a publisher, a television network, a table or a machine tool at Renault or Ford. Yet this is precisely where things change the least. Even a car is no longer made the way it used to be. A camera is still built—if you look at a Mitchell camera, it's exactly the same as it was seventy years ago. It hasn't changed a bit.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *Meaning there is no change . . .*

I tend to think that the cinema foretells a little. In political life you often see aspects that people don't particularly—not everybody is demanding change. No, they want improvement without changing anything. Because when you have to change, it's very tiring, it's hard. To become an adult, a child takes at least—how much time is spent going from five years old to thirty? Twenty-five years. It's tiring, you have to go to school, you have a lot of problems. It's tiring, life isn't something—it could be otherwise, but changing is hard. Childbirth is not free of pain, it can be done with less pain, and less pain attached to moralising about pain. And I think cinema is a place that is relatively easy to change because it has no importance. It would even be easy. You can see that people hang onto their place there much more than elsewhere.

If a cinematographer or worker says they are not paid well enough, you can promise them, you say to them: 'Well, I'll pay you more' – I've done this and I realised I was a little naïve – 'I'll pay you more, but write a little dialogue'. But he says: 'It wouldn't be any good, I don't know how to write'. And I say: 'I know it will be bad, but the fact that it is bad will help me find something good. [Laughter] So let me pay you at least so you can tire yourself out writing dialogue that will be completely idiotic; at least that will give me a starting point for finding something good. It will be even easier because I'll have something idiotic at the start to find something less idiotic'. But he never takes up a pen. He's a cinematographer; he won't take up a pen even if you say to him: 'Write about yourself'. About himself even less so. He likes to talk because talking isn't impressed anywhere. As far as talking goes, people talk in cinema! [Laughter]

SERGE LOSIQUE: *And in life!*

Even more! Even more! Even more! Because in life they are limited by work. Children aren't allowed to talk in school, workers aren't allowed to talk in the factory, university students barely have the right to talk . . .

SERGE LOSIQUE: *Secretaries . . .*

Secretaries not at all, etc. So people in the cinema, actors, directors, have a privileged position. There they talk a lot, they don't shut up!

SERGE LOSIQUE: *They go on strike too . . .*

Yes, but when you tell them: 'More work, less talk'—never. We tried something recently and it was a disaster. We tried to pay on a regular basis the cinematographers we work with by saying to them: 'We'll give you a topic, bring us back a few shots. At the same time, it will be a test of new material for you.' But it was a disaster. We had to stop because they were incapable of trying to be interested in something. Then they would be making films, which is not something everyone can do.

Amateur filmmakers have made Kodak's fortune. They take a lot of shots but they always take just one shot. They take a shot during their holidays, a shot at Christmas, perhaps a shot when a child arrives. But they never take a shot after those shots. When they take a shot, what do they need? This may be natural for them but it is not natural for me in the case of film professionals. My enemy is the film professional, who takes fewer shots than the amateur in fact. An amateur, who's interested, at least I can ask them if they have seen a film of mine, I can ask them: 'But when you take that shot there, why don't you take another?' At least then I have a quite real conversation about cinema. And they will realise that having to take another shot means beginning to want to tell a story. This is something they don't need; no one is asking them for a story. Not everyone has to make films. But those who do, you can ask that of them.

SERGE LOSIQUE: You mentioned the word *professional*. People always wrangle over that so much. At what point did you see yourself as a professional? You, as a creative filmmaker, when did you see yourself as a professional? Was it after *À bout de souffle*?

That depends whether you mean it as praise or in a pejorative sense. Generally speaking, when I argue with professionals I accuse them of not being professionals, because this is what they claim to be. But when other professionals accuse me of not being a professional, [laughter] I say: 'Well, I claim to be an amateur'. I tell them: 'You're right, you're not amateurs, you're film professionals, who are even worse than professional baseball players'. I accuse them of being poor professionals.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *What do you expect? I'll tell you quite frankly, there are lots of people who manipulate the system, they scoop up all the grants, it's like the mafia.*

Yes, that's it, it's like a caste. It's the mafia and people are afraid of them. It's quite clear with video. It could be a little simpler, but at the same time it's becoming specialised very quickly. That's how it remains and people don't realise what they could do with it, so they don't do anything.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *Look at how long it takes a professional to set something up . . .*

Yes, but they're neither a professional nor an amateur; they're nothing. You can compare them to what are called good and bad workers. You can say that a table is well made or not. Then you can talk about it. If it cracks the moment you sit on it, and the guy says: 'I made it, I'm a professional', you can tell him: 'Well, you're a poor professional'. It's just as easy to make films as—but people take advantage of you a lot, when in fact they know very little, I find. Very few cinematographers know how a camera works and, if not how to repair it, where to take it for repairs, what needs to be done. People know little about film stock. Even at Kodak there are very few people who know what they are doing. It's like doctors who abuse you, who don't know . . .

Something abusive in film and which doesn't exist elsewhere, and this is one of the things I criticise about it, is that in many cases people who make films don't do so all the time. It's not a regular trade, except in earlier times in Hollywood. This is why films were, let's say, better; generally speaking I find the average film was better than the average film today. It had a few more things in it. This was a result of the simple fact that they were paid by the day by the big

studios and they punched in like a worker, whether they wanted to or not, and because they talked about things in the cafeteria with other people who did the same work. There was an average level of know-how, an average harmony. You can criticise this, but it existed and today it doesn't exist any more.

And so when someone, an actor, a director, who hasn't shot a film, because shooting films is what one is supposed to do in the cinema, when they haven't had access to a camera or editing booth for a year, and suddenly they're able—it's strange, there's something I find very pretentious. Someone like Richard Burton hasn't made a film for a year, or Brian De Palma hasn't made a film for a year and someone offers him a film, he sincerely thinks he will be able to, even if he hasn't worked for a year. In my case it's true, because I'm always working on a film. The way I live cinema, I'm always making a film. But not him. No airplane pilot, if they haven't flown a jumbo jet for a year, would dare get in one and fly Montreal–Johannesburg. But in film this is exactly what happens. Because the danger isn't apparent. It's not something like a car, where you're afraid the bolts haven't been tightened properly. But what state are viewers in after seeing a film made by people who haven't worked for a year or two? Sometimes they emerge unscathed, but sometimes I think they come out of it in very bad shape. I've always found that it is extremely pretentious for people—and they aren't even aware; when you mention this they find it completely normal. A photo-journalist is often out working, so they always know how to take a photograph. But if you don't take photographs regularly you don't even know how to focus anymore. It's the same in cinema; people think they know. And that's what's unique about this profession or this art, because it's both sickly and extremely popular, and there are some true things in it too.

*Naturally people shoot according to their budget . . . and many people shoot out of personal interest, like that, when they have something to say quickly. It's not necessarily down time . . . or does one think when shooting a personal film . . . ?*

I don't think so, because I've spent some time, I've always tried—once I'd made a film, it was an unconscious process, I had to make another one right away. If not, if it came to a halt . . . At first

I think it was a question of financial security, to find work again right away. Later, when I was my own employer, it was to organise some work one way or another so as to keep my hand in, to always be like this. [Makes rapid working movements with his hands] And to think while making a film, not think from the outside. Otherwise, if you write something, it's more like a novel that you copy in the form of a film. This is what nine films out of ten are today, copies of scripts, the scripts themselves being copies of books. Three-quarters of big American films, there is a book, someone buys the book before it is even finished, then they write a script. I don't know why, because there is a thousand-page book, I don't know why they rewrite it, but that's the rule. Then they hire people and a reel of film comes out of it. I find the overall process interesting, but the film afterwards has no connection with this process. Even when people have original ideas—I think Coppola should have paid Nixon something for his film about Vietnam. Because all his ideas about Vietnam come from Nixon, not from anywhere else. You don't come up with ideas like that.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *There are a lot of people who should be paying Nixon* [inaudible].

Well, that makes for good scripts. [Laughter]

SERGE LOSIQUE: *I'd like to return to the question of women's problems in film, because this morning we showed films which deal with women's problems. You said that you didn't talk about cinema with Anna Karina. Just the same, how were you able to come to a realistic conclusion if you never discussed the concept with the actress? How did you, which methods . . .*

Which methods what?

SERGE LOSIQUE: *I mean, how did you succeed just the same in making the film very realistic, when you never discussed things with the women, the women are . . .*

I don't think I'm a bad filmmaker, if you will. I try to carry out an investigation in my own manner. It must be for this reason that something barely—afterwards something comes out of it. In other words, I worked, she worked, but unfortunately we live in a world in which even then, when it seems easiest, people can't manage to work together. I think that working together must not be very easy.

This film shows women's problems; that's just it: men make films about women's problems. It's up to women to make films about women's solutions—not about women's problems because only men talk about that. Women don't have problems; they only have men who cause problems for them. So it is time for women to make films or other things about the solutions they will bring or would like to bring to the problems men cause them. In film, this happens also in the economic aspect, and by control of the economic aspect with respect to machinery. The way the tables are arranged in this room is not inoffensive.<sup>9</sup> It's clear that this sort of thing, the way cities are built, is not harmless. If you look at them statistically, it would seem that the countryside has been organised for the movement of women only, for women's work. Cities have always been built by men who need to move about. Because they don't have children. It's another kind of machinery. And they didn't agree on how certain societies should work, societies I'm unfamiliar with but which had to exist at a certain moment. I'm interested in trying to approach, to show, but without hiding that I am me, the way I am. In other words to better show, to better say how that was done, so that if there is any criticism to be made people say it. I think that's where all the pleasure lies.

*When you made this film fifteen years ago were you concerned with women's problems?*

I was mostly concerned with my problems with women, or with one woman, or two women, or three women. Or my problem of seeing prostitutes. And at times the shame I could feel, given my past or my penchant for moralising and things like that. Sometimes I found cinema handy because you could show that without embarrassment if you like. But it has to be done well. That's why film is interesting, it can be something small, you can show—it's like an X-ray. Kodak, moreover—most of Kodak's profits or business comes from sensitive surfaces like X-rays. That's going to come to an end soon, there are other processes, but a large part of Kodak's business comes simply from sick people and the X-rays taken in hospitals and doctors' offices to detect an illness. And Kodak makes cinema, as everyone is aware.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *In this investigation of women, you're a good film*

*maker, did you also in your investigations look at—for example, you chose these excerpts you asked me for, you didn't choose them by chance. It would be better to find portraits of women with a woman on her own.*

**SERGE LOSIQUE:** *You always went too far in connecting your films to the history of cinema.*

Certainly. In the beginning our films were too—the New Wave was very limited, it was made only in relation to film history. In the end we had no connection to it, completely mixing the subjectivity of our personal desires coming from our own story [*histoire*] and trying to relate this subjectivity solely to film history [*histoire*]. I even think that's how people like Rivette and Truffaut started out. It was done in reaction to a kind of French cinema and today, well, we've each gone our own way. Why did Chabrol become Duvivier? He's not a bad fellow, but I for example had no ambition to become Duvivier. Truffaut became just like—his is the strangest path, as we'll see tomorrow when we show an excerpt from his film. His is a very strange world, the world of Truffaut.

*Now you make films in connection with what?*

I try to make films that will be seen, or with people who need to make them for their own sake. The same way a doctor needs an X-ray and the sick person needs this doctor, and at a given moment both need the X-ray to have a connection to each other. I try to make films like that, to need them like that. What I reproach [*inaudible*] films for is that very often, I think—they themselves don't need to make—viewers need them, but why do filmmakers need to make a film? You need them to learn something. I'm like a perpetual student, or a perpetual teacher, I don't know, but I need to see farther and to create something to learn. To read a map in order to travel; so I make my own map.

*I think my question is: do you think about the audience?*

Yes, but thinking about the audience, for three-quarters of the people that's a huge swindle. They say: 'You must respect the audience'; 'you must consider that this film will bore the audience'. Most of all, you have to consider that if your film bores the audience people won't go to see it, and the person saying this, if they are putting

money into the film, will lose it.. So it would be better to say: 'It would be best if I tried to attract the largest audience possible in order to make as much money as possible'. There's nothing wrong with that; you need only come out and say it. You shouldn't say: 'You can't bore the audience'; 'You can't'—that doesn't mean anything. In fact for a long time my initial reaction was to start from my own truth and say: 'People talk about the audience non-stop, but I don't know the audience, I never see it, I don't know what it is'. Sometimes what makes me think of the audience are the huge flops. *Les Carabiniers* for example, for which there were only eighteen spectators in two weeks! [Laughter] At that point, when there are eighteen spectators—eighteen, I can count. So there I say to myself: 'But who the hell are they? I'd really like to know! These eighteen people who came to see my film, [laughter] I'd really like to see them, to have someone show me their photograph'. That's the first time I really thought about the audience. But I was able to. I don't think Spielberg can think about the audience. How can someone think about twelve million people? His producer can think about twelve million dollars, but thinking about twelve million viewers is completely impossible. Or there are people who think like him, but to be able to see who it is... [Break in tape]

Sometimes I think that television—I started thinking about this when I began to be able to work in TV, an opportunity that not everyone has. It arrived at a certain point, somewhat by chance and, we seized the opportunity. The fact that you have a TV set at home makes you like other television viewers; if you make a film you have a representative of other TV viewers in the form of your TV set. Then you can think about the television viewer—not about what they feel, but you can think about them feeling something, because you see your TV set everyday. And seeing that my daughter for example can't sit through five minutes of one of my films but can watch hour upon hour of commercials and American TV series, well, that hurts. I tell myself: 'It's completely pointless'. I can't resent her for it, and at the same time I resent myself. Sometimes it makes me sick to buy her food to eat! [Laughter] So there, yes, I think about the audience and I have a real connection. In the cinema there is no possibility of having this connection because cinema is to the side.

[Inaudible]

No, cinema's centralism [*inaudible*].

What?

The history of centralism, the history of cinema in France and the United States being in a central place, or in two central places in the United States, and then going out into the entire world.

When you make a film or you suddenly dare say something you wouldn't dare say, something vulgar for example, something people don't say, because that's the way society is, or show things people don't dare do. On screen there is no hesitation, only action. You don't hesitate because the Chinese who are going to see it, or the Afghans, or the Blacks, or the Swiss, or the Polish, in San Francisco or Paris . . . I don't even know who will see it, I'm lost. That doesn't get in my way. On the other hand, after I left Paris and went to live in the provinces – because provincial France is ruled over by Paris, so I was no further ahead – and even more later on, when I went to live in a small town in a puritan country like Switzerland – I don't live in Montreal, I live in a very small town – and in this small town I make a film, I know that the butcher is going to see it. Because I work in television, I know that he is going to see the image I make, and I know that his son goes to school with my daughter, and depending on the kind of image I make, well, in a small town or in certain countries, that will play a role. At that point you start to think about the audience. In this sense television is much more interesting. The fact of telling yourself, not which audience but that the work exists, people can see it. Then if I redo it as a film later, well, I'm going to imagine that people are going to go see it, and there again I'm lost. Because I say to myself: 'But in which movie theatre? Under which conditions will they see the film?' It's a no man's land. So I'm a little lost. That's what people want. That's not really the kind of films I want to make. I'd like to but at the same time I tell myself that I'm not able to do what I'd like because either I'll be screwed, and one doesn't want to get screwed, or I'll be domineering, and one doesn't want to be domineering. So I say to myself that it would be better to work in neighbourhood TV. Alas! No such thing exists.

And the videos you've made?

Well, you can't live off of it. Unless you work for television. But this is why I said that for us television was a much more interesting way of thinking about cinema differently, if that's what you do. You shouldn't demand the impossible, but perhaps at least have a few other ideas. Lots of other ideas or another ethic, other ideas so you don't suffer when making a film with a big star. I don't know, tell your story a little differently, at least, and be happy to have a few other ideas.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *What you're saying re-poses the entire problem of the honesty, say, of filmmakers, because how many filmmakers couldn't care less about the audience . . .*

They can't be otherwise. What's dishonest is not admitting it.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *That's it!*

But they can't be otherwise.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *When you look at the history of cinema—we look around us every day, they dump all kinds of crap films on us; they say the filmmakers are responsible but it's the producer and the viewer who are responsible.*

Correct. The only people who produce films are the viewers and the producers. Or the filmmaker and the crew are producers, but in truth producer and distributor at the same time. Who thinks about the audience at Paramount? Not directors. They might conceivably end up thinking about the audience if they travel somewhat the same road I have travelled. Meaning at times to be in places to receive what they have done or where you can think about it. At that point a TV set becomes essential. I wouldn't make a film like *Numéro deux* (*Number Two*) in the place I live now, because I could no longer go—I would be too embarrassed to go to the Café de Flore afterwards. Yes, yes, I'm telling you. This is something I came up with after thinking about it for fifteen, twenty years. The only people thinking about the audience when they make *The Godfather*—no one thinks about the audience, not even the head of Paramount, who's the head of Gulf & Western. Paramount represents 1%—the film works or it doesn't, they say it doesn't interest them, but given that it's *The Godfather* and the mafia, together they make a film like *The Godfather* on the mafia. Those guys, they think about the audience, and they have the means to do so. They even think about nothing.

but. [Laughter] They think about the audience, they no longer think about the film.

*You're saying that they think of the audience only in terms of money?*

No, I'm saying they think about a real relationship the way a merchant with a store thinks about a customer. The prostitute thinks about her customer, they have a normal connection. We can ask ourselves, how do filmmakers think about the customer? How do they think about the audience? It's not nice to think about the audience like that, but at least they'd be right in saying they think about it. On the other hand, you can't say that Preminger, when he made *Carmen Jones*, thought about the audience. That doesn't make any sense. Unless to the extent he was a producer, in which case he thought about the number of tickets sold, the music—like that, he thought. And even that gave him certain qualities, because at times he displayed talent, he had an advantage over some of the others.

*On the level of the images and ideas of the film . . .*

One doesn't communicate in the abstract. If you invest money, and you have to invest money—if we lived in a society without money, fine, I'm all for it, but if you live in a society with money you end up with those heresies which have always annoyed me in France, and it must be true in other countries: people execute orders and then they condemn the leader. That's absolutely crazy! They condemn as a war criminal the leader who gave the order to shoot. He only spoke a word, and a word is not terribly dangerous! On the other hand, the person who shot, the thousands of soldiers who shot—those guys, because they executed orders—and executed the person at the same time [laughter]—they were only obeying. What are we protecting? The act of obeying. Sometimes we protect the act of disobeying just a little, because a little is all right, and then—in cinema, a trade union member films a head of state and complains that the head of state pays him poorly. But he'll film him, he'll carry out his job. But how can he? In my opinion he can't. You can't frame a shot in the abstract. You can't film Pinochet blamelessly. You can refuse to film him.

*What do you mean by in the abstract?*

They say you don't think of the audience. Can you think of something you can't see? That may be a philosophical question, but can you think of someone, of something, you can't picture, of things you

can't see? Something your imagination can't follow through on; it's not enough. There are fewer and fewer people—postcards today are almost done in advance. You no longer have to write anything. People, children, know less and less, they don't even know what they should write.

*Suppose you have an idea in your scripts . . . when it comes time to communicate, there are various forms that can communicate.*

Today I tell myself that I'd like to. I'd like to find someone who would like to. And this tells me—I can't think about everyone, but which represents a normal relationship with the audience, a normal relationship of communication, a small model of the relationship that a film could have with the audience. Obviously, you can't know in advance, that's not what I want to say, but I don't imagine something and then—it never works like that. I've always found it strange that people do that. Like novelists, who seem to me to be extremely bizarre people. Musicians less so, painters less so, because music and painting have no dramatic meaning like literature. I find it extremely bizarre that a novelist doesn't go to a publisher, if he isn't one himself, and say: 'What can we do together?' That's what I have always done in film, or what the people who have co-produced with me have always done. Always.

SERGE LOSIQUE: All right, I think we've spoken for an hour and a half, we've been here since ten o'clock this morning, so we'll see you tomorrow at ten o'clock, unfortunately we'll be — I say unfortunately but it's better — we'll be in the H-110 auditorium, because our films, *Day for Night* and others, in the afternoon too, will be in 35mm, and here we only have 16. So tomorrow in H-110 at ten o'clock, and afterwards his film we're showing tomorrow is *Le Mépris* (*Contempt*) at two o'clock, and at three-thirty we'll talk like today. And I'll give you the dates for Jean-Luc's next visit. Thank you.

Friday 5 May 1978

### Notes

1. It is impossible to be certain of the order in which excerpts from each session's morning films were shown. In most cases, the films were listed in chronological order in the original French edition of these talks and it is presumed that that is how they were shown.

In the present case (an unusually large group of five films, three of which were silent), the films were listed in the following order: *Nana* (1926); *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928); *Greed* (1924); *Vampyr* (1931); and *Carmen Jones* (1954). In the following chapter, however, Godard mentions that in the present session excerpts from *Greed* were shown before those from *The Passion of Joan of Arc*. To take him at his word, but with the exact order uncertain, the titles are listed here in chronological order. No changes have been made to the order of this chapter's illustrations. See the notes to the chapters on *Alphaville*, *La Chinoise*, *Week-end* and *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle* for indications of changes made or not made to those chapter headings compared to the French edition.

2. As described in note 12 to the chapter on *À bout de souffle*, the French word *imprimer* has a variety of meanings, including to impress and to print.

3. Spoken in English. *Vivre sa vie* was dedicated in the credits to B features.

4. These two intertitles in the film read: first, after a series of images of the film's protagonist, 'Such was McTeague'; then, after a briefer sequence of images of his mother, 'Such was Mother McTeague'. It is interesting to note that the second intertitle is not found in the director's shooting script. See Joel W. Finler, ed., *Greed: A Film by Erich von Stroheim* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), 41.

5. A series of four articles published in nos. 708, 710 and 711 of the weekly newspaper *Arts* on 4, 18 and 25 February 1959.

6. Marcel Sacotte, *Où on est: La prostitution* (Paris: Buchet-Castel, 1959).

7. *Be Pretty and Shut Up.*

8. *Apocalypse Now.*

9. The room is a small, steeply-raked lecture hall with an imposing, unbroken line of desks stretching the width of its rows.



# Myths

2

## *Le Mépris*

2

*The Man with a Movie Camera (Chelovek S Kinoapparatom)*  
Dziga Vertov (U.S.S.R., 1929)

*The Bad and the Beautiful*  
Vincente Minnelli (U.S.A., 1952)

*Day for Night (La Nuit américaine)*  
François Truffaut (France, 1973)

*Le Mépris (Contempt)*  
Jean-Luc Godard (Italy–U.S.A.–France, 1963)

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SERGE LOSIQUE: Those of you who have been here since ten o'clock I imagine you're pretty tired, it's already four o'clock. For those of you who didn't see all the films, let me remind you that this morning we showed *The Man with a Movie Camera* and then *The Bad and the Beautiful* and then Truffaut's film *Day for Night*. Then, as you know, this afternoon we showed *Le Mépris*. Why did we choose this theme? Because Jean-Luc wanted films which dealt with the same topic he did in *Le Mépris*. And as you saw, we didn't show a lot of excerpts, we did that on purpose. We simply wanted to show three, or I would say four, different periods of film history. The first is *The Man with a Movie Camera*, the second is *The Bad and the Beautiful*, then Jean-Luc Godard who we showed separately, and then finally Truffaut. Four different periods of film history. There you go; now you have the floor, if there are no questions I'll ask mine first.

Was the mauve the print or was the film shot like that? There's a mauve tint to the film at the beginning, was there a mauve filter?

Jean-Luc GODARD: No. It must have been an American print, the distributor is American. They made a print from an inter-negative,

and colour prints don't last long. I think colour was invented for this reason, so you replace it often. Black-and-white prints last a long time, while colour prints last a very short time. We're going to see this soon with sound recordings and video. A videotape, once it is five or six years old, is going to change, demagnetise, things like that – with film the colour disappears, even if it is very well preserved – but there are no examples, no one has any experience with this. It would be interesting to try and find out. Film archives should stock new copies simply to study their deterioration, to see if it is worth the trouble to keep them. I think they will keep a pretty short time. You only have to look at a photograph you've had for a long time at home. It becomes yellow or brown, unless it is under glass. This was probably not a good print, and it's aged.

*Still, near the end the colours are similar. The scene at the gas station, the car is red, the bars are painted red, he's wearing a red sweater, the background has a red tint.*

No, as I recall it was brighter, that's all.

*The question I asked you last time, there's the same ambiguity between the film and the story. I'd like to know how you see the difference . . .*

It was a commissioned film that interested me. It was the only time I had the impression of being able to make a big film on a big budget. In fact, it was a small budget for the film because all the money went to Brigitte Bardot, Fritz Lang and – what's the American actor's name? – Jack Palance. What was left over was a little more than twice what I usually had: 200,000 dollars. For me at the time that was a lot of money, but it was not a huge sum for a big production. It was based on a novel; that was the condition for making the film. I liked the novel somewhat, it was by Moravia.<sup>1</sup> I had a contract with Ponti, who didn't want to work with me, but once Bardot had asked me if—and when I told him that Bardot was willing, he was too. But in fact, the film was a flop, it was a complete flop.

So why? What interested me about it was an opportunity for me to treat the classical film milieu. In Moravia's novel, the character was a German filmmaker. In his imagination Moravia was thinking of Pabst, because he had filmed a *Ulysses* or an *Odyssey*. And at that time I admired Fritz Lang, so I kept the idea of a German filmmaker.

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But none of these ideas was mine. The film was pretty faithful to the novel and it enabled me to tell a story about classical cinema, as if this is how films were made. And I don't think that is how it is made. Still, I added ideas of my own by bringing in a filmmaker I admired. In the end I think it tells us more about Fritz Lang—it's a little sad too, when you see him. Because Lang needed money, so he agreed. He was touched by the fact that young filmmakers admired him, so he agreed. At the same time, he always pretended, he had to pretend to accept what he had been, someone in the service of large productions, except perhaps early in life. But he didn't want to appear as if he were simply a servant of the producer. So I think it revealed something about Fritz Lang; that he was someone who obeyed. For better or worse, he obeyed. At the same time, it's quite touching, because he agreed to pretend to make a film he never would have made.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *In this case, did you obey your producer?*

No, I've always—in a sense I was the producer. Because very early on I realised that the important thing in a film is to control the money. By money I mean to control the time; to have money and to spend it at your own pace however you like. I still remember, when I asked my father for money, he would say: 'Tell me what it's for and I'll buy it for you'. But that was no good at all. What I wanted was money and the power to spend it how I liked. This was my main effort in film: first to have it acknowledged that even if I wasn't the one signing the cheques that I might as well have been. I'd say: 'We're doing this'; 'we're doing that'; 'I've changed my mind'; 'I haven't changed my mind'. That's real power, which very few people have, I think, except extremely poor people. In their case, they're allowed to control their money because there is so little of it, it isn't dangerous. But once there is a lot of it, real power isn't in the sums involved; it's in the time in which it is spent.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *Is it by chance that Cinecittà also appears in your first film, À bout de souffle (Breathless), and that you return to it here? Is this because you wanted to talk about this aspect, about production?*

Cinecittà . . . yes, it's a myth, a little like Hollywood. If we had been able to make the film in Hollywood—I would have liked to, but it was too expensive to rent a big studio. The film's Hollywood producer

didn't have his own studio; otherwise we would have shot the film there. I put in my fanta—my ideas about cinema plus a story about a couple. From what I saw in the film today, the producer character was a dual figure, coming from the producer in a film called *The Barefoot Contessa* by Mankiewicz. There is a producer character like that, a private investor who puts money into films. Someone who is not a real film producer like in the other films we saw.

What I find interesting about the three films this morning is that there was a Russian film that came from a time when there was a great upheaval in Russia. There was a big difference between the Russian film and the three Western films, which may not all have been the same. In the Russian film there was a lot of hope and youthfulness while in the Western films there was a considerable degree of sadness and pessimism. That's what dominant cinema is. There are no young people, only old people, old stories, old myths. Whereas Russian cinema for a while was quite childlike, it was different. It wasn't stories about individuals either. It's quite clear in *The Man with a Movie Camera* that he wants to roam about, to take his camera everywhere. He wants to show phenomena that are more collective. Most of all you sense great hope, something you don't feel at all when immediately afterwards you show *The Bad and the Beautiful*. You feel like you're going from day to night. And even to the night beneath the night; suddenly you come upon monsters in their production office.

... different filmmaking conditions in Russia ...

I think it's a film, precisely—*Le Mépris* can't give you an idea of what cinema is. What it can give you, and this is what I tried to do, was an idea of a few film characters. I find that less dishonest for example than Truffaut's film, which tries to tell people: 'This is what happens when a film is made'. And people believe that. They don't understand a thing but are happy to be reinforced in their idea that in fact they don't understand a thing and that this is how films are made. But it's not like that at all, not even the way *Day for Night* was made. I've completely, definitively fallen out with Truffaut, in part over money. But when I reminded him about this money, I told him that I had seen his latest film, and that of all the shots, the one shot missing was when I saw him, while he was shooting the film.

enter a restaurant in Paris with Jacqueline Bisset on his arm. And, in light of the film he had made, that it was the least he could have done, given that this was why he made the film. All the shots of him and Jacqueline Bisset were not in the film, yet he didn't hesitate to invent stories involving other people. [Laughter] That's the least you can do, and it's what I tried to do.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *What was Truffaut's response?*

He didn't reply.<sup>2</sup> We no longer have any contact. But it's not by chance that *Day for Night* won the Oscar for best foreign film, because it's a typical American film. 'Day for night' is a technical term, it's an effect, the Americans often shoot night scenes during the day with a filter that makes the sky look dark blue. They call that day for night [*la nuit américaine*] rather than really filming at night. At the same time, I think this film won the award because it did a good job of concealing, at the same time as it made people believe it was revealing what cinema can be. Something magic about which nobody understands a thing but which at the same time attracts a kind of wizardry, luminosity, people moving about in every direction, a world both very pleasant and not. This makes people happy both not to be a part of it but also to pay five dollars regularly to see a film.

...the form of the film... ambiguity... without content, with no reason. There is no reason. It's the form of the film which is the content. Its story doesn't talk a lot about this relation between...

I prefer real American films. I prefer the film we saw before that one. It describes the Hollywood milieu in a certain way that resembles this a little. What one can say is that things have not changed. I don't think things have changed very much.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *But in watching your films and Truffaut's film, you're saying that he truly made an American film, that's a fact. But if we look for example on the level of dialogue and ideas, if you look at *À bout de souffle*, is it by chance that you chose an English-speaking actress and in *Le Mépris* an American producer? And Truffaut uses this same technique of dialogue often in English. Why? Is this something from the New Wave period?*

Yes, I was raised—it was a reaction also. When we began making films, people admired [inaudible] French film. It was in reaction to

this that we said: 'In the end a commercial American film is better than a so-called French art film'. That was our reaction: that a little American gangster film was better than a French film written by a member of the Academy or a famous scriptwriter, or based on a novel by André Gide. That's what we did at the time. It was a period of big French productions. There was *La Symphonie pastorale* with Michèle Morgan. That was what went to Cannes. So we said: 'A little American film by Preminger or someone like that—Preminger knows more about cinema, he's a greater artist'. Because that's what was made in France. But we were also caught in a trap by saying that. But that was our reaction. So in effect we were living the myth of American cinema.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *Do you think things have changed today?*

Oh no, it's like that more than ever! From a financial perspective, cinema has been completely American the world over. Maybe there's Indian cinema.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *Are you talking sales?*

No, they produce the greatest number of films. They also have an aesthetic of average films which is completely different from cinema in the West.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *Except Satyajit Ray perhaps.*

Yes, but he's a European filmmaker. He studied at university. He's an educated man who makes films which have no success in India.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *That's why his films are shown in festivals—perhaps at the Montreal festival this summer.*

*I'm going to return to the question of Hollywood production methods. Even in Day for Night I detected a degree of contempt . . . shoot in the street with less expensive equipment with the goal of obtaining an independent style, a little closer to the film author. I also detected in this afternoon's film a kind of contempt for the kind of production, the institution that is imposed on filmmakers. There is a great reaction here and in France and the United States against these production companies but also against the interests which control them and which finance the scripts. I'd like to know whether in Europe or France there is a consensus that direct cinema, shooting in the street, very mobile, to the benefit of filmmakers who want to free themselves from . . . Then beyond that stage*

*if they want to set up a distribution system whose money would go to the filmmakers rather than be dissipated in the distribution system. I'd like to know if there is any explicit awareness of this. Because watching the film, I know that this is something that is said between the lines, so I'd really like to know.*

It's not a question of shooting in the street or not, of lightweight equipment or not. It's a question of people being interested in you, in enough people being interested in you. From there the question is how to reach people. I remember a film which for me had a certain degree of success. It was called *Tout va bien* (*All's Well*). It was made three or four years after May 1968. A leftist activist named Pierre Overney was killed at a Renault plant. His funeral was one of the last great left-wing demonstrations, with around 100,000 people. Then afterwards there was a lull. So we said: 'We're making *Tout va bien* for the 100,000 people who went to that funeral'. It's just that after the funeral they left, so to reach these 100,000 people, we reached maybe—the film was a commercial failure because it had only 15,000 or 20,000 viewers. But I think those 15,000 or 20,000 people were at Pierre Overney's funeral. So, since we don't control the distribution system, to reach those 100,000—I don't know, if someone went abroad, how do you reach them? So there's no point in decentralising production if afterwards this decentralisation—making a little film—little or big, I don't know, but differently, or about people who aren't seen, in a different style. Which means that it might interest—afterwards you become a part of a large distribution system that is too big for you.

Yesterday we spoke about audiences. But who after all has a large audience? They're dictators, with their big productions and television. Television operates the same way as dictators: it has so many viewers per hour on a given day. Moreover, it has succeeded in a more immediate manner, which accelerates the film process from a distribution point of view. It can show the queen of England or the soccer matches coming up in Argentina. Soon there will be, I don't know, one and a half billion people watching the same thing for an hour and a half. Which dictator has not dreamt of an audience like that? And which audience moreover hasn't voted in a dictator who will give them the soccer match they want? So television has

succeeded at what cinema does. What's more, all the big American films now, when they are released there are films that make money and there are others that roll the dice. Every time a studio faces bankruptcy they make a film, bam, they're back on their feet, and then another studio does something. But they make something like 800 or 1,000 prints at a time in an attempt to make as much money as possible.

*... this guaranteed distribution gave film producers ...*

It's time filmmakers began asking themselves the question I've begun to ask myself. I mean, when you write your girlfriend, you think she'd like to hear from you. If she doesn't reply, you say: 'Well, I'm not going to keep writing forever'. Yesterday I said that producers and distributors are more real than three-quarters of artists because they think about the audience. Fine, solely in terms of dollars, they think about three million people times two dollars, they multiply that and then say to themselves—that's how they think. But at least it's real and they try to do something like that. But if you don't think about it. You have to start thinking, when you do something, what is there about me that should interest four million people? That to my mind is entirely unrealistic. I have always said – it's taken me a long time to be able to express it this way – I think that what I might say could interest 100,00 to 200,000 people in France. How? I don't know, because I can't reach them with the means of communication in place. If it's by mail, that leaves me with too many letters to write. If it's a film, I have to make the film in such a way that I won't reach them because I would have to make a different one; I would have to make the film in a way I don't like in order to reach them. So then I say to myself: 'All right, you have to think smaller, a little longer and differently'. Then you realise you are truly all alone, and this is the real problem. Why should anything I do interest anyone? You can always go knock on your neighbour's door and say: 'Listen, give me five dollars and I'll read you a story'. Statistically, tell me how many will open their doors, give you five dollars and listen to your story. Whether it's a good story is another matter altogether.

That's the real problem of production and distribution. So sometimes producers—and the true accomplices of distributors after all are viewers as a whole, which is to say the society in which we live,

in which we delegate. People know how to live their lives and they all have rather extraordinary stories. People who wear themselves out in factories are incredibly tired, but they delegate—they aren't aware that there are craftier people than them who have succeeded in circulating people's imaginations. Some of these people are honest enough, it's their way of working too, but the point is that people delegate to film or television the imagination or non-imagination of their lives.

*... But precisely, a film with small-scale distribution, once it's known and appreciated by critics, it's still true that nothing requires that they share the profits from this distribution, which for the most part . . .*

Yes, but then come the questions; you're in over your head, you're dealing with big companies, banks, movie theatres. Here in Canada you have two production bureaus, the CBC and the NFB,<sup>3</sup> you might say that it would be good if the Canadian government passed a law obliging a third of movie theatres to show Canadian films a third of the time. But these Canadian films have to exist, and Canadian viewers have to want to pay five dollars to see a Canadian film rather than a Hollywood film. But it seems . . .

*But before deciding if there are enough Canadian films, you have to start by passing a law to enable . . .*

Yes, but laws, you don't create anything with a law.

*I would create the possibility of making those films.*

I've never believed in that.

*But at that point . . .*

But the possibility isn't close—today with the technological means that exist, I'm not saying it's easy, but it's possible. It's more possible to make a film than to do something else.

*But at that point the subsidies . . .*

Yes, but at that point you have to say which film. And I think the problem of Canadian cinema is that it interests Canadians very little. By and large that's true. It's the problem of Swiss cinema too, it's exactly the same. A hit film in Switzerland sells about 200,000 tickets. It's possible, but which film is going to sell 200,000 tickets?

*This is what you have to think about in Canada. And you can't feed this into a computer;<sup>4</sup> it can't be figured out in advance.*

*This way of thinking penalises filmmakers, because they will make films for others instead of for themselves.*

But they have to start making products for themselves before thinking about others, or concerning themselves with whether the people around them are interested in them. This is more possible in television. But given what television is like in North and South America, it's more difficult. In Europe it's easier because there are niches, there are networks which say: 'We can't show only variety programs, we need something else, if only as veneer'. That's something that could help. I think that if you want to do something it takes time. If there are two or three people it's easier, but you can't say 'someone's films', you have to say which film, which says what, which wants to show what, and why and how you will do it. If you want to do it to become famous, which is estimable, but it's more difficult. Because I think the NFB has a movie theatre or two, they even show things for free . . .

SERGE LOSIQUE: *It's always empty.*

Of course. You have to realise that people don't go to the movies—they go to television for free, or you pay a small fee, or something like radio . . .

SERGE LOSIQUE: *There's no fee.*

But you buy your TV set. Cinema, if it was free—there are countries where it's free—in Moscow, because they don't get foreign films, when a film series is on, in China too, if there was an American film week in China for free, it would be packed. Here, if they showed American films for free, there wouldn't necessarily be more people than there were for films they had to pay for. People would choose according to the film.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *It's true what you say. In 1968, when I started the Conservatory of Cinematographic Art, I showed von Stroheim's film The Wedding March, a masterpiece that had never been seen here. It was even written up in the press, in newspapers. I said it would be free precisely to be democratic. There wasn't a soul. Ten people. And people said: 'Oh, the Conservatory, it's free, it's worthless'. To re-launch it I was obliged to charge 50 cents and then a dollar. And even then people said 'Ah, it's cheapo stuff, it's just a dollar, it's worthless'. It's true . . .*

... it's not your subject but your treatment of it that determines whether people will like it or not.

Yes, but I think the problem is much more the real—because surely in Canada there are lots of people who can make films, and you have to find more of them. Because once a successful film, which interests people, a little production or a big production, sooner or later—if it reaches them it reaches them.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *If we could return to the history of cinema . . .*

In general every big hit is a film which, when people were making it, they didn't think it would be a success. They were very afraid—even a film like *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, before they released it they had no idea if it was going to work, if it was going to be a disaster or not.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *To return to your film today, I confess, even if this will be public some day, that I have never liked Brigitte Bardot, even if she acted well in the very bad film *And God Created Woman*. I have always found her vulgar. But I find that in watching your film again, I don't know how many times I've seen it, today I discovered that she's actually an honourable actress. I'd like to talk about the role of the actor in cinema. I'd like to know what you think of her yourself because you've directed her.*

With actors I always tried to view them as real people whose reality you had to bring out a little in the script you're working with, in which they're forced to do a number of things. But to keep in mind who they really were. If she is blond, to try to express how nice her blond hair is. Brigitte Bardot, precisely, when I was a New Wave critic, this is why she wished us well. Because when she appeared in *And God Created Woman* she was heavily criticised for her way of speaking compared to other actresses. People said: 'She doesn't know how to act'; 'her dialogue is false'. We said: 'But this false dialogue, which is her style, is much more real than all the so-called good dialogue, which is in fact very false and academic'.<sup>5</sup> In my case, something I like to do is to try to apply myself to making something seem somewhat real, for a woman or a guy to be seen as saying such a thing, so that if you met them it wouldn't seem extraordinary but would have a realistic feel. In other words, to respect the person completely. Which means that I have never shot—even

in *Alphaville*, it didn't bother me at all to have Eddie Constantine say a line by Blaise Pascal, whereas people laughed at it. For me, he was a guy who was paid, he did that, he had that head which interested me, and I found that he was entirely qualified, perhaps more so than someone else, to say: 'The silence of unknown spaces terrifies me'.<sup>6</sup> And I don't see why he wouldn't. So I tried simply to have him say it the way I thought he should to be believed, or in any event if not believed to be heard. To be heard: not to enrapture, but to be heard. This is why my films have never been a big success. I try to make things be heard or seen.

Sometimes I feel I'd like to be able to enrapture people. I felt that there are moments of rapture in Vertov's film. In some films even the music, people like to be hooked; I'd like to but I don't know how to do it very well, or I'm afraid of suddenly not being able to continue doing it the next second. So I prefer simply to be heard, for people to listen or watch. For the film to have a realistic feel, as they say. At that point, everyone is valid. And you have to find an actor. You can start with an actor, then you have to picture a scene using them, you can start with an expression.

[To Serge Losique] You said that you didn't like Brigitte Bardot.

SERGE LOSIQUE: That's just my opinion.

Yes, but that's exactly my point. Should one like or not like actors?

You can have your personal preferences, even physical preferences, that sort of thing. Generally speaking, that's what actors have. Of course, there is a scene missing. It's the principal scene in every film, which is: 'Why hire a certain person?' Extras are like cattle; worse, because sometimes you even choose which animal. In other words, it's completely racist. And the person who has to choose, who has to do the casting, as the Americans say, of course it's completely subjective and completely racist. When it's a guy choosing a woman—this is why women would be more interesting at this because they must be more objective. Or the way in which they are captivated by a man they hire, I think we would benefit from their subjectivity and the fact they find him appealing. Or if they feel like sending him packing, or try to do exactly what men do, at the same time there would be more objectivity involved, whereas guys are complete

racist. Really. They say: 'This person's a Jew, this person's an Arab, this person is a wog, this person's black, that's why I want them, that's why I'm not taking them'. No one says so, but that's what happens, that alone.

And when you watch Truffaut's film—I think mine is more honest if you will, because I placed myself completely outside of it because—at the time I didn't think of it like that, and if I were to do it over today, this would be one of the first things I would do. What's dishonest about Truffaut's film is that he doesn't show why he hired people. Why he hired Jean-Pierre Léaud, why he hired—he simply shows himself in a little bed, which he no longer owns, and then he superimposes the word 'cinema'. Even to show that he's thinking about making films, that is incredibly stupid.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *But you have to give him that . . .*

The American film was more hon—he makes you believe that cin—I don't know.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *Since he started making films . . .*

But it's very different from his first film.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *He has said that his goal is to create entertainment . . .*

Not his first film. To me it's a truly strange career. François Truffaut's real life would be a grand film that would be horribly expensive to make. Because he has had a very strange career. When you watch his first film, *The Four Hundred Blows*, and you know a little bit about his life before then—for me, there was a break right after *The Four Hundred Blows*. And I don't know how that happened. He let himself be taken in by cinema, he became everything he hated. When you read his early articles, and then look at the way some of them have been republished, what is incredible is that some things have been censored in the books where these articles have been republished. In other words when he spoke ill of Autant-Lara or when he spoke ill of Delannoy he was expressing what made us sick to watch. We attacked people by name, even their physical defects. [Nervous laughter] That just wasn't done in polite society. Filmmakers didn't speak ill of each other, they were professional colleagues. Whereas we didn't hesitate because we weren't a part of the profession. I've always enjoyed doing that, so I remain outside; it doesn't bother me

as much. But what bothers me about Truffaut's memoirs is that I can recall very definite attacks against Claude Autant-Lara, for example, and he took them out.<sup>7</sup> That's weird. I mean, who does that? Who rewrites biographies? What is the need of that?

SERGE LOSIQUE: *He could answer you with Brigitte Bardot in your own film, and that a person has the right to change their mind.*

Yes, but you have to show how you change, [laughter] that's the most interesting thing. Everyone has the right to change their mind. It's not that they don't have the right, but you have to show it.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *When you create entertainment . . .*

But what is good about this entertainment?

SERGE LOSIQUE: *He attracts millions of viewers . . .*

Precisely, at that point there's no pretence of being democratic.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *Not at all. Today he is the marshal of French cinema . . .*

Of course, but . . .

SERGE LOSIQUE: *He said so himself . . .*

Precisely. To me, it reminds me – and French cinema as a whole is heading in this direction – it reminds me of all the films made under Vichy.<sup>8</sup> I would have liked to have shown, instead of *The Bad and the Beautiful*, another film by Minnelli called *Two Weeks in Another Town* . . .

SERGE LOSIQUE: *Next time?*

No, no, it's in connection with this. Because my film is pretty much the same thing. But in the end we saw two genres. *Day for Night* makes people think it's a great film, when in fact it's a little provincial film. Or a little provincial comedy. This is why it had the great respect of the Americans, who have always liked—Pagnol for example: it's not *Angèle* they liked, but *The Baker's Wife*, things like that.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *They haven't lost their taste for this. One film they like a lot is Cousin cousine.*

*Cousin cousine.* There you go, that's the true French tradition.

SERGE LOSIQUE: All right, after this rather lively discussion, I'll give other people the floor.

*Do you think that 200,000 viewers, for the medium, for your time, for the money invested, is the optimum figure for your films?*

Sometimes the calculation I make, which is no more real, I ask myself how much I want to earn, how much I want to earn per month. Not how much I want to earn, but how much I want to spend for me and the people with me, or how much money I should bring along. . . contact with the public . . . Do you think that this will . . . that you'll reach a large enough audience?

No, I can't tell myself that. You, in your opinion, how many people are interested in you? [Laughter] In your life? Since you don't ask yourself that question, why do you want me to ask myself, or why do you ask it for me? What the hell do you care if Hitler or Godard or Losique, what the hell do you care if they interest four million people or two people? If no one can ask you how many people, in your opinion, are interested in you? At close quarters, to communicate?

*No, it depends on the medium. In film they expect 200,000 to 300,000 people for a film whose average length is an hour . . .*

We might say that worldwide, roughly speaking, an American film, if you say to them: 'I can guarantee you 200,000 viewers', any American producer will tell you: 'That doesn't interest me'. It doesn't interest them in the slightest. They aim much higher. I think film and television should be more like a provincial newspaper. The students here, you publish a student paper, some students print a paper for the university. They don't say to themselves: 'This newspaper has to be distributed around the world'. They accept that it remain internal. I think films are exactly like that. There may be some that are seen by everyone, but what is not good is to start with everyone from the beginning. I think that has terrible effects which people don't realise.

*Seen from the top of the staircase . . . from the point of view of controlling the entire situation . . . I preferred [inaudible], it was more realistic . . .*

No, this film was just a story – which I didn't even invent – between a guy and a girl. The guy was a scriptwriter, I liked the fact that he was a scriptwriter on a big production rather than something else.

SERGE LOSIQUE: After *Le Mépris* flopped, did you give up making big productions?

No, it just happened, I never—afterwards I made another two or three films, but let's say I gave up on myself a little. Because in seeing my films again regularly along with other people's films what I've noticed is a fair bit of naïveté and a little stupidity. But the fact that it's on the big screen like that, people don't see it. They don't see my—sometimes there are some interesting things, I'm beginning to see those times, but there are all kinds of other times where it doesn't work at all. In my films and the others. Mostly it's because we're able, precisely, to skim through something and then start over. We see a Russian film at the beginning for example, and this is why we should screen them from time to time, they head off in every direction. They were too fast, they should have slowed down a little, gone on longer. Even in Dreyer's film one shot out of every three or four is—it's not that it's not good, it's that there is no need for it. It could have been done more simply. And people don't realise. They're drawn in by the process of telling a story and of not leaving empty moments. A film has to tell a life story but it has to do it in such condensed fashion that it must not be allowed to have any relationship with people's lives. Because people's lives are full of empty moments, gaps, sudden events, things that happen very quickly or very slowly. But everything has to happen very regularly for an hour and a half in a certain manner. If not, people won't watch it. That's the opinion of the person I work with a little, her name is Anne-Marie Miéville. She's highly reticent about cinema, which she finds somewhat loathsome because it's kind of pointless. Television, on the other hand, because—today what struck me with respect to Russian cinema is that I found the three Euro-American films fairly loathsome because they were pointless. They make you believe they have a point because they exist or because they're interesting. Whereas the Russian film was truly trying to achieve something for its country at a point in time. It didn't last long, there wasn't an opportunity—but it was different somehow. You couldn't say that the guy in *The Bad and the Beautiful* thinks about the fact that he's American, that the country has problems and he should do his part.

**SERGE LOSIQUE:** But then how do you explain what happened to me in 1967 in Moscow, a fourth-class western, I'd even say a D feature, it wasn't even Stagecoach, there was a line-up six kilometres long of people waiting to see it?

It's like I said, in Russia—I remember I was travelling once in South America, I was twenty years old. I was already a cinephile, and I hadn't heard French spoken for a long time. Then one day I heard a song by, I don't remember who, and it makes you cry because it's your country or I don't know what. The Russians are in prison, you show them something different, they're happy. You could have brought them a supermarket, they would have lined up for the supermarket.

JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD: Could you say where there is an empty shot in *Le Mépris*?

Oh, for that I'd have to—I think that when we really do the history of cinema in a practical manner this will be one of the things that we will talk about and succeed in doing. In Dreyer's film, I couldn't tell you off the top of my head, but there are two or three spots where you could say that there were, you realise—and it was good to have the Stroheim film before it, because Dreyer didn't see the intertitles as images. It was good that he sometimes saw them as dialogue, but what was missing, all through the film, was for him to see them as images. Except perhaps at the end, which is a little too mystical, when Antonin Artaud says: 'Your martyrdom, my death' and there is some montage between the image and the intertitles.<sup>9</sup> And this is the sequence I chose to put in *Vivre sa vie*.

JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD: [Inaudible]

No, they're transition shots. I couldn't say more without looking closer to remember. They're transition shots. One thing that has always amazed me is: how do you move from one shot to the next? In other words: why put shots one after another? Yesterday we spoke about the amateur filmmaker who takes only one shot. He films his children or his wife coming out of the water at the beach, and then at Christmas, or on a birthday. This is what camera advertisements show us: 'Film your child blowing out the birthday candles'. But there are never two images. Kodak says: 'Film this image here' and then: 'Film the moment when you give him a smack'. But here you have to be interested in family life. Fine, people are interested in family life because that's their life, but mom or dad filming has to think that the film will be useful to their family relationships. At that point they need it, that's why they do it. If there were no need to do that, there's no need to make cinema. Amateur filmmakers don't

make cinema; they have no need to. But professional filmmakers not only put one shot after another, they put eight hundred one after the other. And there's a very good chance – this is what's happening today – that these eight hundred shots will all be the same. It's one shot multiplied by eight hundred. And people use actors to show—or they change the film's title simply because if they kept the same title people would no longer come. And since people are so brutalised in the work they do, in universities and in factories, they don't see that it's the same film. From time to time, when the film speaks Russian or Japanese, they have the impression that it's a slightly different film. Barely. [Laughter] But that's what's happening, I think.

JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD: *Did you choose Jack Palance?*

That was more a cinephile thing; I was still pretty much a cinephile. I chose him because there was a film I liked a lot at the time, *The Big Knife* by Aldrich, and *The Barefoot Contessa*, where there was also a producer. What interested me more was to show not a Hollywood producer but a private individual who invests in cinema. There are a lot of people like that and in general they behave much differently, more boorishly, than a professional producer.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *And he wears the same hat as people in Hollywood.*

Yes.

... Pierrot le fou ...

Who? Zanuck?

JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD: *You must mean Fuller, a director.*

*Fuller. Was he also the producer?*

Oh, he was a film director who was in Paris, and I liked some of his films. I've always liked—writers and other people too, like in *La Femme mariée* (*A Married Woman*) where I questioned a filmmaker I liked a lot, Roger Leenhardt. I quite enjoy mixing them with the film characters. I put him in because he was in Paris, he asked if he could attend the film shoot, I said yes, we found him three or four lines to speak. This is what I would call, it comes from being a cineph—it's putting your friends in your film if you like.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *You didn't try to shoot at the Victorine studios in Nice, which have just been sold, by the way, to a Canadian?*

Canadian? Yes.

SERGE LOSIQUE: Yes, yes, last week Harry Gulin of Montreal and American interests bought it. You saw that Truffaut's film was made there. Didn't they suggest that you shoot *Le Mépris* there?

No, because it's too expensive. Because after paying Bardot her biggest fee ever—she was paid a half-million dollars, she had never been paid that much money before. You could make a cheap film for that. I was hired to make a film that cost no more than a million dollars, Bardot's fee included, which took half.

SERGE LOSIQUE: And a third for Jack Palance. [To audience] All right, is there anything else about this aspect of film history that you saw on the screen today?

After seeing *Day for Night*, I wonder—I think it's the worst film of the four we saw. [Laughter] Because a viewer who didn't know what cinema is might say—if you asked them: 'How are films made?' after the Russian film they would say: 'Well, it involves taking your camera everywhere and pretty much filming everything, people working, people playing sports, people doing such-and-such'. They could say that this is what cinema is. If instead they saw *The Bad and the Beautiful*, they could say: 'Well, from what I can see, cinema is about money. Someone has money, they give it to someone else, and this other person pretends to be an artist when in fact . . .' They could at least say something. For *Le Mépris*, they could say: 'Well, I'm not so sure, I see people who work in cinema and I see that one day it screws up their relationship, so cinema must not be a place . . .' But after *Day for Night*, how would they describe what making a film is about? They would say—I don't know what they'd say. They wouldn't be able to say.

SERGE LOSIQUE: Nothing at all. They saw a show, they didn't see the history of cinema.

But they would be unable to say—and that's precisely it, that's precisely why the film is powerful, because it reinforces people's idea that cinema is a mystery, and yet at the same time they're quite familiar with this mystery, because they give five to ten dollars every week to go see it.

SERGE LOSIQUE: I agree with you there.

[Inaudible]

For me its success is a mystery. I understand lots of people's success, but I have a hard time understanding that of certain big American hits. I understand very well what is going on, because I know that sometimes I too am happy to pay five dollars to go see them. I know I'm a member of the audience. I paid to go see *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. Afterwards, I wasn't happy because it ends right at the moment I thought it was going to begin. [Laughter]

SERGE LOSIQUE: Especially Truffaut [inaudible].<sup>10</sup> [Laughter]

But when people tell me that *Day for Night* had a certain success, I ask them in all honesty what they liked about its description of cinema. I tell myself that it's simply an accurate reflection of the way they imagine films are made and at the same time that it doesn't bother them to see this reflection.

SERGE LOSIQUE: No, you see Jacqueline Bisset crying, she's romantic, Truffaut cajoles her. That's already quite a lot for the audience.

No, because there have been a lot of films made about cinema with only that and they had no success. It's not that at all.

SERGE LOSIQUE: There is the legend that Truffaut loves women . . .

[Break in tape]

. . . get out of Vietnam, it's not just—they should pass a law, they couldn't even count on the American people for that. It's the same thing, you can't complain. It's no easier for a worker. If he thinks that the union—I think in film it's easier sometimes because you don't have to go through that and there is the possibility that there are other people around you. There may be 100,000 or 50,000, and you find the form to reach them. If you think you need them, and if you think they need you too, then you find the forms together—you begin to understand each other, you try to build something. It's based on hope or despair, but it's possible to think—because it's still small. In television this is absolutely unthinkable. Television is finished. It didn't start out like that, but film people paid no attention to it and it was taken over by the people who sell the sets, and later the government got involved. Then it was finished, it's become an immense factory. The CBC or CBS is like the Pentagon. That's something that can't be changed. It's not just 100,000 people every day.

it's two billion the world over. Cinema is more, [makes a gesture with his hand indicating less rigidity] it's possible. That's why it remains so strong, because there is something, there is always the possibility of freedom. At least in the sense people understand the term. And if people still make successful films, because as bad as they may be, even a producer like Jack Palance in *Le Mépris* or Zanuck or someone, they are someone who is a little more—because they're more like outsiders or gypsies. It's quite apparent today, just recently at United Artists, the guy who ran United Artists for ten years was fired by . . .

SERGE LOSIQUE: Eric Pleskow, Mike Medavoy.

. . . by Transamerica. They left, they were fired like the head of a company, there was nothing to discuss, they left and they are the ones who make films that do well.

SERGE LOSIQUE: This new group already has projects for this year. For this year and next they have projects worth 150 million dollars.

Yes, but what's 150 million dollars? For a film it's not a lot of money. That makes what? That makes seven films at twenty million. That's not a lot. It's a lot for a person, but film numbers are quite tiny. If you look at that in individual terms, you say: 'One hundred and fifty million dollars, that's a lot of money compared to what I earn'. Granted. But that's not the way to look at it. What is the budget of NASA? What is the budget of the CBC? The CBC makes threepenny films with someone like this [draws a line across his waist] talking in front of a map. They make billions with that. They're much stronger! They don't do a thing, television is fantastic! [Laughter]

Cinema is powerful. People still like to see—what do they like to watch on television? Variety shows, sports and films. But films made as cinema, or series made by film people in televised form. Whatever, *Le Mépris*, it doesn't matter, *Day for Night*, if they are still liked on television or if they are liked by people in movie theatres, it's because there is a way of making films over three or four months that is close to the individual but made in a group. There is something extremely powerful in that which may not—the technical means will change, but that's what film is about. This is why a young filmmaker should always be full of hope, because it's the only place – otherwise it wouldn't keep me, it helps me to

live – it's the only place where change, or even what people call 'revolution' – that's not how I would describe it, but – where it is possible to change things that aren't working. In other places you need too many people, too many things for this to be possible. So you have the choice of waiting and doing your own thing if you can. But this requires great passivity. Because sometimes it explodes, you aren't able. Cinema is possible because it's fairly simple. There are a small number of people on a film. In my case it's eight people. For the average American film it's 120, 150 people. It's easy, 150 people!

*There are people who are paid to do nothing . . .*

Then you work with twelve people, and then with two, and you try with two or three people to find others. If you don't get along you try to find others who want to. It may not be with film people that you have to ally yourself. You have to ally yourself with other areas if you want to do something.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *What would happen to cinema, speaking of the power of television and NASA, what would happen say to Hollywood cinema, the majors, because if you look closely at the budgets of NBC, etc., what is Hollywood today? It's nothing at all . . .*

It's nothing at all.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *It's a cultural phenomenon because there are tax shelters and that sort of thing.*

Yes, but this cultural phenomenon is much stronger than anything else.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *Agreed, but if this cultural phenomenon disappeared tomorrow in favour of television, what in your opinion would happen to cinema?*

But it can't disappear. It can't. The proof is that it continues on better than ever.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *I'm not so sure of that.*

It has been continuing on better than ever since 1900. They make just as many films each year around the world . . .

SERGE LOSIQUE: *No, they're making more and more television series.*

Since 1900 about two or three thousand films are made each year around the world, that doesn't change. Perhaps there will be another

technology but this is something that has remained. It's the heart of television in a different way. And they need it. So they put it on oxygen—Hollywood no longer exists in the same way, but it exists in a different way.

*If there are just as many films, are there just as many viewers?*

More than ever! How many children do parents make each year? Where do you think viewers come from? [Laughter] You still have to make people if they're going to go see films.

*I'd like to know if there is a possibility of having a dialogue with young people in film courses in France, if you were to discuss the ideas we're discussing today over there and then bring back, discuss these ideas over there and come back?*

SERGE LOSIQUE: *He lives in Switzerland . . .*

I'd like to, but I don't know many people. The few people I know, we end up arguing fairly quickly. I haven't been able to find someone. The only person I found, but it was he who came to see me, was Jean-Pierre Gorin. He came to see me and said: 'I can't make films alone. I need to be more than one'. He felt a desire to make films, but unlike everyone else he didn't want to. And unconsciously I realised that alone I couldn't do it. There had to be at least two people, and then if possible three. But I've never—since Gorin, I've found a woman, a friend, so we say: 'We are one and a half', one and a half because we are only half of three. One and a half meaning not one plus a half, but half of three. I have never succeeded in being three. My problem in our company is to be three. It could be a cinematographer, but a cinematographer who would like to do something other than just cinematography, or at least who needs photography, but for himself, not just—and who would be happy to earn a living and sell himself, who needs cinematography for himself, who needs a photograph for himself too, not only for the agency or for me if I ask him.

If it's a cinematographer, that's fine. If it's a financier, then a financier. If it's a scriptwriter, then a scriptwriter. If it's an actor, then an actor. It doesn't matter, we'd start out, each of us in a sense would be the third person. I've never got to that point. Big Hollywood films are made by one person, sometimes by two when they're good.

Quite recently I realised that the strength of the New Wave, the reason it was able to make a breakthrough when it did in France, is simply because there were three or four of us who spoke about cinema amongst ourselves. The strength of average American film before the war was that these people were together all day. In the morning they spoke in the cafeteria, somewhere other than in a factory. It was a factory but a very special kind of factory, one where they could talk. Workers in Detroit or at Renault have no way of talking. They're too tired to talk. Every time there was something people call a 'school'—in painting too. Cinema is closer to painting. When someone talks about 'the Impressionist school' or something like that—Picasso and Braque spoke with each other about painting. Afterwards, when they became famous, they no longer spoke. That's what happened to us. Once we had made a film, we no longer saw each other. We started all over. Even recent American cinema, people like Coppola, Scorsese and De Palma formed a little group somewhere and saw each other and spoke about cinema together. Afterwards, nothing. The Germans too. Italian neo-realism too. At a certain point Rossellini talked with Fellini. And that was enough, because they said something and felt the need to say something to each other. Afterwards to impress something they had to impress together for themselves. Otherwise you don't make films. They needed to impress something and the means of impression was a film and not a book.

*Are there people who still stick together?*

In music a little, but orchestras, because they're dominated—it doesn't last long. People bring their instruments, one person brings a clarinet . . .

*... always the same actor . . .*

If we were already two we would manage to survive, which is something.

**SERGE LOSIQUE: Mr Pelletier?**<sup>11</sup>

*You talked about cinema and television. The fact that television makes films accessible . . .*

They support each other. It's afterwards when people go see them that they're made differently. They serve each other, television

served film and film served television, it's the same thing. They're two places exactly the same. This is why, even at our level, we try, even out of need, to mix film and video in order to express this.

*At that point doesn't cinema lose its specificity?*

Basically, children, let's say, prefer to go out when they're at home by going out through the window of the TV screen rather than going outside. Sometimes they prefer going outside. It depends on a lot of things.

*At that point cinema is hitched to television. Couldn't television adapt to cinema? If there were big screens . . .*

You know, they'd have to build slightly larger apartments than what they build now before building large screens. [Laughter] When they build little shoeboxes like that obviously the TV set is going to be even smaller than the shoebox.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *All right, I think we've exhausted the discussion for today. I've been on my feet since seven o'clock this morning, I'm tired too. Wait, wait, there's work to do.* [Takes a sheet of paper from his pocket] *Wait, I have to tell you that the next time will be the 9th and 10th of June, and then immediately afterwards, the 16th and 17th. Two weekends in a row, don't forget. And then in July and August there will be nothing, and we start up again on the 28th of September. Is that clear?*

[Inaudible]

It will be the same thing. For the other films I don't know yet, because there is work to do. [Reading from the sheet of paper] On the 9th we'll see *Alphaville* and on the 10th *La Femme mariée*. In the morning with *Alphaville* there will be excerpts, I don't know what yet, I have to find something and then see if Losique has access to the films. With *Alphaville* it will be adventure films. I think we will have to show a western, the only idea I had was to show *Man of the West* or *Rio Bravo*, that kind of thing. That was the sort of thing I was thinking of when I made *Alphaville*, someone who arrives from somewhere and something happens to him. That's the basic model for the western. Then there will be *La Femme mariée*, I don't know what we'll show with it.

SERGE LOSIQUE: [Points to a spot on the sheet of paper]

No, because I haven't decided. Then on the 16th will be *Pierrot le fou* and the 17th *Masculin Féminin*, two films that were made one after the other. With *Pierrot le fou* I know pretty well which excerpts I'm going to show, they will be about passionate love gone out of control: Murnau's *Sunrise*, *You Only Live Once* by Fritz Lang and something by Nicholas Ray, whether *Rebel without a Cause*, *Johnny Guitar* or *They Drive by Night*. Excerpts of films with couples. There you have it.

*I'm amazed that each time we follow a theme. With Vivre sa vie (My Life to Live) the theme was women, today it was classical film production. Are we always going to follow a theme like that right up to the end of your work?*

What I try to do, using one of my own films, is first of all to locate it in the history of cinema. In which, given that I was a film critic—at first I always made my films in reference to film history. Towards the end much less so. That came to an end with *Pierrot le fou* in fact. Each time I had a very clear idea with reference to a specific film, and here I'll show you excerpts from the film that influenced me. And then see this kind of film if possible through the history of cinema, to see a Russian film, a Swedish film, an American film, both silent and talking films, to see the various forms and periods. Later choosing excerpts will be harder. *La Chinoise* was a case of making a film I used to call political, meaning to make a film that spoke about politics. So what that means is that other people had the same idea. We'll have to show an excerpt from a recent Cuban film, an excerpt from a Russian film, an excerpt from a Nazi German propaganda film, to create a kind of debate.

*The 28th of September is a Thursday.*

SERGE LOSIQUE: *That's when he arrives.*

So it will be the 29th, it's always a Friday.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *Thank you very much, we'll see you back here in a month's time.*

Saturday 6 May 1978

## Notes

1. Alberto Moravia, *A Ghost at Noon*, trans. Angus Davidson (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1955 [1954]). (The novel's original Italian title was *Il disprezzo*, or 'contempt'.)
2. Godard's letter – and Truffaut's reply – can be found in Gilles Jacob and Claude de Givray, eds. and Gilbert Adair, trans., *François Truffaut: Correspondence 1945–1984* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990 [1988]), 383–91.
3. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the nation-wide public television and radio network (its French-language wing is known as Radio-Canada), and the National Film Board of Canada, a public film-production body specialising in documentaries on social issues.
4. Spoken in English.
5. Although Godard says 'we said' (which might even be construed as 'I said' given the context and his habit of using the impersonal third-person pronoun *on* – variously 'one', 'we', 'they', etc. – when speaking of himself alone), in fact it was Truffaut who wrote comments very similar to Godard's remarks here. See François Truffaut, 'Vous êtes témoins d'un procès' (1957), in Truffaut, *Le Plaisir des yeux: Écrits sur le cinéma* (Paris: Les Cahiers du Cinéma, 2000), 334 and 335–36; and 'Les Critiques de cinéma sont misogynes: B.B. est victime d'une cabale' (1956), in Henri Blondet, ed., *Arts: La Culture de la provocation, 1952–1966* (Paris: Tallandier, 2009).
6. A slight misquotation of the original. Pascal wrote: 'The eternal silence of these infinite spaces terrifies me' ('Le silence éternel de ces espaces infinis m'effraie'). Godard here says: 'Le silence de ces espaces inconnus m'effraie' and has Eddie Constantine in the film say 'le silence de ces espaces infinis m'a effrayé'. Blaise Pascal, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Seuil, 1963), 528.
7. The volume Godard is referring to, *Les Films de ma vie* (Paris: Flammarion, 1975), is not so much a memoir as a small selection of Truffaut's vast output as a film critic. There is no doubt that this collection casts him and his writing in a much mellower light than the *enfant terrible* image he cultivated in the 1950s before he began making films and became famous (the director named by Godard, for example, Claude Autant-Lara, called Truffaut a 'thug' (*voyou*) in re-

sponse to his criticism). The articles Godard refers to here appeared in the weekly newspaper *Arts*, where Truffaut published 528 columns between 1954 and 1958 and where Godard also published a handful of texts. Godard overstates his case, however. The two articles on Autant-Lara included in *Les Films de ma vie*, one mildly critical and the other rather admiring, were not edited for publication. Rather, Truffaut and his publisher left out two much more abusive articles from the same period, 'Claude Autant-Lara, faux martyr, n'est qu'un cinéaste bourgeois' and 'Autant pour Lara' (a play on words meaning 'so much for Lara'). Here, Truffaut describes Autant-Lara variously as a coward, an opportunist and 'rotten' (*pourri*). These articles are reprinted in Henri Blondet, ed., *Arts: La Culture de la provocation, 1952–1966* (Paris: Tallandier, 2009). In another article in *Arts* from the same period, in November 1955, Truffaut said about Jean Delannoy that his film *The Little Rebels* merely 'put into images' a script by Jean Aurenche and Pierre Bost and that Delannoy was 'not intelligent enough to be cynical, too cunning to be sincere and too pretentious and solemn to be unaffected'. Quoted in Pierre Ajame, *Les Critiques de cinéma: Le Procès des juges* (Paris: Flammarion, 1967), 75, which provides a good overview of Truffaut's critical sallies.

8. A sterling example of Godard's spontaneous word associations. After Serge Losique describes Truffaut as the 'marshal' of French cinema, Godard compares his films to those made under the collaborationist French government based in Vichy during the Second World War, headed by Marshal Pétain.
9. The lines Godard quotes are not those of the character played by Antonin Artaud but Joan of Arc's in response to him. When Artaud's character comes to prepare Joan for her death, he asks her if she is truly prepared to die for her beliefs: 'And the great victory?' 'My martyrdom!' 'And your deliverance?' 'Death!' ('Et la grande victoire?' 'Mon martyr!' 'Et ta délivrance?' 'Ma mort!'). This would appear to be the first occasion on which Godard used full-screen titles in one of his films. The same intertitles reappear – this time in a smaller format – in his film *Notre musique* (*Our Music*).
10. François Truffaut has a part in the film.
11. Possibly Gérard Pelletier (1919–1997), a former journalist and federal cabinet minister who at the time of these talks was Canada's ambassador to France.

# Words and Images

3

## *Alphaville*

1

*Faust*

F.W. Murnau (Germany, 1926)

*Rancho Notorious*

Fritz Lang (U.S.A., 1952)

*Beauty and the Beast (La Belle et la Bête)*

Jean Cocteau (France, 1946)<sup>1</sup>

*Last Year at Marienbad (L'Année dernière à Marienbad)*

Alain Resnais (France, 1961)

*Alphaville: une étrange aventure de Lemmy Caution*

Jean-Luc Godard (France, 1965)

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[The first nine minutes of the videotape are without sound]

JEAN-LUC GODARD: [In medias res] . . . there aren't a lot of people [three-second break in sound] always start out with very few people.

SERGE LOSIQUE: You're right. That's true research for you. [Ten-second break in sound] People always expect things to be what they call pre-cooked, ready-to-eat, here is Godard ex cathedra, we're going to say one thing and another, blah blah blah. Not at all. We're going to do this gradually, we'll end up with something concrete. For the moment this may be the best way we have of proceeding. I have to leave, so I leave you with Jean-Luc. Feel free to ask him whatever questions you like. I wanted to ask him a question about Marienbad, someone beat me to it, bravo. So I'll see you in a while.

[Serge Losique exits]

PAUL GODARD: My name is Paul Godard. [Laughter] You have shown us this morning three or four pieces of films for us to get to know Jean-Luc

Godard, your thoughts around *Alphaville*. Thank you for the films; now for books: can you do the same for books? Can you indicate, you have a literary culture, a great artistic culture, you should be able, you have all these things in mind when you make your films. You have shown us a few sections of films, can you do the same thing by indicating to us a few titles of books, a few paintings or sculptures perhaps?

No, I won't do that for you with books, which are beginning to be my enemies. It's true I was raised, I had an intellectual upbringing. I was raised in the cultured bourgeoisie. And what strikes me about this film is the way I used this entire culture, which I sifted through in my own manner and which today I no longer really have. So for books, or paintings, no, you have to ask other people. Besides it's been quite well done, it's been done quite often in a number of books. But it hasn't been done visually, precisely, so it isn't very interesting to me. Besides I don't understand very well what you would like to know.

**PAUL GODARD:** *Jean-Luc Godard's bibliography around a work . . .*

Yes, but what we are doing here has no—I have no interest, my only interest is in seeing pieces of films and in trying to see a connecting thread, like a film, a musical theme. But we can only find this thread if we assemble the right instruments, capable of producing certain notes for a certain period of time, and the people to produce them. At that point we may discover a kind of music and express something that happened or that we wish to happen.

I have been a part of film history simply because I made films. Many other people have been a part of it in other ways, by going to see films for example. But no one filmed them or questioned them at that moment, so we can't have a very good idea of what happened to them. But there is a whole section of film history, the principal section—we won't even mention television, because it's so many billions of individuals and hours spent watching—but when people do a history of cinema, they do it using the films only. But you should also be able to do it using the way viewers watch films. There are too many of them, but there would be lots of interesting things. But at least we can do it using the point of view of people who made films. This has never been done because it is always literary types who do film history, and even today film criticism is done by literary types.

Writing film criticism means writing: 'This is good'; 'what's-his-name acts well'; 'what's-her-name acts badly'; 'extraordinary spectacle'; 'lovely colours'; that sort of thing. Then they put a photograph so the newspaper reader can be certain that this is the film they're talking about. [Laughter] But the photograph has no other purpose; critics don't use photographs, they don't need them.

I think I must be quite alone in the cinema. There are not very many people—this is something today I'm quite certain of. I've spent twenty years, twenty whole years to get to the point, let's say, of growing up. I've spent about twenty years in film, meaning I'm still quite young in film even though physically I'm 50 years old, meaning—a half-century already, I'm beginning to grow old. But in the cinema I'm fifteen, twenty years old, I feel like I'm quite young, in full possession of my powers. And I'm starting to be able to see things and see what I'm doing. The last time I told a friend: 'I'm beginning to see in *Le Mépris* (*Contempt*) what isn't good, which shots are bad, etc.' and he said to me: 'Can you tell me which ones?' But I couldn't say. Today, however, thinking about it, I realise that it is moments in the shot and they weren't seen because they were part of the shot. When shots are shorter, you can see more easily that certain shots shouldn't have been made. But because there are so many of them, you don't see either, because they're carried along. It's like in a newspaper. If there was a single headline, you could see. But when there are sixty pages, you can't see what doesn't work perfectly well.

I'm beginning to understand a little about how talking film took the place of silent film, why you see, and this is important—I realise that a film like this, for example, is very similar. That's why, each time I show one of my own films, I always try to show a silent film beforehand, because people no longer know—even not very good silent filmmakers expressed themselves a little better, I think, simply because the film spoke in a different manner. Sometimes there were intertitles, some of which were seen as titles, but at the same time they existed in time, they had the same weight as a shot, so that the following shot could start all over again if you like. Today we saw that there was—it was like back then with silent film: there was a shot, and after the shot an intertitle, and then back to the shot or another shot. So what did the invention of the talking film consist

of? No one has ever said. I thought of it only two weeks ago. What did it consist of? Well, they removed a shot, they removed the shot where the intertitle is, where they put the intertitle, and put, side by side—meaning there were three shots and they removed one and made one shot out of the other two. They removed the shot with the intertitle. The intertitle shot was before the mouth and then afterwards the mouth did this [*opens and closes mouth silently to imitate silent film actors talking*]. That was silent film. And talking film consisted in simply letting a shot slip, and the mouth [*bouche*], like in real life, began to talk. But it was interesting, because silent cinema, before, could result [*déboucher*] in something, and I think the system was such that no one wanted to—it would have changed a lot of things to be able to see things. It would have changed, and I think this is the history we have to tell. This is the project Losique has offered to help with in his own way at the start: to recount this history, something that might have changed. The means of changing, or at least the means for seeing that change was possible. Because I believe that silent cinema would have changed things. This is my belief, you can say it's easy enough to say because it didn't continue, but it's my thesis and examples exist. In Russia, when they were changing things, why did Russia become what it became? It's not easy, to say because so-and-so was a baddie, or things like that. It's because of the things they did; now, what they did, they were carried away by the—in any event cinema – we can't see this elsewhere – cinema represented communication, it represented the future television. You can see that cinema, when Lenin – the soviets were launched this way – was one of the most important things for them. And if you were to study rather quickly, over three or four years, the evolution of two or three leaders, what happened, you could see that there was a world that might have changed and which didn't change.

And I think film, because it recorded that, retained traces of it. Today we can watch these traces; they're like a direction that would have ended—how? I don't know. Or would have truly begun how? I think that the history of cinema is like a child who may have learned something just a little bit different or who began to understand something different. If a child is born and absolutely refuses to say the words 'mommy' and 'daddy', you sense that this child will be different. And what do they do? They declare the child

abnormal. Well, silent cinema was declared abnormal by literature. That's my point of view. Later it was normalised by making it talk, and today it has great difficulty in becoming something.

This history, which is not long, perhaps sixty or a hundred years, say the entire twentieth century, is interesting because it contains clear visual traces. It is much more interesting than literature or anything else, because these traces resemble us, and seeing yourself is a little like watching—and doing film history is a little like watching a story—I think we'd all be interested in seeing the history—if, every time we looked in the mirror, man or woman, a little automatic thing took a photograph. And then at the end of the year we went to an office and there was a series of photographs showing each time we looked in the mirror. This would be an interesting history for people. They wouldn't entirely recognise themselves. The photo would have the date; I think there would be people who wouldn't simply see an exact copy of their face.

*I'm going to return to the question of titles. Did it bother you to have to watch the subtitles on your film?*

No, to follow—even though in general I don't really like subtitles. I prefer dubbing, but dubbing is so poorly done that in the end I end up liking subtitles more. But I think that dubbing is something that should be done well. My first films, *À bout de souffle* (*Breathless*) and *Le Petit Soldat*, were dubbed, meaning post-synchronised in their own language. Compared to the dubbing that went on at the time, when a film was post-synchronised in three or four days, *À bout de souffle* was a minor revolution. Like everything else, it was difficult, because I wanted to work on—it took twenty-five days to a month and I tried to really work on it. It's something I'd like to have the chance to do again on certain films. For example there's something about actors; it would be difficult, because they see themselves—it's not really fair, I don't think, because you should have the right, the possibility, which you don't have in Europe because of the concept of authorship and intellectual property. Actors think they possess intellectual property rights on their voice for example, and that you shouldn't dub them with another person's voice. This is something that's both true and false, but you should be able to discuss it depending on what you want to do. For example, what I would like to do in

a future film, what I might do, is to blend several voices for an actor to give them a completely new voice made out of five or six voices. To start with animals and to try also to succeed in having a man speak with a blend of animal voices and women's voices too, along with other men's voices, things like that. To try to combine them, but obviously that requires an awful lot of work, closer to music for example. But I think it has a lot of potential. On the shoot itself, you don't have time to restart the same piece of music 800 times if you don't restart the image the same way, and this is a good opportunity to break that up. And it should be something you do for each film, because if the story is real a character shouldn't necessarily have the same voice all the time. They could even have several different voices within the same film; some of them blended voices, some of them not. All that could be dominated by their own voice also. I think there are lots of things to be done, things you come up with only if you have a little time and a little freedom.

*What do you think of what Buñuel did in That Obscure Object of Desire . . .*

I didn't see it.

*Unlike Truffaut in Fahrenheit 451, who uses one actress for two parts, he uses two actresses for the same part who look somewhat alike and you only notice at the end of the film.*

In principle I think I would prefer that to the other way around. Several actors playing the same part seems to me a little more real than the reverse. Several people playing the same part—I don't know, when you go to the movies – and in life, and social life – when you go to the factory, there are several people playing the same part for the company you work for. So we all resemble one another. To use that as a starting point for—I don't think Buñuel has pushed things very far in that direction. But you should be able to make films with just one part and a thousand actors to play it.

*But making a film with many voices would make it a greatly shifting fictional work. I think in this film you didn't work very much in this vein of multiplying this vision.*

But I did a little. I began with fiction, which I have always treated in a very documentary manner. *Alphaville* is entirely a fiction film. It

even ends with 'I love you' and you hear violins playing and things like that. At the same time it's treated in a completely documentary manner. Nothing was hidden. We shot in Paris of the day, and to get to the outer lands not much was needed to make things go haywire. It's both very documentary and a complete fiction, like a graphic novel if you like. I like graphic novels quite a lot, often not enormously but quite a bit, often they have more imagination than a film because sometimes a hand and a pencil can be freer. Naturally you need talent. Since then I've leaned more towards television; I've tried to carry out more studies, more research, by which I mean investigations. I see myself as both a journalist and a novelist, if you like. Both a journalist and a musician, and rather than doing a little of both like in the beginning I gave it up because it was too difficult. I'd like to make films with a lot of money, today I can find a little, just a little, not a lot. Not huge sums, and I need even more than a big prod—so I'm out of the running from the start, because naturally the large sums of money would be to have time to explore. My dream would be to work like Pagnol or Chaplin, meaning to have my own studio. This is why Chaplin's films were so successful, apart from his talent. He made a film every six or seven years and had the time to do so, which is pretty much the normal time to make a film. Time to start over, to do a big scene, to make a mistake, to do something else and to find—with a lot of people too, not necessarily with just a few. In my case, in order to survive, I was always a little—I work in the corner of my garage or atelier, so naturally I make films with less. In this film, Alpha 60 was not a super computer or anything like that, it was a little three-dollar Philips fan, lit from below. [Laughs] On the other hand, we took the time to find someone with a voice, we found someone whose vocal cords had been operated on and who had learned how to speak again. Naturally you need time to do that: the time to find them and sometimes the time to have the idea, because ideas don't come just like that, they come from working. Today, I'd prefer to continue working in what I would call a kind of television, or something closer to journalism. But a journalism different from the way it is usually done, so once again I find myself alone, quite solitary, and I have to keep fighting, and in the end it becomes tiring. To base myself on what I learned in audiovisual journalism to make fiction once again but a little differently, a little

differently than this film, than the classical Hollywood films we see. A little differently, but then you need a lot of time, to compose like an orchestra or a painter.

*Where do you situate Alphaville in the overall scheme of your work?*

That I no longer remember. I haven't made a great many films—something that amazes me, I have a hard time, I've begun to mix them up. I haven't made that many, about twenty, and counting up to twenty is not a big deal. I read Raoul Walsh's memoirs, this is something I talk about, I think he made 1,200 or 1,300 films, and he said: 'I don't remember very well if that one was the 700th or the 900th'.<sup>2</sup> I have the sense of doing the same with twenty, meaning I no longer remember if it was the seventh or the eighth, and I feel like I'm speaking about 700 or 900. This film, I remember—but I no longer remember for example if it was made before *Pierrot le fou* or afterwards. It seems to me, since it's in black and white, that I must have made it before, because at a certain point—then again, *Masculin Féminin* is in black and white and it was made after *Pierrot le fou*, which is in colour. That I remember. I think this film has no importance in my oeuvre. I don't know, it was a little like making a western and a crime film in a way a little more controlled than *A bout de souffle*. It began with a producer asking me if I would make a film with Eddie Constantine, who had been a big star in French crime films before I began making films. Now he was in decline or was no longer making films, which didn't bother me at all. Rather than putting someone on a horse in a western, you put him in a car, have him arrive somewhere, and after that you fill in the gaps, you invent, you act out; that's how I see it. What interests me is not the place the film occupies in the history of cinema, but to use the position I had in this galaxy to try to see the history in which I was a drop of water, to see the flow of the river in which I was a drop of water. How the river flowed in a sense. And I, as that drop of water, have reasons for speaking about that river.

*If Alphaville is a western . . .*

It's just someone who has a very linear path. We pick him up at the beginning, we don't know who he is. He arrives and we learn things about him solely through the dialogue between the characters. In a western, *Rio Bravo*, someone arrives, he swings open the doors of a

saloon, he goes to the bar. I mean it's always like that, it's people—they play it by ear if you like. It's the same thing in *Alphaville*, there's nothing—he comes looking, he comes to carry out an investigation and then he leaves. He has difficulties carrying out his investigation. Every western is like that, or there's a sheriff who arrives somewhere, he's come to find a prisoner and take him away. And the film lasts the length of time it takes to find him, or the time it takes to take him away, or a little of both. It's the exact same thing here; he's a sheriff who comes from what they call the outer worlds, he arrives somewhere and then he leaves.

*Is it possible to see a connection between Faust and this afternoon's film? In your film, the acting is a little over the top. The characters are types rather than people.*

In *Alphaville*? Yes, I think so. Watching a little bit of *Faust* this morning, watching bits and pieces of it, it seemed to me that this comes more from—I think in part this comes from Eddie Constantine who is not a good actor in the way people use the term. He moves around like a block of granite, he's not at all an actor like Jannings. Anna Karina, on the other hand, was a Scandinavian actress and acted more like a silent film actress, with her entire body. She didn't act at all psychologically. She thought she acted psychologically, and I may have been wrong not to try to emphasise that. But I find that the way people act today, actors can't, you can't—that's what society wants. You can't say that they don't know how to act, but they no longer have the opportunity to know how. In general they're better when they start out than when they finish, or when they become super well-known. Because the better known they become, the less they act, and at that point you spend millions of dollars simply for the right to photograph them. Then these photographs are shown in movie theatres because that's how the system works. But if you compare the great—there are a few. For example it's strange how the big stars, in general the three or four famous stars in the United States today, like Travolta and Robert De Niro, are Italian. But I believe that actors, compared to silent film actors—you see this for example with extras. In the silent era, for a long time, until before the Second World War, minor actors were often better than the stars and gave a film its solidity. Today there are only extras. The true minor actors still working—because of a strange time warp, extras

act like the stars of the olden days. If you take an extra, someone who acts as an extra in movies as a profession, and you ask them to play a scene, they will play it exactly like Jannings in *Faust* for example. People call this 'acting very badly', but is it good, bad? I don't know. But today, I think that because films have dialogue, precisely, and the dialogue is this sort of dialogue, acting has taken a great step backwards and atrophied. I believe there are few actors who free themselves and use this freedom to assist or participate in the directing or the dialogue. In film, the filmmaker works with the author of the dialogue a little at the beginning, or the scriptwriter, but the script is never written with the actors. It's only once the script is finished, like God made the Bible and afterwards said: 'All right, I'm going to give this part to Moses, this part to so-and-so, this part to someone else'. That's how films are made. It's a bible; it's laying down the law—who are the strongest.

That's something that upsets me a lot, so much so that I'm quite willing to talk about things like that, but it's not really spoken, it's—a true history of cinema should be able to show a moment in the history of the human body in its social form. [Long pause] Are there more . . . Do you want to know anything else? Are there one or two things you'd like to know? [Long pause]

In the end I realise—I'm beginning to become interested in what I come here to do from time to time. I've realised what it is you need but which is not possible, because I have to do it, and I'll do it only over the next three years. Then I'll screen for you—you won't be here anymore, but for those who replace you, I'll be able to tell the people who replace you that they're seeing what you didn't have a chance to see, because I had to do it. Meaning that instead of talking like today what's needed is to be able—and Serge and I realised this was not possible, so I had to start from the very beginning. We ought to have projected a piece of film, so first I had to find it; we ought to have begun by projecting the fact that I searched for this piece of film, by projecting a bunch of little bits and pieces, by explaining how I found them, saying: 'I looked in this direction'. Then, suddenly, but with and in front of you, like in an experiment, realise that this little piece here is interesting, and then you link it to another piece and make a little piece of history. But to do this you need to

have films, you need the means to project them and to work with them. And you need the intellectual means to do all this. In the end, the history of cinema you make will be a trace, like a regret that it isn't even possible to make the history of cinema. But you'll see traces of that history.

*What about the work of someone like Georges Sadoul?*

But that's the work of a scholar. It's like the discoveries of Einstein or the discoveries of Heisenberg or I don't know who. When scholars or researchers—and Sadoul searched, and when he searched he did things, he saw things. Then as soon as he began to relate what he had seen, given what relating and literature have become today, or the act of writing if you like—you can't relate what you have seen, you can only tell it, and that has no connection with seeing. When Einstein compared things, when he related it afterwards it no longer had any connection to what he had seen. This is true because all great discoveries take an enormous amount of time because you see right away—Copernicus or Galileo, he saw right away that the Earth [sic] did not turn. He saw this right away and then he had to relate it. But because he related it and other people didn't see it, they didn't believe him. Or other people saw it but didn't want to say so, in which case there would have been no problem, it would have been done right away. It took at least 200 years for people—it took 200 years for a text to be written, for a text to be recorded in the body and in the relations among all our social bodies. It takes at least a hundred years. Even to make a baby, which happens more quickly, it takes a woman nine months to receive a message and to create other living matter out of it. It's because there are lots of them that this goes fairly quickly. But a major discovery has always taken a long time because it is written down—and the time needed to translate it, and to understand the translation, which in the end has no connection with what was done, so that afterwards it is even applied differently. You can't even benefit from a major discovery. That's what happens. If it took time and we benefited—but we can't benefit because the benefits come 150 years later, and after 150 years there no longer any connection with what happened before.

Today, after twenty years of cinema and fifty years of existence, I think that if a Third World country or a country like Cuba had been

smart, they would never have taught people to read and write. Naturally I would be interested in doing a film on a country—but I don't think that's possible now. It may have been possible, and Cuba had a fantastic opportunity because it's an island. Cuba could have because it is on an island. Cambodia can't; it would like to, but it can't, and that's why it's so bloody there. They would like—they had a vague idea like that, but they aren't able. And since there is a very profound idea that can't be implemented, you end up with a kind of terror or a powerful force. Cuba could have done it peacefully because they're on an island. They were Robinson Crusoes, ten million Robinson Crusoes. They could have done it, and what's more people wanted nothing better than to be Robinson Crusoes. Alas, they sweated blood and tears to try to do away with what separated them from others. Now they find themselves—they're committing exactly the same stupidities as the others. They have to. Once you have the Tablets of the Law, and Cecil B. DeMille directing it for you on top of that, well . . .

I think there is an interesting film to be made: to try to find a place where people didn't learn to read or write and after twenty years see—I think this is no longer possible today because communication is going everywhere. It was possible when—by communication I mean simply telephones, tourism, things like that. Tourism is a means of communication; you should see how it communicates. I've often spent my holidays in Tunisia. Well, after twenty years and three million Germans visiting the country every year, Tunisia no longer exists. It's been completely massacred. In Tunisia, for example, when you go to the south of Tunisia—it's the same thing when you go to a Mexican hotel, nothing is in Spanish, it's all in English. In Tunisia you can't even find a French or English newspaper, there are only German papers. So how is a landscape devastated? I mean that communication—a country could no longer live and say—there would just be a decree, they'd say: 'No more alphabet for a time, we're going to watch, we're going to try not to'—I don't know how that would happen today. But I believe in this. I like to make films, but you can see the harm. Sometimes I also argue with friends. When I come back from a trip, my friend says to me: 'Can you tell me what you did?' And I feel really picked on to have to say 'I saw this, I did that'. Meaning having to create a text that has some

connection, but it really has no connection to the bits of images and sounds that I saw. They may need a text at some point, but not only a text. They need moments like in a silent movie, where there were bits of text between two shots, so that even in a bad film the way the camera was used appears to me to have been a bit more lively than today. Today it's difficult; either you do like we do and put too much text, or you don't put enough, or you don't know what to do.

*Do you see a role for film criticism?*

Film criticism should make films and above all not critique, or critique by making films. Our strength, when we did criticism, was that it wasn't criticism. We were filmmakers talking about other films. Very often we didn't really know what to say about the film; if we didn't like it, all we could do—we couldn't say: 'It's bad, this pan is bad'. We had to name the person who did it by name, as a physical and moral being, and try to harm this person so that they realised we were speaking ill of their film. If you tell me, if you base yourself solely on my film and don't refer to me too—even if you attack me a great deal the film should be able to account for itself. If not, I would quickly show the filmmaker that in fact what they were saying was bad, or really good, or something like that. They had to make a connection between themselves and the film, and between me and the film. I don't know how one can be a film critic the same way one is a music critic. A music critic yes, a painting critic. You put two paintings, take a photograph, you put two paintings, three, four, a half, and make a connection and use the alphabet too if you like. This is what a few critics do. Not many: Élie Faure a little in France, and Malraux a little afterwards, I don't think there are any others. In fact the novelty of Malraux in art history – he was very successful – was simply that he put in a lot of photographs. You could at least see what he was talking about. With film [criticism], you can't see.

Film criticism is film programs: 'Today at the Imperial from two o'clock to four o'clock a film with Steve McQueen'. That's film criticism. Or at least that says something; we know where to go to see it. The rest is literature, it's something else. When we made the New Wave, we were people who talked about films because we couldn't

make them. We weren't sad, because we were just starting out. I think that's it: I didn't see myself as a film critic. I saw myself as someone who talked about a film because he wanted to make one, and talking about a film was already making one. It was a way of being in cinema. It was the same thing when I worked for two years in the publicity department of Fox in Paris. It was a way of being in Hollywood. Since Hollywood has always been like that, it may have spared me the desire to go there, because I spent two years in Hollywood: Hollywood in Paris, at Fox.

*I find it very strange that you speak ill of literature because in your films there are often phrases from books, we see books. I find it odd that you appear to be attacking literature and are trying to diminish its role in cinema.*

Yes, I put in too much, and it was not so much books, it was more like ideas, and today I regret that these ideas appear only in the form of books. Because I was incapable of having a thought I used another person's thought, but I also put in a lot—posters and other things as much as books. It was a form of thought, or of poetry. Today I find it too literary. In *Alphaville* I would have preferred to be able to put in my own. This is not to deny written texts, but just the same it was a moment between two images—it was also a way of finding the respiration that a text can contribute, but independently of the face. To see '*Capitale de la douleur*' and then to see a face looking, which just the same is a montage effect—to believe in the text like a painter or illustrator, or someone who draws. If I drew there would be a lot of drawings. That's something I regret, to have forgotten—I knew how to draw a little, but I didn't keep it up, today I don't feel up to it but I would really like to know how to draw. Not cleverly like an untalented illustrator of a graphic novel but to draw correctly, to be able to draw something. I think I would use it a lot in films.

*Or paint?*

Paint or draw. It's like in television or in video; there are instruments [*reaches out to imaginary knobs in front of him*] which let you draw on screen. These could be improved. Or writing could again play a real role and not just be a trace ~ I'm not sure how to say it — almost of policing, in the sense that it controls you too much.

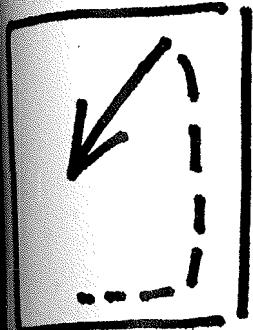




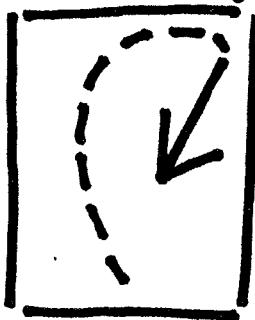




Muran



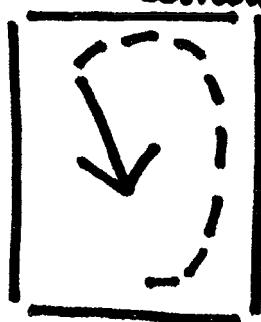
Cage



Cocteau



Renoir



le désir  
du destin  
la contre-plongée  
la capitale comme désir de  
la douleur  
capitales de l'imprimerie



*To return to this question of film criticism, from the point of view of a viewer seeing a film, it seems to me that saying 'you shouldn't write criticism, you should make a film' is to say in the end that you can't exercise film criticism. Criticism is a form of communication that costs nothing and is very important to viewers who want to understand the film's project.*

Yes, I agree, but . . .

*I don't see how we can say that to do criticism you have to make a film, I don't see how the viewer . . .*

No, not make a film, but for those who really want to, those who really need, I don't know—criticism in the sense of analysis if you will. Because three-quarters of the people who go see a film—this is precisely what is interesting about cinema. Books, music and paintings were taken up as intellectual creation to such an extent by the bourgeoisie or the intellectual nobility that if you show a painting to a worker, they won't dare say much. Maybe that's Europe; in North America people think more freely in this sense, but in Europe they won't dare say, if you show them a painting, no matter who, a famous painter, even if they don't know they won't dare say whether it's good or bad. They will never say: 'I don't like it very much'. They'll say: 'I'm no judge'; they'll say instead: 'I'm no judge'. If you show them a painting by Picasso, if you have them listen to Stravinsky—and I've noticed, I don't work in music, I also tend to say: 'I'm no judge'. With people who like jazz, for example, three-quarters of the time I don't dare say anything bad. I say: 'Oh, I'm no judge'. I'm afraid to tell them I find it stupid, or no good or something like that. I myself say: 'Oh, I'm no judge'. But I think with film, precisely, which is very popular, and television too, no one is afraid. Here people can judge. No one hesitates to say: 'Oh yeah, that guy'; or 'Greta Garbo, she's a

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Illustration page 143:  
the desire  
of destiny  
the low-angle shot  
capital as the desire of suffering  
capitals of impressing

fantastic actress'. People aren't afraid to say that at all. So there must be something to it, that's what I mean. It's not criticism, people can talk about it. But those who make a profession of criticism, journalism—I criticise them just as much when they write an article on Vietnam or something like that. There is almost no analysis; there is a kind of expression of their own ideas, their own desires, their own problems. Everything that they don't know how to relate very well and which is quite apparent in music criticism and film criticism, which are very far removed from the object they are talking about.

Even an ad for a car or a washing machine speaks better about the washing machine, even though it does so solely in a laudatory manner. But it's close to its subject, while film criticism or what is done in universities when they teach cinema is very far from its subject. People have completely forgotten — they don't realise except, unconsciously, the viewer — that cinema is a place where, when you make it, you move around a lot, your body moves around a lot. More than a worker on an assembly line or a secretary in a bank. Directing something or being directed and photographed—even an amateur, you only have to watch a Japanese tourist taking a picture of a street in Montreal, if you broke down all his movements, he moves about like a madman just to take a little shot of the street or something like that. And when you do criticism, it's only this, [makes quick, nervous writing motion in the air with his hand] it's the army; it's the 14th of July parachutists marching in a circle,<sup>3</sup> in columns. I don't know how many columns there are on a page; and ideas, given what they are in literature and novels it's possible, they're words talking about words. In *Alphaville*, what's annoying is that there are words talking about images, and images aren't made for that. Images can refer to themselves, they can go outside of themselves, they can enter into themselves, but at that point you have to make photos. I feel very alone in cinema because I have never been able to find, apart from one or two people in the beginning—but that's a social difficulty, even when you're on the same side you have . . . it's difficult to agree. I've never found anyone who, in order to write, to hold a pencil, needs a camera. At a minimum. That's how I'd express it. Or who, to take a photograph, needs a pencil to write the caption. Don't forget that a pencil also has an eraser. In other words, someone who needs an eraser in order to take a photograph. An eraser

because the eraser is the other part of a pencil. That's cinema and television—let's say audiovisual media, to employ a fashionable term. Or information, a word I prefer, which I don't use the same way as computer people [*informaticiens*].

*Have you seen Wim Wenders' films?*

I've seen one or two. I find there are good—the photography's all right, but afterwards, precisely, he doesn't hold the—the pencil has no connection to the photography. And he tells stories, so there are a lot of things which come, I don't know, from his cinematographer, who takes nice shots, it's true. But my impression is that Wenders doesn't look at them for very long, and that if he looked at them longer the next shot would take into account the shot he did before. But the following shot is a shot that was decided by the writing at the stage of deciding to make a film. Whereas in Hitchcock, for example, you don't see this. He knew—Hitchcock for me is a very great, well I have to say it, a great filmmaker, he's someone who, in the five or six great films he made, accomplished a lot because he knew how to prepare a script out of a few images he saw in the countryside. He saw a windmill, he saw someone who—and then he said: 'Let's see, the blades of the windmill stop. What will that mean? Ah, that will be a signal from someone hiding there who's sending a signal'.<sup>4</sup> And then he began to find a story, and this story, well, he couldn't invent it, that's fine, but perhaps at that point he bought the rights to a novel which helped him to find a story and then he made a shot after the first shot that he saw one day or something like that . . . [Break in tape]

When you watch a film or television, you see only what you want to see. If you have children, ask them to tell you about a TV program they've watched, or a film. You'll see that they tell it in a way completely different from the film script as it was handed in at Fox or Columbia. We too, when we tell someone about a film we've seen, we recount bits and pieces. Come to think of it, we see it in bits and pieces. There are pieces we see 100% of, there are pieces we're inside of, there are moments when we're outside, or alongside, which is normal. And filmmakers today, in my opinion, no longer have this possibility, or if they do they don't really have the possibility of applying it. But they don't even realise it. They make films without

seeing them, one might say, because they have read them beforehand and so they follow the script. It doesn't matter how the script was written, that's not the point. They no longer see what they're doing. Sometimes they don't even realise that they no longer have any idea when they have to cut a shot or when they shouldn't. Besides, that has no importance, the editor does that according to the system in place and it has nothing to do with it. This is something I sense very strongly today and which I don't sense in silent cinema, even in so-called bad silent films.

JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD: [Inaudible]

No, no, that's not true. It's not true because you would really have to carry out an investigation, and it would take seven or eight hours to find. What I mean is, I think even a film like *Alice in the Cities*, when he made it, he took a shot. Once this shot was made, no one looked at it to know what to shoot next. That's just not done today. People know what shot they're going to do next. Mack Sennett didn't know which shot he was going to do next, which was normal, cinema was just beginning. Neither did Chaplin. Me, not in the same way. That's what I mean. If we followed a film shoot, what would interest me – and this would be film criticism, it's not saying whether it is good or bad – would be to say how it is that people found it good, bad or interesting for their own purposes. But I don't see any critics—and if I did criticism I'd have to stop making films to follow a film shoot or relate the history of cinema, but I think that a good article for *Cahiers du Cinéma* or *Sight and Sound*, something like that, would be to decide to send their people to do that. If I was editor in chief today of *Cahiers* or of the cinema page of the *New York Times*, after this discussion we've just had, I'd say: 'All right, Wim Wenders' next film, we're going to take a good look'. I don't think this is how it's done, and if you examine it afterwards, honestly, you see that they assign a greater role to literature. This doesn't mean that they don't watch their rushes, that's not what I mean; it's that they don't have a profound desire, or there remains nothing of this profound desire to see the rushes in order to know what to do the next day. It would force a change in the economics of cinema from top to bottom. And, given the economic system that cinema is in, the economic system dictates the law.

But how does one dictate the law? By writing it down. When it states on your passport: 'Forbidden to enter Russia', it's not an image that does that. How would an image do that? Images don't do that, because images are freedom and words are prison. An image is necessarily freedom. It doesn't forbid anything; it doesn't permit anything because it's an ensemble of other things. You can say 'you must' or 'you must not' with a gesture [*clutches at his throat*] and then with the memory of this gesture. I don't think the memory of this gesture is on your passport. We could say that if cinema had any influence today 'Not Allowed in Russia' would have the word 'Russia' and a hand doing this [*clutches his throat*] and then the word 'Soviet'. Then there would be your photo, and the Russian agent would know that this means you don't have the right to enter Russia. But there isn't this, there are words. It's written: 'This citizen is undesirable'. No photograph expresses this 'undesirable'. That's what I mean, that words became—after all, the alphabet is two or three thousand years old, at one time it hadn't been invented. Today it is overused and it is a particularly interesting time because there are images which retain the trace of the time when it hadn't been invented and which were subjugated by those . . .

And listen, I've lived and fought for twenty years in cinema, I've experienced this phenomenon. It's caused problems for me in my relationships with people, even my most intimate ones, and that's something I see. I see very well how the talking film came along. There was a shot that had fallen between two others. Where did this shot go and how was this gap filled? So they eliminated something. When you know how to replace it, that's fine, but it has fallen into this gap—which is memory. A moment ago you had the example of Wim Wenders, it was a good choice. For me, he doesn't hold a candle to Hitchcock. Because he knows how to create a shot but he doesn't know how to create two. The film studio knows how to make two, society knows how to make two for him, but because he knows how to make a shot we forget. For me, every four shots by Wim Wenders I say: 'That's one good shot!' And after half an hour I'm even more bored than I am with someone else. I'd rather go see a film by [*inaudible*]. Because there at least—in Wenders you have a sense of subterfuge. You sense that he doesn't realise how he's manipulated, how his own talent has been depreciated.

It's like the way women's sports are filmed on television. It's quite clear during the Olympics, you see women for less time. You sense quite well on television that the crew doesn't like filming them. When it's the finals it's interesting, when it's the star at the end too, but when it's the little people you miss out. But that's television. In cinema, the people who make films, the technicians, don't realise something. And that is that television is 500,000 people just like them at the same moment. And at a certain point quantity—an authority said this, Stalin said this, quantity is a little stronger than quality,<sup>5</sup> and he knew what he was talking about. But someone like Wim Wenders, when he shoots in a studio in Frankfurt, he doesn't consider that all the dozens of multiples of twenty-four hours, all the television stations in the world – I'm not even talking here about films – play a role in his way of being in the world, the moment he's in when making images like that. And that has a certain weight.

On the one hand it's that and on the other I never tire of saying [inaudible] I never did that. Unconsciously, as soon as I started work on a film—and today I try to establish this as a small craft industry. To be in the process of making shoes is to know how to contribute to repairing them. To be in the process of making films all the time, whether here—for me this is making cinema, it's a beginning, that's why I try to see a little of the film, to talk, so that words aren't like that. I'd like it to happen a little differently but I can't. I'm always in the process of making a film, one way or another, always in the process of producing something that—because the people who make films, in general they shoot a film and then for eight months they don't shoot. They see a few films, they talk about film, but they no longer have any contact with what it is to take a picture. Then a year later they pick up a camera again, which they don't even own, because they feel they don't have to. So for a year they don't make a film. Yet they think they know—which to me is an extraordinary inadequacy and arrogance. The camera comes along eight months later, they haven't laid eyes on one for eight months, they think they know how to make an image enter and leave. Anyone who hasn't driven a car for eight months, they take at least three minutes; the same thing for a bicycle; for an airplane it's even longer. A mother who hasn't cooked for a year will feel like she isn't putting in the right quantities. Whereas a filmmaker . . .

It's all rather strange. I've thought about this and talked about it with my cinematographer and I realised that, unconsciously, once I had made a film back then I always wanted to start another one as quickly as possible, no matter where [inaudible]. Something else right away, meaning that I often made two films per year, which is far too many and too tiring. Later I realised that I should work longer, more calmly, to make a film every five years. But to always be in film, always be thinking about film, buying a lens [inaudible]. Otherwise I don't see how you can pretend to know how if you haven't used a camera for three months. It's obvious. But because it's the local specialist who does it, Wim Wenders doesn't realise. And if you don't tell him—this is the kind of criticism that could be useful.

JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD: [Inaudible]

He has more talent than a lot of people, there's no doubt. Often I think it is better to attack people with more talent because they see things better. I couldn't tell you that about a film with Alain Delon, it's not so clear. People aren't interested in you the same way, whereas in this case you can see what I mean.

[Inaudible]

It's a Chris Marker film? No, I haven't seen it.

[Inaudible]

But Chris Marker is someone I respect.

Tomorrow, then, we'll show shorter excerpts. I think there are three. Because the film is *La Femme mariée* (*A Married Woman*) I've chosen excerpts, a little excerpt from Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*, which is a film that probably everyone has seen so no one will come. But no one has seen *Nanook* just before a little piece of *The Flowers of St Francis* by Rossellini, and no one has seen them one after the other, and then *La Femme mariée*. No one has ever seen that. At least that's what we can say.

Friday 9 June 1978

## Notes

1. In the French edition of these talks, *Beauty and the Beast* and *Rancho Notorious* were listed out of chronological order in the chapter heading. Whether this was an error in preparing the French edition, a deliberate change on Godard's part or the way the films were actually screened is unclear. Perhaps something was said to explain this anomaly during the long discussion at the beginning of the session which was not recorded. In the absence of any indication that the films were screened in any order other than that indicated in the French edition, that order has been retained here.
2. Raoul Walsh, *Each Man in His Own Time: The Life Story of a Director* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974). A French translation was published in 1976. No such expression of confusion around the chronology of his films appears in the book.
3. 14 July is the French national holiday, complete with military parades.
4. The reference is to *Foreign Correspondent*.
5. The quotation 'quantity has a quality all its own' is often attributed to Joseph Stalin but has not been documented.

# Fragments

3

## *Une Femme mariée*

2

*Nanook of the North*

Robert Flaherty (U.S.A., 1922)

*The Flowers of St Francis* (*Francesco, giullare di Dio*)

Roberto Rossellini (Italy, 1950)

*Persona*

Ingmar Bergman (Sweden, 1966)

*Une Femme mariée: Fragments d'un film tourné en 1964*

(*A Married Woman*)

Jean-Luc Godard (France, 1964)

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SERGE LOSIQUE: For those of you who weren't here, this morning we saw excerpts from *Nanook of the North*, then Rossellini's *The Flowers of St Francis* and finally *Persona* by Bergman. Then we screened in its entirety the film *Une Femme mariée* by Jean-Luc Godard. So if you have any questions . . . Perhaps I could begin, because there is something that really struck me today. In the excerpt we chose from Bergman's *Persona*, there are a lot of close-ups of hands, he plays a lot with a person's hands, and then Jean-Luc Godard's film opens, precisely, on the man's and woman's hands, isn't that so? Was this intended, did you study beforehand, did Bergman's film indirectly influence you with this problem of women in general, or . . . that's the question.

JEAN-LUC GODARD: No, I chose Bergman—I'd never seen *Persona*, and in fact I made a mistake because when I asked for *Persona*, I was thinking of an excerpt from *The Silence*. I don't know film history very well and I thought the real title of *The Silence* was *Persona*. That's why I said *Persona*, but I was thinking of *The Silence*.<sup>1</sup> But what you tell me proves that for once I had the right idea, that we had to show Bergman. In my life, or my life as a filmmaker at any rate,

Bergman was an enormous influence. And, at the time of *La Femme mariée*, as a man more or less labelled a misogynist—in any event who placed a lot of emphasis on women's characters, like Bergman. I remember that in France the New Wave, actually before it existed as the New Wave, we might say, not launched Bergman, but brought him to prominence. I remember that we were the first to say good things about *Monika* and another film afterwards that was called . . . oh, I've forgotten the titles, there were two or three films like that before Bergman obtained his great reputation. So with respect to *Une Femme mariée*, or *La Femme mariée*,<sup>2</sup> I wanted to show someone who had influenced me in turning a woman into a character, into a heroine like in Hollywood. A heroine like a character in a western, which treated women like characters. In psychological westerns it was a necessity. So what you said is additional proof, I'm not at all surprised that he would have the same practical images that I did. In fact *Persona* is a film that came after *La Femme mariée*.

*And why Nanook?*

*Why do you think?*

*Unfortunately I didn't see the film, I arrived late. With Persona it's easy to make the connection, but with Nanook . . .*

The easiest thing is that Nanook is an Eskimo<sup>3</sup> who fishes, and then afterwards if you show *La Femme mariée* you can say: 'Look, I don't see the connection between an Eskimo and a married woman, or between a fish and a married woman. We could say that a woman is caught in the bonds of marriage like a fish in a net. But that's a fairly literary connection. Not really a connection, or the connection we were talking about—showing hands playing with each other is a fairly facile connection. What I would like to do—I always try to make the first film I show define the ensemble. It's the heading of the day's screenings, and I use a silent film to show that silent cinema invented something. Then I show what became of it and I stop where I passed through what became of it. So in this case it was to talk about the documentary and more simply the way of looking that is called documentary, which is something that didn't exist in literature or painting.

In painting, no one says: 'Velázquez made a few documentary works when he painted the lower classes'—not Velázquez because he rarely

painted the lower classes; another painter, Bruegel for example. When he painted no one said: 'Velázquez is a fiction painter because he painted kings and princesses'; they didn't make that distinction. In music there is no distinction. No one says: 'Rock is documentary and Johann Sebastian Bach is fiction'; no one says that. I don't know how it happened in film, and people have the impression they know what it means to say 'documentary' and 'fiction'. In fact I believe they are two different moments and I can see a little but it's not that simple. At what moment is a worker's gesture documentary and at what moment is it fiction? When is the gesture of a mother with her child or of a woman with her lover a document and when is it fiction? They say it's a document if, at the moment you shot the film, the person really said that. Meaning that you didn't make them say it, the filmmaker didn't make them say it. But when a child says 'mommy' to its mother, maybe the mother had the child say it, so at that moment the mother is the filmmaker. And it's society, we could say that it's the production society<sup>4</sup> that produced all that.

It was in order to think about all that that I was always very sensitive to—I remember a phrase that served me as a guide for a long time, when you take up slogans like that. It was a phrase of Lubitsch's, who was seen as a psychological filmmaker, who made only psychological dramas and comedies. Lubitsch said: 'Start with filming mountains. When you know how to film mountains, you'll know how to film people'.<sup>5</sup> And I think there's something to this. When you know how to model mountains, model people. You see in China for example, Mao Zedong, China was transformed when they had to model people, they also had to model the landscape to change people's relations: dig canals, throw the landscape into upheaval. So *Nanook*, I think, was a sense of filming a drama and filming the time of documentary, which is not exactly the same as the time of fiction. And this time has to be returned to fiction a little. So for me a film, whether *Nanook* or—it's a documentary quality, a fragmented quality of reality with a degree of dramatisation. In *Nanook* it's the drama of eating; in *The Flowers of St Francis* the drama of—while remaining thoroughly documentary. And, to my mind, Bergman introduced something to psychology: to be quite documentary. Meaning that he looked at women – because he loved them – he looked at them like, I don't know, like a scientist, a little

like the way a zoologist looks at the animal they're studying. There was a quite documentary quality, he expressed himself through impressions he had already received. And *La Femme mariée*, if you like, kind of highlighted that, because I come right out at the beginning of the film and say that these are fragments of a film shot in such-and-such a year and are shown as such. All the films we showed today could have had this kind of title, whereas certain American films, I think, or other films of mine, wouldn't have this kind of title. This is why, in my opinion, *Nanook* fully belongs in this group. I don't see any difference between *Nanook the Eskimo*,<sup>6</sup> Eskimo being the adjective describing *Nanook*, and the married woman, married being the adjective describing the woman.

*When can we say that a fiction film has a documentary quality? Is it the way in which it looks at the subject which determines that fiction begins to make . . .*

But fiction is an interesting question that can't be answered like that, I think. What I find more and more difficult here, because I'm missing the pieces of evidence—because universities aren't made for learning. For their own reasons, they're made to make people think they're learning, which is a complete mystery. I'm quite happy to come to a university if they pay me to speak, but if I'm not paid, never in my life. So it's very difficult. You'd have to be able to take a shot—the real work, you'd have to be able to take a shot of *Nanook* for example, then you'd take a shot from any film and when the excerpt was isolated like that, what would be interesting—there would be various ways of answering this question, I've thought about it. You take a shot from *Vertigo* for example, or a film like that, a real fiction film having no connection to documentary, something completely dreamt up. But if we project it for you all of a sudden—bam, you show up, ten o'clock in the morning, we show you a section, you arrive in the middle of, let's say *Vertigo*, you see Kim Novak walking down the street. A woman walking down the street. First of all, it takes you two or three seconds to realise you're in a film, to recognise Kim Novak if you're a cinephile. These three or four seconds, if we tried to break them down and film you for example with a little video camera watching Kim Novak, and if we could watch this afterwards, we'd say—I don't know, if we knew

how to film there should be on your face, the moment the fiction arrived—meaning that Kim Novak would no longer be someone making us ask ourselves if she's a housewife going to pick up her kid at school or a secretary carrying a document from her boss to another boss or something like that. We'd say no, it's Kim Novak, and there was this before and that afterwards, and there is fiction. But what is fiction? I think it's the moment when the document or piece of evidence—it's the moment of communication, the moment when you can receive the piece of evidence. Because otherwise it's just a piece of evidence we don't look at. If we look at it, there's fiction.

It's looking that creates fiction and we realise this after a while; otherwise it remains a piece of evidence in a police file. There are hundreds of photos, your photo in police files or computers. So it's a piece of evidence, and the moment the police look at it and while looking at it say: 'Hey mister, was it you who killed your mother in such-and-such a place at such-and-such a time?' there is fiction, a fiction that is true if you killed your mother, or untrue, or another act, an act of political activism or something else. At that point fiction is looking, and the text is the expression of this looking, the caption to this looking. That's how I would answer your question. Fiction is the expression of the document and the document is the impression. And in a recent television series, I hope you'll be able to see it, I'll bring it to show you in the fall if I can sell it to the CBC, there are two moments when impression and expression are separated and become two moments of the same thing. I would say that impression is the document, but when this document expresses itself or when we need to look at it, at that point we are expressing ourselves. And that's fiction, but fiction is just as real as documentary, it's another moment of reality.

JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD: . . . A Grin without a Cat. What surprised me about this film is that it gives the distinct impression that no document of May 1968 exists, that nothing was shot. One gets the impression that Marker was desperately trying to find things . . . and the result is extremely poor. In fact I have the impression that for this film he could have thought of putting in films that were shot around 68. They too would have been documents . . . We're getting all mixed up by categories. Meaning that we look at something . . . We say: 'This is fiction, that's

a document', when in fact there is no true . . . Sometimes documents are fiction, but there shouldn't be any fixed boundaries. In fact we could make documents speak using fiction quite well, because elsewhere we have managed to make fiction out of documents.

Yes, I agree completely. In France in particular, it would have been interesting to show, because it was the only place where everything came to a halt—the railroads, gas stations, schools, insurance companies, everything stopped. There is only one thing that didn't come to a halt – where the strikers, including strikers from the CGT,<sup>7</sup> asked for a pay increase and obtained it in four seconds – there was only one place, and it wasn't film production. It was film distribution, movie theatres. That was the only thing that didn't come to a halt in May 68 in France. Including the films of Claude Berri and François Truffaut, who said at Cannes that the production of films had to be stopped. But their films were released then in Paris.

JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD: That's when Chris Marker . . .

So what would be interesting in Chris Marker's film would be to talk, not about the films that were produced, because that came to a halt too, film shoots were stopped. I remember I went to London to shoot *One plus One* at that moment, people said I was a scab because I didn't obey the union's directive. But what was funny was precisely the fact that movie theatres were the only thing that didn't shut down. And when you look at the history of 1917, during the great periods of revolution in Russia or Germany at the end [sic] of the Weimar republic, one of the few things to keep going were movie theatres there too. So in Chris Marker's film, precisely, as a film on May 68, it's not that it was shot, because very few were shot, and what was shot wasn't necessarily connected to 1968. On the other hand, what was deeply connected to May 68 were the films that were screened during this time. That's more revealing. But I don't know if this was shown in the film or talked about in the film.

SERGE LOSIQUE: You're thinking of which film, Jean, the last one he showed?

JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD: *A Grin without a Cat*.

SERGE LOSIQUE: Ah yes, he presented that, I was away. He presented it at the Outremont theatre, I think. Was he there himself?

JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD: No.

SERGE LOSIQUE: Because they said he would be there. In any event, I'd like to know, since you've started in on documentary, I wonder whether a documentary doesn't make fiction a little. Because a documentary, take for example a demonstration, it's always intrigued me, I have even had demonstrations here. And there is a filmmaker making a documentary on the brawls between students and the Montreal police. Or take the case ten years ago of the St Jean Baptiste day celebrations. I was in the street with millions of other people, I saw people making love on the grass, you weren't even aware that something was going on between the Bourgault group and Pierre Trudeau. Yet all you saw on television was that. They didn't show the whole celebration. So I find that documentary is always like that, it's terribly limited.

It's limited because documentary today, especially where television exists—if *Nanook* were made today, it should be shown on television. But how? It shouldn't be shown as a *Flaherty* film, as a masterpiece or whatever. It should be shown as a document for those who want to learn how to fish. You show it and then maybe the next day you show the follow-up—not a documentary on *Nanook* but the equivalent in another profession or another field. That's when documentary becomes fiction again. And *Flaherty* is seen as a great filmmaker even though he made five films. But what's sad is that there should be, given that there are twenty-four hours of television, television has the opportunity, or filmmakers have the opportunity to make those films for television. The real films on May 68 should have been shown on television. My view today is that very often a film is bad not because it's bad in itself but because it is shown in a place where it can't be seen. And that's bad for your health; I don't know how to say it. Bread can be bad, not because it's poorly made; it's the sum of being poorly made plus the fact that you eat it. And the fact that it's poorly made means that you eat poorly and become sick. Films or things, it's all the same.

Three-quarters of films—recently in France I saw a film called *Rape of Love*, for example, which I consider bad because it wasn't seen on television. It wasn't made to be seen on television because if it had been made to be seen on television the girl who made it wouldn't have been able to make it like that, she would have been forced to think that she—in cinema you don't think about the audience in the

same way; you don't think about it at all. In television, at least you're forced, depending on the channel where you show your work, if it's shown at ten o'clock at night or at noon you know that it will be seen at least, it's already a little clearer. You see a certain category of people, a certain number, and at that point you say: 'I can do this', or 'I can't do that'. Moreover it's not you who says this; it's the network boss who tells you: 'Old chap, if you do that, it won't be shown'. It's not open to discussion, whereas in cinema today everything goes. Before nothing went: my film *La Femme mariée*—I remember the absolutely incredible discussions I had with the man who's the minister of justice in France today, his name is Peyrefitte. Before that he was minister of information and later was minister of education in May 68 and made a fortune on the backs of the Chinese by publishing a book called *La Chine s'éveille*.<sup>8</sup> I remember our absolutely incredible discussions about *La Femme m*—first of all, it was called *La Femme mariée*, they demanded that it be called *Une Femme mariée*. There is nothing particularly special about this film when you see it today, but to get it passed I remember that I had to ask Mr Malraux, who was the senior minister responsible, if he could help, because it had been purely and simply banned. Why? I have absolutely no idea. There were all kinds of discussions. At one point they said that I couldn't put a hand and a foot like that [places his hand on his foot] because people might think . . . [Shrugs]

SERGE LOSIQUE: *It's a sin.*

JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD: [Inaudible]

Yes, but today they let—at the time television didn't exist, or not like that, but now they let you do anything in cinema. They let you do anything in cinema because you can't do much on television, and since you can't do much on television, filmmakers have absolutely no idea that the freedom they are given in cinema—they don't even know how to take advantage of it because they are atrophied, if you will, by the dominant system of visual thinking, which is the system of television, where the number of hours of images each day is infinitely greater than the hour and a half of film they make once a year. And when you make a film, even though you have every freedom, you are in a place where you don't know how to use it. I mean, economic and historical conditions have a kind of truth. It's not a question of being a genius or not being a genius, of having ideas or not.









Ideas don't fall from the sky, you have to find them. To find them, you need work. If this work doesn't exist, you don't have ideas. In our history of cinema, we'll be able to date the arrival of the kind of film known, systematically and industrially, as the pornographic film. There is always a boundary, whether above or below the belt, but not a bit of both. The pornographic film, however, is cinema below the belt, but this is the fault of people who film only above the belt, who don't know how to film below [dessous] without being underhanded [dessous] you might say, by taking the entire human being into account. To fasten your belt—you could say this is all word play, but words aren't harmless after all. 'Tighten your belt' works two ways: sexual hunger exists also. And I see how I was limited. I remember my compositions at the time, when people said: 'You can't film like that because people will see this or that'. So who was framing the shot at that point? The Ministry of Information, not me. Whether I was Eisenstein, Godard or an unknown, it wasn't me, it wasn't me framing the shot. Yet I had ideas, because if there hadn't been a directive against which you could try to rebel in the long run—when everything is allowed, what do you do?

I wouldn't know how to film a nude woman today. Much less a nude man. In fact in women's films you see very few nude men. In this film I saw, *Rape of Love*, what was truly contemptible in my view was the fact that the girl filmed the raped woman exactly like in any Altman film, like any crummy film like that. But she didn't film guys—at certain times men dropped their pants too, but she was afraid to film them. But that was the least she could have done. I don't see how one wouldn't be afraid. But we might imagine that as long as a woman doesn't work as a relay for us on this topic, and as long as she doesn't have not only the financial and economic means but also the intellectual and cultural means to do so, things won't progress very quickly.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *It may be progressing quicker than you think, because you read in the papers that men are now regularly raped by women. But what I would see here is not a sign of the justice system compelling your composition, that you shouldn't show this or that, but that you explored sensuality through close-ups, especially the woman's flesh. It's sensual, which I enjoyed, I have to admit.*

I think it's too limited. What should have been good in a film like that—I remember, I liked the principle quite a bit, which was once quite classical. Cayatte made a film, I forgot the title . . .

[Inaudible]

Yes, *Anatomy of a Marriage*,<sup>9</sup> which showed the woman's point of view on the one hand and afterwards what it called the man's point of view. The film was very popular, it was like a shot-reverse shot of a point of view. In *La Femme mariée*, precisely, what would have been good—the woman may be well filmed, but the man isn't. At times it doesn't work very well. I find it a fairly cold film and not very well done. Not that it isn't well made, but in the sense that it isn't very moving. I thought it was moving at the time, but as soon as I saw it afterwards I realised it wasn't. It's also true, and this was not good, that it was made as a wager, if you like. In July the Venice film festival asked me if I didn't have something to show at the festival. So I said: 'If you show it, I'll make something'. So I made the film in a month, which is a little quick. But this comes back to what I was saying yesterday too, that I took advantage, at a time when I was—I didn't realise that I was being denied the means of production. I was like a woodworker living in the woods, or his tools, perhaps more so today—but small-scale craftsman, that's what I was looking for.

As soon as an opportunity arose to make a film, when I was finishing *Bande à part* (*Band of Outsiders*) or something else, I jumped on it. It must have been an unconscious movement not to lose touch with making films. Otherwise you don't know how to make films, and I have always—this wager must have come from that. I have always accepted every proposal, like I accepted Losique's when he said: 'Come do your research, it won't amount to much, but come do your research'. And it's true, it's a bit far to go to do research, 6,000 kilometres from home, but if this is the only place, then this is the only place. But I don't have the impression—strangely enough it's the only place where I've had the opportunity to watch my films and be paid for watching them. Because watching them on my own wouldn't be the same thing at all. It's not work. Here I'm being paid to watch my films, so it's work, in the normal sense of the term. I have nothing to be ashamed of. I take the plane, I tried to obtain first class, I got it. But I'm paid. At that point I can discuss with a worker

why he can't get paid to travel first class in the subway when he goes to work. You talk about things on the basis of practical conditions. And that's work. So I have the impression of working in cinema. And if I pick up a camera again, well, I'm not too far away. But *La Femme mariée* was made too quickly, it's not a very good film, in the sense that it isn't—it could have been moving and it isn't. I didn't watch too closely what we did today, but it's clear that *Nanook* is more moving than *La Femme mariée*.

*One way to compare Nanook and La Femme mariée is the fact that Flaherty went to film Eskimos with the preconceptions of a man living in an industrialised country. Certain preconceptions about what he was going to find. In the case of La Femme mariée, the way I felt the film, I find it's the same thing; it's made by a man who looked at the married woman, his look was that of a man, the way Flaherty looked at the Eskimo. You could compare the titles The Eskimo Nanook and The Married Woman. My question is whether you thought you were making a film . . . constantly looking at the woman?*

Looking, looking, that's nothing. You can look at who's looking and at what's being looked at. The point in common between the married woman – I forget if her name was Françoise or Juliette,<sup>10</sup> it doesn't matter – if her name was Françoise, we could have called her Françoise the Parisian, then you would have seen the connection with something called *Nanook the Eskimo*. Here we see how everything comes from the text, the way we read things, and not from the images. With *Nanook* for example I agree with what you say, although that must not have been much of an issue at the time. What's interesting is the moment when *Nanook* raises his harpoon – I don't know if this is the excerpt you saw this morning – and then he waits. It's the wait. It's true, there's a way *Nanook* looks at the wait; it's closely tied up with waiting. But this is less successful in *La Femme mariée*. It's a little more so in *The Flowers of St Francis*, I find. In that film there is a gesture during moments of waiting, and we all know that in our romantic relationships, just like our work relationships, when you make a gesture towards the other person—and I didn't know how to express this because I worked too quickly, for the reasons I explained. What I should have tried to find, but I didn't even realise I was trying to find it, was this way

of looking at the gesture. The same gesture, the fact of waiting and that you're going to catch something. Instead of catching a fish, you catch a hand, and this hand, depending on what it does to you, will also satisfy your hunger. In fact, the truly interesting film, which would be interesting to make today, would be a mixture of *Nanook* and *La Femme mariée*. A film that would show how two gestures, the gesture of a lover and the gesture of an Eskimo, resemble—could resemble each other. And it's interesting to show that they could resemble each other. So these would be documents, and out of these documents you could imagine a fiction which would take these documents as its real and scientific basis. Films by Wim Wenders or Jean-Luc Godard or François Truffaut would employ these documents.

*But don't you think that the fiction you create in the film is a fiction that satisfied your own desire to see the married woman in that manner?*

Absolutely.

*She doesn't represent at all the position of married women today or of women in cinema.*

Oh, that I . . .

*How do you think this film is useful?*

That I don't know. I don't think it is useful, but how can you call a film 'useful'? I can only reply if you say to me: 'I, as a married woman, it doesn't interest me much'. I believe you without hesitation. At the same time, what would help me would be for you to tell me why it doesn't interest you. But then you'd be obliged to do a little cinema in your own way by saying: 'I would have liked to see something that . . .' Meaning to think of yourself, a married woman, if you're married, a little in terms of cinema, with images. 'I would have liked to see something that I didn't see in the film', and I think three-quarters of the time I'd agree with you.

*I mean for me the film isn't much different from a pornographic film. We're talking about distinctions between cinema . . .*

That's true, I think, it's not much different from a pornographic film. But this, in my opinion, is what's good about it. Because at least it wants to acknowledge that it's a pornographic film and in fact, at the time, it was banned by Mr Peyrefitte for that reason. The only thing I regret today is that it wasn't more out-and-out pornographic, because you'd see more, in the classic sense like when you see a

pornographic magazine, full of tail and pubic hair and violent colours. When you see that you feel like you're in a slaughterhouse, it's quite awful. So there could be very different kinds of films, manuals for example, or so-called high-class eroticism. I remember something that both pleased me and at the same time made me a little—when it was screened at the Venice film festival – Italy had not had its so-called sexual revolution, it was in 1966 [sic] or I don't know when – and at a certain point you see only an extreme close-up of Macha Méril's belly, which may have been a pretty strong image at the time, and the usherette at the cinema in Venice where it was showing, who must have been a young woman brought up in the Italian fashion, I remember that she looked away. I watched her, she looked away. She was shocked by this image. Fine, you'll tell me that there have been many more since, but that's not my point. I said to myself: 'There's something to it'. The fact is she was shocked, and this is the sense in which I reply to you today that I prefer to say it was pornographic. It was not well expressed or very well done at the time, but whether from emotion or from an analysis you can say: 'Well, at least it was good for that'. And I could answer your question by saying the film was not well done. What I can't answer is how the film is useful, that's for you to tell me, or how the film is useless.

*You don't find it significant that it was a woman who turned away from the film? What I mean when I speak about your way of looking is the way you look at . . . first of all in the film we see the woman as someone reserved, or going to bed. Never as someone very productive or very active. There are stereotypes not much different than dominant cinema. The way the film looks at the woman serves to satisfy men's common desires.*

I don't think so. I honestly think that if we did an experiment, even today, women would be more interested in this film than guys, who would be deeply annoyed, because women's films are not what they like to watch. In this case, although it's not well done—it's true, there is no productive situation. She's a certain kind of married woman. It isn't stated enough, although it's fairly clear: she's a middle-class Parisian woman. It's true, there isn't a lot of—I eliminated almost anything that could be somewhat interesting and lively, and this is what's left. But when it comes down to it, what do we know about other people? Do the married women you know today, or that you've heard speak, married women in Montreal, do their gestures—if you

wanted to do a statistical study, if someone said to you: 'Give me twenty images of married women in Montreal today, or forty images, forty images of married women who come to mind'. Well, I think that of those forty pictures a good twenty would be like mine. That's what I mean. There wouldn't be very many others. You don't have much of an opportunity to know married women other than through three-quarters of the [inaudible] images which date and which, moreover, I'm sure of it, are not very good. But a great many of them will be like that, that's all. That's why the film is fairly cold. It's more like a police report which presents itself as such. But I agree, it would have been better to do something a little different. I'd like very much at least to see films like this made about guys, for example. As a guy it would serve to question me a little from a film point of view, because otherwise, as we've seen, people say: 'You look at women the same way'. That, I agree. All I can tell you is that I didn't look at women any differently than Rossellini looked at the fools who believe in God. It's no better. Or the way that *Nanook*, or Flaherty, looked at simple Eskimo fishers. You don't find the Eskimo fisher ridiculous, you don't think Flaherty was mean towards—you don't say: 'Are there [no] other images to be shown of the Eskimo fisher?' while with *La Femme mariée* it's more apparent. In that sense it's a little better, that's why I put them together, because thanks to *La Femme mariée* we can say: 'But Flaherty shouldn't have shot only those shots of the Eskimo fisher'. Especially the kinds of documentary we see today, which don't even have a little patience, or are reactionary—but even so something real, an interest in something that's happening. Or Rossellini, the kindness in his way of looking at things, he lets people talk things over a little. That's all he does, he doesn't call the Church into question.

I think this is where the interest of these screenings lies. They don't seem like much, but I think it's the first time in the history of cinema where, once a month, which is not a lot, little fragments are shown and compared. Completely clumsily and awkwardly, and which have only one *raison d'être*, and that's my coming here. And when I come here there is one of my films – but that's a reality – and with this film I'm trying hard to remember the five or six things I think it should make us think of or connect to, that's all. It's an opportunity to think. Because when we go see a film—if you go to

the movies tonight in Montreal, you don't think: 'Let's see, I'm watching a film in 1978, in such a day and age, and it's made in this way'. That would be the least you could do. But something else entirely happens when you watch the film. Television too, it's something else altogether. When you watch television, you don't think: 'Let's see, I'm looking at five minutes of the 400 million times five minutes on television right now, and there are 400 million people watching these 400 million five minutes'. You don't see yourself like that in it, meaning that you don't see yourself in the world, you see yourself inside yourself.

SERGE LOSIQUE: [To the audience] *You're talkative today, that's good.*

*... I think the question is this: is it possible to make films for people on a situation—not an analytical situation, on people with backward ideas about politics, but on people who are models?*

Not me, or at least less and less. Because I think what you have to show is that there is no model. There is modelling, but no model. And I have always, if this is what you're asking—something like the correct way of looking, which would enable us to say: 'Ah, that's right'. I don't like that very much because models—what do we call a model, moreover? It's interesting, in French a model is a person who poses, meaning a woman as objectified as possible, we call that a model. We could call it something else, but we call it a model. And in the fashion industry, where women workers are extremely exploited, we say model for a line of clothing. But what controls the model, meaning the first model, in French at any rate, I don't know about English; in French we call a clothing pattern a *patron*.<sup>11</sup> We say a fashion pattern [*patron de mode*]; I copy a pattern to make a dress. People say: 'I copied this pattern from "Fashion Magazine"'. So the question of the model becomes very interesting. I think that you have to show that a model, when it becomes too big, quickly becomes—it quickly becomes Stalin, Hitler, who? I don't know, Pelé in soccer, Godard in film. I've managed to survive because they haven't been able to turn me into a model. In the end, for cinephiles or in the history of cinema, I'm the model of the non-model, the person who can't be categorised. But they categorise me as non-categorisable, which is the same thing in the end.

So I don't think you can, although I'm certain there is some truth in what you say. That's my opinion. I think that to make me understand you would have to use something other than language or feelings. If we had a direct relationship, meaning if we lived together, when there is a personal history between the two of us, in the end I think this personal history would make me understand a few bits. There would be no need to use images, books or sounds. But if we don't have this relationship and we have only these other relations, for me to understand the truth, which is hidden underneath lots of untrue things—I don't quite understand what this truth is that you want me to say, but I can't say—and much less show. I need to see this truth. This is why I believe, I've always said that it's easy to make films. It's not expensive. To make an expensive film is expensive; but to make a cheap film is cheap. And to express yourself and say something, an image or sound is stronger. Stronger than a text, which makes it possible not to make an image. To say: 'Don't you think that you should have filmed that woman in a different manner?'; well, it's much easier to say, and that's why we learn as quickly as possible in school—starting in kindergarten the first thing they teach children to do is to speak. But today the first thing they should do is give them little Polaroid cameras. Certainly not say anything to them, and if they don't do anything, well, they don't do anything. Then before asking for a slice of bread they would have to learn to film one and not to say 'I'm hungry'. In the end they'd learn. And that, I think, would change something.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *The people have the floor.*

[Conversation amongst audience members, principally the previous two questioners and Jean Antonin Billard]

JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD: [To other audience member] *Why is it that it's a woman . . . Anne Claire Poirier for example belongs . . . how is the way of looking at women different? And the woman one chooses . . .*

[Inaudible]

In *Numéro deux* (Number Two) for example it seems to me, precisely, that I made a little progress. But it would be interesting to say—I find the woman in *Numéro deux* a little different from the woman in *La Femme mariée*. For me, however, I'm an endpoint; I need women to take over from me. Sometimes I get by at the level of the text—

what I mean is that I bring them a different production method, and then I realise that this is not how it's done. They're afraid. They have an attitude towards images or towards the fabrication of images. There are far fewer women television reporters, unless they are star reporters, and even then there are fewer than men. One might imagine that there would be fewer women novelists, fine, but there are far fewer women painters or drawers. In the graphic novel, for example, there are almost as many women as men, in France at least, and that I think is a good thing.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *In this film, especially at the end when they're walking through the airport, the woman appears very fearful. She looks around all the time, even in the taxi. Was this something you wanted to show?*

A little. It's not by chance either that the film she goes to see at the Orly airport cinema—of course it's fiction, because at the two or three movie theatres in an airport it's unlikely they would show a film like *Night and Fog*, for example. She is, in a sense, in a state of night and fog. And the two films I made side by side afterwards, *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle* (*Two or Three Things I Know about Her*), which you'll see soon, end exactly like that, they give a sense of a concentration camp. At least say where we are. I've always thought this. And it follows on from the interview or sort of speech by Roger Leenhardt, who is a real French filmmaker. Just like the text by—so it's a film about women's occupations, about a certain number of a certain woman's occupations. It doesn't bother me that it's called *Une Femme mariée* because it's more about this woman than it is about others. The reason I called it *La Femme mariée* was to say that in 'a' there are many. In fact, while she is married, she is not only that. She has a certain number of occupations. Some of them I wasn't familiar with at the time: housework, children, all that. She doesn't have children, so a woman in a certain social class, if her husband earns a certain amount each month, her mornings and afternoons are freer than if she had a child. If she doesn't need to work, then she has to occupy herself, find occupations. And occupation—all right, it's a play on words, but what is occupation? In France we had the Occupation, which was the Germans, the war, meaning the occupation of a country, a territory, the body and, I don't know, people's time. Here there are three very precise references.

First there is the cook who speaks a text by Céline, who was a big pro-German writer. We see *Night and Fog*, so it's taking place twenty years after a period, and at the same time I let it be understood that this period still exists, that it exists stronger than ever but in a less visibly heinous manner. This makes people no longer pay attention to it, which makes them dispossessed.<sup>12</sup>

You made *Une Femme mariée* and *Alphaville* around the same time, and yet there is an enormous difference between these two films from the point of view of the object. *Une Femme mariée* is the hands, and the body is very close to the camera, while in *Alphaville* we enter a more aerial space. Nothing is real. The body is shown in its entirety on the screen. How did this difference come about?

I don't really agree. It's you who has reminded me that they were shot pretty much the same year or during the same period, something I didn't really remember.<sup>13</sup> I don't really agree with you. Let's say that at the time there began to be a quite clear sense of fragments. That's why I included *The Flowers of St Francis*. I even accentuated this to the point of making an entire film out of a fragment. Here too the film was made out of several fragments. My most recent films and television programs—and this is why I prefer, in this case, working in television, where the concept of the fragment is allowed. In television series, they show one fragment per day. *La Femme mariée* had this in its title and *The Flowers of St Francis* was made like that. How a woman met her beau one afternoon and what they said to each other. There were novels like that in former times.

To return to the question of women, I was thinking about something with respect to texts. I've read some books by a writer I like quite a bit, an American feminist called Kate Millett, whose three books I've read, and I find—in a sense I see them as lame from a feminist perspective, if I were a feminist or we had to put a name to it. What I see as lame is having made a book and not a film, because Kate Millett has made films, precisely. She talks about them in *Flying*, she tells the story of the film she made with some friends.<sup>14</sup> What I deeply regretted was that she didn't tell the story of this film in film—the stories she told or lived or imagined, I don't know, but in film. Because in film someone as honest as she is could not have done this the way she does. It's easy to write a novel and this is what makes it

lame. Whereas in film—a guy could have made a film, you can well imagine a guy adapting and buying the rights, maybe it's been done and she refused, but one can well imagine Fox buying the rights to Kate Millett's books or books like hers and making a film with a big star. But if she had had to make a film, it wouldn't have been this film, whether it was me, Altman, Truffaut or anyone else who made it, she would have been obliged—given who she is, she would have seen she couldn't do it. So, can you do something else? That would be interesting to see or know. I think that would make, if a book by—I think, very naïvely – there are hundreds of examples – that if images could replace texts, or if texts took their true place within images, and if this happened where it is needed, and Kate Millett's book, if she made a film, would have to be shown on television, and then it would have a great effect because we would see things. We'd simply see, the way people say 'we can see that . . .', or when there is a judicial error and we can prove that there was an error because a document appears and proves there was an error. During the most famous of all, the Dreyfus affair, one day a document was produced and people saw that he was—or in any history. Recently I read a history of the CIA, it shows what the United States did on such-and-such a day in such-and-such a place. There is the document, so you see, but you see in literary form. Television doesn't show this, or when it does, it interviews someone talking, which is the same as a text, so it has no effect.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *Are there no more questions? All right, I'd say we've exhausted this topic for today, because he has to catch a plane. So thank you for your attention, and we'll see you here at ten o'clock next Friday.*

What are we showing? In the afternoon I think we'll show *Pierrot le fou*, and in the morning—you don't have the . . .

SERGE LOSIQUE: No.

I think we are showing an excerpt from Fritz Lang's *You Only Live Once* with Henry Fonda and Sylvia Sidney, and then an excerpt from *Rebel without a Cause*, and then an excerpt from a Japanese film, *Ugetsu Monogatari*, and then *Pierrot le fou*. There was an excerpt I wanted very much to have for *Pierrot le fou*, but you won't see it because Losique had the crazy idea of sending it to Langlois, and Langlois devoured it, as he had the habit of doing, so it disappeared.

It was an excerpt from *The Picasso Mystery*. I for one would have liked to see this because I've never seen it, and it was an opportunity, because in order to speak about—for once we would have seen, with respect to a colour film like *Pierrot le fou*, the way it was experienced and conceived—we would have seen someone like Picasso, or a painter if you like, an interesting film on a painter. Not on his paintings, but on the act of painting. It's too bad we won't see it.

SERGE LOSIQUE: Yes, just a few months before his death Langlois was here, he showed *Nana*, and he discovered that I had a copy of *The Picasso Mystery*. He said: 'Lend it to me, I've got an exhibition in Paris, I'll send it back to you next week'. He never did. People imagine that Langlois gave me a lot of films, but the opposite is true. Even the meagre resources I had have disappeared. So that's that. Langlois kept that one for history. What can you do, we have to forgive him everything.

Saturday 10 June 1978

### Notes

1. This was one of only four times in his series of talks that Godard screened excerpts from a film made at a later date than his own, in this case accidentally.
2. As Godard explains below, he planned to call the film *La Femme mariée* ('The Married Woman', with the sense also in French of married women as a social category), but was forced by the censor to call it *Une Femme mariée* ('A Married Woman'). Godard makes a point of referring to the film throughout his discussion as *La Femme mariée*.
3. Today the Eskimo are known as the Inuit.
4. The expression *société de production* normally means 'film production company' but in this instance Godard appears to employ a play on words to implicate society as a whole in the 'production' process he is referring to.
5. While Godard has quoted this remark from at least the late 1950s until at least the 1980s, the translator has been unable to document it.
6. The title of the film in French is *Nanouk l'Esquimau*.
7. The French trade union *Confédération générale du travail*.

8. *Quand la Chine s'éveillera . . . le monde tremblera.*
9. André Cayatte's twin films *Françoise ou La Vie conjugale* and *Jean-Marc ou La Vie Conjugale* (known together in English as *Anatomy of a Marriage*), which recount events in a couple's relationship from their respective points of view, premiered in January 1964, a few months before Godard began work on *Une Femme mariée*.
10. The name of the principal character in the film is Charlotte.
11. In French a *patron* is both a pattern, in this case a dressmaking pattern, and a boss or employer.
12. Godard does not complete his thought and name the third reference in the film, a scene from Racine's play *Bérénice*.
13. In fact *Alphaville*, which Godard screened before *Une Femme mariée*, was made after it. This was one of the few occasions in his series of talks that he screened his films out of chronological order.
14. *Three Lives*. This was the only film Kate Millett had made at the time of Godard's remarks.



# Between

4

## *Pierrot le fou*

1

*Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans*

F.W. Murnau (U.S.A., 1927)

*You Only Live Once*

Fritz Lang (U.S.A., 1937)

*Rebel without a Cause*

Nicholas Ray (U.S.A., 1955)

*Ugetsu Monogatari*

Mizoguchi Kenji (Japan, 1953)

*Pierrot le fou*

Jean-Luc Godard (France–Italy, 1965)

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JEAN-LUC GODARD: Losique isn't here to help get things started, and I'm no better than you at speaking first, so go ahead.

[Inaudible]

Yes, it was an adaptation of a novel, by an American crime fiction writer whose name, I think, was Lionel White, and the novel, in French in any event, was published in the *Série noire*. It was called *Le Démon de onze heures*, and in English I don't remember.<sup>1</sup> But what I should sometimes mention was that I was finding less and less money to make films, and when I couldn't find any at all I realised that if I didn't put some aside, or if I didn't find a way of providing myself with money, people would give me less and less. I started with 100,000 dollars, that's an amount I never went beyond in my classical productions, but in exchange I kept my freedom. Freedom for me meant being able to think at my own speed and my own pace. Once there was a little more time—since I didn't write a script, or at least what's called a script, meaning the film written in advance

in such a way that those who provide the money, who provide it willingly because there are a lot of them, can picture the film from the way it's written. I've never known how—it's not even that I don't want to, it's that I don't know how to do that.

If I knew how to write I don't think I'd have any desire to make a film afterwards. I take notes for my own use, but these notes aren't sufficient. You have to find a way to write, so often I use a novel or a document written in advance. That way I can show something written that will put something of substance in the producers' hands, or the co-producer's hands. And I can say: 'I'm going to try to invent something based on that'. With this film I was quite faithful in the way I told the story. There I find the Americans—I've had confirmation of this, I just spent a week in California, you get the impression of being in a country with no sense of history [*histoire*], which doesn't know what it's doing, but does all kinds of things, invents all kinds of stories [*histoires*] every day. And every cheap or expensive American novel is full of stories. But it has no idea what it's doing. Nixon has much more imagination than de Gaulle, but he has less knowledge of what he's doing. Thus for me, depending on the mood I'm in, depending on what I come across, I can invent something from any American novel.

[Inaudible]

Can you plan a film like *Pierrot le fou*? Yes, in a sense, because as I say the script was a novel. So you could say that Lionel White's novel, whose English title I forget, was, for me—what is a script? If a script is what people call a story with a connecting thread that starts out, or the name of a character and then the name of another character, and then something happens between these two characters and we wonder what will happen next, and there are a certain number of twists and turns, of adventures if you like, and then it comes to an end and the reader is satisfied, they're happy to have read that. So if that is what is called a script, this book is a script. If we call a script what I would call a film script, if today we had to summarise this film with words and a few photographs, I think it would be quite different from the original novel. That's what I would call a script. I can show people something in written form, but at the end. Even that annoys me: the film is done, why redo it in the form of a summary?

When I have to make a publicity brochure or summary it always annoys me, because I don't see what I can say. I've already said it in a different manner.

What I like doing a lot is making *bandes annonces*, but what is annoying about *bandes annonces*, or what the Americans call *trailers*, I believe—the little films before the film which say: 'Coming soon to this theatre'. That for me is almost the perfect film. I'd rather make trailers than films. My trailers would last four or five hours—much longer than the film, because I'd hold forth on the film you're about to see. Today – I don't know if this will interest you – I watched bits and pieces of *Pierrot le fou* because I may do a final film with Belmondo. Well, we're discussing it, and my position is no longer the same at all. In France he's a superstar, not in North America but in France. That's enough for him to—and my relationship with him is—so I came to see what I had done in this film, to see what he was still capable of doing, or what I was capable of asking him to do at the time, to see if—because when I went to see him it was a little like seeing a young version of myself, although we're the same age. But given that he has made hit films, he's paid an incredible amount of money and has tremendous decision-making power. And I have to ask his permission—it's a little difficult because I sense that he's a little afraid of doing something with me. He asked me for something quite straightforward, and that's something I'm not capable of, so I was curious to see the film and to see some old films with love stories and gangsters to see if I could come up with any ideas about how to use him.

[Inaudible]

What must have fascinated me a little, I don't know, or maybe it came from me, I've spent a lot of time—I don't know my own history very well. Or take my relationship with my parents. I've always lived in two countries, and the story of each of us comes a little from where we come from, so it's not surprising that today—gradually I've come to situate myself in neither one nor the other but on the border between them. In the beginning, somewhat unconsciously—*Pierrot le fou* for me marks, not the end of an era but the beginning of my awareness of the cinema I made, which in the beginning was completely defined by chance. Because I think that when I do things

I like, the right elements fall into my hands. If it had happened at another moment I wouldn't have found them. In this case I came upon a book I was familiar with, by Élie Faure, which talked about Velázquez and said that at the end of his career – which I did at the beginning of mine, although I didn't know it – at the end of his career Velázquez painted the things that lie between things.<sup>2</sup>

And gradually I realised that cinema is what lies between things. It isn't a thing, it's what is between one person and another. Between you and me; and on the screen it's between things. Obviously the least interesting kind of cinema is that which is oriented, either completely towards the viewer—B-grade genre films, a few big hits like Travolta recently, things like that. Films that completely face their viewers, where there is both nothing on the screen and nothing behind the camera if you like. This doesn't mean that the viewer is nothing, but that it's the viewer who makes these films, they're made in such a way that the viewer makes them. Viewers can see them one way or another and, given the lives they lead, the way they work, how they love, they see them in a certain way and are happy to see them that way, as products.

Then there are films, like some of my films, which don't succeed in creating a relationship with the viewer or with certain—they're quite marginal; you might say they're made solely behind the camera. Then there are other films we might call a little more interesting, or certain parts of a film, because in the film you see things happening—and good films I think are more in the middle; they know how to move from completely behind to completely in front, if you will. Because when the viewer watches them, the camera is inverted. There is a kind of camera in your head, which is called a projector, moreover, which projects. Moreover when Lumière invented the movie camera in the beginning like the small-time manufacturer and good technician he was, he unconsciously and honestly made the camera serve at the same time as the projector. The same device was used for both things. There was something unconscious in this that was completely natural.

[Inaudible]

But when Lumière invented the movie camera, he invented the projector at the same time because the first machine he used to record

the film was used to project it too. It was the same mechanism: a lens; two reels; a drive shaft where you put a crank and which went from one reel to the other; and a lamp for projecting. To record the image, on the contrary, light is projected onto the film stock. But it's the same device. That probably came from the fact that when you make a film you're behind—it never changes, but the device is turned around and you re-project the projection. I think the most interesting films, the good films, could be as different as *Battleship Potemkin* and those films with some sort of audience or success. Sometimes they find this audience slowly but I don't think there are good films without an audience. It's just that sometimes the audience is dispersed, it's never there. I think that in some of my films that had no audience, meaning they were seen by fifteen people—other films have been made that were seen by fifteen people, but I think my film interested those fifteen people. Some of the films I've made with Gorin, a film like *Lotte in Italia* (*Struggle in Italy*) was seen I think by 200 people, but of these 200 people, twenty or thirty really saw it. So then the problem is that these good films, if they're on bad ground, are too easily accused of being contemptuous of the audience. But they shouldn't be placed on ground that isn't their own. You have to find—what's difficult in film and television today is that the places for projecting a film—it's as if we planted every flower in concrete and succeeded in getting three-quarters of them to grow in concrete, but two or three don't grow. Does this make them bad flowers? No, it's the concrete which is no good.

[Inaudible]

I'm only beginning to—because I've had access to television these past two or three years, because I made films that didn't manage to survive, which had no success, which were seen by very few people, although we managed to make a living from them, but not in a very proper manner. I mentioned the film *Lotte in Italia*. Well, this film was commissioned by Italian television on the strength of my name. They gave carte blanche to Godard to make an hour. Well, we did an hour, and when Italian television saw it – and this was just a small section, the cultural section – they said: 'No way, we can't show that'. So we received the money and managed to live while making the film, which only fifteen people were interested in seeing afterwards. Naturally, if we received just one dollar from each of these

people, we wouldn't have been able to live off it. But this enables us to pose the question a little more realistically. And after twenty years of having done the rounds a little, when I do something I'm beginning to say to myself: 'But this has to interest someone'. Then I ask myself: 'But who, who can I interest in this?' In a sense I really ask myself this question, and at the same time there is no answer to it. Because a film is made—even a crew of ten or twenty people, television—you don't know the people who are going to watch the film, you don't know who is going to see it. So it's a rather hard question to ask. When I made *Pierrot le fou*, I didn't ask this question at all. I tried to make a film the way other people run. And sometimes when you run the problem arises—if someone tells you that you run a little better than the next person, the next problem that arises is to win a race. If you win a race, you want to be first at the Olympics or at least national champion. If not, I think you retain a degree of pleasure in running, although it must be hard. In the world soccer championships, people want to be first so badly that all these people who play so well end up playing very poorly once they arrive at the world championships. I remember that when I began work on *Pierrot le fou*, a week before I was completely – nowadays much less so – I was in a complete panic, because I didn't know what to do. Even though, following the book – and this is why I need a thread to follow – following the book I had already established all the locations, I had hired people according to the book. And I wondered what I was going to do with all that. It was like having all the ingredients for a salad and then in the end not being sure you want a salad. But since you ordered it, you wonder if it will be nourishing. Well, a salad, that's not a very—you can always eat the salad, but when you have to prepare it in addition and you're uncertain, suddenly you say: 'But does this salad nourish a human being?' and you find yourself with a ton of salad in front of you. You're in a panic; you tell yourself you'll die if you can't eat it all. It's a little like that. Then, as the work progresses . . .

And I think that scripts, precisely, are made to make people very afraid, young filmmakers in any event. People who haven't made films and who might make a few. People wrap cinema up in magic that's why I didn't really like Truffaut's *Day for Night*, I think it's dishonest. Because it reinforces the idea that it's an intricate kin-

of magic and that only people with a kind of grace, what people call talent—talent: some people run better than others. But the pleasure of running, if someone has that—you can criticise someone for the fact that they run badly, that they are harming themselves a little in the way they breathe for example. If they want to run, they're harming themselves. Some people have better legs than others, things like that, they can do high jumps and stuff. I find that references to cooking and sports make it much easier to talk about cinema.

So I remember that at the time I had not put in a lot of things but that—sometimes everything was possible. Increasingly, film didn't consist in finding a number of things and placing them before the camera. At the time it was already more a case of casting aside anything that might be in the view of the lens: Marianne, Anna Karina, a dwarf, Vietnam—everything that came into my head as I was at the time. To cast it aside and then to try to see what remained, or to try to bring it back later in the film if you had used it poorly.

[Inaudible]

What I mean is that I used what I knew. But today I look less at names. I remember references and places I liked as a child. Today I would try not to use references so that people no longer see a system of references. But clearly this is what was at work when people used the word *collage* to describe my films. Afterwards something else came into play that cinema was missing, given the way it was made to operate. It lacked the possibility of working a little like a musician. Musicians have many references: they use classical music, different types of rock music. Clearly, rock 'n' roll wasn't invented in the Middle Ages simply because horses don't make the same noise as trains, planes and cars today. And when musicians play a note they are certainly making a reference, or when they sing they are using, I don't know—but whether a noise or a voice, it isn't seen as a reference. This enabled me, coming from a literary or cultured background—I never hesitated to use references, but what I later learned is that the references are right there for the taking. If I make a film in Montreal with its skyscrapers in the background and the St Lawrence River behind them, well, that's the reference, I didn't invent it.

[Inaudible]

It's the same language as advertising. Whether you make a reference to Faulkner or an ad makes a reference to Colgate, it's all the same in the end. Sometimes, for example at the beginning of *Pierrot le fou*, I remember I made people at a party speak using expressions taken from advertising brochures. This also occurs in *La Femme mariée* (*A Married Woman*), when she describes her interior decoration the way people describe interior decoration. Naturally, I'm looking for something I haven't found yet, so I use both literary and visual elements. In order one day to succeed in redoing a dialogue or in using a dialogue that's already been worked on a little bit more. But here you don't have much choice. When you listen to the conversation of two people or two lovers in a bar or something like that, it's hard. This is why in films today scenes are generally very short, because after a while people wouldn't know what to say to each other. The best example I always give is Spielberg's film:<sup>3</sup> people don't say anything to each other and then, just as they are finally about to say something to each other, the film ends. It would have been a lot of trouble for him to—he doesn't know what to say to the Martian, he doesn't know what to have the Martian say, either as a human or as a Martian. As a Martian myself, I maintain that his film is quite bad.

[Inaudible]

Let's just say that it's a little like—I don't know how to invent a melody. Sometimes it's not even a question of inventing a melody, it's inventing a language for the melody. So I put, I choose—like a solfa, a musical staff [*portée*], a system the way it was invented. I just add the notes. But if I add notes without a staff [*portée*], as I did in some films and continue to do, in an attempt to – this is not a play on words – for there to be another meaning [*portée*], to make it understood that there may be other meanings [*portées*], and that my meaning [*portée*] is not the same. It's not a play on words: it's not at the door [*porte*], nor is it within my grasp [*portée*] or your grasp [*portée*] to communicate, so I use an old staff [*portée*]. Because what I'm doing today is to try—for the past ten years, since *Pierrot le fou* I have worked more on—if I had to explain it, I have worked more on the staves [*portées*] and less on the notes. So people said to us ‘There is no melody’. But I no longer wanted that melody.









montage :

ne voir que ce qui  
peut être vu  
(non dit,  
non écrit)

l'explosion atomique en  
haut de la colline de ceux  
qui ne vivent qu'une fois  
rejoindre

le ciel et les fourrés de ceux  
qui suivent la règle du jeu  
avant que n'explose la guerre  
mondiale

(les photos comme radio  
de la maladie)



## [Inaudible]

By Buñuel? No, not very many. The only film of Buñuel's—I haven't seen his latest films, the only film I liked a little when I was a critic, because he was somewhat independent. Something I like was that he became deaf, for example, but I don't believe, he can't really be, I mean it must be a joke. He can't really be deaf, because in my opinion if he was really deaf he wouldn't be making the films he is making in his old age. When you look at Beethoven's final quartets there's a difference, you can believe that because of a physical circumstance he no longer heard music the way people heard it in his day and age. Whereas Buñuel's deafness is more social. The film of his I prefer is the film he made with Salvador Dalí in the very beginning, *L'Âge d'or*. When you watch it today it still has a very strong subversive power.

## [Inaudible]

No, I haven't seen *The Milky Way*, I can't tell you. But I don't agree. On the contrary, I think Buñuel is more in that category of people, and at times I have been too, who are completely behind the camera and have no connection with the audience, apart from a so-called 'cultured' audience or cinephiles who place themselves in the same position as Buñuel, or me if it's my film, and say: 'Oh, what a great film, you must understand, I'll explain it to you', etc. Three-quarters of film criticism is like this, it places itself, it isn't between—in my opinion, film criticism can't exist. But since it exists, it's a heresy, there are monsters. Meaning that it is not made for the audience—the audience doesn't need critics because cinema and television are

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Illustration page 191:

montage:

to see only what can be seen (unsaid, unwritten)  
the atomic explosion from the top of the hill of those who only  
live once  
reaches  
the sky and the thickets of those who follow the rules of the  
game before the world war erupts  
(photographs as X-rays of sickness)

the only things it knows how to criticise naturally. Critics aren't between the audience and the person who made the film; they try to put themselves in the place of the filmmaker as a kind of trade union representative. And, because it's usually not workers but rather aristocrats who are behind the camera, imagine what the union representative of an aristocrat speaking to the people is like.

[Laughs]

[Inaudible]

You say to me: 'still' [encore]; I say: 'I haven't yet [encore] succeeded'. This is truly the thing that interests me the most and that I'd like to do but can't. I see people in the United States who not only tell stories, but who must tell each other so many books, so many stories, in a way so very different from other people, since I don't know when; for at least a hundred years they've captivated the world. They captivate the world just like a real live storyteller. Not only do they tell a story, but they make people live it. It's quite clear; there's no other reason Germany would place itself at the feet of the United States. The Deutschmark is stronger than the dollar; German industry is more inventive than American industry, the same for the Japanese. But this is what is happening: the yen and the mark have placed themselves at the dollar's feet. They prop up the dollar even though they could do something completely different, like 150 years ago. There's a history [*histoire*] of the United States to be written as an empire of the story [*histoire*], if you will. This is striking in California in particular, which is the most inventive place from a technological and cinematic point of view. This is where it all happens. You have the sense of being in a kind of empire which invents everything, that there are thousands of very different stories. The least crime novel—I've always wanted to make a film – except in the end this isn't what really interests me and I don't live here – but I'd like to find another story or not be dependent solely on that story. After twenty years in cinema I still haven't succeeded. The first ten years pretty much ended with *Pierrot le fou* and then I started over with the film you'll see tomorrow, *Masculin Féminin*. This is a little black-and-white film which already makes reference to television, quite unconsciously. Today, after two times ten years in cinema, I'd like to start to try to tell a story. But how and with whom? It's hard to say.

[Inaudible]

I don't know. It would be better to ask yourself that question; I don't know. To close my eyes, or not close my eyes, what story would captivate me for an hour other than the story of my day, which I live and am thus somewhat captive to. With what story should you captivate someone else to get out of this captivity? This is the question I ask myself about the problem of stories. Meaning the story behind an event—that's how I think about the problem of stories. I'm in a prison but I don't know it very well. I have to find an idea to get out of it. If there is no idea for getting out of it I have to invent one, so I have to invent the world where I want to go. So I ask myself: 'Is a story something that should help you get out of yourself, or is it something that should help you enter inside yourself a little? After twenty years in cinema, I have the impression that I went far too far with respect to myself and I have the impression of being beside myself a little and that now I'd like to go back inside a little. So a story is that: inventing, imagining a train or a plane or something that enables me to return to my point of departure. Stories about form too. I think what's needed—there is a bit of science fiction, a bit of graphic novel, a bit of realism and all that in two hours and 2,400 metres of celluloid. Because that's how stories are told, that's where stories are recorded. Two hours and 2,400 metres are both too much and too little for a story. I think that to be able to discuss this better we would need to start with one or two photographs. That's the idea I had at first when we started this course, but we aren't there yet. Maybe in two years when I come back after having done something, I'll have something to show you from the start. But here what we need to do is to show an image and then say: 'Here's the story that could be invented about it'. Often I watch people in the street, I find it quite interesting. I try to imagine what came just before and what will come just afterwards.

[Inaudible]

The means, you mean the technical means?

[Inaudible]

That's a myth too. What is difficult—if you do amateur photography or cinema, today a little camera costs what, 50 or 100 dollars. What's expensive, once you've taken a picture, say of your fiancée, you

take a picture of your fiancée to remind yourself of her, what is expensive is when you try to say a little more. When you look for the next image or the one before. Meaning making a film about your fiancée or you or something else. Then it starts to cost—it's not a question of the camera, a 20,000 or 200,000 dollar camera, that's not what is truly expensive. Technical things in a film are relatively inexpensive. In a four-million-dollar film, technical things, the laboratory, all that doesn't cost a lot. What costs a lot is everything around it or the way things are decided. What makes American films expensive is the way they decide to do things. In my day there was the story of *Cleopatra*, which is very instructive. I was working at Fox then, and when Elizabeth Taylor made *Cleopatra* a Greek guy named Spyros Skouras was still in charge of Fox. And the people in Rome, or in Paris, sent a telegram. The budget had been set at a million dollars at first, that was fifteen years ago, it would be more now. They said – work had not even begun on the film – they said: 'We're at a million dollars', so they telexed New York and said: 'Can we go over that, can we budget at two million?' That took a month and then a telex arrived saying: 'Yes, OK, you have New York's OK for two million dollars'. In the time that took, the film had already reached two million dollars with all the people they had there and the cost of the telex and the telephone, so there was a new telex saying: 'Ah, but now we're at two million, can we go to three?' It went on like that up to twenty-five million. Today if you make a film in Hollywood, when you start out, when you sign a contract, two million has already been spent, at a minimum. On any film, even a run-of-the-mill film. People say 'that's expensive', but what is expensive? The phone calls, the trips, things like that. In other words, the way they spend money. I've spent a lot of time trying to understand, often trying to prove to producers or bankers that there is a better way to make money. Rather than make a film for twenty million, which brings in a hundred, which is not much, five times as much, to make twenty million-dollar films instead, which could be more diverse.

I've spent a lot of time coming to understand that cinema and television is not a place where people want to make money. Let's say the system as a whole in the economy [doesn't] want to make money. It's a place where people want to spend money. So the fact that an individual earns, that the president of a company or such-and-such

actor earns a lot, when they earn a lot—it's like in the United States, people earn a good living, in Canada people earn a good living, but you earn a good living because people in the Philippines, India and Mozambique lose out and have nothing to eat. It's a communicating vessel, the Earth is not infinite. And today, when communications go more quickly, the better people eat in the United States the worse they'll eat elsewhere, because things move more quickly. Poor people are poorer than poor people in the Middle Ages, and the rich are richer. What's interesting in cinema is that it's a form of expenditure. Otherwise viewers wouldn't agree to pay five or ten dollars—it's merchandise, they eat with their eyes instead of their stomachs. I remember Carlo Ponti once said to me when I was making *Le Mépris* (*Contempt*): 'My poor Jean-Luc, you think people watch a movie with their eyes, but they watch it with their stomachs'.

[Inaudible]

Today, I try instead to think—I tell myself there must be, just the same, a certain number of people whose problems are similar to mine, in their own way, depending on where they are. I know this from newspapers and television and the stories I hear. When you hear some piece of news, when you see that people have done something, it doesn't matter what: a strike, a murder, when you read the news and try to interpret it for yourself, to make it your own – someone has fought over a house, or killed their child, I don't know, or even economic news – you tell yourself, I tell myself: 'Well, there must be people not that much different from me'. For a time I didn't say this to myself in this sense. It was by making films, by which I mean being in a kind of means of communication. To be neither the bow, nor the person who shoots the arrow, nor the person who receives it, but to be the arrow. And writing, making a film, thinking and speaking are the arrow. Love is a little different, it's the moment either when the arrow is shot or when it is received and you no longer need to think about the arrow. But it's not always possible to receive or shoot the arrow; sometimes it just flies, whether for hundreds of light years or for three seconds. But living and earning a living in these three seconds or these hundreds of light years is an interesting moment. You're neither one nor two. You're between one and two, you're always the third, a representative of the third . . . I'm lost. I was thinking—what was the question?

[Inaudible]

Oh yes. So I started thinking, not about the viewer, but about the fact that viewers exist. I told myself that reality for me was to try to know or imagine, to think that I am one of them. Sometimes television and video have helped me think about this in a material way simply because the fact of having a monitor, a television screen at the end of the line—video gives you the entire production line, meaning that it lets you think of yourself as a producer who records a camera image, to think of yourself as a laboratory and all that. Meaning you see the entire production line that you don't see in cinema: the camera, the lab, the movie theatre. Because in video you see the image right away, meaning that you think of yourself as one of the first viewers. In any event from the position of the viewer. If I'm working for state TV, which sometimes commissions work from us, the fact that you receive something on your television set at home – you see your daughter or, if you don't have a child, you see someone who receives it – you're behind and in front at the same time, you're forced to think that someone is going to watch. Whereas in cinema, in the beginning I didn't think that someone was going to watch. I don't believe three-quarters of people do, except producers who, in a certain sense, have a kind of honesty. They may be dishonest with this honesty, yes, but at least they are real, meaning that they think the film will bring in money. Sometimes they're more real than the artist, who doesn't think anything at all. To think about nothing other than the fact that the film is going to bring in money, and to do a certain number of things for that reason alone, you can ask yourself which money, how much, but at least they have a kind of reality.

So little by little, on some films—I remember a film like *Tout va bien* (*All's Well*), we clearly told ourselves—at the time we saw ourselves as activists, we took ourselves for—although we differentiated ourselves from others, we discussed things with others. A Maoist activist named Pierre Overney had been killed at the Renault plant, there was a huge funeral. It was the last, spectacular gasp of May 68; there were between 100,000 and 150,000 protesters at the funeral, it was enormous. I remember that Gorin said—we told ourselves that we would make the film and that those were our viewers. So given that it was shown, it's not a terribly bad film, but it was not

it had a lot of faults, but it had one quality, and that was that it was made for an audience. But not really for an audience; for the first time we were the audience, to whom we felt equal. At that point it's like a community, one person might be a better baker, they say: 'I'm going to make bread for the other twenty-five' and the other twenty-five agree. With this film, it's true, the others weren't in agreement; we don't live in a society which enables us to be in agreement with them. Especially since we never saw them again after the funeral. This meant that when the film was distributed in a system that wasn't made for films to be seen only by those who had been at the death of Pierre Overney, it was only seen by ten or fifteen thousand people. But those people, in my opinion, were at the funeral.

[Inaudible]

You mean it was necessarily a flop from the outset?

[Inaudible]

Yes, but the publicity—we even stressed that because at first we had a lot of problems with Gaumont to launch the film because the slogan that we placed in the newspapers, we said it was a great disappointing film. [Laughs] It was exactly that, but the system doesn't allow that and one is wrong to place oneself in this system and to say to yourself: 'I don't want to get hurt by the system'. That's the mistake. For me today thinking about the audience consists instead in starting out in a real fashion by saying: 'How much money do I want to earn?' And you realise that when you make a film—I've been a producer for a long time, when you're working with big stars they have no problem telling you how much money they want: 'It has to be a million dollars, or 500,000 dollars; otherwise it's out of the question'. But when it's people you know, especially in my case, they say: 'Oh, no problem, pay me whatever you like'; and I have a lot of trouble getting people to say how much they want to make. How much do you want to make and how much do you think what you know how to do should bring you? In my case, for example, I say to myself: 'I need to spend around'—let's say that I consider an honest salary to be between 800 and 1,000 dollars U.S. per month, say 1,000 dollars U.S. per month to pay let's say for a car, a two-bedroom flat, a bathroom, an occasional trip. So you need a minimum of a thousand dollars with the prices of things where they are

today. The problem is, can I, am I capable of—to think about it in real terms: what do I need to do to earn a thousand dollars? There are systems like painting—if I were a painter I could say to myself: 'All right, I'll do a painting per month, and my problem will be to succeed in selling it for a thousand dollars, or twelve paintings per year on a regular basis'. A film is not just that; if I tell myself that I'll make one photograph per month, I won't find anyone willing to buy it for a thousand dollars. In painting this is possible. In popular music I don't know. But this is how I try to think. I tell myself: 'Let's see, maybe I could make a photograph that I could sell for a dollar, but then the problem is finding 1,000 people each month willing to buy it'. But there is a kind of reality—I tell myself that I will never find 1,000 people, so then I say to myself: 'Maybe 500, but then I'd have to sell them for two dollars, and then afterwards maybe 250, am I capable of knowing and seeing each month 250 different people, and then I'd have to sell them for almost five dollars—four dollars'. At that point, what does there have to be in the photograph so that, if I meet 200 people each month, I can say to them: 'Will you give me four dollars for the information in this photo?'

Well, this is a little abstract, but it describes a reality, it enables you to—what is needed for someone to—you really need information that affects someone personally for them to agree. Either a picture of his wife doing something different he hadn't thought of, something very private, but I couldn't do that because I don't know him. So I'm forced to find something in life, to try to imagine, but that gives you—and I think that very few filmmakers, very few film people, producers, things like that—starting with an average sum, an average salary, say that of a skilled worker. But it makes it possible to think in real terms of the story you have to show, of the images you have to show, and at the same time of the impossibility of showing an image that will interest—so if you have only one image you need an image that will interest 200 people. What is the image—the same image—the image, the sound, the text, that will interest 200 people at the same time? When you think about millions, you're guessing. When you think about millions, you trust to luck, you say: 'I'm going to do what I enjoy and I hope others will enjoy it too'. But when you think about it in real terms, there's not much to use as a starting point: there's food, hunger, life and death, sex, things like

that, there aren't tons of things. To make it more individual, more real, more decent—that's what I would call having trouble finding stories today.

[Inaudible]

I think it has changed a lot. Meaning the Earth has changed, or the world has changed. At the same time, I don't think so; people are starting to dress like they did in the Middle Ages, with just a pair of pants and a tunic and some clogs. So all that in the most perfect universe, that changes a lot and it doesn't change a lot, I don't know. I think that films, judging from the films one sees, viewers haven't changed very much because films are practically the same as they have always been.

[Inaudible]

Today there are no more, there are no more. There may be an evolution in the films too. Maybe it's films that have changed and on the contrary it's viewers who have remained the same. That's what you have to show. I think it's a little of both, but what hasn't changed—or rather what has changed but—when people say it is increasingly difficult to make films, it's increasingly difficult to co-exist with people. It's like in the press, look at the press; it's changing, because there are always lots of little newspapers being started up. In film they still haven't discovered that, it isn't done. Films don't exist for themselves, they only exist in families. If there were no families, only lovers—say lovers didn't have families, they didn't get married. There would be no amateur cinema. The day there are fewer marriages, Kodak will crumble. There's no doubt about it: when do you begin to record, in the form of images and not texts? When there are three or four of you. As long as there are only two of you, you don't need images and sound to communicate. All right, for a very little while, but not afterwards. I'd like to find—I think that an interesting book on film would be for a viewer, not to be a film critic but to tell their story as a viewer, to make a kind of cinephile film [sic] if you like. There has never been a book like that. Because they fall into film criticism. What's bad about film criticism in books – even in the books they've made out of all my articles – what is bad is that there is nothing to show what lies between the articles. If they did they might make interesting novels.

[Inaudible]

I've often thought—for the past two or three years I've been trying to make—moreover I was commissioned to make it by the SFP,<sup>4</sup> I had to give it up and return the money because it became, I don't know, I had no idea, I was going off in every direction, it had become a 200,000-hour film and there wasn't enough time left in my life to shoot it. It was simply called 'Mes films' ('My Films'). I had no idea how to approach it, there was so much that had to be said and I'm not at a point where, in images at least—I can't show just two images from *La Chinoise*, or one. If I had to show the three years between *La Chinoise* and *Pierrot le fou* I'd show eight images about me, and me, and my world between these three images, and show other, smaller images, and others too. I'm completely incapable of doing that. But I think it's possible in television, if television at that point weren't—my story would be less interesting, but other stories could be made this way. Or the program at seven o'clock in the morning would have a different relationship with the news than it does today, and the news would have a different relationship than it does today with sports, and sports a different relationship than it does today with variety shows, etc. Or television would be images of the nation, of certain moments of the nation. Some local television stations might need to make films and the films would be studies or the in-depth life of shorter news, that of a day. Toronto television programs would not be seen in Montreal, except certain things. Otherwise they wouldn't be watched, they'd have no interest. But the opposite occurs. Even Buenos Aires television programs are seen in Montreal. But because they watch them the people of Montreal know less about what is going on in Buenos Aires than in Jesus' time.

[Inaudible]

Yes, but at that point, who is the true author of the film? It's the person who programmed it. The true authors of films at CBS are the programmers, the people who program the program.

[Inaudible]

Well, every time someone uses my name, I try to take a percentage at least. [Laughs] I haven't had much success; I think people use my name very little. Still, it's annoying not to have—all my efforts for the past ten years have been to no longer have a name, to

have a different name than my own. Because people hide behind it. Whether they use it to be for or against, what's important for people is the name, like on your passport. I had a discussion for at least forty minutes with an immigration officer simply because—he asked me for my passport, and I have a Swiss passport. And he said: 'Are you Swiss?' And on the passport it's written: 'The bearer of this passport is a Swiss citizen'. And he asked me: 'Are you Swiss?' So I told him to give me my passport and I read: 'The bearer of this passport is a Swiss citizen'. Then he asked me again: 'But answer my question, are you Swiss?' So I said to him again: 'Give me my passport'. It drove him crazy, while it amused me for a while. I found it absolutely incredible that this guy would give me, a tourist, lessons in semantics.

[Inaudible]

That's right. When I asked Belmondo, or his manager, if I could make a film with him, he asked me: 'Do you really want to make a film?' I didn't understand, I was obliged to be crafty a little. Because if I said to him right out: 'But what do you call a film?' he'd think I was a smart aleck or I don't know what. So a little crafty, because I might like to do the film. But what does he call a film? If he said to me: 'Do you want to make another big film?' that would be extraordinary because that's what I've always done. He meant *Pierrot le fou* for example or *Alphaville*, but at the time, when I made it, he was all over me the same way. He said it wasn't a film. When *Pierrot le fou* was about to be released in Paris, [if] Belmondo's name wasn't on it – he was a pretty big star and he agreed to do the film for a lower rate – Gaumont [would have] said: 'We're not releasing this film'. It was produced by Dino De Laurentis in Italy, who didn't release it there, he said it wasn't a film. Today it seems fairly . . . [Break in tape]

Trust is solely a question of merchandise. If you ask a friend for ten francs, he trusts you, he's interested in giving it to you or not, or lend it to you, or discuss the matter, it's the same thing. In film it's quite interesting. When you build an airplane people can see a scale model, and if you put a sail on it instead of wings, or a string underneath with a chunk of lead, the banker will say: 'But your airplane will never fly, old chap'. So he'll say: 'I'm not giving you any money, your project is no good'. But what's interesting in film is that he has

to give money, meaning a material sign of something, for something he can't see.

[Inaudible]

But I always ask myself how my name—that's a question for you to answer, because you've come upon that name. I always ask myself how my name is known, because materially, my films by no means circled the globe. Not even like Bergman's films, and I know what I'm talking about because when I was a critic we launched Bergman. Or like Hitchcock and Bresson, people like that. My films had very small audiences. Even today when I'm going through customs with 'Godard' on my passport the CRS<sup>5</sup> agent knows me, he knows my name. I don't know where he saw it, because he has little ed—and still today I wonder how it is that I'm known. I've only made—in commercial terms all my films have been failures except *À bout de souffle* (*Breathless*). *Pierrot le fou* was a financial failure, it cost 250 million old French francs<sup>6</sup> to make. It never made the money back.

[Inaudible]

Yes, but I think that's something different. In the end I think I must represent someone who didn't abandon the idea, I don't know how to express this today, of earning a living honestly or in an interesting way, much more interesting than in a factory for example, or in the army or as an academic, doing not what he feels like, because people believe—but doing what he can, and trying to tie his desire to what he is able to do. And it's true, this must be quite rare for there to remain a certain trace. I seek out other people who do the same thing, whether in a strike—I'm still encouraged when I see a strike, a successful strike, or countries where a part of the population overthrows another part. I'm always encouraged, I say: 'Look, there are other Godards'; or 'I'm another Chilean'; or 'I'm another Czechoslovakian'; or 'I'm another worker at Lip'<sup>7</sup> in my own way. That's how I look at myself.

[Inaudible]

I don't think so. He's more limited than before, and the problem is whether these limits make it possible to do something. I mean sometimes a block of stone is just as interesting as something else. It depends on whether it falls on your head or you can climb on top of it. I think actors and big stars are a big problem today. Not only do

they limit you a lot, but supposing you have the money, supposing you've visualised in written form something that will get them for you, and that there are no problems, the problem is that they are in such a position—without being dictators, they are representatives of dictatorship, which is the same thing in the end. That's why, each time I'm here, it's interesting to see what I believe is a deterioration in acting. Today this was particularly apparent. When you see an actor—I don't remember the name of the actor in Murnau's film, but there you can say: here's an example of someone, even if he was a star, or Janet Gaynor<sup>8</sup>—here is a guy who performs a certain kind of labour with his body, with his head, and who tries, even in the limited space he's in, to have a certain relationship, to earn his salary, even if he is a little extravagant. When you watch *Pierrot le fou* afterwards, if there hadn't been a lot of colour, if there hadn't been a lot of other things, especially the things you put in it yourself, and my somewhat freewheeling talent at the time, which let you put things a little in disorder, a little in order, but which was much less imposed on you than a film like *Jaws* or something like that. There you can think only one thing, and you think it. If you like that, if that is what you want at that moment, that's tremendous, great. But if by chance this is not what you want, and you're in a state that you don't even know that this is not what you want, and you think it is, at that point it doesn't work.

In fact we see in every film—this is what I find interesting, and watch out for a little, to see an overview of fifty years of cinema in two hours. To see, say, the difference between Belmondo and James Dean, which was already enormous. At the time of *À bout de souffle* Jean-Paul and I, the team we made, were the equivalent in a sense of the team of Nicholas Ray and James Dean in their day. In *Pierrot le fou* there is already much less—Jean-Paul was much more mechanical and I had to insul—for it to work I had to give him something else, which moreover was very often too intellectual, because I myself was attracting things and I didn't have the strength to give him texts or, I don't know, from my life, my oxygen. There are other interesting things in *Pierrot le fou*, but this, I think, especially with respect to silent cinema—every time we see a silent film, or even Henry Fonda and Sylvia Sidney, how they acted. The film isn't very good, but you see what I'm saying, that you could use the actor to

tell stories. I think you no longer can today, actors can no longer really be used to tell a story, they prevent the story from developing. Or it develops in books, and that's why every film takes its inspiration from a book, not the way I did, but by copying it.

[Inaudible]

But I think that unknown actors—actors are so powerful that most often even unknown actors very quickly—well, there are people like that, you see it in sports I think . . .

[Inaudible]

I think he's a complete idiot.

[Inaudible]

His first film, fine. But you can compare, you can show ten minutes of—what was his first film called?

[Inaudible]

Fine, you show ten minutes of *Loves of a Blonde* and then show ten minutes of *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* and you'll see, in ten years or twenty years, what the Russians did to Czechoslovakia. What the Russians did to Czechoslovakia—not to show that the Russians are bastards and the Czechs are pathetic to let themselves be screwed like that. But to show—you show an image called 'Miloš Forman one' and an image called 'Miloš Forman two' and then you call this little film 'What the Russians Did to Czechoslovakia'. That's two images and a sound and, I don't know, you can't even say it's his fault. There's something strange too because there are several Czech filmmakers who are refugees in the United States. There are rich and poor, the rich are no better filmmakers. There is one very poor Czech filmmaker whose name is Němec. You may have seen his films. Today he earns a living in San Diego getting up every morning and collecting bottles and beer cans on the beach and cashing them in to make two or three dollars per day.

[Inaudible]

I'm here to research history, or to think out loud a little in front of people so I don't have to think all alone, or so that when we do a history of cinema it will have come about like that. But here is a place in our film history we will call 'Relations with the United States'. What it has done to two filmmakers and then today, from

what they tell me, there are Czechs who have succeeded here—there's Kadár, there's Forman, there are one or two others, and of course they're annoyed that there are one or two others who haven't succeeded. As Czechs they have to help them a little but at the same time it annoys them to have to do it. These are very interesting things.

[Inaudible]

Yes, but I don't know, if Dashiell Hammett was a good writer it's because he started out as a taxi driver. I don't know, he didn't find—if the Czechs are bad, it must be because they are also—these writers must also be bad taxi drivers, in my opinion.

Well, if there are no more . . .

[Inaudible]

Tomorrow we'll show, I don't remember exactly, but I know that I chose films that could be called films by young French filmmakers at the beginning of their career, with *Masculin Féminin* for me being a re-beginning. So what I was looking for were a few films by young filmmakers. I think we're going to show films made about groups of average young French people, in other words other masculin-feminines in French cinema. There should be an excerpt from a film by René Clair, one of his first. Perhaps they're super well-known. Losique always says to me: 'But they know that one, they've all seen it'. I say: 'But they've never seen twenty minutes alongside twenty minutes of another one'. It's as if you said: 'I know her'; fine, you know her, but you've never seen her with this person beside her. I think that's what is interesting. And I chose one of the most recent films that Losique showed in the French film retrospective, which I think is called *The Girl from Prague with a Very Heavy Bag*. There will be a little excerpt from this film because it's made by a young woman I met in Paris, I'm curious to see it. My impression—I'd describe it as their *Masculin Féminin* today. That's it, I always try to do things that hold together just for the day, if you will, which have a kind of reality. A film that was missing this afternoon, I would have liked very much to show it, because we would have been able to talk about this painting between things, to show a painter who despite his name I quite like: Picasso. I quite like his way of painting. The film is *The Picasso Mystery*, you see him painting. You don't see actors, you see colours

as characters. I think that could have helped us to see in *Pierrot le fou*, or even in a silent film, or a film like Murnau's, how shifts of space were done, things like that. All right, see you tomorrow morning.

Friday 16 June 1978

### Notes

1. Lionel White, *Obsession* (New York: Dutton, 1962).
2. The relevant passage in Élie Faure's book, read in voice-over at the very beginning of *Pierrot le fou* by Jean-Paul Belmondo, reads: 'Velázquez, after the age of fifty, never again painted sharply defined things. He wandered around objects with the air and twilight'. See Élie Faure, *History of Art: Modern Art*, trans. Walter Pach (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1924), 124 (translation modified slightly). Faure's book was first published in 1921 (the above passage does not appear in his 1903 monograph on Velázquez) and was reprinted in 1965 in a pocketbook edition from which Belmondo is seen reading in the bath in the second scene of the film.
3. *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*.
4. The Société Française de Production, founded in 1975 and initially devoted to producing French films; it now supplies technical support and is part of a pan-European conglomerate.
5. The Direction Centrale des Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité (DCCRS, commonly referred to as the CRS), a branch of the French national police.
6. Although the old French franc was replaced by the new in 1960, with one new franc equal to 100 old francs, in 1978 Godard continued to think in terms of old francs. Two hundred and fifty million old francs, or 2.5 million new francs, was roughly equivalent to \$500,000.
7. Lip is a French watchmaker which in 1973 was hit by a wildcat strike over secret restructuring plans. The strike attracted national attention with, at one point, 100,000 people demonstrating in the street in support of the workers.
8. Janet Gaynor was the lead actress in Murnau's *Sunrise*, an excerpt of which was shown in today's session. The lead actor was George O'Brien.

# Television and Video

4

## *Masculin Féminin*

2

*Under the Roofs of Paris (Sous les toits de Paris)*  
René Clair (France, 1930)

*Pickpocket*  
Robert Bresson (France, 1959)

*The Girl from Prague with a Very Heavy Bag*  
(*La Fille de Prague avec un sac très lourd*)  
Danielle Jaeggi (France, 1979)

*Masculin Féminin: 15 faits précis*  
Jean-Luc Godard (France–Sweden, 1966)

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JEAN-LUC GODARD: [*In medias res*] The first part of this research course is over, for future research – not too distant, in the next two or three years – for a history of cinema, or stories about the history of cinema and television. Not written but seen, which the film company Sonimage, my company which I represent here, and the Conservatory of Cinematographic Art, which is represented by Serge Losique, agreed to undertake. And like we said, we realised at the beginning—I thought of carrying out this research in front of you rather than doing it with no precise purpose in the abstract. That's why I accepted when Serge Losique asked me to take over from Henri Langlois. I said that it wasn't a question of taking over from Henri Langlois, it was a question of continuing in another way a job he had begun and which he did in a certain way and with which, moreover, I was not always in agreement. Not long before his death I said to him: 'It's time to sell the Cinémathèque, and if you don't find a buyer you can burn it and we'll do something else afterwards'.<sup>1</sup>

To me, Henri Langlois was a producer. He was a producer who produced part of film history. Whether he let himself be overtaken by

things and all that, that's—things are too difficult when you're all alone. So I told Serge Losique that I would agree if he saw it as a film production. And he said to me: 'But what film are we going to produce?' And I told him that I had a project for the history of cinema, that what I needed was to see films, what I needed was to talk about them. This was a project I was going to do with Langlois and I was counting on him to send me off in directions I no longer knew, because I made films rather than watch them. So we had to look at that as a production. And then we realised that, before producing a history of cinema, we had to produce a way of seeing the films, and producing a way of seeing the films does not consist – I wasn't sure at first, but now I'm convinced of it – doesn't consist simply in watching them and talking about them afterwards. It consists in knowing how to see. And perhaps the cinema that shows things should show the history of seeing that it fostered and the history of blindness it fostered, which is sort of the thesis we'll develop in this history of cinema: to use classical examples to show how there is something different from both painting and literature, and how afterwards with talking cinema it quickly—they had to blind this light that was quite popular and remains quite popular.

And when I arrived here I thought I could carry out experiments in seeing in front of you: project films, put little pieces of film beside each other. Then I saw very quickly that I had the equipment to do this – I'd spent ten years acquiring it and even having the idea of acquiring it – but that I didn't have the films. Here Losique had access to the films but he didn't have the equipment, or the equipment is nearby and not set up in a way we can use it. So we were reduced to having discussions like in a film society, seeing a film and then talking about it, meaning that if anything is visible during the screening to blind it with words afterwards. Because I think cultural anxiety is such that people need to be—they prefer being blind to experiencing this anxiety. In any event the average audience for commercial films doesn't have it. They aren't happy, they regret spending their four dollars, or they're happy, they don't regret it and they'll go see the next film. So in the end we may have found a system. I realised that for me too what interests me, and it doesn't bother me much that it's a long way away, because when you're far away—I've forced myself, in exchange for – which is my share of the co-production

also – I've forced myself to watch my own films. At home I wouldn't have forced myself to watch them like this. So I've forced myself to watch them, meaning to see myself at a precise place in film history, following chronological order. And to try to compare myself to the films which, at the time, or which today a little at random, I might think had a connection, because for three-quarters of the excerpts we show we should have—you have to have seen them in order to select them. They've been chosen a little at random. But who has seen them? Is there here, at the university or at the Conservatory or the Cinémathèque,<sup>2</sup> any more than in Europe or anywhere else—there is no practical little guidebook to tell you: 'Now, if you show *À bout de souffle* (*Breathless*) or you show *Masculin Féminin*, we advise you to show beforehand, or afterwards, to inform the discussion'—or show every second reel for example. A little bit of *Loves of a Blonde* and a film by Vigo, for example, or by somebody else. Then they'd tell you: 'Now, show *Loves of a Blonde* from the fourteen-minute mark to the sixteen-minute mark'. Truly like in medicine; if you want to study something, they say: 'Here, look in that direction'. But they've been studying the human body for a long time and for certain reasons.

I think cinema is the only place this would be interesting. It would be fairly unique, because it's made up of nothing but images following along after one another. So its history should be easy to do, because its history is inside it, it isn't outside or alongside it. There are side histories, which would be the history of viewers who have seen the films. That history hasn't been done either. The only history of cinema that has been done isn't the history of how films are made, it's the history of the people who made films. They tell you that Griffith was born in 1900, in 1800 and something, at best they tell you a little about what was happening in the United States at that time, but you don't have the slightest idea because they don't know how to do it. What should be shown is the fact that he was born in such-and-such an age or the way he did it, that he was able to invent an editing style called crosscutting. That it was done then and not in Germany or Russia because in Germany and Russia at that time they found something different given that different things were happening there, and so on.

So it came down to watching my own films again and comparing them with others—chosen, alas, somewhat at random. At times this morning there was a little—I kind of, in fact we kind of messed up. I didn't go to much trouble to choose the films and Losique even less than me, so that—my idea with respect to *Masculin Féminin* was to try to show films by young people about young people. My thought was: 'When the filmmaker made this film it was their *Masculin Féminin*'. In fact we should have shown excerpts from, I don't know, silent film—but that is precisely where I needed to speak with someone to get ideas. I wanted to show Billy Wilder's German film *People on Sunday*, I was also looking for a silent film from that period, but I'm not familiar enough with it.

And so we'll start over again in early September with the same format, the same kind of excerpts. I wonder if you have anything to say, if you think it's working, or if you'd rather we did something slightly different. I wonder if it would be better to show two or three excerpts a half-hour long, or forty minutes, or more excerpts but shorter. That I don't know. Maybe someone could tell me what they think of these screenings of excerpts which are—alas! we're really just starting out. I need the time to select the excerpts, and to select them I need to have seen them, and to have seen them many others have to have seen them and I have to see what they saw in order to be able to use it. So we're really just starting out. That's what I told Losique, it's a little like—even before planting a tree, which will be our history of cinema, for the moment we're weeding the ground, which we're not even sure is ours. That's why I've always placed one of my films, so I at least have a reference to my work, which I knew a little, and watch pieces that resituate me.

With respect to *Masculin Féminin*, I don't know if you—yesterday I spoke a little about the difference between it and *Pierrot le fou*. What I can say from the outset to launch this discussion is that it was true, but it wasn't so much me as the people who saw it, especially a small group of people I spent time with, friends, or rather assistants, one or two people who wondered what I could do after *Pierrot le fou*. Their impression was that it was like the end of something, a sort of fireworks. And this didn't do me much good, because in fact I was asking myself what I could do, and my production principle

has always been that once one film is over, even before it is over, to try to set up another one. To create, not an oeuvre, but to create in my mind a regular working life like an employee if you will. With this film I had a proposal to make a co-production with Sweden whose topic would be left up to me. It began with a short story by Maupassant that I completely abandoned; gradually this is what the film became. Of course I can see differences between them; today the difference with *Pierrot le fou* is quite clear. But what is clear? It's not easy to say. So if you have any questions . . .

. . . men's and women's relationships. In *Pierrot le fou* there are adventures. In *Masculin Féminin* we return to a high level of reality. In *Pierrot* there's the countryside, the seashore, the stolen money . . .

Yes but stolen money is a reality. There are bosses who steal money every day from workers who let themselves be robbed, that's a reality also. The countryside is another reality. I think very few films take place in the countryside because people wouldn't know what to say about it and almost all films, some 80%, take place in cities or are about cities. In *Masculin Féminin* you can say men's and women's relationships, fine, but it's my relationship. I've never hidden the fact that I put myself in—it's never bothered me to place myself in each character in turn, but sometimes this means that you see that they aren't very well done, they're illogical or not logical. But this comes from the fact that I place an idea that is purely my own in one of the characters. Then the next thing is completely my own, meaning my unity, but in another character. In this film I was watching the dialogue between, I don't remember their names, not Jean-Pierre Léaud and Chantal Goya, the other two, and I tried to remember how I wrote their dialogue. In fact I think I recall that this was not written dialogue, it was real interviews with the actors – me doing a real interview with the actors – which were partly fictional because when I spoke to them about the character in the film they were supposed to reply in a certain way, the way the character would. But sometimes I spoke to them as themselves. Afterwards I tried—each person had an interview and afterwards I mixed the interviews up, knowing that I was going to do two assemblages, one a dialogue between Chantal Goya and Léaud and another between the two others, but made out of interviews. I simply edited them so

people would think they were talking to each other, and in fact they appear to be speaking to each other at the same time as they appear to be speaking on their own and speaking to me.

I've always tried to take as real not so much what is said but the moment it is said: it could be real, it could have happened. In this film I think there began to be—afterwards there was *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle* (*Two or Three Things I Know about Her*) in particular, which you may see in September. I prefer to try to choose films, to use these excerpts not at all to show unknown films, although that interests me, but for that I need help, and I don't have any, because that's not how you've been taught, how they try to teach you to show cinema. On the contrary, I try to use the most classical films possible because they're the most familiar if you like. To use what is familiar to show—to talk about light you wouldn't use some extraordinary laser that no one is familiar with, you'd take a lampshade everyone knows and use it to show what light could be. To talk somewhat abstractly perhaps or in a complex manner, but based on something very well known. So here, with these excerpts, to take well-known examples which come from my memory of film history, and if I don't remember anything I ask Serge if he has an idea. And for *Masculin Féminin* it's true, I didn't have a lot of ideas.

**JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD:** Can this be explained by the fact that in *Masculin Féminin* one has the impression of shifting to a different kind of cinema? Its film ideas are much more like television . . .

We could take an image of Brecht's, who said, I don't remember exactly, that there are difficulties in climbing the mountain, but the real difficulties begin when you come back down. That after the difficulties of the mountain come the difficulties of the plain.<sup>1</sup> I would describe my difficulties up until *Pierrot le fou* as the difficulties of the mountain, and starting with *Masculin Féminin* as the difficulties of the plain. And with respect to television, I bought a television while making this film; before I didn't own one and I remember Truffaut telling me, or me saying to myself: 'I'm going to be a little like Truffaut, I'm going to buy a television to watch actors. Because there are a lot more than in film. Television was just beginning to develop, so it was an opportunity to see faces in a new way.'

and to see unknown actors also. Because the way I work is based on—the boy I hired was some guy hanging around, the girl was a non-professional. At the time Chantal Goya – *Cahiers du Cinéma* was published by Filipacchi, who at the time also published *Salut les copains*<sup>4</sup> – Chantal Goya was someone who worked—a singer he was trying to launch. So there was absolutely nothing inv—to use what you see [*three-second break in sound*] compared to television. I think I put in the credits: ‘One of the films that aren’t made either in cinema or in television’.<sup>5</sup>

Already back then I had the idea I have now that it’s good to make a huge film from time to time, but it shouldn’t crush the small ones. Sometimes films are bad simply because they’re the only ones made. They’re bad because alone—bad doesn’t mean nasty or anything like that, it means they aren’t able on their own to meet a need, even though they often try. This is why I said in *Masculin Féminin* that it was one of the films that weren’t made. For me this is a critique of the film. It would have been different if that year sixty films had been made the same way.

Finding excerpts is a little difficult for me, because you have to think about the films again, you have to find films that were made in their minds from a similar perspective and which give you something to discuss. Knowledge of film history—but seen this way, it isn’t necessarily a film about young people; that’s just an indication. I didn’t even find anywhere in film history a list of films or ten films with young people in such-and-such a year which try to depict their own day and age. A film by so-and-so from such-and-such a country. I had to remember by myself; you can’t do that. So with *Masculin Féminin*, precisely—you realise that it was much easier with *Pierrot le fou* to find those few films with some connection, simply because it was a love story taken to extremes. So you can find three or four films, you could find four, five, six or ten others and the examples would have made a fine spectacle alongside *Pierrot le fou*. We would go from a silent German film to Sweden to Italy; we could have found any number of other films. With *Masculin Féminin* it was much more difficult, and it may not be by chance that there was a kind of gap this morning. I showed an excerpt from a film by a young filmmaker. There was no point in showing the whole film, it will be seen here in

the French film retrospective. I didn't see the film in Paris, so I took advantage of the opportunity to see it here, saying: 'Look, someone has made their first film, what have they done?' Because when I made *Masculin Féminin* I had an impression of starting over again a little. But then I always have the impression of starting over.

LUC CHAPUT: [Inaudible]

*The Girl from Prague with a Very Heavy Bag*, I can't tell you much about it. The film was made by a woman named Danielle Jaeggi, who works in Paris. I think it's her first film<sup>6</sup> and it was shown in the French cinema sidebar at the Cannes film festival. It will be shown here next week in the selection from the sidebar being done by the Conservatory. Let's say I chose it in order to show a film by a young person, let's call it a young French film on young people, wondering whether there might be something political in it. Because *Masculin Féminin*, I think, is the beginning of what people call my political period. It shouldn't be called this, because this would be to do the history of cinema the way I don't want to do it at all. This period consisted if you like of talking about people and their problems while showing what was happening alongside with at least equal intensity. Whereas in *Masculin Féminin* we're in the realm of the sensational little news item, of great political events in the form of sensational little news items, because there is also the Black question in the film and every ten minutes something comes along.

[Inaudible]

It's difficult to say this in writing or by speaking. If I could there would no longer be any need to do this and I could show you. My idea, which was my starting point, to head off in that direction—it's like judges in the United States when they hold a commission of inquiry, they say: 'Sir, isn't it a fact that . . . ?'<sup>7</sup> This is how I wanted to show the sequences in the film. 'Isn't it a fact that Mr Griffith, when he was dreaming then of what he called a close-up, isn't it a fact that in fact he was looking for something else which we call editing now?' Something like that. That, you could say, will be a very simple history of cinema, there will be four hours that we'll sell in video cassette format and which can be sold separately as films, but which for the most part will be made either for television or, especially, for universities and schools where people study film, where film is taught. I wonder

how they can teach cinema, how they can do that outside of any real practice, the real practice of cinema being exhibition in the end. How they can do that. So there will be four cassettes on silent cinema, then four on talking cinema; the first cassette on silent cinema will be called 'Silent America', the second 'Silent Russia',<sup>8</sup> because I think we'll do them in English first and then in French, because it's mostly in the United States, a little in Canada, but mostly in the United States that the educational market is larger. There are 1,300 universities in the United States and every one has two or three film courses, not to mention the smaller schools. So it's huge, and it's in order to provide teachers with something visual to show when they talk about the visual. This should give them ideas, and perhaps afterwards – given that it's done with the simple video means that exist today – they'll have their own ideas about film practice using a small Sony camera, or a small Sony U-Matic. So that when they're talking about Eisenstein they can try taking a shot and see that they don't know how, or find a camera angle. Then they'll have an idea of how to really talk about Eisenstein, but at the same time to see. The idea is simple: to use the most classical examples – silent America, Russia and Germany, the three large countries – and then to make another cassette with the other countries, particularly France. The same thing for talking cinema, talking America, Russia, Germany, and then the final cassette, mostly covering France.

I have ideas to start out with but there are places—I know talking cinema for example but I'm not quite sure yet for silent cinema. I think we'll start with the example of Griffith in the United States, Eisenstein in Russia, German expressionism, Murnau and Lang. Then for the others I don't know. The basic idea is that when it was invented cinema fostered, or impressed,<sup>9</sup> as you have been able to see, a different way of seeing called editing, which is to put something in relation to someone in a different way than novels or paintings. This is why it was successful, enormously successful, because it opened people's eyes in a certain way. With painting there was a single relationship to the painting, with literature there was a single relationship to the novel, but when people saw a film there was something that was at least double – and when someone watched it became triple. There was something different which in its technical form gradually came to be called editing, meaning there was a

connection.<sup>10</sup> It was something that filmed not things, but the connection between things, as I said about *Pierrot le fou*—the form of filming them. Meaning that people saw connections in them. First of all they saw a connection with themselves. And music and novels changed direction because of that, the graphic novel changed direction because of that. In earlier times people didn't listen to Mozart; they listened to songs. But the people who listened to Mozart, princes and things like that, didn't see a connection between it and themselves. Not like today, when people go to rock concerts and things. That came from cinema. People saw a relationship with what they saw, because what they saw itself created a relationship in the form of telling stories and made this relationship truly seen. And there is something—but it's complex, you have to show it at the same time, because to say it in words, you'd have to—you can't say it in the form of commentary, you have to show it.

Basically, my thesis is that all the great directors of silent cinema—or those who remain well known because they went further than the others, either stronger or more desperately—were looking for editing. That's the thesis. They were looking for something that was specific to cinema, which is editing. Then when talking cinema arrived, society or the way in which it was taken up, because at first its development was a little anarchic—editing made it possible to see things and no longer to say them. That's what was new about it. You could see that the boss was robbing the workers. It wasn't enough to say it. So if making films meant showing that bosses stole from workers without saying it, it became obvious that the boss was a baddie. And seeing is believing, as the saying goes, you saw him. And still in criminal trials today, when they want to find you guilty they find you guilty with evidence, because it isn't enough to say something, you have to see it. These are extreme situations. But cinema made these extreme situations natural, or was capable of making them natural, and that would have changed everything. That's my opinion: if cinema changes, everything changes, and it's the place where it is easiest to change. This is why it's the only place that doesn't change. It's the only place where you can change something, but if you change something there you set off a chain reaction. Because you change our way of seeing, and even children are taught at first to speak rather than to see.





généalogie de la  
jeunesse

(du cinéma)

logique de la  
jeunesse et  
jeunesse de cette  
logique

la lumière comme  
jeunesse de l'obscurité

salles obscures

risque

l'ombre

toujours le désir

la proie et l'ombre



[Inaudible]

[Interrupts questioner] No, I said it was the basic idea of the thesis. We'll show by telling certain stories [*histoires*] that have happened, or a certain way in which history [*histoire*] has been experienced through individual stories [*histoires*]. Griffith, for example, invented the close-up. Fine, let's keep the myth, but supposing he did, what was he trying to do? He wanted—he wasn't trying to see someone closer up; he wanted to bring together something far away and something near at hand. A long shot – he never succeeded – and something close at hand. But he never thought about it like that.

Then, in the section on talking cinema, we'll show that the invention of the close-up very quickly became tied to the appearance of the big star and a certain way of seeing the star. And the dictatorship of the big star, which of course is connected to political dictatorship pure and simple, or to relationships of a dictatorial nature. It's an example of these, which cinema makes it possible to show quite well. Then we'll try to show that Eisenstein, who thought he was a specialist in montage, was in fact, I believe, one of the rare filmmakers to have a perspective on things. And he had this not just at any old time at all, because he had it around 1915–20 [sic], when the Russians, or some Russians, had a perspective on the world that was different from most of the rest of the world. And there was a fairly precise idea that this perspective would make something, which became what it became. At the time, however, Eisenstein depicted it well because he knew how to find—all he had were

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### Illustration page 221:

genealogy of youth (of cinema)  
logic of youth and youth of this logic  
light as the youth of darkness  
dark movie theatres  
prison  
shadow  
always desire  
the prey and the shadow

ideas for camera angles, but he had such ideas for camera angles that if you put two shots by Eisenstein side by side, when he put them one after the other in a film, well, there was a relationship between them. He thought it was—but it wasn't montage, on the contrary. Because someone he argued with a lot at the time did almost the opposite. This person had only montage ideas, meaning relationships, but he didn't know how to do it and it was all flat, Vertov's films. That's pretty much how we'll show things and then we'll try to show what became of it—what might have become of it and what became of it in the talking film. The way it was dismantled [*démontage*] and how Russian cinema, which was a cinema of shots, became in the end, already at the end of Lenin's day and all through Stalin, a scripted cinema. Even a cinema scripted by political commissars. That is how it was similar to Hollywood. And in the history of cinema, peaceful co-existence came very early on, long before it did in politics. What's more, when countries sign agreements, the first agreements between them, the first thing they trade, is films. It's not raw materials; the first thing they start to trade is always films.

*... writing scripts . . . how much time do you . . .*

It was like all my films, there was no script in a specific sense, meaning a vision of the film told in written form. I took notes, I met people, I put them in the film, and little by little I'd place that—I don't know, there are painters who may make a drawing and then once the drawing is done they colour it. Then they go out and buy everything they need to make an exact painting of what they've done. Then there may be others who do things differently. They wander about, they start to sketch, they return, and afterwards they may no longer even need to go into the landscape they saw, or see the people they saw. And they finish their work like that, it takes two or three months, there's work. The difficulty in film—I've gotten over this a little, you become a little less anxious as you grow older—is being afraid of not being capable, which, I think, prevents three-quarters of people who would like to make a film, they're afraid and they don't dare try. And they hold this fear up to people, and blow it up even bigger by saying that filmmaking is expensive and things like that. So people feel incapable or, when

they're capable, if they're a little bit honest, if they're not megalomaniacs, they feel too much responsibility. The responsibility of knowing how to last for an hour and a half, an hour and a half to two hours, which is a completely idiotic length. And I think that the history of cinema should be able to recount how, suddenly, because films started out at two or three minutes, how little by little they arrived at a certain standard length. Because if you escape that, you aren't placed in prison, you're outside it. That's the case of the film we were talking about at lunchtime, *Chronique quotidienne* by Leduc, which was commissioned by the CBC.<sup>11</sup> It has a three-minute section and then an eight-minute section and then a twenty-three-minute section, which is not a big problem; if you fry an egg, it takes three minutes; if you do a steak, it takes a little longer. Things don't have the same time. But for the CBC a fried egg should last twenty minutes, a steak twenty minutes too. Everything twenty minutes, and if you don't do that, well, they'll decommission what they commissioned. So how can you . . .

This business of length is interesting. Soccer games too for example, a soccer game lasts around an hour and a half to two hours, about the same time as a film. Where does this come from? I like soccer a lot; I'd like the game to go on for eight or nine hours. [Laughter] I think that in earlier times—but people have become completely incredible. At least the Romans, with the gladiators, when they had had enough after three minutes everybody put their thumb down, meaning that they killed them. Or if they liked it they raised their thumb for it to continue, so things lasted completely different lengths of time. But in *Masculin Féminin* there is a length that I find—the biggest, for me, and I often say this, to me Rivette makes films exactly like Verneuil. Then people say: 'Just the same, Rivette is a nicer guy than Verneuil, that's not what you mean to say, really'. But in fact he makes a film an hour and a half long, or two hours – fine, we don't have the final say on that – but in addition he makes it in the same economic time as someone who in principle is his enemy. Meaning that he makes it in a certain number of weeks times a certain number of people. It doesn't matter if there are twelve people times five weeks, their relationship is the same. Whereas I always unconsciously, and today very consciously, sought to escape this relationship. And I sought very quickly to have control over the film's budget.

Today by becoming my own producer, so that people take me seriously, they know that I won't go and gamble all the money away in Las Vegas, they at least know that I'm going to make the film. But even before—I had to fight very hard with my first producer to control the budget, to tell him: 'Today I'm deciding such-and-such'. Unconsciously I felt, precisely, that I shouldn't do a script or a work plan because afterwards that boxed you in. People said: 'But you planned on shooting Tuesday with three elephants and two gladiators, why aren't you doing that?' If you write it down they corner you simply because it's written. They say: 'But you changed!' And myself too, even in a discussion, if I change, I prefer to say: 'Yes, I changed'. Then they tell you: 'But you're contradicting yourself'; 'Of course I am'. That's what's interesting—look at the dangerous effects of the fact that I'm contradicting myself. The simple fact of contradicting yourself is not terrible, but it's terrible for me. Why? Because to live in Europe is to live in a Cartesian system which says that you must not contradict yourself.

PATRICK STRARAM: [Inaudible]

The connection between Verneuil and Rivette is that both of them, when they make a film, shoot for eight to twelve weeks and employ twenty people.

PATRICK STRARAM: [Inaudible]

But he does it the same way, so at a certain point he can't do anything different. You have to—we don't live in a free world, you do only what you can. If you work in the same way, if you always make the same gesture—a worker in Detroit and a worker at Renault—the worker in Detroit doesn't make the same kind of car as the worker at Renault, but he makes the same gesture, and in the end his life is the same. A Cadillac isn't the same as an R5.<sup>12</sup> I say it is the same thing. It's the same thing with the owner, the worker who produced it—and then afterwards, the person who uses it has the same relationship with it. It was made the same way.

PATRICK STRARAM: [Inaudible]

But Verneuil let Gabin come up with his own dialogue.

PATRICK STRARAM: [Inaudible]

Oh, it's not so . . . I think it basically comes down to that, yes. And

I think it becomes, maybe not—less at the time of *L'Amour fou*, but more and more . . .

PATRICK STRARAM: [Inaudible]

[Interrupts Patrick Straram] But I didn't say it at the time of *L'Amour fou*. I said it three years ago when making *Numéro deux* (*Number Two*),<sup>13</sup> not at the time of *L'Amour fou*. But what would be interesting would be to go back and see, because obviously he's someone—I don't know if I'm right, it's a proposition, a discussion we're having. There are few filmmakers, few producers—and you find only producers who would be interested on occasion – because they're crazy, because they love cinema, because they're real filmmakers – in changing the relationship during production a little, if only because they're bored. Beauregard agrees to work with me under changed production relationships simply because he's bored. But that, it seems to me, is the least he can do. Who says they're bored with their work? Me, Beauregard and the worker at Renault. Who says they aren't bored? Barbet Schroeder, Rivette and Verneuil. That day I said that Mr Beauregard, even though he's a producer, has a greater connection to a worker at Renault than Mr Rivette. He wants to change for that reason alone. It's not that the rhythm is infernal; on the contrary, it's too slack.

[Inaudible]

First of all by having very, very little distribution, far too little. So we end up in an economic situation—our company is a very unhealthy company economically because it lives only on the money it receives to make films and not even a little from the films' profits, as small as they may be. Since we live in this system, we have to live like others a little. If you don't like to wash, you can't stop washing for a year if you live with two or three other people. There's a minimum. So you work in television, and because we had the opportunity, which we created ourselves a little by consciously buying equipment that brought us closer to people in television because they had this same equipment, which I bought as a film person. So then the television people said to us: 'Ah, so you use this equipment? Maybe you could make a little something for us?' We leapt at the opportunity because there was an opportunity to write in a newspaper or to have access to television programming, which is completely real. It's like a singer

who makes records and never performs in public. I don't think it would work for them if that was all they wanted. At times they have to perform in public. They can't be happy with just making records, even if they are very successful.

So I've made several films for television, like *Lotte in Italia* (*Struggle in Italy*), *British Sounds*, *Pravda*—experiments that weren't very well done but which were commissioned by television, but as films, cinema, which didn't work very well. Afterwards I had the opportunity to make series. And in a series, suddenly—once I said to myself, when FR3,<sup>14</sup> with the INA<sup>15</sup> as an intermediary, asked us: 'Could you make a one-hour film for us in two months?' There was a contract to make them one hour per year. I told them no, two months for an hour is not enough time, because an hour is enormous and I need time to do it. I don't want eight weeks; I want a year to do an hour, at a minimum. But when we learned that they had six hours, we said to them: maybe six hours, we could do that for you in three months. Because at that point you conceive it completely differently. To have the time to talk for six hours to your girlfriend, for example, is huge. Because if you have to say everything in an hour it may not be enough. You panic completely, you don't see why someone would say—but suddenly, with six hours, you say to yourself: 'Well, at least I can do a frank and honest conversation, at least I can do what is never done on television, which is not to cut, not even after ten minutes, but after four seconds'.

*Where was it seen?*

It was shown on television.

*Was that all?*

That was all [*tout*], and, like you say, that was everything [*tout*].

*I didn't mean . . .*

[Interrupts questioner] Yes, but *tout* [*all/everything*] is not *rien* [*nothing*]. [Laughter]

*I'm not saying 'that's all' because it isn't good.*

It's neither better nor less good. It's something different. And sometimes I preferred to talk for six hours to at least 200,000 people. That's how many people are watching the third network in France at ten o'clock on Sunday night in the summer. Two hundred, two hundred

and fifty thousand is the minimum, so we were even under the ratings threshold because we didn't even reach 1%. We didn't register, yet even so there were 200,000 to 250,000 viewers, and I've never had 250,000 viewers. At that point, I say to myself that these 250,000 viewers are people who, in some aspect of their daily lives, must resemble me a little. What's more, people didn't despise me, they didn't say to me—they said it wasn't bad, there wasn't the kind of hatred you often see in cinema, or which was often directed at me. A true hatred, at times from technicians, at others from distributors, at others from critics. True hatred, I don't know what else to call it.

All this means is that I'm someone—I make a displaced cinema. I'm more interested in marginal people and I feel closer to displaced people, whether Arabs displaced by Jews, Jews displaced by Germans, sick people displaced by doctors, displaced crazy people, things like that. A displaced cinema, and for that reason it is not always in the right place when it's seen. At times television has restored in me – the fact that it's seen around the world – has restored in me a feeling that I can exist normally and has let me rethink film differently. It has let me not be terrified of the one and a half or two hours because I'm not going to change it just like that. If I need four hours, to try to make a film that is four times one hour, to think about it as four times one hour and not one times four hours. Lots of things like that, elementary things that might help me. And I realise that people who are making a film for the last time, people who are at the end—someone like Chabrol is no longer able to think that. But someone starting out today, I see that they are much more limited, more limited than we were when we started out. They're completely limited in their thinking. They say to themselves: 'A film is expensive' without realising that this is what they are told to think. It's true a film is expensive, but which film? And is it worthwhile making a film like that, and why do new filmmakers make films like that? What do they want, what do they want really?

Today I know – I didn't know very well before – I know that I need to show myself outside myself in a certain form in order to talk about myself. This helps me have contact with people, even contact as impersonal as you here, even so it helps me a little. I haven't found this in Europe. If I find it in Montreal, it's worth the trouble

to come here if I can. If we make a film and I earn my living from it, well, it's a film like any other. I'm shooting right now. It's the same as a film production. When I wrote criticism—I don't think of this as a lecture. I'm having a lot of trouble with my taxes and the taxman, who says to me: 'But you're speaking, you're paid to speak.' And I say: 'No, my company has hired me to do this work and I receive no salary. The company receives the money to produce something and I'm a producing machine that is producing it'. Naturally I have to be fed, like a machine. But the length is no longer a hindrance. I'm less afraid of it, but I hesitate to re-launch myself on the length of an hour—because for me what is called a big production or a film say in the normal system starts from length, from a dual length: the final length, which is the length of time you recorded, and the length of your shoot.

*The only thing is that we're talking about two different things. If we're going to talk about video, talk about video, and if we're going to talk about film, talk about film.*

I don't understand. What difference do you see? There are two media; one has a magnetic base . . .

. . . there is contact with people . . . There is an enormous difference between film and video.

But I experienced this difference. To me there is—but there isn't in the sense that they shouldn't touch. There is the same difference between a bedroom and a kitchen. They're part of the apartment. The format is pretty much the same.

Video is interesting, it could be interesting, because of the fact that you see the image right away. The technical relationship and the technical hierarchy aren't the same. They could be different, because the cinematographer looking—it could be like that but it isn't, because video is used in television and cinema uses film. Because in video the cinematographer sees the image right away, at that point he's no longer a specialist with a trained eye. Because this specialist is a little better able to judge—and it's a good thing he can, it's impossible to know how to do everything. But he knows a little better what you'll see tomorrow when it comes back from the lab. For this reason I don't speak with him because I don't have the technical knowledge. Or once we've exhausted my technical knowledge w

don't talk about the image. The next day in the screening room, watching the rushes, you watch them only from a technical point of view. You're so happy that something was impressed—afterwards you don't speak, whereas in video, and this is something we've noticed in our work, we have a lot of trouble finding technicians because they feel—I feel, if I hire a cinematographer, I saw this in my last film, I made a film on children this time, I said: 'All right, this interests me too, the cinematographer I want to work with has children, so the mere fact that we will see right away, and that he won't [sic] hear me talking with the little boys and girls, and he's not a bad fellow, he's fairly open, more than the others, that will reassure me. He'll tell me: "Listen Jean-Luc, in my opinion you shouldn't ask that question like that, because today my little girl came home from school and was telling me stories".'

I told myself that this would help me a little with the script, that I wouldn't be alone in imagining my film, which is Rivette's point of view, Verneuil's point of view and my point of view when I made—and I suffered a lot from that and I wasn't able to get by all alone. Because they teach you to be alone. Over the long run, what I was seeking in my history of cinema was to be less alone. I got through it like an idiot, but I succeeded somewhat. When someone like Gorin wanted to make films, what was novel about him was that he couldn't work alone. From the start he said: 'I have to work with someone else'. So I got through it, but I felt that I needed someone. For there to be two people, say—two men can't work together, but a man and a woman can. Two people working together creates a very interesting relationship I find, and video lets several people be a part of an image. You're forced to be more numerous because you see the image right away. And in these films, traditional film and television technicians—we found that friends hid behind their technical specialisation. Because a friend said: 'No, I'm just—don't ask me about the image'. In any event I'm the one who will decide, yes because it's my film, but because it's my film doesn't mean that you can't say something to me now and not when it is finished. I'm quite happy moreover that they don't say anything to me when the film is finished. They'll tell me it's good, it's bad, but what do they really tell me?

We noticed with video that people were keeping quiet. And we, Anne-Marie Miéville and I, felt their silence so strongly that there was a great unease because they felt that they couldn't remain quiet. To speak with Godard about the image they had made. Not by talking about Godard by saying: 'Godard you're a genius', or 'What you did there is really awful', but by speaking themselves: 'I have a little girl, I wouldn't film this little girl like that in this situation'. In other words not to speak to me as the genius Godard or as a complete idiot, but what we call normal, with respect to what you were saying. For me video made it possible for me to return to cinema normally, solely because the technical aspect is arranged differently.

[Inaudible]

In television, no. The filmmaker becomes more of a viewer. And when you see a viewer, you can say to them, something I've never deprived myself of doing: 'When you take a picture, you can take another if you want'. You can ask precise questions: 'Do you need an image in your life? Do you sometimes need photography? Do you take photographs, and when you do, why?' If they don't take any in particular, there is no reason to talk about cinema with them. To talk about what you do. If you buy something in a drug-store, you don't describe the drugstore for twenty hours after you've bought something there. You say something more practical. You can also talk about cinema like that, but it isn't done much. It isn't done much because people conceal what they use it for. We make films exactly the opposite, but which come out of the same thing.

*... If we talk about the scenes where men talk and women talk about clothes... and especially the fact that she becomes a singer and only has self esteem through the spectator's identification, while Léaud participates directly by painting slogans on cars... To return to the editing of the interviews... I found the dialogue at the beginning between Léaud and Chantal... the one at the end with Catherine... and the one in the middle... And what struck me... whereas in the dialogue with the editing... I found that we felt interesting things. At one point Léaud, when she asks him... feelings for you?, answers 'What a strange question'. What this gave me, I began to think: 'Yes, but what a strange question he asked her'. I found that this kind of editing invited each of us to question the questions he was asking. It was a strange question. And this reversal*

*this editing . . . [Break in tape] I found that by virtue of the fact that the camera . . . without editing we didn't think about the questions the interviewer was asking but rather we came to despise her and turn her into a consumer object. I think we didn't have an opportunity to step back and not look at her as a consumer object and examine the role he was playing by asking her ridiculous questions and laying her bare like that.*<sup>17</sup>

JEAN-LUC GODARD: 'Could you comment on that'. [Laughter]

SECOND QUESTIONER: *In a word: 'Explain to me, Godard, what is socialism?'*<sup>18</sup> [Laughter]

FIRST QUESTIONER: . . . when we talk about cinema, we always talk about people who talk, about active people. But people who listen, passive people . . .

But it's when people need to see, to see first rather than to—when a child is born, I think it is socialist. It needs to see first, and to touch what it sees and to see what it touches. Afterwards it becomes, I don't know how, but it doesn't remain like that. You become like that a little when you're old if there's something left to you in your old age, whether it's madness, poverty or something else. The very young and the very, very old, moreover, often have a good relationship. And the rest of humanity, involved in running the world, has cast each of them aside.

There is a film I've thought about, I may do it someday. Not now, but I've often thought about it for a long time. It started out as the idea of remaking *À bout de souffle*, but with two old people. I think I wouldn't be able to do it today. It's still a captivating idea from a producer's or a scriptwriter's point of view. But from time to time I've thought about it seriously, because before I thought about it simply by saying: 'It's easy, I'll have them say the same things', but then I saw that I couldn't. So it would be something completely different, but this is what I would call a film idea or a starting point. But today it couldn't be constructed like that. It would take longer. I agree with all your comments, I think they're fair comments. What conclusions should be drawn, I have no idea.

[Inaudible]

[Interrupts questioner] But why do we always have to draw conclusions?

*What do you see in this image?*

Of the young woman in the film, *Mademoiselle . . .*? But at the time that was the reality, the true—I've always put in my films—for a time I always needed to confront what we might call a true reality, the reality of television, and to try – this may already be ideas – to try to talk with them a little longer than you see on television. Meaning to interview them for real, and to put this real, or at least what is coded as real, meaning the television interview, in the film. To put so-called real characters—I don't see how, once they've been photographed, I don't see how the photograph on my passport is more real than me. But in films, if I'm in a film with Steve McQueen and I'm called Jean-Luc Godard, the fact that I'm called Jean-Luc Godard they'll say: 'There's Jean-Luc Godard who's called . . .' Or François Truffaut in Spielberg's film,<sup>19</sup> if he was called Dr Truffaut, people would have said, or if he was called the filmmaker Truffaut, which would have been a little better, people would have said: 'Look, he's playing himself'. I don't quite understand—in real life, do we play our own role? But, let's say, to obey conventional language, that I always put real people playing themselves in my films, starting quite early on. Brice Parain. Sometimes unknown people. For example in *Pierrot le fou*, which you saw yesterday, there was the woman called the princess, Aïcha Abadie, who was a real person. I was at the Cannes film festival, two weeks before work on the film began, and she walked by in the street dressed like that, talking nonsense the way she did. So I said to my assistant: 'Go see her, ask her if she wants to play in the film'. How? When? Where? Well, more or less in this part here. So we set her up somewhere and I asked her if she could repeat—and she didn't need to be asked twice. In fact I think she had a good sense of things, because ten years earlier she had been chased out of Lebanon, claiming that Lebanon was a minefield where socialism was going to arise. She wasn't crazy.

[Inaudible]

[Interrupts questioner] Pardon me, but *Mademoiselle 19* really was *Mademoiselle 19* that year. Otherwise I can't invent *Mademoiselle 19s*. It's not for the viewer, it's for me, it lets me take a so-called real object with respect to the so-called unreal objects or subjects

around it. I have always navigated between fiction and documentary. I don't make any distinction between them and I use them to describe, to always go back and forth between two things and in the end—like I was saying yesterday, cinema is something that oscillates from one pole to another. In the film itself, I place two poles, or at least indicate the poles and then oscillate in lots of places: from one pole to another, from documentary to fiction, from Anna Karina to Brice Parain in *Vivre sa vie* (*My Life to Live*), from Belmondo to Princess what's-her-name in *Pierrot le fou*, at times even to make a real interview with someone oscillate with another real interview to create, to try to create unreality out of that true reality, meaning that the interview is different. But it's true, with respect to journalism and all that, I realise that today I'd like to see a film like that but the other way around. At the time I should have—but I wasn't able, I'm a guy, that's what I do. Clearly I have difficulty; guys—all I can say is that when I have a male character speak, I feel — today I see this more clearly — like I'm in front of him, but I also feel like I'm behind him because I'm a boy. When you think about yourself, you think from behind if you will, because you see forward, but the fact that other people see you, you think about yourself from in front. Basically we have two perspectives on ourselves. On the other hand, when I think—I can think of another boy from these two angles because it's someone else. But someone of another kind, an animal for example, I don't see very well. You look at an animal more like this. [Looks down towards the ground] Unless it's a giraffe, I don't think you see a giraffe like that for a very simple reason.

[Inaudible]

[Interrupts questioner] So I see women only one way, whether from behind or from in front. I need someone else. If it's a boy—if I'm heterosexual, I would need a homosexual to give me another point of view, or a woman could give me another point of view. But not because it necessarily contradicts my own, but because she has a double point of view, to give me another double, and when there are two of us that makes four if we are two doubles.

Do you also think of the viewer's perspective? A woman watching that scene . . .

Yes of course, how she might see that interests me, simply as

documentary information. If people in film courses tried to understand what they had seen and how they saw it; that would be work. There is an entire history of cinema—just now I branched off in a different direction. There is an entire history of cinema—the only history that has been done is not that of the films; the history that will never be done is the history of films as they have been seen, if I can put it like that. The history of the viewers who have seen the films, and if there was a good relationship between viewers and a course, and if in a history of cinema like Sadoul's there was a first part – there would be at least three parts – there are always two poles and the needle between them, with the film being the needle. So in a true history of cinema that would be one of the poles: Griffith was born at such-and-such a time and did such-and-such; second pole: *The Birth of a Nation*; third pole: a viewer at the time who saw *The Birth of a Nation*. Just one viewer for now. Here you see how in film histories there is barely the first part—and the way they do it! They tell you that in such-and-such a year Griffith did X, and then bam, they put a photo of *The Birth of a Nation*. You're forced to take their word for it. For my part I'm not even sure that he was the one who made the film. Sadoul says so but I have no idea, I wasn't there, I didn't see.

[Interrupts Jean Antonin Billard attempting to ask a question] What you can believe is what you have seen, and I think that too is socialism. People must not communicate like that everywhere, but people believe what they say, you have to a little. But because that is all they do, you only believe what they say, without seeing. You end up believing that there was a revolution in 1917, that Descartes wrote *Discourse on Method*, that Griffith shot *The Birth of a Nation* and that you learn about cinema at the Conservatory of Cinematographic Art. [Laughs] [Interrupts Jean Antonin Billard] Socialism would be people who succeed in understanding each other based on what they see. There are bits of socialism in some relationships between animals, between a mother and child, more than there is between parents and children—and a socialist society would be when the way a child here sees and touches could be tuned to produce a day-to-day life with a Chinese child or another kind of child. That would be the relationship. But because our relationships are based on what is said, it isn't done this way. So we don't even have to talk about it, we can

show it. There must be moments of socialism in love, the moment when the body's work or the work of the two bodies no longer needs words. Or they need words for sometimes dreadful things. But these are difficult things to do.

I need to do this in film because I don't feel capable of doing it in life. In life it is so violent all of a sudden. Today communication travels so quickly that you receive ideas from a thousand people. Anne-Marie Miéville and I – she and I work together and we also try to have a personal relationship, which I'm not very good at – we call this the *valseuse* effect. We saw a film once by Bertrand Blier with Depardieu and Miou-Miou called *Going Places* [*Les Valseuses*]. It's an abject, worthless film. We came out and we both agreed, we dumped all over the film, but then because we had spoken ill of the film we ended up arguing. Still today we wonder how in ten minutes this came about. We agreed, it was vile, it was abject, it shouldn't have been made, we were quite happy not to have made it, and in ten minutes we were really giving it to each other, extremely violently. [Laughter]

Sometimes I say that cinema, images, drawings—for example there is something about education in the West, drawing is taught less and less at school. [Interrupts Jean Antonin Billard] I knew how to draw well and I regret—but in order to continue drawing well I had to become a kind of drawing specialist, a caricaturist or something like that. Then I would have done only that. But today I feel a great need to draw, more than to write or take notes. To draw, whereas I draw more abstract things, arrows and things like that which are often much too abstract. But I'm drawing. I'd like it when Anne-Marie asks me: 'What did you do in Montreal?' to know how to do four sketches: here, there, me in the street, me looking at something, and then to be able to talk about them. But if I have to explain it all I no longer can. That's why I say that if cinema changes it can help, and it's the easiest place because an image isn't dangerous. It shouldn't be dangerous, but they make it into something dangerous. [Interrupts Jean Antonin Billard] An image isn't a human body: when someone tears up your photo, it doesn't hurt you. If your fiancée tears it up, yes, [laughter] but it's not the photograph physically that hurts, it's your fiancée tearing up the photograph. If you have a broken arm, you can break it all by yourself.

JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD: . . . socialism meets people's needs first and then their desires, clearly. And clearly it's in this repudiation of desire that, images for example, desire is censored.

It's true, more images have to be made. I have no qualms coming here to talk, since all I'm doing is expressing my lack, my lack of ability to remain quiet. So, is that a good conclusion? [Laughter]

So I hope some of you come back in any event. I'll be back in late September, I don't know the exact date but it's the last week of September. Then there will be five more weeks like this, with excerpts in the morning and one of my films in the afternoon. Right up until *Numéro deux* and *Comment ça va*, and I hope we'll find a way the final week to show videos in North American format of some of the television programs we've done. Have a nice holiday. [Applause]

Saturday 17 June 1978

### Notes

1. In a letter to Henri Langlois dated 8–9 July 1975, Godard urged him to sell the Cinémathèque française's film collection to the state (with a clause that it be managed by Gaumont, and to use the money from the sale to buy Gaumont!). See Nicole Brenez, David Faroult, Michael Temple, James S. Williams and Michael Witt, eds., *Jean-Luc Godard: documents* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 2006), 258. No known document attests to Godard's comment about burning the Cinémathèque's films.
2. A reference to the Conservatory of Cinematographic Art's cross-town rival, the Cinémathèque québécoise.
3. 'The travails of the mountains lie behind us. Before us lie the travails of the plains.' Bertolt Brecht, 'Observation' (1949), trans. Martin Esslin, in John Willet and Ralph Manheim, eds., *Bertolt Brecht: Poems 1913–1956* (London: Methuen, 1976), 416.
4. *Salut les copains* was a highly successful popular music magazine published between 1962 and 2006.
5. *Masculin Féminin*'s initial title card reads (in translation): 'Argos Svenskfilmindustri [sic] Sandrews Anouchka show with light and shadow one of the 121 French talking films of which only three or four are made' ('montrent avec de la lumière et de l'ombre l'un des

121 films parlant français dont on ne fait que 3 ou 4'). The use of the figure 121 is probably a reference to the 'Manifeste des 121', a manifesto against the war in Algeria signed in 1960 by 121 French intellectuals and public figures, including François Truffaut but not Godard. As an estimation of the total number of films shot each year in France in the mid-1960s, national productions and international co-productions combined, this figure is roughly accurate. Fewer than fifty films the year of *Masculin Féminin*'s production would have been entirely French and about one hundred would have been co-productions in which a French firm was the primary partner.

6. A decade earlier, in 1969, Danielle Jaeggi co-directed the 16mm feature *Pano Will Not Be Shown* (*Pano ne passera pas*).

7. Spoken in English.

8. Spoken in both French and English. In an undated document describing this project, 'Studies in Motion Pictures and Television', Godard refers to the 'Silent America' video as 'Silent USA'. See the appendix to the present volume.

9. See note 12 to the chapter on *À bout de souffle* for a discussion of Godard's use of the term 'impress'.

10. The word *montage* in French, outside of the cinematic context, means to assemble or connect.

11. Jacques Leduc's film *Chronique de la vie quotidienne* ('Chronicle of Daily Life', 1977–78) was made for the National Film Board of Canada (NFB), not the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). In production for four years, the completed series of eight films totalled over four hours in length, but ranged from ten minutes to eighty-two minutes each, rendering its public exhibition or television broadcast extremely problematic.

12. The Renault R5 was a French compact car manufactured from 1972 to 1996.

13. Godard may have said this in the pages of the weekly Paris entertainment guide *Pariscope* around the time he indicates.

14. FR3 (now France 3) is a French public television network largely devoted to regional and cultural programming.

15. France's Institut national de l'audiovisuel (INA) is a radio and television archive.

16. The questioner's remarks are partially inaudible, but it appears that she has misremembered the scene; while Jean-Pierre Léaud does remark at one point 'What a strange question', it is in response to the question 'What is the centre of the world for you?', not a remark about feelings.
17. The questioner is referring first of all to the dialogue between Paul and Madeleine in the first half of the film, which was in fact separate discussions with each of them edited together to appear to be a dialogue between them, and the one-on-one interview between an off-screen Jean-Pierre Léaud (with Jean-Luc Godard in fact speaking through him) and 'Mademoiselle 19', in which there was no dialogue constructed through editing.
18. The questioner is alluding to one of the questions put by Godard to 'Mademoiselle 19' in the interview in the film mentioned by the previous questioner.
19. *Close Encounters of the Third Kind.*









# (Hi)stories

5

1

## Made in U.S.A.

*Les Vampires*

Louis Feuillade (France, 1915–16)

*Underworld*

Josef von Sternberg (U.S.A., 1927)

*The Postman Always Rings Twice*

Tay Garnett (U.S.A., 1946)

[An unidentified film by Clint Eastwood]<sup>1</sup>

*Made in U.S.A.*

Jean-Luc Godard (France, 1967)

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JEAN-LUC GODARD: Are some of you new, or are you the same ones from last time? Are some of you here for the first time? As always, I'll ask if you want to speak first, otherwise I'll speak as usual. I'm recording this [*gestures to portable cassette recorder at his side*] because at the end of the year Losique and I are going to try to make a book out of the ten weeks, a summary that would serve as an introduction to the history of cinema I'm planning to do with Losique, for which we're doing the preparatory work now. I was happy to see again—it's always a little strange for me to come here, I've said this often, it's a little far to come to see bits of my past again. I perspired a little watching this film because I didn't see at all what—I don't know what you thought of it, if you had already seen it. Since it was called *Made in U.S.A.*, I wanted to try to screen this morning a few excerpts from films that were, well, *made in USA*<sup>2</sup> or were adventure films or crime films. I believe that this morning we screened one of the first American films, even though it was made by a Frenchman: *Les Vampires*, one of the first serials. And I screened it like a serial, moreover, like *The Perils of Pauline*, which was made at about the

same time. And Feuillade was one of the first authors of a crime film, *Fantômas*. Then there was one of the first films to launch the crime film, almost before *Scarface: Underworld U.S.A.*,<sup>3</sup> which was made by Sternberg and Ben Hecht. I took a classic American crime film, Tay Garnett's film based on James Cain's novels. Then I think you saw an excerpt from a Clint Eastwood film, which continues the tradition in another genre.

And then my film. I remembered how the film was made. This may explain why it isn't very good, apart from a few things—there are a lot of extremely confused things in it. I no longer remember at all what I wanted to do, but that's not by chance because it was almost a boilerplate film. I was on vacation and Beauregard called me. He said: 'Jean-Luc, do you think you could start a film in three weeks, because if I start a film I can borrow money on it and I need to make my month-end payments. I need to pretend to start something so I can borrow money on what I'm doing and pay for what I've done.' Well, since Beauregard was a friend and I always wanted to make films, I told him: 'Sure, just wait a little, give me a day or an hour or two for me to go to the corner bookstore and buy a crime novel, and then I'll adapt it and make your film for you.' And that's how it was made. The novel was by Richard Stark, an American author, called *The Jugger*,<sup>4</sup> which I transposed to France without changing a thing. Afterwards Beauregard—well, in fact it was changed quite a bit, but in my opinion it remained fairly faithful to the story line, but because Beauregard thought it had been changed so much that the author wouldn't recognise his novel he didn't want to pay for the rights. Because the author was American the film was never distributed in the United States because Beauregard didn't want to pay the author for the American rights. In every other country, like Canada and France, he couldn't claim his rights, so it was shown there.

Tomorrow I should maybe have shown another of my films, *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle* (*Two or Three Things I Know about Her*), because the originality of that film, I think—I like *Deux ou trois choses* quite a bit, I'll see when I see it again. I think we're showing it next week, or in three weeks, but we could have shown it tomorrow because it's a film that was made at the same time as this one. I don't know if many people have made—I've always been intrigued by the

fact that in the early years of talking cinema many films were shot in dual- or triple-language versions. It seemed to me difficult to make a film in two languages, or to make two films together. So I wanted to try—these two films were truly made together, it was a kind of wager. It took eight weeks altogether: four weeks for one and four weeks for the other, and there are even one or two scenes—in this film, the shots of the girls being tortured were done for the other film, for *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle*.<sup>5</sup> I no longer remember why but I remember that I filmed them to put in *Deux ou trois choses* and they were put in today's film. The two films were shot at the same time, with the same crew. They were edited at the same time—I had two editing booths—and I think this explains why one is more interesting than the other. And today's film, given the way it was conceived—purely commercially—explains why it was, well, I don't think it's very good. It's not very—what's interesting, what interests me, is more the colours. I put a fair bit of work into the colours. But that doesn't make a film.

At the same time, as I look back on that era—the film was made in 1966, at the time of the Ben Barka affair in France.<sup>6</sup> I remember that in my mind it was what we might call a political film, a serious film, which wanted—moreover, at times there are sounds or words cut out, because censorship at the time was even more ridiculous than I was. They thought it might be serious. I think this is how I started out. I mean, I've always tried to tell a story, and *Made in U.S.A.*—today I realise that Europeans don't know how to tell stories and that the strength of Americans is that they tell stories all the time, but they have no historical sense, they go off in every direction. That may be their strength, the fact that they can—when I say 'American', I'm mixing up, I mean the American continent, Canada too. And I have a very strong feeling that people here invent—or the government, or society—they're constantly inventing lots of stories [*histoires*] and for that reason can impose them on the rest of the world. But they have absolutely no sense of history [*histoire*]: a sense of time, of the history of the world and all that, which is something the Europeans have a better sense of. When you make a film, there is a little of each, and I have always tried to give my films a historical quality, to deal with major problems as they say. But at the same time through stories, and I can't do that at all. I have always

been—gradually I realised and so I tried to find something else, I tried to distance myself from commercial cinema – because I didn't know how to handle stories – and to come back to it later, perhaps in a different manner, when I was able to tell a story more simply. Because that's what is interesting about cinema. Television may be a little different. But in cinema—with this film I realise that, after seven or eight years in cinema, I had no idea. Sometimes things held together, like in *À bout de souffle* (*Breathless*) or *Pierrot le fou*. But here the mayonnaise, in my opinion—I don't know what you thought of it, you'll have to say a few things about it. It didn't hold together at all, it goes off in every direction; it's made out of bits of music or of encounters I like or actors I liked but who no longer had any reason for being in it.

In American films there is absolutely no reason for these things either, but that must be their strength. They manage to impose their stories on the rest of the world. Maybe it's the age in which we live, maybe it's because the rest of the world is trying to experience different stories than the Americans. Or the struggle with Russia—but at a certain point that country starts to live somewhat the same way I find. There may be other countries, other peoples, other places; I think that's the struggle. Take music, for example. You see how America, in the end, just as it had black slaves, they succeeded in killing all the Americans [sic], they succeeded in killing the Indian people, they almost succeeded in doing the same thing with the blacks, with black music, which was profoundly original and different. So they succeeded, black music became American music. That's what they call it, 'American music'. That's what I mean with respect to history. So I'm happy to see a film where I had completely lost my footing, but for me it can be accounted for by the fact that I was making two films at the same time. In the other film I didn't tell a story, I tried to study a region through one or two people. A region, meaning a historical, biological and geographical event, but through a person—because with several people it's too difficult. In the end that film may have had more of a story than this one, where I tried to tell a real story which, like every story, especially if there are secrets, or even without – in this film there is a murder, but even without a murder – well, these are extremely complex stories that are completely incomprehensible. Like real stories, like the story of

Ben Barka, like the story of—when you have to establish the truth of a simple matter, it's very difficult.

Whereas the Americans, when they do that, I don't know, it works. I like American films a lot in fact, because they follow a story and you yourself put a lot of things into that story. I don't know how they do it, but I think there's something evil in it because at the same time it has the appearance of being very clear, and when you come out of the theatre you're no further ahead than you were. I'd like cinema to be something necessary to our lives, but conceived as such.

With *Made in U.S.A.* I thought I was making a political film. I think that tomorrow, the film we're showing, *La Chinoise*, even though it's extremely maladroit, is much more—is still spot-on in its awkwardness and better as a documentary. In fact tomorrow, along with *La Chinoise*, I've tried to show other films that also claimed to be political, from a Russian film to an American film by Capra, who thought he was making social-issue films at the time, to a film like *Z*, which is seen as a classic. For me *Made in U.S.A.*, however, is more—in France, there are books called the *Série noire*, they're *detective novels* and things like that. For me this was a final attempt to do something that had captivated me as a child: the captivation of American cinema, which for me was expressed in crime films.

Why did the crime film [policier] have so much – people don't really like the police – why did the crime film have so much success? I think it's because—I once read, I may have mentioned this before, I once read a graphic novel by Gébé, who explained this by the fact that a police officer – the investigator, the police officer – is someone who can do what he wants. He fits the idea of freedom that people have, which is not necessarily freedom, but someone who walks around with his hands in his pockets, who doesn't do anything. He's not forced to work at a machine like a worker, he doesn't have big responsibilities in government either or things like that. He smokes a cigarette, he can walk into a bar, grab someone by the collar and ask them questions. He must represent the Western ideal of freedom. This, I believe, is why—Gébé explained that this is why some films were so—police officers are the real heroes, even if people don't like them. Much more than Robin Hood or Tarzan. He's a hero, someone you can say bad things about moreover because he's

the police, someone you may not even identify with or pretend not to identify with even though you identify with him profoundly. He's a *flâneur*, a guy who's paid not to give a damn, who can do what he wants. He can live out a story—that's it, he can live out a story, he's not obliged to live out a historical event like Vietnam or a strike, or some group's demands, he can truly live out a personal story. Yes, you had a question?

*One gets the impression you did everything in your power to prevent us from entering your stories.*

No, I do everything in my power for people to enter them, and they don't enter them at all because, I don't know, it's not on purpose. I'd like to know, I think it's . . .

... characters recite things or actors don't try to make us enter into a story. You use all kinds of methods to take us out . . . You take us out of the story by all sorts of means, on the level of emotions. Usually a viewer enters and experiences people's emotions, participates in the suspense. You step back, you force us to step back from all that. We don't enter into a story, we're constantly asked to analyse.

Yes, but in this film—I didn't succeed, because I'm not able to tell a story. But take a film like *The Mattei Affair*, for example, which is a more interesting case. What's bad about my film also is that I drew on—I would have been better off if I had really made a kind of documentary, with a journalist character who would have—and to use a man rather than a woman, because after all—or to take a real journalist to recount an aspect of the Ben Barka affair, because that was my starting point. But, I don't know, sometimes I no longer asked myself questions. By 1966, two years before 68, I think that I had arrived at—luckily back then I was shooting films a lot of the time, because that helped me to see what others don't see themselves. They didn't know how to do something they thought they were doing automatically. I thought I knew how to make the film I wanted to make. Because three-quarters of people, when they want to do something, they think they know how to do it. I don't know, you might think that a woman who wants a child knows how to do it. I'm not sure she does, in any event it's not clear she will know how to raise it or will be strong enough to prevent society from making of it what it wishes.

There's something completely incredible about cinema. People don't make films every day. I try to place myself in the situation of making films every day, simply to be like a normal employee putting in his eight hours or three hours. If it's three hours, then to see that as an employee benefit compared to others who put in eight or twelve hours. But in cinema people shoot a film maybe once a year. There are even people who make one every five years. Except, perhaps—and this was when American cinema was the best. And I explain this by the fact that people worked in studios, where they worked like manual labourers or like managers, but they had a normal relationship to work. They saw a camera at least once a day. Today a filmmaker, this seems very strange to me, or a cinematographer, this seems extremely strange to me—first of all they don't own a camera, generally speaking. They see a camera no more often than a parent who makes home movies twice a year. But they're called professionals. At least the daddy or mommy who makes a holiday film in the summer or the winter, who touches a camera once a year, doesn't pretend to be a prof—even apart from the salary they don't claim to know how to make cinema. At best they claim to know how to use the camera just to record an image of their kid coming out of the water or something like that. But the professional who touches a camera once a year to record an image of Marlon Brando or Elizabeth Taylor, who does this just once a year for a period of a month or two, and then who doesn't do anything else for a month [sic], it's extremely pretentious of them to think that they know how to use a camera. And that the following year, after having not seen a camera for a year, they will know how. I've spent twenty years discovering that they don't know but they keep on like they do. In the end that accumulates and, in my opinion, films aren't as good because people know less about how to make them, because they no longer know how to do much of anything.

In this film, it's clear that I had arrived at a moment, more than twelve years ago—I had reached the point when I was practically going to place myself face to face with the fact that I no longer knew how to place one image after another. I couldn't hide the fact from myself; other film people—and this became clear at the time through a social event in France that was important for the French people, what happened there in May 1968. And I unconsciously felt

the first effects of this in my work then. At a certain point I decided to focus on history [*histoire historique*] – quite poorly in the beginning – and now ten years later, twenty years after, to try to start over and tell a story [*histoire*]. Even in *Numéro deux* (*Number Two*), which I'll show you in December, I don't know if you've seen it, I start over from the beginning: mom, dad, the children. To see how people's stories begin so I can attempt afterwards to invent stories also and no longer be forced the way I was then, under the domination—and everyone the world over, almost, does the same. If you want to tell a story, until now there has only been the American way of telling it, in cinema at least. In literature, which goes further back, there have been—American literature gradually emerged, but in the end it had a big influence on American cinema which had a big influence on literature in turn. Today, not a single big production in Hollywood isn't based on a novel. As soon as a novel appears—sometimes it's purchased even before it appears. And much fewer things are invented, fewer even than before.

At the moment, I'm working in Mozambique, which is a country that has been independent for only two or three years. There's a little film institute, things are happening, I go there to do a study of television before it arrives, the way you would study a baby in a woman's body well before she even meets the man with whom she'll make this baby. I've realised that they have a huge problem with film because they'd like to be able to make films they could call political, to mobilise people—films with a Soviet or Chinese influence, militant or revolutionary films. But what do people like? They like films from India or American films, Indian cinema being an adaptation in that part of the world of American cinema, a kind of second-rate Hollywood cinema made in India, which produces 800 films per year.

So you see, people need stories, but they don't know how to tell them, and it's extremely difficult for them to—they'd like very much to find their own story, their own way of telling a story. It doesn't matter what, the story of a mailman—but it's very difficult, and in general it happens after a war. The Italians, after the collapse of Italy – it didn't last a very long time – there were one or two filmmakers who succeeded in telling a story in a way that was uniquely Italian, in films like *Rome, Open City*, and *Paisà*, *Umberto D*—one or two, "

started up again, but it stopped when the Marshall Plan's economic aid brought intellectual nourishment at the same time as food. Culture and agriculture go perfectly well together.

There is an entire history to be written of agreements. When the Americans made agreements—at the beginning of the talking film period German cinema had failed, it was having trouble getting back on its feet. The agreements between Paramount and UFA at the beginning of Hitler put it back on its feet. As if by chance, Hitler began when Paramount was shooting films in three versions in Paris and Berlin. So in the history of cinema we'll do, what we'd like to do, in fact, is to show that if we can. To try to show this story of the history of these stories of the history of cinema. That's why all these stories are interesting to do. And *Made in U.S.A.* is interesting because of its title, if you like. It's a by-product, a kind of canned good. At the time I thought I had more freedom than I really did. Today I see that I was far from my own—I did this intentionally, because I called it *Made in U.S.A.*, and you can draw a lot of inferences from that.

*Deux ou trois choses*, on the other hand, which was made the exact same month, was about a small corner of the Paris region. And I was incapable of making a story out of it or the story of one person. I'm still incapable. But this is the tragedy of any cinema that isn't American, it's the tragedy of the rest of the world. Currency—I live in Switzerland, there's something that flabbergasts me: why do the Swiss, when everyone buys Swiss francs, which have a very high value—Switzerland is rich, but it doesn't go to the Swiss people. Life there is expensive for everyone: there is unemployment, a room costs as much as anywhere else. Yet there's something very strange in the fact that part of the West, rather than living its own life—if people don't want to live like Chinese or Indians that's normal and understandable, but what seems very strange is that the Germans and Italians want to live like Americans. Their currency is even stronger, but rather than doing something amongst themselves, they prefer to go through the United States. The dollar may be extremely weak, it's annoying for them but they prefer to leave a kind of leadership to the United States. And in cinema it's the same thing.

In fact I lived through a kind of end of European cinema. After the big war there had been new beginnings, because things had been destroyed. When things have been destroyed you can always start again. Then everything, at an industrial and political level, passed through Hollywood, as it does today.

I like coming here to speak because you are the makers of my story. As a European and a filmmaker, I live your stories much more than you live ours. What's more you don't even know who we are. There is even something about universities, I believe. Here and elsewhere, there are lots of film courses, which is real proof that culture is much more developed here. I think that among the different film disciplines there are even scriptwriting courses. That's something I'd really like to talk about here, if there was someone who—but I've never managed to corner a professor who teaches scriptwriting. Because I would be very, very curious, even anxious, to learn what a scriptwriting course consists of. I tell myself: 'That's where you must really take the monster by the throat'. How do they . . .

I can understand that in China and maybe in Russia they have scriptwriting courses. Given their political system, that's understandable. But theoretically, in the free-enterprise system, how can you have scriptwriting courses? Actually, when you buy a small Super-8 camera, they give you lessons on how to use it. They tell you: 'You must begin by doing this, and then that, and then that'. They tell you how to film, how to tell a little story, they show you how to create effects like a dissolve. And that's fine. Does no one want to say anything?

*I have a comment on your film today. My impression is that it resembles Bande à part (Band of Outsiders) a lot. You get the impression that it was made in a period that was about to end. Later, La Chinoise was no longer the same thing.*

Yes, it's the same kind of film as *Bande à part*, which I find very bad, very unskilful. I remember the newspaper ad I made for that film, I used a phrase of Griffith's, it said: 'What is cinema? It's a gun and a girl'. And I believed that. From a historical point of view, there's some truth in it. The Americans do it based on individual things, so as not to have to trouble themselves with anything else. We Europeans don't know how. Americans are much stronger in the sense

that they count only on this individual need. But because everyone has this need, it creates a mass and in the end they examine the problem of the mass only in this form. *Bande à part*, today's film—and *À bout de souffle* was exactly the same thing, they were the follow-up to *À bout de souffle*. But I realise that I don't know how—in *À bout de souffle* I was naïve, it was my first chance. It wasn't better—there may be a few things in it that are better, which were more explosive for a little longer, but in my opinion it's not much better. Or what's better is that it had a relationship with the audience that was better, it was a better fit, but this didn't work a second time when I wanted to start over again later. Moreover, *Bande à part* and *Made in U.S.A.* were flops, complete and well-deserved flops.

*Sometimes you use quotations . . . here it's more direct . . .*

No, I've always used a lot of . . .

[Inaudible]

No, no, you see it better here because it's less solid, there isn't as much of a backdrop. But I've always used quotations, I've never invented anything. I staged elements that I saw based on notes that I took. These notes could come from things I read or from something someone said. I didn't invent anything. In *Numéro deux*, a large part of the text, of the dialogue, is made out of personal writings from our day-to-day relationship that Anne-Marie Miéville allowed me to use, things like that. That's all. I'm unable—in cinema, what I find interesting is that there is no need, there's absolutely no need to invent anything. I find it's close to painting in this sense because in painting you don't invent anything. You adjust, you place, you assemble; you don't invent anything. Music is different, or closer to novels. But what I find interesting in cinema is that it can be, like everyone says, a little idiotically, a synthesis of everything. It's painting that can be constructed like music. That's why it interests more people at the same time, whether on television or at the movies, because there is a novelistic quality and a painterly quality. You know that you're merely watching and then you assemble.

But with respect, precisely, to the film excerpts this morning: do you think it's interesting—we're making contact again, this time I've arranged three weeks in a row so we follow a little better—I hope

three or four people will attend regularly. But I wonder: do you make connections when you see them? Is it interesting for you to see three or four excerpts, then an excerpt from another film made in another period but which nevertheless has a connection to the films you saw this morning? Meaning that there is a sense of history, the history of how people projected things, or how people who made cinema – who represent those who don't – projected the others' imagination onto a screen. And how that was done, meaning that you sense bits and pieces of history. Whether you feel like you're inside the history of cinema if you will, which appears to me to be a somewhat different principle. At least this is what I tried to do. It's a little different from simply seeing a film and talking about it afterwards. It's more interesting to talk about it with respect to another; otherwise you don't see the difference. Or what it is you're looking for by coming here.

*Can I ask a question in English?*

Go ahead, ask it in English.

*In La Chinoise all the images which were taken inside the house appeared to me to be very flat whereas outside there seemed to me to be an emphasis on depth. Did you intend this or am I seeing things or is this a kind of political reaction?*

Well, I don't know, we'll talk about that more with *La Chinoise* later.

I've always liked making films. I also painted when I was little. Today I regret no longer being able to draw. But I'm starting to draw my scripts again, for example, for myself. Or I cut images out of graphic novels that I find well drawn and construct scripts out of that. It's fairly strange, because when I'm looking for a co-producer or a banker or something, if I show them an image, they don't understand a thing. You have to show them a text, with no images at all, the film truly sketched out. But since I don't know how—and because if it's completely sketched out there is no longer any need to make it, or you make a graphic novel or something else. But if, instead of writing: 'He travels through a landscape, the leaves were such-and-such', you show them a photograph, they say: 'But what's that? What's that doing there?' So I say to them: 'I don't know, it reminds me of a landsc... That worries them more than anything else.'

So this flatness probably comes from the fact that I've always liked things without perspective; painting, but without perspective. I like modern painting a lot compared to perspective painting, which at one point was modernism compared to painting before Giotto, or to Chinese painting. What I like about Picasso is the mixing of forms that tell a story. What we should have done alongside today's film was show the film Clouzot made on Picasso.<sup>7</sup> And then we could ask ourselves: 'But why tell a story like that?' I've always been a little in-between things, and in cinema it's difficult. As I explained last time, now I try to separate things better, and when there are several things to do together, to do them separately, by trying to work mostly in television. With a film like *Made in U.S.A.*, you can say that there is a way of approaching it, that you can make a documentary on what happened at the time of Ben Barka, then use one or two scenes with actors to do a dramatisation of that, and then add colours to make a three- or four-part program. But which television network will let you do that? So you always find yourself in a corner. Either you have too little time in a film to do something well, or much more time—but in television you have neither the space nor the place to do it, because it's done differently.

*... my impression today of Made in U.S.A. . . . it's an American form . . . at the same time, there may be a certain ideology also . . .*

Yes, but there is something nevertheless: I remember when I showed *À bout de souffle* it was the same thing. Before *À bout de souffle* I showed a film that influenced me at the time. Today for example, if some of you are cinephiles, you must have recognised that all the characters' names are the names of real actors or the titles of films. When Anna Karina crosses the gymnasium, they page Ruby Gentry, a film with Jennifer Jones, they page Daisy Kenyon, a film with I don't know who. So, the whole story of films that are—it's purely—this is something that people in graphic novels do a lot for example. So the film is more of a graphic novel. But there is something that amazes me just the same: in the end I tell a story that's fairly clear, about someone who is quite real, moreover, because it's the story of the disappearance of a witness in the Ben Barka affair, whose name was Figon, who disappeared and was murdered by the police two weeks later because he was one of the few witnesses remaining.<sup>8</sup> He

had a daughter I used to know in Saint-Germain-des-Près. I remember that this is how I got the idea of the daughter who goes looking for him. It's a classic story you see in ten billion American crime novels.

But there is something that intrigues me, and intrigued me about *À bout de souffle* – and before *À bout de souffle* I screened a film by Preminger called *Fallen Angel*, I could have shown something else – and that is that Preminger's films are completely imaginary and make-believe, they appear not to hold together, and yet at the time – or with their successors today – people didn't question the reality of something that's completely imaginary. And if you watch them ten years later, or twenty years later – when the people here saw *Fallen Angel* they found it completely asinine, it didn't hold together at all, and I found it fairly fanciful in the end too. Yet I could well imagine a little shop girl in Minnesota back then on a Saturday night, after seeing that, finding it, well, it's a crime film with a story, with Dana Andrews and Linda Darnell, or I don't remember who – and, well, it held together. But today it appears completely fanciful. So when I make something fanciful like *À bout de souffle*, people don't see it as real at all, they say: 'It's completely fanciful, it's not real at all.' Whereas with the American film, the Clint Eastwood film, which was just as fanciful, people aren't like that at all. It happens a little, but his character is, I don't know, a kind of – Clint Eastwood's films are as fanciful as *Alice in Wonderland*. Moreover, all you have to do is read the interviews with him: he has no idea whatsoever why people say he makes trash while saying good things about films by Coppola or Louis Malle. He says: 'They do the same work I do, I do it responsibly, what do you mean by all that?' Or someone like Alain Delon in France. Something that intrigues me is that people tell me I don't tell a story, that there is no story, there's something completely different. But when you see a Clint Eastwood film they say: 'Ah! There's a story'. So I tell myself: 'All right, these people here, Americans and people in the grip of the Americans, doped up by the United States, they need . . .' The United States has succeeded in drugging people by telling them: 'You have to live out your story. But I can't manage it. I have the impression of doing the same thing and yet I see that I do something different. But I don't see at what point that occurs.'

I don't think any of you, when you watched the excerpt even of the Sternberg film with George Bancroft and Evelyn Brent, saw that as realistic. A slightly fanciful reality but the reality of the day. That was the way gangsters were depicted back then. They weren't like that at all. But when I do the same thing, people say: 'Oh, it's not the same thing'. And I think you sense a difference. I think you feel that there is a difference between *Made in U.S.A.* and the Clint Eastwood film. They're equally bad, [laughter] but you find one a little realistic and the other one not realistic. To me, each is as unrealistic as the other.

For different reasons.

But which reasons? Why is it that you find Clint Eastwood's film realistic? You don't like it, but what makes you think it's realistic?

*It's real the way a sensational little news item in a newspaper is.*

But what is realistic about a sensational little news item in a newspaper? That's what's amazing. I seek realism. I'm like Brecht, I'm looking for a better realism, a different realism than that. My ideal would be to make Clint Eastwood films, but to make them well. [Laughter] It's true, they're films of sensational little news items. But how do you make a good Clint Eastwood film, that's the question.

...the answer you gave a moment ago, that the Americans use images in reference to the thousands of images consumed . . .

Yes, but to consume thousands of images—they're the ones who produce that consumption.

. whereas in Europe there are . . .

No, we have the same way of . . .

So they don't have the . . .

Yes, but, for example, there's a place called California, which by chance is where cinema developed. And, I don't know, a story is something that goes like this. [Makes a circular motion with his hand] And it's also where electronics developed. And electronics is circuits, [makes the same motion] circuits that are linked up and today are even—and when you're in California, you have a very strong sensation of being somewhere that has no historical weight but is full of hundreds of little stories. That's what gives it its strength, which is stronger than historical weight and has no need of it, because in the

end it makes history [*histoire*] by making stories [*histoires*]. So it has no need of a single history or the truth or anything. All that matters to it is making them. And you have a very peculiar and very strong sensation of monsters creating people's entire lives.

But this problem of telling a story, for me it's a serious problem, if only because in order to make films, meaning to find the money to make films, what people ask you is: 'Is there a story?' That's the question people always ask me. I say: 'There's nothing but', and then they say to me: 'But this isn't a story'. So for me this is the thing, the story of people's lives or the story of how someone steals a hundred-franc note, how someone was able to get a raise in pay, how someone cheated on his girlfriend, any story at all: they're all enthralling, they all take time, and that moreover is what people's lives are made of round the clock. Then what remains is what they deposit in the social fabric. That's how films remember themselves.

*Can I ask what you think of German filmmakers like Fassbinder and Wenders . . . The American Friend . . . crime novel . . .*

I'm not very familiar with their work. I have the impression that they're like us. I don't know their work very well, in the first place because it's poorly distributed. I saw Wim Wenders' last film, yes, *The American Friend*, in fact it's the first film of his I've seen. Then the other day I saw a bit of another film of his, *The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick* or something like that. And Fassbinder, I've only seen his first films—I see they're showing one in Montreal, I'm going to go see it because I haven't seen it. Basically I think it was like the New Wave, they were people who talked about film a little amongst themselves. And the mere fact that they talked amongst themselves – this is a thesis I often propound – means simply that their films were a little better than the others. Now that they're separated, their films are going to become less and less good, unless they succeed in changing their system, which does not appear to be the case. That said, I can't . . . I haven't seen enough, I don't want to judge them like that. Based on what I've seen of Wim Wenders, I have the impression that he owes a lot to a writer whose name is Peter Handke. Even when he wasn't making a film based on Peter Handke he was in fact making a Peter Handke film. I haven't seen Peter Handke's film of his novel *The Left-Handed Woman* so it's just an idea of mine.

*The American Friend*, for example, I think had the same sort of success as *Pierrot le fou*. But Wenders isn't interested in telling a story. That may be what I might reproach him for a little. I have always been interested—I didn't know how, but that was always what kept me going. I've always wanted to tell a story. I told them in my own way, badly, and I'm still looking for the answer. So sometimes I try to approach it from a different angle.

At the moment I'm trying with five television programs I'm making under an agreement with the government of Mozambique to tell the story – the title of the programs is 'Naissance (de l'image) d'une nation' ('Birth of [the Image of] a Nation') – to tell how, because nations make images, a nation will make its first images, which it has already made, because it has made postage stamps, postcards, pictures of people—but from a more general perspective, to tell this in the form of a story. Is their case the same as that of Germany, France, the United States or other countries? Or, because they claim to be living out a different history, will they recount this history a little differently? How this is going to work I haven't the slightest idea.

I respect Fassbinder a little, because I think he has succeeded in achieving a certain power, or strength, which must not be easy. Every interview I've read with him has been pretty good and quite forceful. He does his thing and seems to be fairly independent. I don't know how much he realises it. Filmmakers never talk amongst themselves, so it's difficult . . .

PATRICK STRARAM: Have you spoken with Wim Wenders?

Yes, I've seen him. I'm going to see him again in San Francisco, because I'd like him to play a small part in a film I'm preparing, to play himself as he is today, shooting a three- or four-million-dollar film. [Patrick Straram laughs] But that's good, it's called *Hammett* and it has a connection with the film I'm preparing. He's someone who speaks in it, the way I interviewed Jeanson in *La Chinoise*. There will be several people. What I have always tried to do is to place—like at the end of *Made in U.S.A.*, the only shot I find any good, perhaps not by chance. Suddenly—in fact it makes the film possible. Before then it wasn't any good, but in the final shot the characters raise their heads up out of the water, it works. But, I don't know, it may be

the man's role, which is nothing, which is played by Philippe Labro, who became a bad filmmaker. At the time he was a journalist with Europe 1; for me he's a real character who I got to speak a fictional text. And the fiction became real once again. That's why this scene holds together for me. In fact, if the film had been a good film, that would have been the first shot.

Well, I don't know, if you don't have any more questions, I don't have a lot to say either. It always takes a little while to get going. I don't mind soliloquising, but we have to take a little—it's too bad we were interrupted by the holidays, because the last time, the very last time we saw each other, it seemed that there was a bit of a rhythm. So if there are—tomorrow we'll show what are known as political films.

*I still don't understand what level you're referring to when you say that Made in U.S.A. is a bad film.*

It's not—when I say bad I mean, I don't know, it's a film that can't be seen in any other way. It's a somewhat facile film if you like. I explained the way it was made, which isn't a very honest way to make a film, if you like. Or at least I should have been upfront about it. A film, but still there's a certain morality. In this case, the morality was such that, well, we played on our abilities—Beauregard's ability to make a business deal because he needed this deal to find money and with this money to pay some debts, and me with my ability to make, in the good sense of the term if you like, anything at all. But at the same time you can't make anything at all any time at all, if you like. That's the problem. At a certain point there's too much 'any'. It wasn't 'any way', it may not have been 'any thing', but it was 'any time', there were too many 'anys'. [Laughter] It was pretty much that, if you like. There should be only one 'any'. On that point I agree, there's no shame in doing any thing, but you shouldn't—'Anybody' has a certain import if you like. When you say 'they aren't anybody', it's very deprecatory. 'They aren't anybody', once you know the person, has a certain import. Everything is interesting, but you can't be interested in anyone any old way. That's what I meant, that there was something a little immoral from the start, I explained why. Perhaps that's why, to compensate—just the same I feel that, as a filmmaker, there is a great deal of morality. Everyone says: 'I have no right to do that', or 'I can't do that'. You feel very good when w

do something. Then I did something else at the same time, which concealed this from me.<sup>9</sup>

[Inaudible]

I agree, but he may have been more concerned about what he had done than I was at the time. And, because he's Clint Eastwood, he was more honest about what he had done. What he had done was dishonest, fine, but as a whole it is more coherent if you like. In my film for example—or the fact that I used Anna Karina again. I had no reason to make a film with her, except by force of habit. It wasn't very honest for her, unless she needed money—at that point, you can do someone a favour. But this was not how the question was broached initially. So it was like some of the films Sternberg made with Marlene Dietrich. Sometimes he was dishonest with her, and she with him too, because it was more out of force of habit and it showed in the film. There was no longer any desire on either part, or the desire to work together. They worked together rather than with someone else out of habit. This is why my film was plainly commercial, in the pejorative sense of the term. It's not a bad thing to want to do business, but it's bad to want to do business only like that, or to make of it only a business deal. At that point, precisely, there's an element which, if you're skilled enough, or flashy enough, can create an illusion. I liked some shots, but I'd like to see them in completely different films. There's an incredible amount of padding; I had a lot of trouble coming up with eighty minutes. Yet it's a film that seems to me very long to sit through, even though it's only eighty minutes long. Eighty minutes is short. Recently I've made films for television, series that last only half an hour. But after half an hour you have the impression of having spent an hour. They may be a little too long; but in this film I don't think you feel that time is passing.

There's something that's true about films that are too long. When Harry Cohn at Columbia wanted to know where a film should be cut he installed very scratchy seats in the screening room, and every time there was a scratching sound he'd say: 'You have to cut there.' This afternoon there were a lot of scratching sounds. [Laughter] Me [fidgeted] a lot. It may be an exaggeration but there's some truth in it. And I could see quite clearly where I was padding, by

stretching a shot out for the pleasure of it. But this pleasure had no purpose at that moment. That's what I mean when I say it's 'bad', in the sense that you say something is bad. The sauce isn't very good.

So, I'll see you back here tomorrow, next week too and the week after that, and then twice in December. For those who will be coming back that makes, let's see, that will give you four or five more chances to talk with someone who doesn't mind telling the truth about cinema. But then afterwards . . . [Laughter]

Friday 6 October 1978

### Notes

1. Godard's remarks during this session indicate that an excerpt from an additional film, by Clint Eastwood, not named in the 1980 French edition of these talks, was on the program this day. At the time of these talks, Eastwood's most recent film was *The Outlaw Josey Wales*.
2. Spoken in English.
3. Godard is confusing two films: the first film shown in today's session, Josef von Sternberg's *Underworld* (1927), made five years before Howard Hawks' *Scarface* and, as Godard remarks, generally credited with inaugurating the modern crime film genre; and the 1961 Samuel Fuller film *Underworld U.S.A.*
4. Donald E. Westlake, writing under the pseudonym Richard Stark, *The Jugger* (New York: Pocket Books, 1965).
5. In fact no such scene appears in either film.
6. Mehdi Ben Barka, a left-wing Moroccan politician abducted in Paris in 1965 by French police and never seen again, causing a political scandal and prompting the resignation of a French cabinet minister.
7. *The Picasso Mystery*.
8. Georges Figon, a petty criminal who may have been involved in the abduction of Ben Barka, claimed to have witnessed his murder at the hands of the Moroccan secret police and was found dead in his apartment shortly thereafter. The cause of death was officially ruled a suicide.

9. Because of a break in the video recording caused by the need to change the videotape, the comments underlined here have been taken from the original French edition of these talks, which was based on an audio cassette made on a portable recorder at Godard's side. These cassette recordings are no longer extant, making it impossible to verify this passage for the present edition. For previous chapters, corresponding to the spring sessions of the talks, no such cassette recording exists. There, the interpolation [*Break in tape*] indicates the loss of a passage presumed to be about the length of the underlined section here.



# Forms

5

## *La Chinoise*

2

*Battleship Potemkin (Bronenosets Potyomkin)*

Sergei Eisenstein (U.S.S.R., 1926)

*L'Âge d'or*

Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí (France, 1930)

*Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*

Frank Capra (U.S.A., 1936)

Z

Costa-Gavras (France, 1969)<sup>1</sup>

*La Chinoise*

Jean-Luc Godard (France, 1967)

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SERGE LOSIQUE: . . . Jean-Luc will be back next Friday and Saturday, and the same thing the following weekend. Because today's theme is 'Cinema and Politics', or 'Cinema and Revolution', the floor is yours if you have any questions you want to ask. Let me remind you that this morning we showed excerpts from Battleship Potemkin, and then Mr Deeds Goes to Town . . .

JEAN-LUC GODARD: No, *L'Âge d'or*.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *L'Âge d'or* by Buñuel, and – what was the last one? Z by Costa-Gavras. And then this afternoon you just saw *La Chinoise*. So I'd like to ask you the first question: what comparison do you make between *La Chinoise* and, let's say, *L'Âge d'or*?

In fact I put *L'Âge d'or* in this morning so we would ask that question. Because I think that when the filmmakers made these films they thought of them as political films. And precisely, I think that *L'Âge d'or* wouldn't be categorised by film critics today as a political film, even though it is probably the only film ever to have caused

something of a scandal. Today it still has great force; you sense that something is changing, that something could change, and this is disturbing. It was interesting to see it right after *Battleship Potemkin*; it might appear rather odd. I watched *Potemkin*, bits and pieces of *Potemkin*, and this morning I walked through the streets of Montreal. This film, which was made in 1925, tells the story of the events from 1905 which were behind the events of 1917, which was a rather major social change, or something that—at the very least it caused a lot of fuss. Today, when you see what remains—I was looking at the dirty streets, the cars, this rather sad weekend . . . What is modern civilisation? What did people want forty years ago? And then there is a kind of memory of people who are dead. It's always interesting to see cinema as that too.

I think that *L'Âge d'or* is interesting because it's a change in—it's a film that talks about forms. I think the most difficult thing to change is not content, it's form. To use the classical distinction, to agree on our terms, form is the most difficult thing to change. To change the human form takes millennia, all sorts of things. I think that *L'Âge d'or* can be categorised as a political film because it is concerned with changes on small points, changes in form, and we see that these are the most powerful. Mere things like social relations or good behaviour. The way you conduct yourself. We see how a university degree—or clothing, for example, is extremely powerful, and if you dress badly you aren't welcome in some places. Forms: the way in which a government leader is greeted at an airport, or the way in which a baby is baptised, or the way people get married, which I think is still quite powerful. Places where people cling to a number of forms. And true change is when these forms change, and true non-change is when words change, when people say 'socialist' instead of 'capitalist'. What has really changed? That's what is interesting.

Today we had four examples, or five with *La Chinoise*, of films that say they are dealing with the changes in people who want to change something. This is these films' subject, seen through one or two characters. We see how this was dealt with at different times by the Russians, by two Spanish anarchists, one of whom became a supporter of Franco while the other withdrew to Mexico, and by a kind

of Sicilian idealist who was a Hollywood prince for a time. And then a classic film like *Z*, about which a lot of good things have been said, and then a little film like *La Chinoise*, which was made about a year before the events of 1968 in France.

I think that *L'Âge d'or* has a place here, absolutely. We should place it among these films, between *Z* and *Potemkin*. It's a film which, when shown in good society, or what is called good society, would cause a scandal. It's a badly dressed film. Gaston Modot's character is tremendously powerful. It's a film where love is tied to—unlike other films, when people make political films love doesn't play a role. This film shows love – what people generally call love – as an essential element. You can always go to a dinner party at the prime minister's house and roll around on the ground with the maid, but I think they'll show you the door. That is also a part of revolution. By that I don't mean that this is how you carry out a revolution. I mean that little changes—I see my daughter in school, for example, there's something quite funny. If she wears a headband like Björn Borg, that's not tolerated. But if she wears a headband to keep her hair back and the headband, instead of being hippie-style or Björn Borg-style, is placed more discreetly, it's tolerated. It's completely tiny, it's three centimetres difference. But for the school principal it's fundamental; one is acceptable and the other isn't. And this happens in every high school and every university. Or the way in which airline stewards and stewardesses<sup>2</sup> are dressed, or nurses in hospitals. Clothing is extremely powerful. That's what I would call the change of forms.

SERGE LOSIQUE: People always ask you this question: you wanted, speaking about the change of forms, but in *La Chinoise*—in the end, watching this film, I'm sorry to make this comparison, because I know you once described Chris Marker, you called him 'Magic Marker' . . . Is it true you said that or do people only say you said it?

But it was very nice. I said it out of kindness, don't you think?

SERGE LOSIQUE: Ah, OK. But I think that you ended up . . . He talks about the documentary, about the unattainable dream of what people call, say, the revolution. If you look at his most recent film,<sup>3</sup> he ends up with the same result as you did in *La Chinoise*. At least that's my personal impression.

Yes, but he may have come out of it worse than me, because he invested more time in it if you like. *La Chinoise* is a queer film. At the time, people saw it as ridiculous: 'That's not what politics is—these characters, these students, they're bourgeois, what are they talking about, it's ridiculous', and all that. To me, I was doing more of an ethnological film. There was a documentary aspect. I was studying a certain kind of person I didn't know very well, little groups in Paris which called themselves Marxist-Leninist. I didn't have a very good idea what that was but I was drawn more to them than I was, say, to the Communist Party trade unions—which, moreover, wouldn't have let me film them. But the others were like the early Christians, so I had to scheme a little. That's how I met Jean-Pierre Gorin, who gave me a few tips because he was a part of a group—it was my first encounter with him—which published something called *Cahiers d'études marxistes-léninistes*.<sup>4</sup> They were an intellectual club. And they beat up on Gorin because of his ties to me. They didn't think he should have anything to do with a bourgeois filmmaker who was vaguely pseudo-anarchist or pseudo I don't know what.

There is another character who is real—the person who plays the role of the black man. His name was Omar Diop; I met him through Anne Wiazemsky. He was also a student at Nanterre University. I asked him if he would play himself in the film. I wanted him to be the one to give the others lessons, precisely because he was black. Omar Diop died in Senghor's prisons in Senegal three or four years ago. To me, that shows that the film wasn't—sure, what they were doing was ridiculous, but they weren't ridiculous. What was ridiculous, moreover, is that everything happened the way it did.

Today the film's true reality is that—fine, these people were ridiculous, but if you look at where all these—and I was very careful to take the only thing I knew anything about, where I came from, meaning children from good families playing at being Marxist-Leninist. During the summer holidays they played at being Marxist-Leninist the way children play at building a tipi. They were playing at being Chinese, if you like. It was the time when Mao's little red book<sup>5</sup> was appearing. But when you look at what has become of all those hard-line activists today, it's quite—the film is a true documentary and

they never accepted it. A documentary is something a little touching and a little ridiculous that is only—and I tried to show in a plausible manner a girl who shuts herself up in her parents' big apartment for two months and plays at being Marxist-Leninist the way others play in the street. It had both true and false things.

I think that today the film has a fairly true feel to it. And as if by chance, the events of Nanterre happened a year later,<sup>6</sup> so there was necessarily something true about it. I filmed it before it really took form. This is the sense in which I'm interested in—cinema can be used for this, to see the creation of forms, their embryology. Embryology is something extremely mysterious which is not governed by—there are fewer laws than in biology. The form something takes. Why does a bird have a certain kind of plumage? Why do some people have brown hair and others black? How are forms born? And social life, how are societies formed? And people are formed and informed and deformed: once a form is set, how does it change? You can call that a revolution or a half turn, because if you only do a half turn that makes a vicious circle. Otherwise, as Mao Zedong said,<sup>7</sup> that makes spirals and that's how things change.

*In the end you realise that no form . . . the United States for example, they fought for their American Dream. Their dream has been fulfilled, but they realise that it doesn't meet their needs at all, that there is always . . . Once it's fulfilled, there's nothing. What seems to me the most important thing, what seems real, is the struggle to achieve it; after that, once you achieve it, it's like it never happened. People lose interest or they're still dissatisfied, they're constantly searching for new forms without there being a real goal to attain any more. How does that happen?*

I don't know . . . I sense what you're trying to say, but there is no real question.

*It's more of a comment, that throughout history there have been untold battles, people have always had to fight the same battles over again without there being . . . Just now I took the example of the United States . . . to have a kind of free society . . . they realise that it doesn't mean a thing . . .*

Yes, but 'it doesn't mean a thing', you have to say—that's a reason for that, it's far from being ideal. It's always written in books that things are ideal but people aren't that stupid, they see that it isn't true.

*That's something that has always existed.*

Ah, I don't think so, I don't think so at all. I think that the way history is told – or cinema or television, images – is important because an image doesn't lie. Moreover it doesn't have to; you can make an image lie but an image never—it's just an event. It's not even the whole event, it's a moment of an event. What can lie is the way you use it.

*... or the representation of something ...*

Yes, but representation ...

*Filming in a certain way or not, and if you film that way ...*

No, my intention is not to say something; my only intention is for people to be able to say something afterwards. My only intention is to film a certain way; it's not to film a certain way *in order to*. It's to film a certain way; the 'in order to' is for something to happen.

*What did you want to do with the way you shot this film? What form are you searching for and hoping to find? What is its purpose?*

Its purpose, for example, was to be able to show that it was real, as ridiculous as it may be. That there was something interesting and real in what happened, and afterwards. And while it was possible to say in 1967 in France: 'These children are ridiculous', it was possible to say 'No'. And today, instead of saying: 'Those children in 1968 were fairly serious, they did fairly serious things', I can say today: 'Still, they were a little ridiculous'.

*What you just said demonstrates—objectively, you've demonstrated ...*

If this is something you'd like to talk about, otherwise I'm not intent ...

*A question calls for an answer.*

Who says that a question calls for an answer? The people who invented—even a dictionary, when it writes the word 'question', doesn't say that a question requires an answer. It's an entire system that's been put in place. I prefer the system of images, with words and sounds, which the system of words on their own prevents. That is what always prevents a change in forms in the end. Sure, there is always a word; 'socialism' for example. People fight over words like that rather than fighting—two housewives for example, they don't fight by saying: 'Salads are better than potatoes' or something

like that. You can make different dishes and prefer different ones at different times.

With respect to what you said, there has always been a feeling that everything starts over again and we will never succeed. But this is imposed by something that was twisted, that wasn't made for that, which is simply sounds organised in a certain manner, with which you can communicate but which is not communication in its entirety. That's nine-tenths of what people call communication today. Even television, which has made images—today we've achieved a real tour de force: television shows texts. Newspapers will be on television. You'll read—first of all it will be very bad for your eyes, and it's important that people harm their eyes because that will sell eyeglasses [laughter] and then they won't be able to see, what's called seeing. They only know how to read. They use their eyes to read but not to see. People learn to read at an earlier and earlier age to make sure that children don't see how to overturn things one day, or old people who begin to see other things, or a few small tribes or sorcerers who had a certain way of seeing. And they're ridiculed by people saying: 'This is scientific'. That's not the point. Science consists only in seeing, and scientists use their eyes and succeed in seeing something. What's no good is what comes next, when they convey, when they try to say what they've seen rather than making a film or images—they use images when they see the world. Rather than trying to make cinema, once they've taken a camera called a telescope and seen a certain number of things, or a camera called a microscope with which they've seen a certain number of things. Then, rather than using images—and sounds too, and words too, but which come out of images, and slip between them, which is what cinema has always done. People write an enormous text and images are only used to prove that this is what you have seen. But at that point the image no longer has any use; there are only words. That's why, in my opinion, I've said this here before, discoveries take so long to happen. Einstein took a long time to discover relativity simply because he used words. It could have been discovered much sooner, like a whole bunch of other things. But words came along to mix up, to discuss. They discussed for fifty years. Before, people contrasted determinism or I don't know what with freedom. Today, people contrast—but when you see something, when you see how

a Russian worker lives, how an American worker lives, you see—if people really made films, if they looked instead of reading, they'd see things. Then they would see what can be kept and what can't. That would change so much, but that's work. That's work, and people prefer to use their eyes for pleasure rather than for work.

SERGE LOSIQUE: [To questioner] Are you satisfied? No? How so? Go ahead.

What would satisfy you? You'd like to be satisfied by what?

[Inaudible]

What I would find interesting when people ask a question—because it's obvious that when I reply I ask a question in the way I reply, because this is what interests me. That's why I'm here; you know a little bit about what I do, you understand that I'm capable of talking like that. But when you ask a question, what would interest me and help our dialogue also is if you said: 'I'm interested in knowing the answer to this question, because I'm in the process of doing such-and-such and I think that my question is connected with my life or my work or something else'. Otherwise, I necessarily understand the question abstractly. For you it's concrete, but all I know is to resituate you in your concrete. That's why I ask why you're not satisfied: how does not being satisfied with the little dialogue we had bother you? How is it going to inconvenience the rest of your afternoon?

... do you think that *La Chinoise* is a critical film?

Yes, I think all my films are critical, with varying degrees of success. That's why it is easier to see — once time and the false ideas that I also helped to spread — it is easier to see if something is happening because it's a critical film. What I understand by a critical film is like justice, it's a critique, it's a film that can show aspects of something and can help people look at it in a critical manner. There are several senses to the word critical: there is also the critical point—the point where things change, the boiling point of water, or a moment in a dramatic situation. The word 'critical' is a critical situation. You're about to fall off your bicycle or war is about to be declared or your wife is about to leave you.

I've always tried to film critical moments as much as possible. This is the sense in which I think of them as critical films. The films!

find poorly done, such as *Bande à part* (*Band of Outsiders*) or *Made in U.S.A.* yesterday, I think it's because I thought I was filming a critical point when in fact I wasn't at all. I didn't succeed in making that happen; I was far from the true critical point. In *La Chinoise*, I think I was close to a critical point. There were lots of others, other films, other ways of making them, other things to do. But this film is interesting because it appears to be far away and a little ridiculous, talking politics with rich kids. But just the same there was something, if only—today, all the former Maoist activists have written their self-criticism. Some of them have become gurus in India, others are musicians and there are others who are quite alone. But at the same time it makes it possible—the real films which should have continued to be made aren't made. When they say: 'You must remain close to the people', well, I continue to, I always try to . . .

*What is the purpose of these films?*

Which film?

. . . *La Chinoise*.

Well, if you like *La Chinoise* can work as a document of some of the student body at Nanterre, where a certain movement was started, or rather where it passed through. It was one of the social spaces where it happened. I remember going to watch things at Nanterre. There were two worlds. People said things that were not even said by the people who came later. Today, ten years later, we can return to . . .

*It's a little difficult to talk about the film as a documentary.*

But what do you call . . . At what point do people make a distinction between . . .

[Inaudible]

*What is a document? Does a document have to be soiled, for example? It's not necessarily clean?*

*Anything is a document.*

*Everything is a document, absolutely. Everything, including the way you look at it. It becomes a stock, and this stock is placed in memory, and this memory can become different kinds of memory. It can remain a memory of pure documents. Documents aren't everything.*

*This is why, to use the classical terms 'fiction' and 'documentary'—they're two aspects of the same thing. And I've always tried to give*

a quality that people call documentary – to use the usual terms – to something fictional. To make imaginary characters act in reality and real people act imaginarily. In this film, for example, and I did the same thing in other films, I asked Francis Jeanson to do his real text in a somewhat imaginary situation not of his choosing, but which he agreed to.

*There are people who say that with your films you're doing a form of politics. Do you agree with that?*

I don't know. I'm not the one who invented those words. I don't think so, in fact.

*Those words exist; they're concepts that are very, very . . .*

Yes, but what I try to do is talk about politics with an object in hand and not with words. Otherwise, no form is created because there are words. Moreover the law is made up of words, it isn't made of images. Images are only used at a certain moment to apply the law. When you show the evidence, or the judge shows the evidence or an innocent person shows the evidence of their innocence with an image. This image can be a text, but at that point it is seen as an image because you see, suddenly you see. There is an expression in mathematics, 'we see that'. Otherwise, words are used to solidify something. They become a law, whether a social law or an intellectual law. A social law is: 'You have to wash your hands before sitting down to eat'. To change this law there have to be people who say: 'For that I need soap, and soap is expensive'. So there are . . .

[Inaudible]

I try not to contrast them. Naturally my enemies are those who don't use images or who use images to hide rather than reveal, which is what most films do. They try to hide what people have and that's why they like images because they show them hidden things while at the same time hiding them from themselves rather than being . . .

*Every time you have a frame you want to show . . .*

Absolutely. But I think it's interesting in . . .

[Inaudible]

But life has fra—which frame are we in? You go home, you have at least one window in your home, so there are frames [*cadres*]. The door too, the table is square, the bed is square, so we are necessarily

framed [*encadré*].<sup>8</sup> The very way in which we approach embryology, birth or the genetic code. All these are frames around a certain form. Sometimes it's a good thing that they're rigid and at other times it's not so good. What you can't do is . . .

. . . whether the actors . . .

As I said, apart from Omar Diop, who was so good he ended up being murdered by Léopold Senghor. Francis Jeanson, long before the film, was one of those rare French intellectuals to be active in a political network, which was in fact called the 'Jeanson network' and was actively helping the Algerian FLN. And he was sought by the police and he risked his life, like the people who fought the Germans during the Occupation, or here during the Vietnam War. Francis Jeanson was someone who was an activist for Algeria even more, say, than someone like Jane Fonda in the United States and who took risks like her. So is the film a documentary? Sometimes I don't at all see what the interest is in naming things. We name them so we know where we are. We call the place where trains depart 'central station'. We could call it something else. But calling something documentary or fiction, or calling something socialist or capitalist by saying: 'No, what you're doing isn't socialist', that's like saying . . .

[Inaudible]

No, I'm not criticising what you're saying . . .

[Inaudible]

How the film was made? As I said, for me it was a documentary because at the time I was in love with Anne Wiazemsky, who worked at Nanterre, so I went to study Nanterre. And I asked her if she had any friends. I had vague ideas – left-wing, right-wing, I don't know that people had put in my head or that I had put there myself. But the idea was to go somewhere I knew or at least wanted to know, and to make the film using people I knew. If Anne Wiazemsky wasn't a student at Nanterre at the time and if Francis Jeanson wasn't one of her philosophy professors, there wouldn't have been a film.

[Inaudible]

But at that point—I don't see why when making a film you wouldn't be an actor or a camera. People who like to act have work. Some children like to dress up, others not as much.

[Inaudible]

[*Interrupts questioner*] No, no, what I meant was, what people call the 'documentary tradition' is shooting on location and asking people to act out their usual gestures. But I also ask them to invent a story, meaning to do theatre. Theatre that has a connection to the theatre they do in real life. After all, why was she going to school? No one was forcing her to go to school. She was twenty years old, she had money. Why did she need to go to school? At that point, you can ask her: 'Would you like to imagine another school, and then we'll act out some theatre, another school?' And then we'll film that, and show it to people, and if it interests them they'll talk about it a little or won't talk about it, or they'll punch you in the nose like some people have done. Or afterwards others will say: 'Ah! Premonitory!' But they'll say it two years afterwards.

[Inaudible]

I find that Buñuel is quite diff—No, I think that Buñuel believes . . .

[Inaudible]

I don't know, I think that it is much more a film by Dalí than by Buñuel.

[Inaudible]

*L'Âge d'or*, yes, which you saw today. Buñuel became a filmmaker and Dalí became what he became, but it's a film that has much more Dalí in it than Buñuel.

*I always thought that they believed in revolution . . . but when I see La Chinoise . . .*

In this case I'm not at all capable—years ago I would surely have said something, or my way of not replying to that would have been a provocation, or humorous. I realise today that if I replied in a certain way it was because I didn't want to reply to that and be caught in the trap of—the moment you fire a shot at someone, or the moment you make a film or make an omelette, and someone comes along and asks you: 'Do you really believe in that omelette?' or: 'Do you really think you need to eat?' The woman making the omelette or the cook making the omelette for you will throw it in your face, and that's if they're nice.

[Inaudible]









But how can you ask me, to me it's flabbergasting, it's the sign of a profound sickness, which I share, because I must do it in some ways too, but I tried not to do it in this film, and that is: 'Do you believe in the revolution when you make a film like that?' I don't. No more than I believe in the police when I make a film like *Made in U.S.A.* or believe in cars when I make a film like *Week-end*.

[Inaudible]

Of course that's not what you meant. But sometimes you have to stop saying what you mean, because you can't.

[Inaudible]

What I believe in are the possibilities for change. I believe that what is most valuable are the possibilities for change, and that the image is the most valuable of all because it can fix moments of change, whether in the form of cinema or in the form of photographs. Thus you can verify and compare with others whether the possibilities for change which exist are interesting, useful or gratifying, depending on the case. If there are quarrels, you can reach an agreement, and the image is there just to remember the possibilities for change; because you're recording and sometimes what we record inside ourselves, in our memory, and given the way our memory operates, given the way we are assembled in society—sometimes it is much more difficult to explain yourself, and that is why people spend their time. If the United Nations used images and words a little more it would be more effective, but the UN doesn't want to be effective. Sometimes, you want to be effective. Against Hitler, who went too far. The others were doing the same thing. Churchill was doing the same thing in the British colonies and the French were doing the same. What's more, Churchill, once Hitler was wiped out, had no other—they started up again right away in other places just like before. But Hitler at least was more open about it. He did it at home if you like. So he was really dangerous, he had to be eliminated, he was a complete crackpot. They eliminated him like a crackpot, for that reason alone. It was because he was a bad guy who was even crazier than the others and wouldn't even listen to them any longer. Here sometimes images have been used; they've shown a few photographs of the concentration camps. And the English and people like that who were being exploited by Churchill said: 'Oh!

What a monster that Hitler!' But they don't show images of the concentration camps any more today; no one knows what happened.

Someone who made political films in his own way – we might have shown one, now that I think of it – was Stanley Kramer for example. When he made a film on Darwin,<sup>9</sup> it was, I don't know, like Z. But I think it's more interesting, and what sank him because of its honesty was the film *Judgment at Nuremberg*, which upset everyone. And ten years later he, an American, still wanted to try to—he took a simple case, a small-town judge, I think it was Spencer Tracy,<sup>10</sup> who arrives to judge a small case and who—but no one really wanted to see that sort of thing anymore. Sometimes people don't want to see an image. An image of horror is difficult.

*You chose to show classic films, Potemkin and L'Âge d'or, and you chose to show actors . . . can you talk about that a little more?*

Yes, I think that's right. I hadn't thought of that, but unconsciously that must be it. There were two excerpts which showed ruptures and people trying to create ruptures where they were. In their own way, the Surrealists in France—the uncouth scamp who pisses on the French flag during a ceremony or something like that. Today, if there are still poor wretches cooking an egg on the tomb of the Unknown Soldier, well, you get two weeks in jail for that. So you can see what is permitted and what is forbidden at a given moment. And Eisenstein came along in the early stages of what they called the Russian Revolution, there were big changes going on. These were films that had an enormous influence. *L'Âge d'or* was shown very little, it was banned by the censors. *Potemkin* was screened very little; it became a classic, but in people's memories. People began screening it long afterwards, once the Russian Revolution and what might have been new or dangerous about it for other countries was no longer—when the image no longer carried weight, no longer existed. Because this film was banned everywhere. To give you an idea of just how stupid the Germans were, when Goebbels saw this film, he summoned Eisenstein and asked him if he could make films like that for the Germans. He said: 'What we need is a German *Battleship Potemkin*'. But what the Germans were doing wasn't the same as what the Russians were doing, that's clear. They weren't able to make their films. That is also a judgment on them. Because

otherwise, if they had been able to make images that carried any weight—the only images with any weight are images of the concentration camps, and that completely ruined them.

So there are two films that are signs of a rupture. And I wanted to show them with films that were seen, if not as political, as social. When you read Capra's memoirs,<sup>11</sup> he speaks of himself—he doesn't use the word 'revolutionary', but it's clear that's what he's thinking. He thought he had made a film that set things going in the United States. He speaks of himself the way Eisenstein might. Whereas we see the film today only as a little comedy. But one of his somewhat better films, which we couldn't find, was *Meet John Doe*, which flopped. And sometimes failures are more interesting to study; it's too bad they flop at the time, but afterwards—often it's because they go just a little beyond the boundary of what is permitted. They're poorly dressed, they don't have quite the right form they should have, and the audience, and the producers who exploit<sup>12</sup> both the audience and the cinema, take advantage of the situation by saying: 'So it flopped, we won't be asking you to make another film'. But they're interesting films because they're dressed—all my films have been—the only reproach—people have never said to me: 'Your film is left-wing, your film is right-wing' or something like that. The only reproach film people have made to me is: 'What you're doing isn't cinema'. When I made television, it was: 'That's not television'. My difficulty is in managing to be just below the point where I upset everything and am seen as someone poorly dressed. But it's also because I'm too alone, and that's a weakness too. I try—one doesn't always want to live on the fringes.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *The citizenry has the floor.*

*Le Gai Savoir . . . Jean-Pierre Léaud, Wiazemsky . . . you speak of the ridiculousness of young people . . .*

Yes, but on the topic of ridiculousness, there is another film—we can't screen everything, all we try to show, what we're showing [*enseigner*] here is that cinema is not really taught [*enseigner*] in university. Cinema is used to teach other things, but there is no attempt now—that's what we're trying to do here. There is a film that would have been interesting to show with *La Chinoise*: *Ice* by [Robert] Kramer, or a film like Kramer's films. Because at the time people

always told me that my films weren't—people who saw themselves as activists contrasted them as if one were true and the other, a film like *La Chinoise*—and today I would have liked to see, because we would have seen, through what was going on in the United States and what we know, in what way Kramer's characters, who were filmed documentary-style – hand-held camera, newsreel-style camera, that sort of thing – were neither more nor less ridiculous, touching or completely outside the American context than mine were outside the French context. But their way of being outside the French context or outside the American context is what made them at the same time completely within their context. This 'outside' was a kind of—in one place, not everywhere but in one place, because May 68 had no connection with this film. The streets of Paris or some of the factories that were occupied or things like that, I don't know, they had no—what little I saw, and everything I didn't see or experience, had very little connection. But this lack of connection had a very real connection with what happened just the same. At the time, people contrasted *Ice* and other films by Kramer with *La Chinoise*. Today we see they were quite similar.

[Inaudible]

If at the time people had really filmed groups like the Weathermen in the United States or had really filmed—I remember once near the end an entire house in New York was blown up because they didn't know how to handle explosives. If someone had filmed that, the cops would have laughed and said: 'Are these the people we're afraid of?' And they would have been a little ridiculous and enormously touching in a sense. If it had been possible to film people in the Baader gang, it would have been a completely dream-world film. Dream-world but resembling a Clint Eastwood film too, with extremely violent and vulgar things. But for that to happen people have to accept images instead of words.

*Can time erase the difference between the films?*

No, on the contrary. But to show something better—the difference is that adjectives aren't made for judging a situation. Today adjectives are used to define things. What defines something, even in a sentence, is a verb, a complement or something. An adjective is there for something else, not to define. Today a film is defined, ev-

if we limit ourselves to film criticism—what I'd like to do again, and may do if I have the time, if I find at least two or three people who want to, like me, is to go back – in the hope that this would be a spiral and not a vicious circle – to go back to being a critic, to make films and talk about films or make films more in the form of a magazine. Perhaps not to make a film but to write or publish something, a different mixture of photographs and text. Especially film criticism, which I feel capable of doing a little differently today: to do criticism the way one would critique a dish of food or a badly built car engine. Not to say 'it's fine'; 'it's magnificent'; 'it's worthy of Sternberg'; 'it's greater than Shakespeare'. To say—you only have to look at the phrases film distributors and critics use: *marvellous; fantastic; genius*. Sometimes they even still use: *The best film I ever saw*—not too much, because they've been saying that for a long time! [Laughter] But you still see this sometimes. But how can you define something with an adjective? You can't say 'pretty'. If you say that your girlfriend is pretty, that doesn't define her. You're adding music or painting to everything she is. If something that is a piece of information becomes the very centre of the definition, it doesn't work at all. Even the words 'true' and 'false' become completely devalued.

SERGE LOSIQUE: Now, don't go after critics, because your former friend Truffaut defined them quite well. He divided them into seven categories, which I don't want to repeat here.<sup>13</sup>

... on the topic of Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, according to Buñuel he made the film, not Dalí. Buñuel made the film; he told me that he launched Dalí.

That's just my point of view as a critic, meaning I have no evidence and I'd have to undertake a long investigation. Maybe some day I will. In my opinion, aesthetically, from what I can see—but that's because I don't much like Buñuel, so I'm subjective. But I think he's lying when he says that. But perhaps that's the best thing, lying.

He told me that Dalí was a nobody, that he was the one who taught him.

I'd have to see it again, I'm not familiar enough with—given what each of them did, I'd say they were pretty much equal and that it's more a film by Salvador Dalí than people think. What's weak in it, the somewhat infantile attacks on religion, comes more from—or

showing priests and things like that, which makes people laugh, whereas other things at the time made people afraid and even—I remember seeing *L'Âge d'or* four or five years ago at the New York film festival. It had never been shown there, and there was a kind of silence in the hall, as blasé as New Yorkers are. I think it had a kind of transgressive power; it's a film that transgressed certain things. Sure, it's about bygone things, it transgressed a kind of society that's now past, but people unconsciously felt that their own lives are full of taboos that they don't dare transgress and that here was an image of transgression. I think that's why we can categorise it as a political film. It would be interesting to know how it was made exactly. I told you my subjective point of view. If Buñuel made it, I think it's his most violent film. The others are much less violent and are something else altogether.

*If I could ask another question: what's changed in you? In Venice in 1973 you were aggressive and indifferent. Today you're smiling. What changed?* [Laughter]

Well, the people here might be a little nicer, too, and in my case, I have a new outlook on life, then I was . . . that might be it.

[Inaudible]

No, I mentioned just now that there were lots of things I didn't know how to respond to, or I didn't know how to be, or I didn't know how to behave, and that gradually—at least in cinema a little bit, not in life. I've always thought that cinema could help me; otherwise I don't see why I would go. It's in this sense that I understand today that I'm close to the audience, meaning that I'm a part of it. And audiences don't accept me because I also make films and they don't. This is why they feel that my films aren't very successful with the general public but rather with an audience of creative people: novelists, students, people like that. But normal audiences don't accept me because right away they sense—a worker or someone like that, when they see one of my films compared to a Travolta film, they sense quite well that I'm one of them whereas Travolta no longer is one of them. But that's what they ask of Travolta and what they don't accept in me and what I let them see. Let's say that I don't see—I say that I feel close to the audience solely because I need a film for myself. Otherwise I wouldn't make films. If I had a need to navigate, I'd be on a ship, or if medicine interested me more—

moreover I spent a lot of time discovering that this thing would be a film. At a certain point I came along and saw that—but I need to make films for myself, to say who I am and to have the right to ask others. I find images truly marvellous, because they make it possible to say everything, to express your faults, but you're not embarrassed because they're to the side of you. And if people criticise your faults, the fact that you showed something of yourself to the side, when they criticise you, you won't feel it too strongly. If someone says: 'What you did is stupid'—rather than saying right away: 'You're stupid'—I feel this like everyone else, it bothers me, I say: 'That's not true, you are too' or we end up—it becomes an argument like any other.

But if I show it in an image and at some point really see where I am, and someone says to me that you're fat, and I see an image of you and they're not right, well, I can see. The same for other things. To say: 'You're a jerk for having paid such-and-such a person like that' or 'You're a jerk for having seduced such-and-such a person like that', and I can show it. That's what I'm asking myself, that's why I think the image is valuable. I think it's because its value is so high that people need it. But the people in power or those who support the people in power, most of whom are a part of – otherwise they wouldn't be there – and you have to use the image because you know inside yourself that it's powerful and that you need it, if only the image of ourselves. But at the same time you always have to try to mask its real power, which is only a power for discussion and not a power for bringing someone down. People try to bring someone down with definitive evidence of guilt or innocence, not 'a little innocent and very guilty', or 'very guilty and a little innocent'. That's why I think the image makes it possible to talk. Without images you can't talk. That's why it seems to me that cinema courses or histories of cinema that happen far from the image—I've tried here with Serge to bring them together as much as possible. To try to talk not about one film but about three or four at the same time. Fine, I was the one who chose them because I need them for the history of cinema we're preparing. I needed at least to see my historical trajectory with my own films. What I sometimes find extraordinary—suddenly, in one second, I say to myself: 'All right, I made a film, now I'm going to watch *Potemkin* again, but just before, and that will help me to think

about it. That's very valuable. It's true that it's a little excessive that I can do it for me and not for you.

SERGE LOSIQUE: [To audience] So, he's in the process of being reborn after Venice, don't you think?

Yes, but it must be said that I'm the same person. That's why I respect Buñuel and people like that. What's a festival? Today I couldn't stand it, I couldn't stand the . . .

*It wasn't a festival; it was a counter-festival, in 1973.*

Yes, but I was extremely uncomfortable. I no longer wanted to go to the other festival, and I felt obliged to go to the one you mentioned. And I didn't dare tell those people that they were as stupid as I was by being there. [Laughter] And at the same time I wanted to show our film. So it's all extremely complex. It's like going to a party and saying: 'Who are all these idiots at this party, I can't stand it any more.' But at the same time, if you can say: 'Who are all these idiots at this party, I can't stand it any more', it's because you're there too, otherwise you couldn't say it. So film festivals are like a kind of law, and there are more and more of them. There are even a few in Montreal. [Laughter] But it's the only place where people don't talk about film. Something that's true, film people, since they no longer talk about film—you have to talk a little about what you do. So you get together one way or another. It's like anything else; there are dentists' conventions, things like that. Filmmakers are an industry like any other, they hold conventions. It's just that they call them something else. Dentists wouldn't go so far as to say 'Tooth Festival'. [Laughter]

*You made a lot of films and suddenly you stopped. Why?*

Ah! There history has been badly written, because I've always shot a lot of films and I'm shooting here. When people – I don't know who – started saying I had stopped I was shooting even more than before. But these films were little seen, sometimes voluntarily, sometimes involuntarily. They were also experiments or studies, and sometimes for us a film was truly successful if it was seen by two or three people. If a woman were to make a film about the relations between a mother and child, nothing but the mother and child speaking to her, she could at least say: 'At least those two saw the film'. So there's that. Today I don't think that films should always be made for the same reasons, and that's why they shouldn't always have<sup>14</sup> the same

form. Today, the fact that there is video, amateur films, all sorts of things, you can make—it's no longer true that films cost a lot to make. Some films cost a lot, some are cheap. And certain moments of films shouldn't be films, the same way that you don't try to make a novel out of the things you say during the day. They're a part of the novel of your life, but the sentence you uttered when buying a kilo of meat and then when taking a taxi, you don't try to make them into a harmonious whole so that in the evening you can say: 'Oh! What a fine book I wrote today!' [Laughter] Films are exactly the same.

I think that some films should be made to be seen by very few people. Some films should be made to be seen only by students here, or scientific films should be seen only by scientists. Then if someone is interested—and fiction films should be like that too. But there is a completely totalitarian idea about cinema, which comes from Hollywood, because it didn't exist before. And everyone yielded to Hollywood for the reasons we spoke about yesterday. I see them as tied up together, and call them stories [*histoires*] and history [*histoire*]. Which means that everyone has delegated to Hollywood the power to tell stories, which have a connection to history just the same.

[Inaudible]

No, I started going on about Hollywood, but what I wanted to say was that there is a very totalitarian idea, which is both socialist and capitalist; Russian, American and Chinese.

[Inaudible]

Yes, except that Hollywood is much more powerful in that respect than the Russians because everyone sees American films. Today, if a Russian film opens on Sunset Boulevard or Fifth Avenue, no one will line up to see it, whereas if you open an American film in Moscow, everyone will line up to see it.

*That's true everywhere in the world.*

Yes, but there is a totalitarian idea that a film should be seen by everyone. Lots of filmmakers still say: 'I want my film to be seen by lots of people'. There is some truth in this totality, but at a certain point it shouldn't only be carried out in a form that can only become totalitarian. It's like the purity of the race. So if films—there are also good Aryan films and poor Jewish films or poor Arab films. It's true,

for a while I was interested in Arabs and Jews and others, minorities, because I truly felt like a minority myself in the space I was in. People said: 'Yours isn't the perfect example of a film that is seen by everybody!' And I'd say: 'Thankfully!' [Laughter] Yes, thankfully, but at the same time, if you're this minority you no longer have the right to a salary. Because in cinema the only people with the right to a salary are the people who are seen everywhere. And television is replacing them. So when I see a television camera operator working in a vest and tie, at other people's command—when I'm there I ask myself: 'But why does he have the right to be paid for doing nothing while we have to work like crazy, and badly?'

But there is some element of truth in this idea of totality, precisely, as well as something completely insane and false. What's interesting are the boundaries, the limits, because only through limits can we understand – our totality is too great – our desire for a lack of limits, in both senses of the word, and understand reality. In this sense the *cadre*, the *frame*,<sup>15</sup> is extremely interesting. Everything is *cadre*, everything is *framed*. But whether the frame is round or square, the image is an image of life, and representation is a particular frame, the same way we too have a physical frame we call our body. Then there is a social frame. And the problem of the frame and the angle is interesting. You can see—in our history of cinema, we'll talk about American cinema more as having invented the close-up and the big star and Russian cinema as having invented—both were looking for what we can call editing, meaning an assembly—a matching. But one looked for it through the close-up and thought he had found something. Or Eisenstein thinking he had found montage. But what he found was the angle. He knew where to place the camera. But he knew once, and there weren't a whole lot of other people in Russia who knew. That was because in Russia they had a different angle, a different point of view on things. And at a given moment that took form in an individual who knew how to find another point of view and who was unique. Because the Germans at the time didn't work like that, or the French, or the Americans. And it was Eisenstein—soldiers shooting people coming down a flight of steps—who had a different way of filming that was unlike anyone else and no one has been able to repeat it since. No one placed themselves—there was only Eisenstein – maybe for a while—no, not even Hitch . . . – who

placed the camera first and then built his film like that, consciously. You only have to look at Eisenstein's directing courses<sup>16</sup> with all the drawings they did, it's absolutely—there you see what it is, you can sense what it is to make an image at a time when there are changes going on in society. And he wasn't alone; he followed the course of his history.

SERGE LOSIQUE: Unfortunately, this totalitarian image of cinema still exists. There's nothing to compare with it in literature. When a writer begins to write, he isn't paid for several years. But before you even begin to think about the image, you have to pay a scriptwriter. Find me a scriptwriter who will—an American, say—the image Jean-Luc spoke about, the totalitarian image that became Hollywood, that was seen around the world. Before touching the image you're obliged, even the artist, the film director, is obliged to start by paying a scriptwriter. Which scriptwriter? Say a more or less well-known scriptwriter. If you want to hire one tomorrow for something, they're paid in advance. Well, if you have no more questions, we'll see you back here next Friday and Saturday. And let me tell you that the excerpts we don't show we'll show when we do the definitive history of cinema, Jean-Luc Godard's history of cinema, we'll put all these excerpts into the final edit. And you'll see the whole thing within two years. So thank you and we'll see you next Friday and Saturday.

Saturday 7 October 1978

#### Notes

1. This film was absent from the chapter heading of the original French edition and has been restored in chronological order here according to references to it in the talks.
2. Spoken in English.
3. A Grin without a Cat.
4. *Les Cahiers Marxistes-Léninistes*, of which seventeen issues were published between December 1964 and May 1968.
5. Quotations from Mao Tse-Tung (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1966).
6. Student unrest at Université Paris 10–Nanterre and the administration's decision to close the institution on 2 May are generally seen as playing a large role in setting off the protests of May 1968.

7. In a text entitled 'Some Questions Concerning Methods of Leadership', dating from 1943 and included in the 'Little Red Book', Mao wrote: 'And so on, over and over again in an endless spiral, with the ideas becoming more correct, more vital and richer each time. Such is the Marxist theory of knowledge'. See *Quotations from Mao Tse-Tung*, op. cit., 129.
8. The verb *encadrer* can mean to frame a picture or compose a shot in a film and in a much different sense to supervise (an employee, for example) or to regulate and govern social behaviour.
9. *Inherit the Wind*.
10. Spencer Tracy plays a lawyer defending the accused in *Inherit the Wind*, based on the famous real-life 'Scopes monkey trial', and a war-crimes judge in *Judgment at Nuremberg*.
11. Frank Capra: *The Name above the Title: An Autobiography* (New York: Macmillan, 1971).
12. In French the verb *exploiter* can be used in both the English sense of 'exploiting' someone and to refer to film exhibition and distribution: these activities are called *exploitation* and an exhibitor an *exploitant*.
13. Truffaut wrote an article entitled 'Les Sept Péchés capitaux de la critic' ('The Seven Deadly Sins of Film Critics') for the weekly *Arts* on 6 July 1955, in which he described not so much categories of critics as their common sins. See François Truffaut, *Le Plaisir des yeux: Écrits sur le cinéma* (Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma, 2000), 315–21.
14. Because of a break in the video recording caused by the need to change the videotape, the comments underlined here have been taken from the original French edition of these talks, which was based on an audio cassette made on a portable recorder at Godard's side. These cassette recordings are no longer extant, making it impossible to verify this passage for the present edition. For previous chapters, corresponding to the spring sessions of the talks, no such cassette recording exists. There, the interpolation [*Break in tape*] indicates the loss of a passage presumed to be about the length of the underlined section here.
15. Spoken in French and English.
16. Vladimir Nizhny, *Lessons with Eisenstein*, eds. and trans. Ivar Montagu and Jay Leyda (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1962).

# Monsters

6

## Week-end

1

*Dracula*

Tod Browning (U.S.A., 1931)

*The Birds*

Alfred Hitchcock (U.S.A., 1963)

*Germany, Year Zero (Germania anno zero)*

Roberto Rossellini (Italy–France, 1948)<sup>1</sup>

*Week-end*

Jean-Luc Godard (France–Italy, 1967)

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SERGE LOSIQUE: Is it the end of cinema or the beginning?<sup>2</sup> [Laughter]

[Jean-Luc Godard arrives]

SERGE LOSIQUE: There, I just asked the first question. Was it the end of cinema or the beginning?

JEAN-LUC GODARD: You have to ask them too.

SERGE LOSIQUE: Jean-Luc says he has nothing to say. It's up to you to answer.

It's the beginning of the end.

SERGE LOSIQUE: It's the beginning of the end, right. So, from Dracula and Hitchcock we end up at Godard. Apparently Hitchcock loved birds, and you like chickens and pigs, eh? I'd like to start off—what other excerpts did we see this morning? *Germany, Year Zero*, *Dracula*, *The Birds* I think.

There was an error of historical montage this morning because I would have preferred to show *Germany, Year Zero* after *Dracula*. There was another film we couldn't find, an excerpt I would have liked to show, and I wasn't able to think of another, and that was *The Fall of the Roman Empire*. I would have liked to show a film—I

thought of *Freaks* [*Les Monstres*] by Tod Browning, we couldn't find it, but *Dracula* worked quite well. Then we should have shown *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, then *Germany, Year Zero*, then *The Birds* and then *Week-end*. I don't know if you found a connecting thread or why those films. I said to myself 'monsters' because these are various periods of monsters. That's why there should have been some monsters seen from a historical perspective, even by Hollywood, like *The Fall of the Roman Empire*. In all these films there is a kind of downfall or even damnation. *Dracula* may have been the last, perhaps, but it was the last of a new series. It was the first in the cinema. When I came into the auditorium while *Dracula* was on, it seemed to me a little outside the others, and the first thing I heard Bela Lugosi say was that in order to live he needed blood to drink, that blood was necessary to life so he had to take blood to live. It seemed to me that this fit perfectly with what the Romans did to others in their day, which concluded with the fall of the Roman Empire. It went perfectly well with what Hitler did to others, and Rossellini began his film at the end of the period of a kind of Dracula who had more resources than Dracula. Then with *Week-end* we started all over again. So monsters are just a kind of constant starting over.

I think that by putting these four films together today just like that, which people think have absolutely no connection between them—I'd be curious to know, if you come fairly regularly to my course, whether when you watch these excerpts you are a part of the film, you watch the film as a film, or whether you try to see the film as a piece of what it really is, a piece of a product at a certain time, which we can enter into. But we can think of what comes before, to the side of or afterwards. Especially what might have come before in film. I think this morning it was quite clear. What I would be interested in seeing, knowing what was before and after, is how these films continue on.

For example, in *Germany, Year Zero*, which is a truly fantastic film, in the true sense of the word, at the end we see monsters being born and how one of them, who is practically a child, who doesn't want to be a monster, ends up dying also. Because we see—Hitler may well be dead, we see that this boy dies, and it's enough to see this brief excerpt, without seeing the whole film, to understand that he dies because people put into his head and into his body, which is bigger

than he is. He becomes monstrous even though he doesn't want to be, simply because he talks like an adult. He talks the way we're talking today. In fact in our history of cinema we could show shots of Berlin today and then ask ourselves how it came out of this. Or shots of other cities. It's in this sense I think that today's four films, from the point of view of 'historical montage' or 'elements of the history of cinema', were quite successful, even though this may not appear to be the case.

PATRICK STRARAM: ... *Germany, Year Zero* . . . except that in French it's more . . .

No, it's more—in the end it's not important if *The Birds*—also, I do these classes, I show things in order to show them, sometimes it's interesting to enter into a film and at others it's interesting to look at it from outside. In *The Birds*, it was quite clear—and then after a moment, just when we cut and moved on to *Germany, Year Zero*, we were all a little disappointed. We wanted to see just a little bit more, so brilliantly was it handled by Hitchcock. Someone says: 'Something terrible is going to happen' — Tippi Hedren says: 'Something terrible is going to happen' — and bam! we move on to something else. But what is terrible is that there were birds of prey of another kind that descended on a country at a point in time. You can also look at things that way. That's also a film or a story. Whether this story is told in French doesn't really matter. Whether Quebec is French or English or the film is dubbed or not, it doesn't really bother me.

PATRICK STRARAM: [Inaudible]

It would have been better in German, but . . .

JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD: . . . the image track and the soundtrack . . .

Yes, but here—I think that in excerpts like these it's not that serious. That's not what was important today. It's an important element too—not so much that it's dubbed, but that it's dubbed badly.

PATRICK STRARAM: [Inaudible]

Well yes, the dubbing is poorly done because there are monsters who do it badly. [Laughter]

PATRICK STRARAM: [Inaudible]

[Laughs] Well, if that's the case you shouldn't come. When there is no one here to watch, if there was no one to watch films and people said: 'We won't go to the movies until . . .'

PATRICK STRARAM: . . . *dub the film Week-end into Japanese?*

[Shrugs] Well, I think that in Japan the film should be shown in Japanese. All I ask is that it be done well. From that perspective, I prefer neither subtitles nor dubbing but a kind of commentary in the country's language, done by several people or one person, which would enable people to follow the story while at the same time being aware that it's a foreign product. If they don't speak the language, it lets them follow the story. Because I don't see how—everyone would speak the same language. You'd end up with a monstrosity whose effects you're complaining about come only from that. You'd end up having children speaking like adults and things like that. You'd make films speak a way they don't speak. A subtitled Brazilian film is just as deplorable. But because we're a very cultured or literary civilisation, we think it's better to read bad lines than to hear bad sounds.

SERGE LOSIQUE: You hear that Patrick? Now I can show dubbed films at the Conservatory. [Laughter]

No, he can show well-dubbed films, something no one knows how to do.

PATRICK STRARAM: There's no such thing.

Yes there is. *À bout de souffle* was a well-dubbed film in its own language, because it wasn't shot with direct sound. I put in a lot of effort—these days it's not well done, but my first three or four films—I said once that I would like to return to making films that I call dubbed, meaning that you don't record the sound at the same time so you can try to create other things. Because what was bad [*in Germany, Year Zero*] was not so much the dubbing itself; it was poorly done, but mostly it was the text of the dubbing, which was as poorly done as the text in subtitles. As for the rest, I find the music by Rossellini's brother much worse than the dubbing.

SERGE LOSIQUE: Yes, but since you've raised this, Patrick may be right. I've never dared show a dubbed film—maybe a couple of times because I had no choice. And then I slipped out the back door so as not to be hanged. But take for example one case that happened right here. A few years ago I showed a Marilyn Monroe retrospective, with films in their original versions. But one was dubbed in French, with a Marseille accent I think. Obviously people kicked me in the ass over that one, pardon the expression, because when you study the sex of Marilyn Monroe, it's

her lips, isn't it? And if you dub her in a French accent or foreign accent, it's no longer Marilyn Monroe. How do you account for that?

I don't; you shouldn't dub. [Laughter] You shouldn't dub, you shouldn't dub. You should let people follow something if they want to follow it. I think that subtitles, even though they make you think you can follow something, sometimes prevent you from following it in a normal way. It should be conceived for each film. But since all films are the same, they're all put through the same—they're subjected to the same exactions by film people, of course. So there are some films where it's more—this morning, in terms of what was happening, I don't think it was important. This was not the really important thing. It's unfortunate, I agree, but it wasn't the important element.

SERGE LOSIQUE: All right, we'll find a solution to this problem of dubbing. We'll cut the sound and do cinema the way Langlois said.<sup>3</sup>

The only solution is for the people who make films to do it and prevent this; that's the only solution. But three-quarters of the people who make films aren't able to defend their product or they're too weak to defend their product. And since the so-called 'people' or the 'audience' you're supposed to respect aren't bothered by it—if you show something out of focus in a cinema it doesn't bother people a bit. That's how it works. All alone you can't—you can't spend your life battling everything.

SERGE LOSIQUE: You understand, Patrick? Don't come around bugging me, all right?

Is the dubbing done in France?

Yes, it's done in France.

[Inaudible]

Yes, there are companies in France that specialise in this.

[Inaudible]

What I call dubbing is what is also called post-synchronised, meaning synchronised after shooting and dubbed, in a foreign language or in your own language if it's a foreign film. That's what people call dubbing and they try to use words that have similar movements of the mouth, so it ends up looking more like a graphic novel.

[Inaudible]

No, it's done with special machines on an editing table. There's a strip of paper that runs through at the same time as the image, a little like an electrocardiogram, and they write words on it by hand. At least that's how it's done in France, because France and Italy are countries that dub. Lots of other countries don't dub. In South America they show films with subtitles. In the United States films are neither subtitled nor dubbed because they show only American films [laughter]—they have an entirely different principle!

I remember when I made *À bout de souffle*, which was post-synchronised, and a few other films. I was one of the few to go myself. And when the person opens their mouth, you write letters—because the paper is passing through at the same time as the images, and you write letters to make them coincide. What they try to do most of all is to make the labials, the consonants coincide, the 'p's, the 'm's, etc., which is completely idiotic. It would be better simply to put a text over top which would be the real Québécois text or the real American text or the real Italian text. Sometimes it could be longer, because you should completely redo the sound. This to my mind is the only way to do it. But they respect two things. They respect—once the person opens their mouth, and sometimes in the original film they open their mouth just to breathe, and then they say a word and close their mouth. Film people think they're obliged to imitate the sound, [makes breathing and sighing noises with his mouth open] which makes the sound completely crazy on any film. In a film by Bergman or others this becomes—a film like *Cries and Whispers* for example, when it's dubbed, people in the dubbed version talk three times as much as in the original version. What's more, sometimes they choose completely worthless words, simply because there are two 'p's or two 'm's, they put in a word with the same thing. So it seems real but it's false in terms of the film's text, it changes it completely. So yes, this has to be addressed and brought under control. But in my opinion, if you want to dub a film well you shouldn't be concerned with synchronisation in the beginning. A little bit afterwards, but not at first.

[Inaudible]

Well, if film courses were any good at teaching people how to do cinema and especially to undo the cinema that's made, then this

could be done. But for that there would have to be demand on the part of those workers we call students who let the bosses do whatever they want.

[Inaudible]

That's something you have to ask the government of Quebec, why it feels itself obligated, or Her Majesty, because . . .

[Inaudible]

But I think that if it was dubbed in Québécois – I'm not sure what to call it – it would seem even more unrealistic to you than if it was in French.<sup>4</sup> Because, like Serge said, it used to be, even in France, they re-did the entire sound of musical comedies in French. As he said, it's completely unrealistic to listen to Marilyn Monroe sing little bits of verse in a Marseille accent or I don't know what. But what was possible, I think, was to find a singer who would have re-sung the songs without straying too far but by trying to do something suitable, if you absolutely wanted to make a version—but sometimes you realise that there is no interest in doing so for films like that. There are others for which that wouldn't be a problem, but with a song for example it's obvious that there is no interest in doing that. But with songs it doesn't bother people a bit not to understand the meaning. Three-quarters of the time there is so much music, or the way people speak in opera—rock 'n' roll is a return to the operatic tradition, nobody understands a word of what they're saying. Yet you understand things just the same. Sometimes you can understand a film without understanding a word, as long as you understand the story that's taking place.

*You worked without a script. How did you do that?*

If you explain to me what a script is I'll tell you how I manage to work without one.

. . . well prepared . . .

But what do you mean by well-prepared instructions?

. . . for the camera . . . the lighting . . . the sound . . .

By well-made you mean planned out in advance?

Yes

Planned out how many days in advance? Two months? A year?  
Three years?

... *the shooting script* . . .

Yes, but precisely—it sounds like I'm making fun of you, but I'm not at all. I've never managed to understand what the Americans—I've seen them, and I've never been very clear on how what they call a *shooting script*<sup>5</sup> is useful. Because if you tell me—I've never invented anything. I've always made very careful preparations, and then people tell me: 'But you work without a script'. So I say: 'I have to have something else; I call it a script'. But what film people specifically call a script, a book that was written—if you gave me a script, what people call a script, a *shooting script*, I would be completely—if I tried to be as obedient as possible I would be completely incapable of knowing what to do. So it is used for other things. A script is used on big productions – and little productions are wrong to copy big productions exactly – big productions use them to know where they are in the shoot. If it's written: 'Tucson, exterior, day, horse-drawn carriage', then people know they have to meet up in Tucson on a certain day. The whole crew, given that there are two or three hundred people. So it's useful to the producer, like in the army for example. In the army, there's an entire logistic—you have to know which day the people bringing gasoline are going to meet up with the tanks, where, how it will take place, or food supplies, things like that. For every foot soldier there are five or eight people whose job it is to supply them with arms and ammunition and clothing, and there are fifteen people in offices doing the same thing.

A film is exactly the same thing on a smaller scale. For every Barbra Streisand or Belmondo there are fifty people at Fox. So the *shooting script*, if you like, is a series of signposts for all those people. To make the film itself, I don't think so. Maybe someone refers to it if they forget what they were going to do, but if not—because you can't write everything down. I've always worked with my own kind of script, which consists in a number of notes and signposts, because when people leave work each evening they say: 'Where will we meet tomorrow?' And that can vary. If you say to them: 'Well, tomorrow we're meeting in Tokyo', you have to plan on two or three days to travel there by plane, on finding a hotel and things like that. Whether you're rich or poor, you can't do that on a moment's notice. But if you're shooting in Montreal and someone says: 'Where will

we meet tomorrow?' you say to them: 'Well, listen, I don't know. It should be around noon, so around ten o'clock someone will call you at home to let you know'. Something like that. And the same thing for practically everything else. Sometimes you know exactly what's going to happen, the dialogue has just been written. In that case you give it to them. If it isn't written, I say: 'Don't worry, it will be written for tomorrow', or the way you work together means that you'll come up with it together and that will be the work you do. Maybe you'll record it or maybe . . . I don't know.

But I don't think it's true that everyone—if they say you need a script or that you have to be strict about certain things, they're trying to make you think that it's a kind of railroad timetable. It's like telling people and making them believe that cinema is something mysterious and complicated and that without a script it's impossible. It's like telling a traveller that in order to take a train they absolutely have to walk around with the timetable in their pocket, or to walk around with a telephone book in case you might want to make a phone call. [Laughter] To me it's like that. It's useful, yes, but not all the time. You don't have to walk around with a huge telephone book all the time just to make a phone call.

It would be interesting if there was a scriptwriting course, if there was a book that tried to analyse the different ways scripts are written. In the days of silent films, for example, when there was no dialogue. I remember seeing a shooting script [*découpage*] by Fritz Lang. I think it was for *Metropolis*, I don't remember exactly. It had five columns; it was a big book like this, [stretches arms out in front of him wider than shoulder width] like painting books, and had five columns. Today there are only one or two.<sup>6</sup>

Recently I read — skimmed, actually — the script of a film that Roman Polanski is in the process of shooting.<sup>7</sup> But if I had to shoot the film using his stage directions, it would be completely impossible. There are three bits of dialogue, then it says: 'She goes from there to there'. They're signposts, and signposts mostly for the producer, so that everyone can refer to signposts known by all, so they can be certain that this is what they're shooting and not something else. That's fine. But when you shoot a film together—but that's because

film people have no relationship with each other. If you need to be certain on a Polanski film that you're shooting an adaptation of a novel by Thomas Hardy, if you have to be certain that it's not a film with Humphrey Bogart or someone else like that, it means that film people have no relationship with each other apart from the passing relationship of the shoot that cinema creates. Whereas if you shoot as a more informal group, if you know each other a little better—even if you just met—then you're like musicians, and musicians don't have scripts. They have notebooks with notes, which they sometimes follow and sometimes don't. But never does someone like Bob Dylan—when he asks his production company for an advance no one says to him: 'All right, but bring me—*Do you have a script?*' He can play them something.

There's a great danger in this for me because it ensures that afterwards, in the name of the script, if there is too much money at stake, in the name of the script they force you to keep your word because your word has been printed. It's like the law; it's the Tablets of the Law. And once a law is printed—and they even say to you: 'Ah, you changed your mind!' And if you say: 'But of course', they say to you: 'Aha, so you're a liar, you're dishonest!' A liar, you can say: 'I have the right to change my mind', but dishonest, you don't dare say: 'And why not?'

**JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD:** *It's the equivalent of an itinerary . . .*

It's the exact equivalent of a train schedule. I mean, a film isn't recorded—it might not be a bad thing if trains operated like that a little.

*. . . filmmakers, thinking they are eliminating the arbitrary . . . write a script . . .*

Absolutely. Three-quarters of filmmakers or of young filmmakers try to start out in cinema following this model. And it's difficult, there isn't much demand, only one in a thousand is accepted, and you can be certain that this 'one' is well moulded. Because they put it into people's heads that this is how you have to work. What seems more normal to me would be to ask them for images and then to ask them for texts. In Hollywood's glory days, screenwriters, scénaristes, were employed by the week like in an office. They arrived in the offices of Fox or Universal at nine or nine-thirty, they stopped

at noon to go to the cafeteria and at five-thirty they went home. Each day they had to produce twenty, thirty, forty pages, depending on the producer or the production company. It was a real job, in the sense of a salaried job at a desk like other people. If at the end of the day a cleaning lady had gathered up, not what they had given to the producer but what they had thrown in the wastepaper basket, and we were to see this today, I think there would be scripts or ideas for films much more brilliant or extraordinary than what was made.

So what I would call a script, for me that would be more what they threw in the wastepaper basket, because that was how they thought. You can make a film out of that if you work differently, but they threw it in the wastepaper basket because that's not what—they had to deliver something that would stand up in the eyes and ears of their producer. And printing, putting notes on paper, everyone does that. Notes, notebooks: I use them too. I always have a notebook, I take notes. Not the same way as most people. This I think is the problem with scripts. But I can tell that this intrigues people a lot. And the mythology of scripts and of cinema as something complicated comes in large part from that. It's a question I'm often asked; it seems to intrigue people whether you work with or without a script. But I wonder who put this idea of the script into their heads.

*SERGE LOSIQUE: To return to the excerpts we showed this morning and to your film Week-end, you chose this excerpt by Hitchcock, and in your first film you were influenced by Hawks, isn't that right? So is it a case of what Truffaut once said, 'Down with conventional French cinema, up with Hitchcock and Hawks'? Is there any truth in this?*

No, I was never influenced very much—or I admired Hawks less than the others. On the other hand today I admire someone like Hitchcock a lot; I place him in a different country, in a different society, with different problems but who is—he's what I would call one of the two—someone who knows what he's doing and who does it better and better, perfectly. And who lost nothing between silent and talking cinema. The scene—I'm glad it was shown this morning—the seven or eight shots where Tippi Hedren is not doing anything and the crows are gathering. These seven or eight shots are scenes just as—I'm at a loss for words, I don't like to use adjectives—but cinema is also that: someone who doesn't need a text to tell a

story, who uses a text when he has to but at other times uses images or sound. It's a complete package. It's like a singer, like Barbra Streisand: her voice is one of the most complete voices in popular song. Not the words; her voice is like an athlete who knows how to do seven or eight sports compared to others who only know how to do half of one.

People like Hitchcock and Eisenstein weren't well liked in their day: by Stalin in one case, Roosevelt in the other, and then Kennedy and others prevented them—and despite that they managed to do things absolute—the Odessa steps or this shot of Tippi Hedren are, like the critics say, 'the great moments of cinema' or who knows what. But they're merely things where we see that cinema – and television could profit from this example when it does news or reportages – is something incredibly powerful. Even people—this morning there were fifteen people, they must have seen *The Birds* before. At times you're struck, like with music, your mouth is left gaping. It's incredibly powerful, and what you need to do is to use it. No one knows how to use this power.

Every government that comes to power asks—I'm in Mozambique at the moment, and I see this there too. I'm planning to do a film with them precisely in order to examine this. It's called 'Naissance (de l'image) d'une nation' ('Birth of [the Image of] a Nation'). Not 'Birth of a Nation', but 'Birth of (the Image of) a Nation', meaning the birth of a nation through the images it makes or wants to make or succeeds in making of itself and wants to give to others. But you see that every government—Lenin said it,<sup>9</sup> cinema became important very quickly. It was the socialists, the soviets plus electricity, and cinema was a part of that much more than the others. In the midst of the war Lenin immediately gave Russian gold to someone to go buy film stock in New York. He struck out; the guy kept the money and opened a restaurant. But then he sent someone else. That's my idea: images and their alliance, and the fact that when we watch this music less so, music too but in a different way. It's not by chance that the music industry and the film industry—this is one of the topics of my next film if I manage to make it. There are two kinds of industry, and the image is part of this second kind. Images and sounds. There is what I call daytime industry, which is the industry that makes the

body function: workers' gestures when making objects, when making a bed or a car, but which makes the body function, and which exploits the body in a certain way. What people call 'industry' if you like. I call that daytime industry, which is also done at night—three times eight hours to make twenty-four hours, but it is a part of the daytime industry.

And then there is the night-time industry. The industry that comes from the internal functioning of the body: desires, psychology, nerves, sensations and all that, sexuality. All the industries like gambling, prostitution, drugs, tourism, sports and other things where peoples' desire to get outside themselves is exploited, and is exploited after the daytime industry. What people today call the mafia, basically; that's what this industry is. And *show business*, the *industrie du spectacle*,<sup>10</sup> which is the film industry, television and the music industry all at once, is a part of this industry. Cities like Las Vegas are extreme examples of what this industry can be. In Las Vegas it's forbidden to take photographs; it's bizarre but that's—because obviously it would no longer work if any home movie—because people run the risk of being seen on someone else's arm. It's the only place where it is forbidden, and it should be allowed there more than . . .

[Inaudible]

No, you can see things clearly.

And from a financial point of view cinema is a fine stroke for the mafia, which earns—the night-time industry is in alliance with the daytime industry. For example, there's someone in the United States called Howard Hughes; he was the connection. It's not by chance that he also made films, that he worked for both the Pentagon and the mafia, and that he took over from the founder of Las Vegas. Because he agreed to give an air of respectability so that so-called dirty money – simply the industry that doesn't show its face – could be converted into money in the industry which has the right, which morality—but who controls morality? You tell what you show.

And cinema is a very special place, like hotels and casinos. Because the way money is spent on a film—there are many more things you don't control, or that you accept not to control in the same way. What's called 'laundering' money: money from prostitution that

doesn't want to pay taxes can be reinvested in films. I think that there isn't enough economic history of cinema in universities and that anyone who did this would quite quickly be ruined because they would say things like I'm saying here. It's not my problem if Seven Arts buys Warner and then another company with money from prostitution. I find it interesting to say this, to show it and to raise the question.

JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD: *This morning . . .*

No, this is a taste of what we need to do, and I'm doing this with Serge with the goal of creating an introduction to the history of cinema. But for us it's introducing us to a method, a manner of looking at things and of doing it too, because you can't just talk, you need something else, and to do it. For me as I do this I realise—we'll do a book which will simply tell how these things happened. It will be an example of other kinds of courses that should be given on the history of cinema. If I was a professor next week or in six months, I would try—what would interest me would be to say: 'All right, next class, rather than showing these four films, we'll show four others, with a different film or in a different way'. Clearly there would be other films; there are definitely Marx Brothers films we could show. Along with the Marx Brothers we could show—last week I hesitated between the Marx Brothers and the film by Dalí and Buñuel as a political film. To place the Marx Brothers film in the political film the way you mentioned also. We could have shown, I don't know, there were lots of—I try to take the most extreme examples, the ones people—always with the hope, which is a Utopia, that people will want to know why it is there and think about it out loud in front of me.

JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD: [Inaudible]

I tried to show films—from this point of view, *Dracula* and another one I couldn't find—films that also give a sense of downfall or of the end of the world. *Dracula* is there because it's someone from another world in today's world. Fine, people say: 'Dracula doesn't exist', but just the same for three-quarters of the film—you only have to look at how people are dressed in the film. Even today on every board of directors or in every high society, people dress and speak like that. So where are the monsters? Who are the monsters? It's absolutely unbelievable—those big houses, Lugosi's house, all the huge houses, the

houses of Vanderbilt, du Pont de Nemours, people like that, that's where they live. Do you expect them to have shot the film—to have had any other idea for the set than that? Your ideas come from the world in which you live. Here I'm certain: you can only have ideas like that when you see things. If I had seen *Dracula* all by itself, I could never have had that idea. But because I see it and I know that afterwards or just before I'm going to see *Germany, Year Zero*, I say to myself: 'Well . . .' Even me, I'm searching—it's a vague idea I had and then I come here to verify it. Sometimes it works. This morning I think it worked pretty well from a cosmic point of view. There was a kind of cosmic connection between these films and it was—Berlin was *Dracula*'s tomb. And that was Hitler's genius in a sense. He was the only person—if they had put a little moustache on *Dracula*, well, the effect would be perfect. [Laughter] Hitler was a fantastic character; he was the only—take anyone, even an old lady, even a baby, and put a little moustache here and a little hair piece there, right away people will say: 'It's him!' No one else can do that, not Napoleon, not Stalin, no one else. Only Hitler did that. [Laughter] So the conclusion is that just the same he must have had—we must all be like him a little, just a little, if we can manage to look like him so easily with nothing at all! Not even Jesus can manage this: you can put a crown of thorns on your head, no one . . . [Laughter]

SERGE LOSIQUE: You have to be tall and blond.

Still, it was completely crazy. And when you see this film today—I quite liked it in its day, but out of admiration for Roberto. When I see it I'm completely dumbfounded. And I hadn't seen, I hadn't understood, it's only today, because I've made one or two films with children—not because I have children, but on the contrary because I don't—and for me in this film it was immediately clear that people were filling this young boy's head up, everywhere, his body, which was suddenly too big for him. When he realised this nothing worked; he sold cigarettes, he did only those things that adults do, and, well, the city may well have been destroyed, he was a monster who didn't want to be a monster. It was quite fine and even the music, that music by Rossellini's brother, which Roberto used because he put his family to work, was so horrible I came to accept it. I think it did to the film what Hitler did to Germany, and at the same time it was quite all right.

[In English] I think it's a mistake to compare Mr Godard's pictures with other pictures. I think that Mr Godard's pictures, along with Antonioni's, are the most original. You're sure if you're going to see a Jean-Luc Godard film that you are going to see something completely different. I mean it's not going to be like any other film . . . search for something different. You know, I've seen just a few films, Vivre sa vie . . . But for me, these films are very original. They are very different, and you can't compare . . .

[In English] And you think this morning . . . what is your point? You think we shouldn't have shown the other pictures in the morning?

[In English] No, I haven't seen those pictures. I think . . . especially this film, it's very original.

[In English] Yes, it's very original, yes. [In French] No: you say that it's very original and doesn't resemble any other film, but at the same time, if you had seen the other films this morning, that was proof that Week-end was exactly like the others. The others were also very original, and the history of the original and the copy is interesting, because for example you can think of the head of a country or a movie star as an original, and the citizens as copies of this original, who accept their status as copies.

[In English] La Femme mariée . . . is for me one of the most beautiful in cinema, the beauty of these images is . . .

[In English] Yes, but what we are trying here to do, I don't mean to be [to Serge Losique in French: 'abrupt?'] rude or to, but what I'm trying to do here is that sentences like you are making now on films will never be made anymore because they are saying nothing, saying just: 'I like it very much'; 'it's very . . .'; 'it interests me'; 'I was moved'; 'it's really beautiful'. Well, you could say: 'It's awful'; 'I was not moved at all', which a lot of people say. And so, if your child asked you: 'Dad, can you tell me what kind of picture you have seen? Don't tell me it's good or bad, just tell me what was the picture, so I can judge for myself if I want to go, or if I have seen it if I agree with you. Just tell me of the picture, don't tell me of you looking at the picture, tell me of the picture'. Now this is what I am trying to do, to be able to speak of the picture, not to speak of you. Or if you speak of you, well you should—you don't need, if you need a picture don't take a picture from somebody else, make your own picture. With movies or, if you can't afford the money, with paper. Or try to work.

because it's difficult to speak of you and if you say only I love it or I hate it, well, who cares . . .

[In English] *I'm very ignorant . . .*

[In English] No, I feel I'm more ignorant than you, because I don't know how is my picture, I'm trying to know it, if I am moved. I know sometimes I can say sometimes I am moved by that, but you are much less ignorant than you think.

[In English] . . . it's original . . . different from the others . . .

[In English] Yes, but how can you say it since you have not come this morning? You can't say it's different or it's original because you have not seen other copies and you can't say it's different. I have seen it and I can say it's not original, because this morning there were five other pieces who were the same, who belong to the same story, kind of the monster story.

[Inaudible]

[In English] Have you ever seen [to *Serge Losique in French*: 'crows'?] ? Have you ever seen birds attacking people? I think it's quite original. I've never seen it. [Laughter]

SERGE LOSIQUE [In English]: OK, thank you very much. You see, we cannot convince Mr Godard, he wants to compare his own picture with others, so . . . [In French] We can't be more Catholic than the pope. [Laughter]

*There were a lot of connections between the excerpts this morning, in the sense that the monsters were identified, they were present . . .*

But there may also be the fact that you don't know who the monsters are. Because are the monsters the birds or Tippi Hedren? To me that's the interesting question.

*In Week-end it's much less possible to identify . . .*

Absolutely. It was a time when . . . go on.

[Inaudible]

I think that it's a film—it's different from the others, on that I agree, but only because it speaks before a social situation happened. The film was made just after *La Chinoise* in late 1967, before 68, and it speaks beforehand. There were lots of events before then. The Weathermen in the United States—the Front de Libération de la

Seine-et-Oise was before the Weathermen in the United States and dealt with things in a completely different manner. So it spoke beforehand, while films like *The Birds*—that's also why I think it had a place. It spoke well beforehand. It's something that had never happened like that.

Today was an opportunity for me to see a bit of *The Birds* because I have an idea for a film whose last sequence will in fact be that: there will be a rebellion by women—first the socialists will rise up, and then they'll be overthrown by the women, who are overthrown by the children, and then we sense that the animals are going to overthrow everyone. So there are intrigues between the socialists, the women and the children to overthrow the animals, while the animals try to ally themselves with one of the groups. They try to ally themselves with the socialists; that doesn't work. They try to ally themselves with the women; that doesn't work. They ally themselves a little with the children who—well, I don't know, things like that. I wanted to watch a film with special effects because that seems to me—I'd like to mix special effects and real characters; it seems to me quite difficult to do.

What I found interesting this morning and what I hadn't at all thought of when I made up the program, and it was striking because of one of the films. It was striking that the four films, because like you said, the fourth one, *Week-end*, we no longer really knew who the monsters were, because there were monsters everywhere. This is why it was good it came at the end. Because in the others—well, Dracula is the monster, not the others. But in *The Birds*, you say to yourself: 'Well, the birds, it's terrible, and the others are normal people'. But if all of a sudden you place the light of *Germany, Year Zero* between the two films you see that the monsters—you no longer see the monsters, you don't know, and then you feel that even so, because theoretically the monster is dead, his house has been demolished, then we see one being reborn, and suddenly we see who—and then you say to yourself that nothing has changed: the only person who tried to grow up in the film and who was aware he was growing up in the midst of ruins, because they put ruins inside him, he retained a little innocence which only served to shorten his life.









I think there are truly extraordinary things, ex-ordinary in the sense, without playing on words, simply taken beyond the ordinary. Simply when the young boy, when he thinks, when he takes up this position [puts his hand on his forehead in a reflective pose] he—naturally Rossellini, with his talent and sensibility, made him act like a man, like an old man. A child never does that. [Places his hand on his forehead again] There are some things that are absolutely—suddenly there is a mismatch, but there wouldn't have been [without] this film. That's why I say it is important to see, and seeing is comparing. What you do with the comparison is something else altogether. Justice is rendered, and then you apply justice. You try to apply how that will—but first you have to see. Even justice today always tries to make something seen. Sometimes in two different ways, with the two lawyers, the defence and the prosecution, and then the jury tries to see. But does it know how to see? If I hadn't seen the Rossellini film this morning, I wouldn't have had the idea that Bela Lugosi had the most natural air in the world in the midst of the others—doctors or people who speak like that. But you see, you only have to see a meeting of a board of directors, or a photograph — pardon me, Serge — a photograph of a jury at a festival in the midst of doing I have absolutely no idea what. [Laughter] It's people in uniform, and here we're back to what I said before, that what's most important is the form. And Rossellini's film, and I came out of it, because after all he's only ten years old, and I came out of it—he lived through the end of the war; I lived through the beginnings of other kinds of wars. In Rossellini's film everything is in ruins, everything is mis-shapen, and we see someone who would live naturally and who was filled with mis-shapen . . . and who cracks in the end.

SERGE LOSIQUE: But what do you expect? Last year I tried to open the festival without a microphone. The newspapers all said it was amateurish, that you need camera flashes, spotlights, everything, that it was botched.

The other day I went to Hollywood, just like that, there was a dinner at an agent's house. I went, but Rassam had to lend me a tie, otherwise it would have caused too many problems. This exists! And what's astounding is that people yield on these points. The tiny detail, the extreme power of—it's absolutely incredible. Today I think that people's clothing, or forms—and when you go to expensive parts of a big city, places where real estate is worth the most, the

stores you see most often are banks and clothing stores. Much more than in the Middle Ages or twenty or thirty years ago.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *Did you yield to Hollywood?*

No, I yielded to myself.

SERGE LOSIQUE: [Laughs] *He always gets himself out of a scrape. If there are no more questions . . .*

*A true monster film makes you afraid not only while you're watching it but also afterwards.*

I would say instead that real monster films are those which don't make us afraid but which make us monstrous afterwards. The others, meanwhile, make us afraid a little, they always have a little something; they liberate a little, they make it possible to think, even if they don't intend to. The true monster film is *Grease*, it's *Saturday Night Fever*, it's things like that. [Laughter] Those are the real monster films, because we have absolutely no fear. We'll be afraid when we have an accident three years later as a result of this kind of product. Because they come from the imagination, but what does industry produce? Cars, planes, coffee makers, razors. But these are invented [*imaginé*] objects; nobody just went out and found them. So the imagination is producing and producing is inventing [*imaginer*]. It all holds up. And I think it's better to make a record or to invent [*inventer*] a song. These are products of the imagination, just like making cookies.

*I found something a little problematic in Week-end, precisely in the context of this morning's film. Especially in the historical montage you did In Dracula, for example, what was frightful in it was an [inaudible] of blood who comes from elsewhere, from a class in the past, another country, who arrives in England . . . for the English bourgeoisie. Then on the other hand, in Rossellini's film, for example, it's people who contribute to their own horror. And I found in Week-end ambivalence between those who come from elsewhere, the numbers of Algerians and Viet Cong who are present in French space, and on the other hand the production was frightful with the fictional quality and the [inaudible] quality . . . This is something that I found very difficult to balance while watching the film. If you look at the period I think you'll see—I may be wrong but I think there were very few films like Dracula, Nosferatu, Frankenstein . . .*

Dracula wasn't a completely invented character like Frankenstein. He scared people but they completely separated him from reality. There was [Dr] Jekyll and Mr Hyde if you like, but films like that always applied to personal psychological situations within the bourgeoisie. No one has ever made a film about a workers' strike using Dracula or something like that, which could be useful. Or films on the mafia or something. I mean, between sucking blood and scooping up money there isn't a lot of difference. Either way you're screwing people. I find everything we try to do here quite interesting; in the case of other films there are other ideas, other ways of seeing how things are done, which can be more interesting and tell us more about a situation. Week-end was clearly set in a much more confused and mixed-up world. For the texts, I used some by [inaudible], I used Engels' first texts on the Iroquois.<sup>11</sup> I tried to make a huge salad, a big club sandwich, in which everything, monsters or not monsters—I'm not—I'm closer to a cry or to song.

JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD: [Inaudible]

That's what I tried to do, but I didn't manage it as well because it's clearly more confusing to remain clear while trying to mix everything up. To show a mix-up clearly is quite difficult. This is always the kind of cinema I've tried to do and it's a little confusing for people. So I try to be clearer in this confusion by showing, by being interested in mixed-up moments.<sup>12</sup> Otherwise it would be a different film. Rossellini wasn't like that, but it's quite easy to imagine *Germany, Year Zero* being made differently. It wouldn't seem out of place at all to see Bela Lugosi suddenly appear in a shot. At the same time, some things you can't do, they wouldn't be accepted. You have to keep that in mind. But there are few films—I think the music in the film is completely monstrous. What was his name, Renzo Rossellini? I don't remember very well, but Rossellini said to me: 'I prefer that my brother play in my films than come to my house to play'. [Laughter] It was a trade-off, something like that. But you can't have everything.

But few films try to do both—when you make *Frankenstein*, to put him in a monstrous social situation. The 1929 Depression or something like that. It comes up sometimes, but the film doesn't deal with it. It treats them as two separate moments. I try instead to treat

them – and on this score I'm even different from Rossellini – I try to treat them at the same time. Obviously it's too difficult for one person to deal with both the situation and the one or two characters you've decided to focus on in these situations. That's the only way I can work. I wouldn't be capable of dealing only with the situation. Or dealing only with the characters Hollywood style, I couldn't do that either.

[Inaudible]

No, no, not at all. I have a few memories, because I knew him a little. I went to his house a few times. I remember because he put to work—he always needed money because he maintained his whole family, and there were an incredible number of them. He had two or three hundred people in his family, whereas you or I have families of two or three people, that's all.

*... a question about the story behind Week-end. You said the film... in France in 68 and yet... already in 67. Is it the least well known?*

I don't know, yes. This film wasn't very successful when it was released. Then six months—it was a little bit like *La Chinoise*, seven or eight months later, things came about which didn't make the film any better, but I had simply drawn on events that didn't yet completely exist. This doesn't mean they didn't exist, it means that I took them before people said they exist. An illness, or good health—cancer, if you knew to take it at that moment. I think the reason they don't cure cancer is that they don't want to, that's all. Because all you have to do is take it earlier, nobody would disagree with that, but with different methods than what they use. Other ways of thinking of seeing. Because otherwise, you always end up—maybe not everything, but you can always do something.

I realise that in the end I've always been interested in things before they happen. I don't know, talking about a trip before you leave, or after you arrive, lots of things like that. Or the history I'm doing in Mozambique: talking about the image of a nation before it walks upright. At the same time, I show that the image is already there; in fact there are a thousand images. But how will they edit them? The history of the flag alone is very interesting. A flag is a kind of image on which you put a few forms and a colour. Of course, one shot th

will be missing – and we'll say: 'It's missing' – would be sitting in on the discussions around—that's all right, we'll shoot another image and say: 'With respect to this, please think of the flag'. That's where you see—but I haven't yet found it because as soon as I say to myself—for example, I wanted to do a discussion about how they're going to choose uniforms for airline stewardesses – will they choose uniforms? You see, it's already – they have an international airline, the question will be raised. But this was already done. They're going to choose cars—will the cars of government ministers have little flags like in . . . ? It's been done. And everywhere I said to myself: 'Here's a place where we can see in a simple object how they'll create a form'. Well, in lots of places it had already been set by Hollywood, Paris, Moscow, New York, Christian Dior, whatever.

And there are other places in fact where you see—the way they build houses, for example. In one place the housing ministry tried to use the material and forms found on site. They tried not to use stuff from Sweden or Germany, things like that. Even to make a chair, to try to make it using local materials, and especially with local ideas. Then if you have the material, fine. If you don't have it, you bring it in. But you'd choose the material that was suggested by the idea you had. And it's extremely interesting to compare the construction of an image with the construction of a house—or rather the image people have of a house. In Mozambique this is something extremely different. With the flag it was already done. With stewardess' uniforms, they're the same as the others. Here it was different. What I'm interested in is the moment when the image or the frame, meaning the form, closes us in, or helps us to liberate ourselves, or to keep us in form, in the sense that athletes say they are in shape [*en forme*]. That's what I think is interesting.

[Inaudible]

Tomorrow, no, it's *Deux ou trois choses* (Two or Three Things I Know about Her).

[Inaudible]

Yes, but what we maybe should have done, it was a mistake on my part, I maybe should have shown *Deux ou trois choses* last time with ~~deux~~ in U.S.A. because they were made together. And then show

*La Chinoise* today alongside *Week-end*. At the same time, this isn't important; all you have to do if you ever do this over is to fix the mistakes in montage that I've made.

[Inaudible]

Yes, but I was afraid that if I put *Made in U.S.A.* with *Deux ou trois choses* and then *Week-end* afterwards then the entire discussion would be about the fact that one came after the other; that this meant such and such, that it had meaning. Fine, if you want to say that Tuesday is closer to Wednesday than it is to Saturday, fine, but then what did you do on Tuesday and what did you do on Wednesday? Here it was more incidental. I found it more interesting to compare. Because I wouldn't have put in the same films. When I put in *La Chinoise*, I said to myself: 'I'll put in a political film in the classical sense'. If I had put *Week-end* at the same time—oh, every film is political. You can say that *Week-end* or the Marx Brothers are much more political than *All the President's Men* or *The Salt of the Earth*, or just as political at least, in a different way. In this case everything would have been more confused, whereas . . .

[Inaudible]

Yes, but I think it's more interesting in *Week-end* to say 'monsters' and not 'political'. I think it is more interesting to keep 'political' specifically for *La Chinoise*, where I tried to choose films to which people apply the adjective 'political', whether Z or something else. The same thing tomorrow—I thought *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle*. Who is 'her' [elle]? It's the Paris region. So I tried to use films that take a region or a country as their subject, seen through people.

I wanted to show Dovzhenko's *Earth* for that. We don't have it, but we'll have *Arsenal*, which I don't think is as good as *Earth*, but I wanted a Russian film of some kind, and since I've never seen a film by Dovzhenko, it was an opportunity for me to see one too. The professor has to learn things also. [Laughter] And then I wanted *Not Reconciled*, Straub's first film, *Nicht Versöhnt*. Then I took classics, *The Rules of the Game* and *Europa 51*, because I wanted to show two Rossellini films to talk about him if people wanted. Roberto was someone who dared take Ingrid Bergman from Warner's and then afterwards call the film *Europa 51*, so that he was detested both by Warner's and right away by Ingrid Bergman also. [Laughter]

... *pluviôse* ...

Here and there I also used the names of the months in the so-called Revolutionary calendar at the time of the so-called French Revolution—the calendar created by Fabre D'Églantine: *frimaire* for February, *vendémiaire*, *brumaire*. And *pluviôse* was one of the months which corresponded—there was *ventôse*, *pluviôse* and *nivôse*. *Pluviôse* corresponded to the winter months, I think, around November or October.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *There you have it. On that note, I guess we'll see you tomorrow. You see, Hollywood brings him back to life. Every time he comes to class from Hollywood he's always in good form. That's cinema.*

Friday 13 October 1978

#### Notes

1. The films *The Birds* and *Germany, Year Zero* appear in chronological order in the French edition, apparently to correct the mistake of screening them out of order in today's session. The true screening order has been restored here. No change was made to the order of this chapter's illustrations.
  2. A reference to the film's final title card, proclaiming the end of cinema.
  3. Henri Langlois believed that musical accompaniment to silent films detracted from appreciation of the films' rhythm.
  4. The questioner is evidently referring to the fact that, at the time, foreign-language films and television programs released and broadcast in Quebec were almost exclusively dubbed in France, by actors with a quite different French accent and vocabulary than found in Quebec. Since that time a few Hollywood studios have been induced to dub their films in Quebec, entailing additional expense because French law and public demand require them to do the same in France. Repeated attempts to have a similar law passed in Quebec have been unsuccessful.
- Spoken in English. In English the terms 'script' and 'shooting script' refer to two stages of the script preparation process. The equivalent terms in French are *scénario* and *découpage*, but with one exception Godard avoids the latter term and uses the English instead.

6. The extant shooting script of *Metropolis*, the copy once owned by the composer of the film's score, Gottfried Huppertz, and now housed in the Deutsch Kinematek, has only two columns and no drawings, like the standard shooting scripts to which Godard refers. A version with drawings, presumably the director's, was known to exist in the 1920s but has since disappeared. It may have been donated by Lang to the Cinémathèque française in the 1960s or 70s and been lost along with other materials he is known to have donated to the institution which were lost. Godard may have seen and be referring to this version, or he may, as he suggests, be confusing it with another film.

7. *Tess*, based on a novel by Thomas Hardy.

8. Spoken in French and English.

9. An allusion to the comment widely attributed to Lenin, 'of all the arts for us the most important is cinema'. In fact Lenin himself never publicly uttered this comment. It was attributed to him during and after his lifetime by Anatoli Lunacharsky, his Commissar of Education, who reported that Lenin made the remark to him in a private conversation. See Lunacharsky, 'Conversation with Lenin' (1923), in Richard Taylor and Ian Christie, eds., *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896–1939* (London: Routledge, 1988), 56.

10. Spoken in French and English.

11. In fact the passage quoted in the film is not from the discussion of the Iroquois in Friedrich Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884) but would appear to be a secondary and most likely contemporary source discussing Engels.

12. Because of a break in the video recording caused by the need to change the videotape, the comments underlined here have been taken from the original French edition of these talks, which was based on an audio cassette made on a portable recorder at Godard's side. These cassette recordings are no longer extant, making it impossible to verify this passage for the present edition. For previous chapters, corresponding to the spring sessions of the talks, no such cassette recording exists. There, the interpolation [Break in tape] indicates the loss of a passage presumed to be about the length of the underlined section here.

# Documentary and Fiction

6

## 2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle

2

Arsenal

Aleksandr Dovzhenko (U.S.S.R., 1929)

*The Rules of the Game* (*La Règle du jeu*)

Jean Renoir (France, 1939)

*Journey to Italy* (*Viaggio in Italia*)

Roberto Rossellini (Italy–France, 1954)<sup>1</sup>

*Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle*

(*Two or Three Things I Know about Her*)

Jean-Luc Godard (France, 1967)

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SERGE LOSIQUE: Put your minds at ease: there was a reel missing. It's not serious: all Jean-Luc's films are backwards. Sometimes you have to show them that way too. What I mean is that we didn't receive a reel; we were missing a reel, that's all. The distributor forgot to send it to us; there you have it. So this morning we showed you excerpts from Arsenal and then *The Rules of the Game* and then *Journey to Italy*. So what is the connection when we see your film with Arsenal? What connection do you see between these two films?

JEAN-LUC GODARD: As I mentioned yesterday, I would have preferred, instead of Arsenal, to show Dovzhenko's *Earth*, and instead of *Journey to Italy* to show *Europa 51*. But it's hard to find prints when you need them. With books it's easier. Finding a film print at the right moment, the exact film you're looking for, the one you need, is almost impossible. For our work here, it's pretty much the same name the film. I thought of *Earth*; Arsenal also works in a way, because it's about war—and people wage war for what? In fact I don't know. I've never been to war and I never even wanted to do my military service. I like to travel, but not in a forced way; people go to

war because they want to travel but don't have the money. The *War Department*<sup>2</sup> pays their trip. But this is a riskier way to travel than a civilian trip. It must also be because they want to see the world. But at the same time seeing the world is conquering the world; it's going to march on foreign land.

These three films were connected. It would have been nice to have *Earth* [*La Terre*] simply because of its title,<sup>3</sup> because *Deux ou trois choses* was basically the remodelling of the land [*terre*] at a certain point in time. That was the film's topic: the decision to remodel the Paris region at a certain point in time, when they were building the entire infrastructure of highways and entrances and exits to and from Paris, the way they did in Los Angeles fifteen or twenty years ago. And it was this problem, which is basically a problem of communication, of roots which throw the land into confusion and then capitalism—we know it's who owns the land, and the entire story of land ownership . . . that's the connection. What I wanted was to describe—to put two or three films side by side, films like *Deux ou trois choses* which had taken as their subject not a personal adventure but a collective adventure, and which tried to film this adventure either more collectively, like the Russians, or through an individual the way I did or Roberto Rossellini did when he made *Europa 51*, I think *Europa 51* is a better example than *Journey to Italy* because by then Rossellini had already entered another phase. He always filmed to a great extent the milieu his character was in, but this film was more the story of a couple, and their relationship with the world has more influence than the story of the world in which they find themselves whose characters are situated like a particle of the world, like a little piece of this world. At the same time, *Arsenal* was interesting because it showed a war at a certain moment, when the land is occupied, to which people return, and then there is the problem of who the land is going to belong to. If it's factory land, who is it going to belong to? If it's the peasants' land, who is it going to belong to? And wars, what is their . . .

I've always found it strange that people would want to invade somewhere. I understand wanting to invade, but I think it's always better to discuss things with the other party. Violence exists, but invading for the sake of invading and marking the land in a different way—

think it would be interesting to study animals in this light, how they fight—people study animals but never as though they were other kinds of human beings or when they fight amongst themselves, for example—I think it is typically human to fight amongst ourselves simply in order to put your name in place of someone else's or your territory in place of someone else's—to tell the Germans: 'Well, now you're going to be Russian'; or Canadians: 'Now you're going to be American'. This is the reason I put these films together: to see people, but to try and describe, to take as one's topic geography as well as psychology. To see the human body – in *Deux ou trois choses* it was prostitution – to see the human body as territory that is bought and sold. To talk about a prostitute as a piece of territory that she sells to a foreigner. She agrees to be occupied for a while, and for what reason? This was the point of view I took.

The word 'elle' in the title refers to an area but it could also refer to death. Yes, but also the birth of something else. It was a good thing we showed *Germany, Year Zero* yesterday, because in my film it was the very government that the French elected which decided at a certain point that Paris had to change in order to be Paris better than ever before. And sure enough, when you go to modern cities today, they're constantly under construction. Back in the Middle Ages I think people built them for thirty, fifty years, they lasted a while and then they changed. Whereas nowadays, the more you visit cities you see—I think things seemed more modern to people in the Middle Ages. Today, at the same time, everything is ultra-modern, because it's—you see this very well in Montreal, which seems both completely ultra-modern and completely slummy, broken down. The roads are—something that strikes me for example, in North America the roads are much more poorly maintained than—there's the climate here, for example, but that doesn't account for it, you'd think you were, I don't know, the major streets—the taxis are completely falling apart, the door handle is broken, yet you're in the most modern country. At the same time that this is born, you sense death closer; the two are connected. That's the feeling you get in North America, perpetual death in birth at the same time.

ERGÉ LOSIQUE: All forms of public transit, everything public here is falling apart because everything is based on private property.

Yes, but you also need to study this with little films, to take this as your topic. Sure, public transportation—but when transportation belongs to individuals, I think they take better care of their motorcycle than a government does a system of streetcars or airplanes. So if it's a case of this happening the moment transportation becomes public—what sort of community has a mode of transportation, a mode of communication, like that? We have the television, subways, taxis and trains we deserve.

The more physical communication we have – it's striking in the great European and American urban centres; Los Angeles – the more physical communication there is, the less communication there is, I think. I mean someone in the Middle Ages knew more—a European knew more about the Americas before Christopher Columbus discovered them. Today they have no idea what America is. Or they think they do, but what they know is from photographs, assemblages of photographs, names. But they don't know anything in fact it's completely unknown, they don't know a thing. We communicate more and more, because we travel to China in three hours, but at the same time, if you had to say something important to your neighbour—you don't even know who your neighbour is in the apartment above you, it would take a long time to find out if you wanted to have some kind of relationship with them. What's more, you probably wouldn't succeed. So we try to have a relationship with people billions of kilometres away, and there is a kind of exchange . . .

Someone like Illich,<sup>4</sup> who may be a little overrated but who did a few interesting studies, showed that in France – in other countries it wasn't the same speed – in France he calculated the average speed. It was six kilometres an hour. If you took the speed of everyone, going to the factory, the speed at which French people travel in airplanes, the speed at which automobiles travel about the countryside and in the city, he arrived at an average speed of six kilometres an hour. In Germany it's eight, in the United States it was even less. It sounds strange, but he said that in France people move at six kilometres an hour when you average everything that moves. And that's true, you only have to look at the speed of—buses alone in Paris move at nine kilometres an hour, whereas streetcars moved at eleven and a half

in 1910. So people went faster for shorter distances, or in a different manner. This is what we have to tell ourselves, and it's interesting to see the Earth turned upside down because of this. These are films that try to get at this.

*... a question ... the reel ...*

Yes, me too.

SERGE LOSIQUE: Well, there you have it, we too. *Prima forgot to send a reel, it happened last night at seven o'clock. And today nothing can be done because they're closed.*

No, something can be done, but since nothing was done—you can find those responsible, but those responsible are also a number of things. I find everything about matters like this interesting. I was frustrated too because I would have liked very much to see it again – it's been a long time since I've seen it and I would have liked to see it again – but what should have been done? On the one hand, we should have, I should have checked, or asked Serge to check, but that involves work, and people aren't always responsible. And those who were afraid of being frustrated would have had to—a film print is expensive, today a print costs a million French francs,<sup>5</sup> what is that in Canadian dollars?

SERGE LOSIQUE: Two thousand dollars.

It costs around two thousand dollars. Small distributors are no better than big distributors, but they're small distributors. To make a new print—they use them until they're completely worn out. I went to look at the print, even the beginning—the film was split in two, so I cut it and said: 'Start there where it begins'. So how can we make prints less expensive? We can't; everyone is guilty and innocent. We would have had to inspect this print. I would have inspected it if one of you had said to me: 'There's no way I want to be frustrated and I'm afraid that a reel may be missing so can you check, because I don't have the means?' At that point I would have inspected it. Serge doesn't have the time to do it and it's not his entire work, because you also have to pay people. How do you pay them? We can talk about it but you have to accept—I accept responsibility for this, but if I'm 80% responsible, well, I'd say that you are all 20% or 10% responsible in a sense. And it's with these two together that the 100% becomes something.

And in the cinema it's too easy to accuse others of—you have to have the means, when you accuse someone you have to have grounds [*moyens*] for accusing them and the means [*moyens*] to repair things, if you will. It's not easy. So in this case, if I had come to inspect it and Serge had said: 'No, I won't let you inspect it', then I could tell him that this was improper. The people who can get upset in fact are the distributors. If you order a print from Metro and you want to inspect it beforehand, they'll send you packing. With a little distributor, I'm not sure. But to inspect it you have to know how. You have to have the equipment, to have access to the equipment. It's clear that in a university things work together, and in that Serge Losique is no more responsible than I am. We try to get by with the means at hand and to do what we want to do, to screen bits and pieces of films, if not this one then another. Next year, if we do something else, we'll try to improve things. It's true: it's a pity this reel was missing.

SERGE LOSIQUE: [To questioner] *For your information, it's a tiny distributor, he brought us the print at six o'clock last night, just when our office was closing. He told us in advance that it was a very worn-out copy, so I had a choice: to show it or not show it. The same thing for Week-end yesterday. So what to do? It's like Jean-Luc Godard said. Because we're aware of this, we'd like to do something, but we're victims too.*

This is why it's always better in principle to make films in bits and pieces. It's always good to eat a piece even if you don't have the whole steak. [Laughter] I've always been distrustful of—I said to myself: 'If we can project pieces of my films . . .' Because I broke them up into pieces from the start. But that of course did me a lot of harm because from a commercial point of view people can't plunge into them when they're like that. But that doesn't bother me. I think it could be an interesting experience. Someday, if you bring a filmmaker here — this is what I thought when I saw there was a reel missing — if you ever bring a filmmaker to one of your classes, well, screen a film for them with a reel missing — you make sure there's a reel missing — and have them attempt with the students to recreate the missing reel, to try to say what they had done. That would be something interesting to do. I would have tried to figure out what there was, but judging from what I had seen—which are my only bearings, along with my memories. We're here to learn or to devote ourselves, to learn a kind of methodology—not fixed, but methods

and means of approaching cinema or the way we do so, in a way that may be useful, so that we don't simply complain. You have a bouquet. Three flowers are missing, but one flower is still something. There are pieces. Especially in a course, we're not here to see a complete show. So it's annoying, like the dubbed sound yesterday, but . . .

*What I liked was the documentary aspect. A fictional document, a documentary fiction.*

From the start I have always—when I was a critic, someone who influenced me, or who I liked a lot, who I tried to champion in my criticism, was a filmmaker like Jean Rouch, who started working in ethnography. I studied ethnography a little too, not for very long. I think that this has unconsciously guided me a little. I have always tried to make what people call documentary and what people call fiction, to use those words—for me they're two different aspects of the same process, and what really makes the process happen is bringing them together. They're aspects of a duality; one thing changes into the other, and to try to mix them up a bit. Today's film I find too—seeing it again today, I remember liking it quite a bit, thinking it was fairly well done. Today I've seen it, I'm happy to see it, I found that it's not as well done as all that. It had some good starting premises, but the film itself . . .

The last little while I have often developed these ideas which, for me—what I try to do nowadays is to mix documentary and fiction, or rather mix television and cinema. To make use of the way in which documentary, or lived experience—or live action, like they call it in television—can make you enter into fiction directly. Or by filming live it becomes something else and then you can use this something else to really make cinema and give a feeling of reality back to cinema. A film is two or three hours long; television is all day. To make television in an interesting manner—producers are the ones who make television programs. They're the ones with the power, because they program. Their films aren't a sporting match or a crime series or a documentary. It's *all* sporting matches and crime series. That's their film on television. And the people who watch TV, plus the news and commercials—in fact that's the film. Whereas a cinema film, like a work of music, is different. It's a self-contained block, and for this reason it's worked on differently.

I think there are two ways of working. They shouldn't be enemies, but people make them into enemies because if they got together they'd have enormous power. For me, if I want to do something well, the ideal would be to do it on television and not be forced to make an hour-and-a-half-long work that has to have a beginning and an end. To be able to follow this woman, for example, or this region, one way or another. Then, after doing it five or six times, it could be used as a preparatory document, and even the audience's reaction, or the way it was received, which it would be possible to know – here is where ratings would have some benefit – would give you an idea for a film afterwards, which wouldn't be the same thing but which would benefit from the experience. I find this film for example is a good script—we talked about the script yesterday, I think that television should be used to—it's a kind of script; what comes before the film but which you could show on television. Today's film is what I would call a good script. Then what remains is to make the film. But films are expensive, and I have always made cheap films, because if I made expensive films they would cost three hundred times as much as the most expensive American film. Because there is work involved, and work is expensive.

*Which aspects of the film don't you like?*

There is too much—sometimes back then I used words or language in too facile a way. It didn't work because it took me fifteen, twenty years to try – and to realise that this is what I was trying to do – to rid myself of literature and spoken phrases, or meaning – in the usual sense of the term – as a way of expressing everything. Someone who thinks—to say, to say, to show it and then say, put a voice, a voice-over, it doesn't matter how, and say: 'This is what I think'. So sometimes I try to deviate little by little to the point of breaking—to make it so that it's she who says it. A shot that I think works – but it doesn't hold up, it doesn't work all the way through – is at the beginning, when I say: 'Her: She is Marina Vlady'; and then I say 'Her: She is – I forget her first name – [Juliette] Janson'. But the same text is used for both of them. There are two different people and there is only one. But in cinema there are both. So here there is an aspect of the reality of the thing being filmed and an aspect of filming in reality. But I wasn't able—in my opinion I didn't succeed in holding all this together. Something else I find works quite well

is the cup of coffee, although the text is a little too literary. But at the same time it's very cinematic. I remember how we shot it. I had the vague idea—everyone has seen this while stirring their coffee. You stop for a moment and watch the shapes turn; they're galaxies, you imagine all sorts of things, fine. So I said to myself: 'I'm going to put a text over top of that to make it explicit'. But at the same time I took a text either half by me, that I wrote, or a text by someone else – right now, I don't remember what it was, but it doesn't matter<sup>6</sup> – but the image didn't really help me; the text didn't come out of the image. It was too early, no one would have known how to do this. So I think, my impression—I've taken twenty years to come up with a bit of an idea of what talking cinema is, to rediscover silent cinema. That's why I always try to show a silent film first, to see how people talked in silent films, how various film people used language. We see in fact that Dovzhenko, to show that music is being heard—it doesn't bother him at all that the film is silent when he shows an accordion; the viewer thinks of music. I think this is less powerful in *Arsenal* than in Eisenstein's films, because he was also trying to do too many things at once.

So if I look at my own trajectory I have the impression that I am trying to go back through silent film in order to find my own talking film style. At one point I only made so-called 'documentary' films, after 1968 in Palestine or about other things. Sometimes there was far too much sound in them. But it was like having a fever or being crazy, sometimes you have to—it was a film called *Ici et ailleurs* (*Here and Elsewhere*). I tried to explain that it was madmen talking about a place where they weren't; where there were other madmen, the Palestinians, who wanted to be in a place and no one wanted them to be in their place. They become completely crazy too, and in the end they had a discourse – I didn't judge them, but I tried to judge myself – there was a militant discourse of: 'Long live the Revolution! Long live the working class!' or things like that: completely sick, but sick isn't an insult. Rather, it's sad. Or the discourse of the leaders, things like that. To try to change. Today I'm starting over; even in *Numéro deux* (*Number Two*) I started from the family and very simple things, dialogues, to make it work. And I didn't really make it work in the film.

On the topic of documentary and fiction, this is the issue precisely, to succeed in showing what exists both inside and out. Not too much, you don't want everything on screen; it should be in harmony with the moment it is projected. And in *Deux ou trois choses* I don't think this really works. A film should be a sort of conclusion of things. You should only make a film when you're certain of making the right film which will be projected at the right moment. In television it's possible to find these things. In a film it's more difficult, and that's why films are made like that, to avoid this moment. Naturally there are times when it's needed. I'm like everyone else: sometimes I need to see an Alain Delon film and not a film by Alain Resnais. There is some truth in this; there's some truth in the fact that Hollywood films are seen everywhere. What's true is that they are seen everywhere, so there is some truth in this. What isn't true is that—it's not right that they should be seen everywhere, by everyone, at the same time. They should be different, whether they're American or I don't know what: American cinema but made differently, whether by Mozambicans or Swiss or Canadians. The sad part is that when Canadians make Canadian films, they make them like Americans. It shouldn't mean 'make like'; you should make American films, but by Canadians.

It's hard to say everything with words. That's why I find *Deux ou trois choses* a little too, a little excessive, because I wasn't able—plus there is often a text that comes along to show what I'm saying, but it's a little—it's too talky, and sometimes to the side and I make the two fit by force. So people think there is meaning when there isn't. It simply shows that it would like to have meaning. Clearly not every shot has the simple force of the cup of coffee, passing time and things like that. There are even too many words, because if you showed only passing time people would get bored. You need a little drama, like Hitchcock with *The Birds*. But here I wasn't trying to put in any drama; I was just trying to show the stars. What I liked a lot about documentary in the form of fiction in that cup of coffee—I remember how it was filmed. We positioned ourselves in front of the cup of coffee, I stirred and then Coutard said: 'I don't see anything, I don't see anything, nothing is . . .' It was swirling around. This went on for ten minutes; and then at a certain point there was nothing. Then there's a moment I quite like—without having done anything, it

just a cup of coffee, but you see the world become unmade and then suddenly recreated and then suddenly become immobile. Things were happening, and this is why everything is interesting. It's possible to make a film with nothing, because in nothingness you can show everything.

**SERGE LOSIQUE:** Since you mentioned Hollywood, the fact that everyone watches their movies, how do you explain the fact that Hollywood—if you look at it closely, it produces fewer films, say a hundred films per year, while even France produces 200, I'm not sure how many. And yet Hollywood's films are seen, as you say, by everyone. If we were to research this tomorrow, how would you explain it?

They know how to make films better than anyone else, that's all. They know how to make films better and the others let them do it because it's hard, it takes work. There is another problem also, which is that Hollywood doesn't try to make films; rather, they try not to make them. It's like a billionaire; a billionaire tries not to work and to make as much money as possible. Hollywood, which is a billionaire in terms of viewers, tries to make as few films as possible while at the same time earning billions with its billions of viewers. They have a recipe for this. No one has discovered this recipe; it's the Americans' recipe. The dollar is the weakest currency, and countries are falling over themselves to buy it, even its competitors. So there's a degree of mystery, the world is—Europeans founded America, because they did away with the Americans who were Indians. So all Americans are Europeans, but they're Europeans who come from elsewhere. In fact I think their strength lies in being Europeans who come from elsewhere, so they're twice as strong. There is something real in the fact that everyone wants to see their films, but this truth may be prejudicial to their own interests, because although sometimes it's interesting to take drugs, at other times it's not.

Today I think Hollywood is in full ascent – full re-ascent – but it's strange because they make fewer films than ever and the whole thing works better and better. They make far fewer films than in 1910, far fewer. They make a hundred films; Germany, Italy, France and Spain make a hundred films each, and that's far too many for them. There is something real I think in not making too many films, making films that are a concentrated version of what everyone

wants. They have their formulas, like Coca-Cola, which distributes. Coca-Cola doesn't have factories, it's a formula. It's a formula they sell but there are no factories, it's a distribution company. There are no Coca-Cola factories. It's a distribution company, then they make products. It's the height of industry: they don't need products any more, there are only consumers.

*... you can produce caramel, but . . . distribute it around the world . . .*

Yes, but we can each ask ourselves this question. If they produce caramel and people want caramel, what makes people like caramel? It's not clear that they like it; what makes people pretend to like it? At any rate they eat it. Why do they make things people don't like? These are strange things. So from an economic point of view you have to research this.

But no history of this has been done. They purchased the movie theatres, fine, they own all the theatres. But they had to buy them; they had to buy the land. And this land, wars had to be fought to occupy this land, or people had to be sent. For example, in Switzerland and France—what ruined French cinema was the Blum-Byrnes agreement at the end of the war. The Americans, in everything they do—today I don't know, but at the time, this was when Germany was in ruins—this was the plan from before Hitler began, around 1930–31, at the time of the great depression in Germany, which came after the Depression in the United States. But it was also the time when Paramount, Zukor, made an agreement with UFA and bought three-quarters of—in the days of the talking film, the agreements between Western Electric and, I don't remember the name, Tobis-Klangfilm. You should have seen the battles they waged. The Americans back then had the Morgenthau Plan, which helped Germany rebuild like the Marshall Plan after the war. But in the Marshall Plan, what always arrived first was cinema. The cinema is a cultural form that gives safe conduct to the rest of capitalist industry. Whenever there are agreements—when they made the agreements with China, the first agreements were cultural exchanges: ping-pong, film, painting things like that. Wheat, electronics, all that comes afterwards. The same with Russia. So what ruined French cinema, for example, was the Blum-Byrnes agreement and its quotas. Cinema in Switzerland which is one of the few countries which still has a quota—except

American films. Why? Because the Americans leaned on the Swiss and the Swiss agreed, because cinema isn't very important to them. In exchange for American films, they have the right to sell their cheese freely in the United States. For the Swiss, cheese is more important than films. [Laughter]

SERGE LOSIQUE: *On that point—excuse me, but now that you've mentioned Switzerland, and cheese. The Swiss, who are the world's bankers—as Voltaire said, if a Swiss banker jumps out the window, jump with him, because there is money to be made. How is it that they never invested in cinema?*

Because cinema—Switzerland is a very—it's almost the opposite of the United States. It's a very strange country where everyone deposits their money. They have an army whose sole purpose is to protect the money of the entire world. [Laughter] It's true, the Swiss do their military service so that if anyone ever comes to take the foreigners' money in the banks they can defend it. [Laughter] That's their problem. The country has far too much, it's completely wacko because the money in Switzerland—it's as if you had an apartment and you could barely move because the place was filled with banknotes to provide for your security. Switzerland is a country like that. Of course, the banknotes don't go to the Swiss people. Life there is just as hard, a room costs as much to rent there as here or in Paris. There is unemployment, it's not at all—but they do have one thing, in fact, and that's trust. Like the Germans or the Japanese, rather than allying themselves with each other—that's why Hitler had to be beaten: he succeeded in allying the Japanese and the Germans. So now they can ally themselves, perhaps in a different way, and be equally independent.

But the Americans have, I don't know, a kind of model, which must be ours too, because we prefer it. We'd be afraid to build another model. You need a completely new country that had nothing and tries to cut itself off. Colonised countries that sometimes start out—sometimes they're an area or a number of people—not too many, not too few—where the conditions exist to rethink themselves. It's not possible for the rest: in Europe it's impossible to think of yourself. In the United States on the other hand it's impossible to—the Americans think only of themselves. It's possible for them, and that's the problem. That's the problem.

*... Mozambique, what do you do there?*

I don't go there much anymore. I'm not too sure, I tried to—I had a study mission, my company gave me a kind of study mission to study a country that is not yet swimming in images like here with television, a country that is trying to take on its film problems. They have 35mm movie theatres where they have to show the films that are still sold to them by Portuguese distributors, even though the country is now independent. It's like in Cuba still today. If you sell a film to the United States, to Columbia or Metro, who distribute it, Cuba is always listed as an American territory. And, depending on what kind of film it is, if it's a small film you can give a copy to the Cubans, who pay you on the side and that's the end of it. But if it's a big film, it's out of the question. At that point you have to part company with American money. So with Mozambique, I said to them: 'Well, let's take advantage of the fact that there is something new. There may only be old ideas, I don't know, but there's a new situation, because you have to think of a million things, and I'm going to watch while you think about your million things: how to have coffee today; what to do to bring in sugar tomorrow; oh—we have to build a house; oh—we have to borrow money; oh—we have to do such and such. So I'm going to look at the fact of looking at oneself, meaning what it is to have a certain image of oneself. Because an image industry exists, and a small one is starting here, so I'll try to see with you what it is'. It's as if one parent tried to learn, not to speak to their child but to learn how to speak all over again at the same time their child is learning. Which means that you don't give the child one word and then a second and then a third from the outset. You try to live the experience at the same time as them. This way, they may need to tell themselves something, they may need language to tell themselves something, and I prefer to show things like that. The childhood of things. So [I'm] always interested in the moment when something is destroyed, either destruction or construction, and the moment between the two. I think this is where the most interesting moments are always found. A film should start at the end of something—that's why all films are the end of something, or the beginning. A film is between the end and the beginning. The beginning of a film is always the end of something. That's where you decide to make the film start.









[Inaudible]

But what is the verb 'to be'?

A little . . . something like the question about the word *lâche*.<sup>7</sup>

No, I don't think I'm trying to create a new language. I'm trying to speak, to make myself understood and to change myself or my way of being. If there is really someone I want to understand and who is willing to put up with me, who I succeed in spending a little time with. Someone who tells me: 'But there is something you should change too, because you may well say that you want to understand, or not, but I still don't understand you'. So I tell myself: 'I have to put part of myself in it'. It's like I said for the film print. If you want a print in good condition, there has to be three people: the person who brings it, the person who wants to see it and the person who has it in their hands, where you go to get it.

Back then, the Estates General,<sup>8</sup> I don't know, it was a film business thing. I wasn't involved that much. I felt challenged; it did me good. I felt—in my case I was a little afraid also, I said to myself: 'All right, this may be the end'. But, on the strength of the ten years of cinema I had done to succeed in breaking into the business, as they say, to succeed in making a place for myself—at the same time as I was acquiring things I think I lost a lot of good things, so I changed despite myself. What helped me a little was the fact that, apart from my first film, which was a great success, I immediately had enormous flops afterwards. Today I'm glad, the way I'm glad I had a motor vehicle accident in 1971 that put me in the hospital for two years. I'm glad I pulled through it, but I'm not unhappy that I spent two years in hospital. That was my war, my personal war or my personal prison. Political activists say they spent time in prison; I say: 'So did I'. That's what I mean. So I feel somewhat removed from that. Because I felt I was being challenged, but I didn't know what. Mostly I listened and then tried—for me it was a period when—I tried to film, but I stopped. I started dozens of films that were never finished; there were a few shots, a few things like that. I think today I'm reaching the end of this period and that it may be possible to make a film over two or three years. To have the financial possibility myself, and there are times when I say to myself—but life is organised for you to head to the factory every day. People who work in Hollywood, they go

to Hollywood every day. If you go to a *party* to talk to someone and get a contract, well, then you go to *parties* every day. Any way you look at it it's a factory. You only have to look at the state those people are in. Generally speaking, anyone who goes to a *party* every night in Hollywood is in worse shape than if they went to General Motors every day. Which proves that the dream factory isn't any more gay than the factory dream.

*You said that you were challenged. Was this during 1968?*

Yes, 68, 69, or 70.

*How?*

Well, challenged, I'm not sure. People said: 'Down with . . .'; 'No more stars'; or 'Godard, you had your share'. It was good for me to hear this, if you like, especially as a film director. What's a film director? That's why people like being one and don't want to give it up. Even actors sometimes suffer from being only actors; they need to be both in front of and behind the camera. A film director is someone, once the film is begun, with all the power. The story of power is interesting. That's why I think women have a lot of trouble remaining themselves and making films, because I think an honest or sincere woman has to search in her own manner. At a certain point she can only run up against something that is very different from her. I think women haven't wanted power, or not like men. This has to be studied. I haven't studied it, but, I don't know, my idea is that in matriarchal societies, absolute power in these societies is not at all the same as absolute power in societies where men have power, which today is practically every society. The power to make other people do things and to do nothing yourself, and at the same time do things through the intermediary of others. If cinema, as I believe, has so much power, it's because it's a product of this power, when a person has absolute power over others, who simply represent future viewers who will come to eat their pittance and even pay for it, spending what someone was obliged to give them during the day. Only the Germans tried at one point to go all the way, and even then something didn't work: they didn't pay anyone, they didn't feed anyone. But at a certain point a problem arose: how to evacuate the bodies? This was the big problem of the concentration camps. So they had to feed them just a little, for just a little self-sufficiency.

and even pay them a little so that in the concentration camps there would be the semblance, a little social organisation, which started up right away, moreover. And if you study the camps—this is why no film is really about the concentration camps, because we'd see our own world in them, in such a precise and very clear form. That's somewhat the sense one had watching the Rossellini film yesterday. Obviously, the concentration camps were managed from above by the big bosses, the SS. But sometimes the SS left the camp in the hands—some camps, like Auschwitz, had a common law system which administered the common law—the mafia—and then there were other camps which were so-called political camps, which were run by the Communist Party.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *And yet recently American television showed a film about the concentration camps that caused quite a stir, on NBC I think.*

Yes, but you have to see that so-called American freedom is part of a very large world. So showing a bit of real sugar in a package that contains only spoiled sugar, if afterwards there is an ad for Marlboro and then the Dodgers versus the Yankees, you have to look at the whole picture. And what does a concentration camp become in all that? A film would be successful when it showed a concentration camp once a day for a week and before that there was nothing, not even Walter Cronkite and the CBS news. At that point the image would have an effect. That's when you need fewer images. Today the image is ten times as powerful because of people's impotence to use it. The more Kodak Instamatic cameras there are, the fewer pictures daddy will take of his little girl which would help him to communicate with her. Which means that when she has a problem, they'll come to blows, she'll leave, or I don't know what.

JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD: *I don't remember what my question was.* [Laughter] *I think it was Hollywood and the paradox—and now Russian cinema, for example, is American.*

Absolutely. At a certain point, when a country is in the throes of—you can't say that the weight of the Russian Revolution, or what people call the Russian Revolution—like the weight of the French Revolution in Europe. In Europe the French Revolution was a bourgeois revolution, but every prince in Germany felt the weight of it, they said: 'We're going to be replaced by the bourgeois! Oh no, that's

terrible!' It was something incredible. Another incredible thing afterwards was, the princes having been replaced by the bourgeois, in Europe the bourgeois heard they were going to be replaced by the soviets or I don't know what. And society was turned upside down, society moved land and houses, all kinds of things. At a certain point cinema, the people making films, one or two personalities who were more sensitive than the others, who were looking for—a certain form of expression was created. At a certain point Russian cinema was different from the others. In the history of cinema I'll do we'll study this, and I think we'll study it from the point of view of—I don't know, we'll examine how the history of the angle of the shot in Russian film became – with what became of socialism in Russia, without judging it – it became the script. How? Even today, the United States is more powerful than Russia, in any event more dynamic with the [inaudible] agreement, simply because they don't settle for just the script; they succeed in taking control. At times they let things go and then take back control later. Yesterday I saw a film called *The Big Fix*, with Richard Dreyfuss. It's all there: Berkeley, Jerry Rubin, the Chicago riots, it's all there.

[Inaudible]

But the story of power is something—people need, everyone needs power. Mothers need power. But a mother's power is very different from a father's, because the mother has the physical power to do something. Men don't have this power, so they make objects; women make objects less easily. I don't think a woman could invent a television set or a car. She can invent a means of locomotion or a means of transmitting an image, but not these means. And men always need a means of being more or less equal to women, who can do so many more things, or at least men feel this way—men feel this as being something lesser, and they want to be equal to women. They become completely, they do completely stupid things. Like this room. [Gestures towards the 675-seat auditorium] A woman would never have the idea of making an auditorium like this to hear someone talk about cinema.

*Men have power . . . and women . . .*

Men try to . . . I don't know, I think women don't have imagination, but they have power – and imagination is contained in that

whereas men have imagination and try to turn it into power. They're wrong, because it's a good division; and things should be allied also. And children are a result of that, and then society, well, it's—but the history of film directing, if you like, is very interesting, because this guy really has all the power. This is something both good if it's shared and not good; he's someone who can say: 'Get undressed'; 'Walk to the left'; 'Walk to the right'; 'Smile'; 'Now screw off'. Simply hiring people, for example, which is something that has always been very distressing—hiring actors, or when you're a little film director, you're hired on a whim. Last night I didn't sleep because I was waiting for a phone call to tell me if I have an appointment with Robert De Niro on Monday or not. It made me really sick to feel myself at the mercy of that, and that I was going to have to plead my case. I think it's worth the effort, but you need to be at least two or three people to feel—then it wouldn't be distressing, because I tell myself: 'After all, what does it matter? I can do it differently. Do I need to do this?' After all, when I hire someone, and they don't even call, and I have no news of them, I gripe. When someone calls me and says: 'I would like to see you', I send them packing the same way; I say to myself: 'Who's this mosquito flying around and bothering me?' I think the reason cinema is so popular, and why television is so—and the people with power are the government, the multi-nationals who—in television the filmmaker isn't the director. The director in television is the person who programs the Dodgers, who programs Walter Cronkite, who programs all that. That's power, and people see this power as rather soft, because—just like in cinema, at a certain point there's someone with a physical power, the power to send people packing, and people even tell them they're fantastic. If Ingmar Bergman sends Liv Ullmann packing with a few kicks in the behind, people say: 'What an artist! Fantastic!' [Laughter] Whereas at least in a factory people would say: 'That's going too far!'

SERGE LOSIQUE: *In a factory you'd even have a lawsuit. You see he's in form today, because he got his appointment with Robert De Niro.*

But there it's the opposite; the person with the power is De Niro ~~in~~ me. Then there are other things. So I'll try to see if I can do my thing and if he'll join me. Or if I feel, because I think he's nicer than some of the others, judging by some of the films he's made . . .

I need this power, otherwise I don't make the film, or if I do the film I do a film like that [*gestures to screen where Deux ou trois choses was just shown*] with my own resources. It's not so much that it's not successful or that it's—because I believe there are films that can be made by three or four people, but sometimes when you make a film for three or four people you don't even have these three or four people. Because the television programs I make—when they are shown on TV, my daughter doesn't watch them, she watches the *Muppet Show* or something else. And so do I, so I can't really resent her for it. [Laughter] But at a certain point, being too cut off—it makes me stand up and fight, and by virtue of making me stand up and fight it also makes me be myself a little. But not all alone, not saying: 'I'm right' all alone. But having someone to fight against. Sometimes I tell myself: 'That's the only interesting thing; at worst I'll talk about my memories, or at worst I'll start a magazine and I'll talk about my film'. In the end I'm trying to make a film with De Niro in order to have an article to write, [laughter] so it's worth the trouble.

*Are you making a film with De Niro because Belmondo said no?*

Of course, if I had Belmondo I wouldn't have asked De Niro. De Niro refused.<sup>9</sup> But my goal was to make a film in a normal film environment, from which I cut myself off too much, without at the same time losing Mozambique. So I'm between FRELIMO,<sup>10</sup> Serge Losique and maybe De Niro. That's my situation as a filmmaker today. And I'm asking everyone for money. [Laughter]

SERGE LOSIQUE: [Laughs and slaps Godard on the back] Which I don't have. That's OK, you'll make it with Robert De Niro.

What I regret here is that there are no Canadian filmmakers who want to—from time to time I've asked to see someone, I've put notices in the newspapers, so that we could have practical discussions. Canada is an interesting country because of its geographic location, the fact that 70 or 80% of it belongs to the U.S. You're tenants of the United States. Whether you like it or not, it's a fact. In France, whether people like it or not—the situation is not the same as yours—but it is also completely dominated by the United States. But what more, we sent people to the Americas, whereas Canada didn't send people to America – Christopher Columbus wasn't Canadian, he was European – so the situation is a little different. But I'd like to be

able simply to discuss how films are made, how certain little things are done. I've told you about De Niro, who I find quite interesting, but there are other people. What I find interesting is being able . . .

[Inaudible]

But I'm tired of being unique. Before, fifteen years ago, I would have said: 'I'm unique' and been boastful about it. Today I can say: 'There's something interesting about this unique case, but there's something tiresome about it too, which is that it's only unique'. Because clearly I can speak – and I think this is one of the qualities I have today with my system of production – I can speak easily when making a film as much with a little girl or a housewife, or a peasant or a head of state. I won't change. It's for the other person to say: 'Sir, you don't interest me'. Robert De Niro will say: 'I'm not interested in making this film', or 'I'm interested'. Or the little girl, or her parents, will feel that they don't want me to speak with the little girl. But this is a situation—except that I feel much too alone and I'd like to talk to other filmmakers about practical problems, even just about a shot, if they're shooting a film – which shot they're shooting – and then to talk with other people to see a little—whether we talk about the financial aspect behind aesthetics or about the aesthetic aspect behind finances, things like that. And that's completely impossible. Film people don't talk amongst themselves. I talk about film much more with bankers and producers, who—in the 'Internationale', there is a line that goes: 'Producers, save yourselves.'<sup>12</sup> And sometimes I prefer to fight as a producer with his product than to fight with bad producers or to get along with better producers, or to get along with a<sup>13</sup> part of them that is good. With Serge Losique I try to take, not the parts I even find—but certain parts I consider good which make it possible to do that. There are other parts, but I'm not in a position to judge them. I'm not going to change the world all by myself. If there were a few more people with me, I could change a few things in cinema.

Cinema is truly—an image is the easiest thing to change. If you don't like it, you tear it up, you make another. Today, with the technical means we have, it is even quite easy to do this. If you have a good photocopier you don't even need an offset machine. We bought a good photocopier, which cost us as much as a movie camera. Why?

And which we look after like a movie camera. Why? Because it enables us to print photographs, which are not as good as photographic prints, but good enough that the sense of the photograph exists. That saves us the expense of an offset printer or printer's costs and we can send images to people. Then you realise quite quickly that people get annoyed very quickly, whereas an image is only made to communicate. It should be made only for that, but for that reason it has to be stopped; fewer have to be made because there are so many. If there weren't a lot, more would have to be made. In places where there aren't a lot, more have to be made. In home movies, where daddy films his little girl once at Christmas and once when they're on holidays, that makes two images, it's not enough. There you have to make a few more. Television, on the other hand, where there are too many, you should make fewer. At that point, images would be useful. They're not dangerous; they're the easiest thing in the world to change. Making cinema is the easiest place: there are a dozen people, or fifty people; a film is a very small operation. It should be the easiest place to change the work done. At Ford or IBM, on a great plantation, such great measures have been taken that you have to do enormous things to change the slightest thing. But it should be possible in cinema. Yet we see that it's the place where things change the least. People make films the way they made them fifty years ago.

*Precisely because it's the image of non-change and it's the model . . .*

Yes, but saying 'that's because', like that, is not saying anything. You have to talk more to explain the langua—for me, this is what I'm doing, [gestures to audience] I've already shown films a little differently, but the only thing to say is: such-and-such happened here today. Yesterday was easier, it went well, and then afterwards there is nothing to be said, we go home and talk amongst ourselves, but there is nothing to be said. Instead you see that there is always a force—and that's what power is, and language serves this power today, to make you say: 'It's that', and you think you've said something. You've said something, but you haven't done anything.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *How do you explain the fact that filmmakers, among themselves—you've always dwelt on this, even when you were part of the New Wave, I've been told—how is it filmmakers don't talk about sh*

and things amongst themselves? They even refuse any discussion in general, whereas musicians talk to each other, or at least they play together. Yes, but that lasts—music is something—people say that music hath charms to soothe the savage breast, and there's something true in that. Music groups last—they don't last forever; pop groups, things like that, after five or six years they argue and it's over—but it lasts a little while longer. In music the equipment is not seen as technical the way it is in cinema and television. And ownership of the equipment: a guy who plays the flute feels he has to own a flute, not that he should go and rent a flute at a flute store every time he wants to play one, and then return it when he's done. The same thing for a clarinet or a piano. But in cinema, technical things are seen as something apart: people don't think that they should have their own camera, except amateurs but for well-known reasons having to do with society and the family. They do only what they do. It would be a good thing if professionals saw themselves as amateurs.

There are two ways of making cinema, it's quite clear. There is my way: I need to make films instead of singing because I sing off key. I'd like to sing well. Instead of drawing, because I've forgotten how to draw well, otherwise—but I need to in order to get closer to other people, so that others can see me. Today I'm discovering this. If they say to me: 'Who are you?' I can show them and the act of showing them makes the direct contact between us less strong. You're not forced right away to criticise yourself, or be afraid or shy or something like that. So I need film, whereas three-quarters of the people who make cinema need to live the social life of the film, whether it's an activist film or a Hollywood film. They need to live Hollywood, they need to live the life of the film; they need to live the three-month life, a life that is absolutely—making a film is extraordinary: you're with people for three months; there's all the appeal of the novelty of it; you don't work and they pay you. You're not the one who came up with the story; if you're the one who came up with the story, it's not you who acts in it; if you're the one photographing it, it's not you who has to provide the money; if you're the one who produces the money, it's not you who has to strip for the camera. [Laughs] What's more, if you're the viewer, it's not you who is forced to produce the film. If you produce the film, you're not forced to be

the viewer afterwards. And this goes on for three or four months. When it goes on for a year, it's a disaster like *Cleopatra* or *Mutiny on the Bounty*, because with these films they had to construct a film and it was a disaster. It was a disaster because they didn't want to make the film. They had the means, they worked, they spent twenty or twenty-five million dollars, and things went from bad to worse simply because they didn't want to make the film. They pretended to want to make it and they became slaves of this pretending. Because they're in Hollywood, they have to make the film, otherwise they'll be told to get lost, and they want to be in Hollywood. Or in cinema let's say.

I think exactly the same thing happens in activist cinema as well, in so-called political activist cinema. I prefer to use the word 'lazy' because it is coded as being pejorative. People who don't want to do anything. They go to interview a worker—three-quarters of books are like that: they publish a book, it's called 'Women Speak', but it's a guy who published it, he says 'Women Speak'. [Laughter] There are tons of books like that. They should go interview a deaf mute; that would be more difficult. [Laughter]

Film people don't need to go speak to someone if they don't need to see them. There is no premise, no critique, but they shouldn't pretend there is, or at least they should after the work is done, if they do. Why did they go see them? Meaning that they should follow through. In activist films what has always been missing is the second part, or the first part that would have led to the making of a third part – because things always come in threes – which would be to make the filmmaker an actor also.

They interview poor people, they interview—that's why I quarrelled with Jane Fonda. I tried to establish a—it was very maladroit on my part, it wasn't well done. I was counting on maintaining a relationship with her. When *Tout va bien* (*All's Well*) was released in the United States, I even made a film that was called *Letter to Jane*. I wrote to the actress with whom I had made the film. I don't think that Zanuck or Orson Welles often wrote, he didn't write afterward, he didn't need to. But I needed to. But the film was—there were a lot of things going on. She was right to be unhappy with the film.

but we could have worked it out, I would have done it differently. If, instead of saying to me: 'You're a bastard, you're a macho, you're a jerk, and on top of that I worked for you for free'—which wasn't true because she had 17% of the film and I said to her: 'Then sell the film; on every dollar you'll get seventeen cents' – that's how I try to work – 'and if you're with us we'll earn seventeen cents more often. That won't bring in millions, but you knew that'. If, instead of saying to me: 'You're a jerk', or things like that, if she had used images and said: 'Your images are badly made', because no matter who you are, when someone says: 'You're a jerk', you think: 'No, that's not true, I'm not a jerk, it's you who's a jerk'. But if what you do is—you use what you've done. If instead of saying: 'You're a jerk' you say: 'Look, the table you made, you can't sit on it'. Rather than saying: 'You're a jerk cabinet-maker', say: 'The table you made, you can't sit on it'.

When Gorin had an influence on me, in the beginning he told me – he was a militant Maoist, and we met at the time of *La Chinoise*, after *Deux ou trois choses* – he told me: 'You're an idiot, you're not a revolutionary, you're not . . .' So I said to him: 'I'm more revolutionary than you are', and then we proved it by doing *a + b* on a black-board. But [if] he had simply said to me: 'There, that image, it's not right the way it is', even without managing to explain it to me, well, that would have hit the target. Given what I was at the time, first I would have been vexed and then I think there is something not bad in me which would have been able to transform that. But I'm only saying this today, here I'm saying: 'I lacked that', because I would have preferred to see it a little earlier. And sometimes honest people, well, those are the people who acknowledge not their mistakes but their—'You can't . . . Your mistake . . . If you move your hand there . . .' It's not that, but you can see the final result, the finished object. An image is like a table or—in addition, a table that can talk about a lot more things than a table. It's both a solid thing—but people don't want to.

She didn't say to me: 'Your film is bad'; she didn't say: 'You shouldn't have mixed up . . .' Then she would have been doing film criticism. But all she saw was—and that's where I was maladroit, because I wasn't able, I couldn't show her that—I don't think she would have accepted it, but I could have done it much more gently. I think I

would be able to do it today, but I don't think it would be accepted just the same, and I no longer have any desire to do so. But we tried to say to Jane Fonda, by showing a photograph of her, by saying to her: 'I don't think you're doing the North Vietnamese any good by acting in North Vietnam, and here is a photograph of you acting in North Vietnam'. We can call this 'acting'—after all, they even call it the 'theatre of operations' in military language, so calling it acting is not a play on words. 'And in our opinion, you didn't act any better than you did in *Tout va bien*'. Alas, I didn't say that. I said no better than in *Klute*, [laughter] meaning: 'In *Tout va bien* you acted better'. She would have told me that; that's how we would see things today right away, she would have sensed that I was criticising myself, that I needed her and that I was happy she had gone there. Then, to talk about it, I would have said: 'I don't need to go to Vietnam' and then, I don't know—we said some interesting things in *Letter to Jane*, but I didn't succeed in getting through. This, in my opinion, is easy to change. All you need to do is talk a little about a problem you're familiar with, because she could have told us lots of things we didn't know anything about. That's how I was maladroit. And we could have added others. An image is much easier than a table; assembling images is much easier than assembling automobiles or tables.

SERGE LOSIQUE: Now, to return to today's concrete research. Why did you choose *The Rules of the Game* to show with your film?

These are three films, as I said, which take place at a moment when something is destroyed, when something changes. If we had had Dovzhenko's *Earth*, and seeing the excerpt with the hunt from *The Rules of the Game*, where they kill the rabbits and film the land, what's on the land, at that moment we'd understand that there are rabbits, there are hunters [*chasseurs*], and the people we see are on the land. And then the third film would have been *Europa 51*, we would have seen – I'm not sure, I don't remember what it's like, it's for that reason too I wanted to see it again – we would have seen someone analysing an entire continent using family situations. Then after that, well, *Deux ou trois choses* explained this and said clearly: 'Here is the kind of film we're making. We're going to film the changes to—we're going to make a film at the moment someone has decided to rework

the land'. It's all about land. And *The Rules of the Game*, which is a film made in 1939, just before the war, is the end of an era. The end of landowners: the film takes place in a château, on the land. That's why I find it interesting to see—because at a certain point, if you had seen *Earth* or *Deux ou trois choses* before *The Rules of the Game*—when people watch *The Rules of the Game*, they shouldn't see just *The Rules of the Game*; if it's a cinematic wonder, they should see something else. They should see the movements in the ballroom as movements coming from—and they should see the people on the land, how they behave, meaning to see them as social beings. So we should have shown one or two social comedies, or social tragedies, which make people think of the terrain. Who occupies the terrain? Who is driven from [*chassé*] and who occupies the terrain?

[Inaudible]

I didn't think about *La Règle du jeu* at all when I made *Deux ou trois choses*.

[Inaudible]

I think that in *Deux ou trois choses* Marina Vlady was not—she agreed, and I thought that the film was a little difficult and the fact of having a big name—the film cost ninety million francs, or 200,000 to 210,000 dollars,<sup>14</sup> which was a hundred thousand dollars more than my usual films. The fact there was a name – she was well known at the time – helped. I don't think she was—it was fairly difficult with her, I got along with her well personally, she was nice, but I don't think she was qualified to appear to be thinking about what she said. She didn't pull it off. That's not a criticism, it's a criticism of me also. I wasn't able to find someone.

And if I feel like trying one last time or perhaps a next-to-last time – the next time will be in thirty or forty years – to have access to what people call great actors. I find Robert De Niro is a classical actor, in the classical sense: someone who works, who rehearses, even in the manner in which one can do this, who rehearses his parts. Can he do other kinds of rehearsals? Because in a film like *Deux ou trois choses*, I remember she asked me: 'What can I do?' And I told her: 'Well, listen. You live ten kilometres outside of Paris. We'll start shooting around noon, one o'clock, or later if you like. What I'd like

you to do is walk to work. That's the only thing I ask of you. I'm not joking, I'm not trying to provoke you. You'll be tired and the fact that you're tired and agree to be tired, you'll think about things. And the shoot will last an extra hour; it won't last longer than that. We'll be right here, when you walk into the room I'll say: "Camera!" and we'll shoot. And then you'll leave. That's it. You'll walk ten kilometres, and 300 metres, and then you can go home in a car if you like'.

[Inaudible]

Nah, she didn't understand, and I didn't succeed in making myself understood either. That's where cinema is not working properly. It should be used to communicate, and I didn't even succeed in communicating with the person three metres away from me, making a film with me to boot. There was the whole region of Paris between us.

SERGE LOSIQUE: Tough luck for you.

*... forms of communication. You spoke about stars. Film directors have become stars. Fellini is a star, Bergman is a star, you're a star. So ...*

Yes, but why do people accept stars? And today worse than before. Before there were three or four kings, today there are a good hundred thousand, what with athletes, heads of state, singers, movie stars. I think that very quickly, from the beginning, mommy and daddy are transformed into stars and not something else. It would be interesting to try to see—I have a film project, I think I spoke to you about it yesterday. It will be called 'La Chute du dollar' ('The Fall of the Dollar'), there are women and children and animals at the end. Because sometimes the relationships between animals, I mean the relationship between the leader and the others, or between the parents, must be the same as the relationship between the people and the tyrant or between the film viewer and the movie star who has an image like that. But you have to know how animals make images for themselves. Between young animals and their parents, is there a relationship—today between the child and the mother is a star. There are feelings like that, and that's why it's very, very difficult. The government profits from this, more or less, because mothers are the only stars who aren't paid for their work, even though I think a mother is the biggest star in the world.

I think that in our history of cinema we'll begin, in the section on silent American cinema, we'll look at the close-up, starting with the myth that Griffith invented it. We'll try to see how the close-up, meaning both the device and something that became solidified, became something, how it helped—it became the star and the movie star if you like. When Lumière started out, he didn't have any notion of movie stars, even though the idea of stars existed in his day: there were presidents of the Republic, there were famous people, there was Dreyfus, who was a star of innocence. But when he shot his first films – whereas Méliès right away changed things a little – but when Lumière shot *Train Entering a Station*, *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory* and even *Waterer and Watered*, you can't say that the star was the waterer, you can't pose the question like that. So how did the close-up, afterwards, accentuate and become—why did the close-up in talking cinema become the movie star, the star? Political stars and movie stars resemble each other quite a bit.

On *Tout va bien* we had enormous problems. We had two big stars, Yves Montand and Jane Fonda. We had problems with Yves Montand because sometimes he would say: 'Why do you film me from behind while you film him from the front?' Jane didn't dare say that. But I think she thought—she had agreed—but suppose you take a star, I don't know who, and you film their feet, how—why is the face more important than the rest? Well, it's tied to language. But I'm not sure that in primitive societies—what's more, what remains of the graphic images of these epochs are gestures, their most important gestures: shooting an arrow, gathering food, things like that. Faces less so. Whereas what will remain of today? Only faces. When you read an article, it says: 'Dramatic Situation in Lebanon'. Three-quarters of the time either you see a photograph in close-up of the guy who wrote the article – and what does that have to do with the dramatic situation in Lebanon? – or you see a portrait of a head of state or—three-quarters of illustrations are like that, as if in order to write—an article about Israel, there's a photograph of Begin: what's the connection?

SERGE LOSIQUE: *He's the top leader.*

Then you show a photo of the top leader and you call the article 'Top Leader'. But then I think every article would be called 'Top Leader'

[laughter] in every newspaper, that's all there would be, so . . .

We've talked about *auteur cinema* . . . What do you think of it?

What we did was really stupid, and afterwards it did me a lot of harm when I thought it had been good for me. At a certain point it was those of us at *Cahiers* – Truffaut, Rivette, Godard, Chabrol, the three or four us who were there – we said: 'It's not the producer who is interesting, it's the author'. We tried to give back, I don't know, what we might call his letters of nobility. But the nobility, it wasn't worth it to cut off their heads in order to give others their letters of credit like that! So for us it was a way of taking our places, of attacking the system in the state it was in, of having the right to eat at the same table, with a different manner of eating. If people like Hitchcock, Hawks and Bergman were honest, they'd give us ten centimes on every franc they earn, because we're the ones who made their name. When it's written 'Hitchcock Presents'—when we started making cinema this wasn't what it said; it said 'Warner Bros.' or 'So-and-So Presents'. Hitchcock was there [*gestures to the bottom of an imaginary movie screen in front of him*] and we put him there [*Gestures to the top of an imaginary movie screen in front of him*] But this was so that in this gesture our hand would exist, and afterwards our bodies would make us arrive. We had to do something, so we did that. We took the author's name from the bottom and put it at the top. We said: 'He's the one who made the film'; meaning: 'We're the ones who should be making films. That's how films should be made, and if that's how films should be made and we're the ones who say that this is the way, then we're the ones who should be making them'. Because we didn't have the right to make films. So we did it to make ourselves exist. If it had stopped as it has for me, good, and it has stopped for me. But for you it hasn't stopped, because I'm still the *auteur*, and that does me great harm and cuts things off immediately. You don't think of me as a normal man who, rather than doing cabinet-making—you don't think of your cabinet-maker as an author, or Shakespeare as a cabinet-maker. And universities are there to reinforce that. Because what we four started, today there are fifty million copies in the United States, which is always out in front of the rest of the world. They don't need to make Hollywood films anymore; every student makes films. They even have diplomas for that; what's more, they aren't paid.

*It's a theory that . . .*

It's a theory that was useful to us, and I've had a lot of trouble shaking the effects. But unfortunately the people around me and the people I have relationships with haven't been able to shake these effects when they are involved with me. So that even my relationships with women I know and things like that—sometimes people invite Anne-Marie Miéville to introduce *Ici et ailleurs* or the films she's made. But every time she's introduced they say: ' . . . who works with Godard'. They don't say 'Anne-Marie Miéville, Anne-Marie Miéville'.

*So that contributed to . . .*

And that was my downfall, yes. [Laughter]

SERGE LOSIQUE: *De Niro is going to fix all that, don't worry.*

*I wonder what you thought, what your reaction was when you opened up Pariscope and saw the headline 'The Cinema is not Dead, Mr Godard'?<sup>15</sup> which is a film playing in Paris at the moment.*

I wasn't aware.

*It's a musical with Patti Smith . . .*

And which is called *Le Cinéma n'est pas mort?*

[In English] The Cinema is not Dead, Mr Godard.

Well, I hope at least I'll see some of the money since they put my name on this film. [Laughter]

[Inaudible]

No, I never said the cinema is . . .

*It's one of a series of references people have made to you in the cinema, for example all sorts of cultural expressions . . .*

What I said was that I was dead.

[Inaudible]

[Shrugs] That I don't know. I'll go see the . . .

*Perhaps you said . . .*

Oh no, never. I once used a quotation of Louis Lumière, who said that the cinema had no future, which simply showed that he had no desire to make cinema. He was fairly honest, he thought—and they constructed a kind of false future for this thing because it could record memory. He was a little wary, and rightly so; he made an

industrialist's mistake, but it was a moral position which balanced things out a little, because they were rich industrialists.

SERGE LOSIQUE: Which cinema did you say it was playing at in Paris?  
[Inaudible]

SERGE LOSIQUE: You don't know where, so I can call my lawyers?  
No, I'll go see it, it interests me.

SERGE LOSIQUE: There you go, you'll finance our project. So remember, next Friday and Saturday, and then he's off to Mozambique or Hollywood or who knows where.

Saturday 14 October 1978

#### Notes

1. In the French edition of these talks, the film *Europa 51* (Roberto Rossellini, Italy, 1952) was listed in the chapter heading in the place of the film actually screened this day, *Journey to Italy*, apparently in light of Godard's frustrated desire to show the former film, a copy of which could not be located. *Journey to Italy* has been restored in the chapter heading here. No change was made to this chapter's illustrations.
2. Spoken in English.
3. In French Dovzhenko's film is called *La Terre*, which can mean both 'earth' and 'land' in English. In English the film is called *Earth*, but the ideas Godard raises in his discussion are better rendered by translating his use of the word *terre* as 'land'.
4. In *Energy and Equity* (London: Calder and Boyars, 1974), Ivan Illich discusses, not so much average speeds, but the time devoted to transportation at different times in history. He makes the claim that '[t]he typical American male devotes more than 1,600 hours a year to his car . . . to get 7,500 miles: less than five miles per hour' (pp. 30–31). On page 43 he discusses some historic 'speeds' in France, but nowhere in anything like the terms described here by Godard.
5. Although the old French franc was replaced by the new in 1960, with one new franc equal to 100 old francs, in 1978 Godard continued to think in terms of old francs.
6. The voice-over commentary during the 'coffee cup sequence' is drawn mostly from Jean-Paul Sartre – in a manner not scrupulous

faithful to the text – with a sentence from Henri Lefebvre and another from Vladimir Jankélévitch. See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: George Brazillar, 1963 [1952]), 597–98; Henri Lefebvre, *Le Langage et la société* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 98; and Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Penser la mort?* (Paris: Éditions Liana Levi, 1994), 59. The phrase from Jankélévitch recurs throughout his writings and was probably seen by Godard in an earlier volume entitled *La Mort*, published by Flammarion in 1966 and reprinted in 1977.

7. A reference to a question posed in the chapter for the first voyage, part two.
8. The États généraux du cinéma français (the Estates-General of French Cinema), named after the French parliamentary body that took on an activist, radical role in 1789 during the French Revolution, were formed in May 1968 during the popular protests in France that month to coordinate the French film milieu's response to and participation in those protests.
9. One wonders, given his subsequent comments, whether Godard meant to say 'Belmondo refused' rather than 'De Niro refused'.
10. The Frente de Liberação de Moçambique, the Mozambican revolutionary organisation and, since independence, ruling party.
11. The translator has scanned the classified ads of Montreal's three French-language daily newspapers during the months of Godard's visits in the spring and fall of 1978 and found no trace of anything resembling a notice seeking conversations with other filmmakers.
12. Godard says 'Producteurs, sauvez-vous vous-mêmes'. The line he is referring to, in the second stanza of the 'Internationale', is 'Producteurs, sauvons-nous nous-mêmes': 'Producers, let us save ourselves'.
13. Because of a break in the video recording caused by the need to change the videotape, the comments underlined here have been taken from the original French edition of these talks, which was based on an audio cassette made on a portable recorder at Godard's side. These cassette recordings are no longer extant, making it impossible to verify this passage for the present edition. For previous chapters, corresponding to the spring sessions of the talks, no such cassette recording exists. There, the interpolation [Break in tape] indicates the loss of a passage presumed to be about the length of the underlined section here.

14. Ninety million old francs (see note 5 above), or 900,000 new francs at the time the film was made, was the equivalent of about \$180,000 (not the \$200,000 or \$210,000 Godard mentions here).
15. *Cinéma pas mort* Mister Godard. This film is a music documentary featuring the Doors and Patti Smith which has nothing to do with Godard.

# Return to Zero

7

## One plus One

1

*Top Hat*

Mark Sandrich (U.S.A., 1935)

*Brigadoon*

Vincente Minnelli (U.S.A., 1954)

*Ladies and Gentlemen, the Rolling Stones*

Rollin Binzer (U.S.A., 1974)

*New York, New York*

Martin Scorsese (U.S.A., 1977)

*Sympathy for the Devil [One plus One]<sup>1</sup>*

Jean-Luc Godard (U.K., 1969)

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SERGE LOSIQUE: There you go, you can choose between the red Godard and the black Godard<sup>2</sup> . . . [yells towards the back of the hall] Jean-Luc!  
[Jean-Luc Godard arrives]

SERGE LOSIQUE: All right, for those who didn't see the excerpts this morning, as usual I'm going to ask Jean-Luc Godard the first question: why he chose these excerpts, for example *New York, New York* with his film *One plus One*.

Jean-Luc GODARD: Well, I think it's fairly obvious. It's because there was a little music. It was to try to think about music, to try to talk a little about music. And this time, for once, I'm the one complaining about the print. The entire end of the film, the entire final sequence, is the producer's version. He and I quarrelled; in my version, you didn't hear the Rolling Stones because we're on a beach. You didn't hear them any more; the sound disappeared with them. You didn't hear them any more and then it ended. There wasn't that unbearable—I never do a credit sequence. There wasn't that unbearable

credit sequence. But he was forced to do it because he had decided to put the music over top, which goes on forever, so I guess he had to do that. And I hate freeze frames at the end of films, I think they're grotesque. But he didn't know what to do, so I guess he did that. In my version it ended once you see the panoramic crane shot. Especially since all you heard was the sound of the beach, the gulls and the sea. You didn't hear the Rolling Stones any more. So for once I'm the one complaining. If you were conscientious cinephiles you would have checked that! [Laughter]

SERGE LOSIQUE: *You're speaking to whom?*

To the people!

SERGE LOSIQUE: *The people! But the people have no power. So the people, since he is calling you for a discussion . . . And the other excerpts, you chose . . . Because in watching this film, you speak of revolution, you say we're going to talk about music, but [Liza] Minnelli's music in New York, New York doesn't speak of revolution. Here the entire revolution is the 1960s, how is that?*

Alas! I didn't choose the excerpts. It's fine that I'm more or less able with your help to find the films; if it's not this one then it's another. I would have preferred, rather than the film of the Rolling Stones—although it could be interesting because you can see two ways of trying to—there are people who need music and people who don't, like the kind of documentary you see with the film on the Rolling Stones. I would have preferred to show a film about Janis Joplin, which is a documentary in the same genre, but Janis Joplin is a more interesting character than the Rolling Stones. It would have let us criticise the way this kind of film is made, meaning like bad—like newsreels which, given the way newsreels are made, saying they're bad newsreels is a bit of a pleonasm. The way they're made, with rapid zooms—clearly, the guy who filmed the Rolling Stones wasn't listening to the music. I think that's the difference with my film. Once you listen to the music, you move a little yourself. If you've got a camera, you can't do much, you can't move very much. You can move slowly, and that's what I tried to do. And especially, while listening to pretty much the same thing, to try to use the music as a starting point. For me it was only a beginning. Most often I used music in a very banal way. I don't know much about it and I used it

as a commentary, as a voice-over<sup>3</sup> to add feeling or poetry, but a little like the way you put ketchup on your McDonald's hamburger. I don't think the music I've done is very good, even if it was with good musicians. It had nothing to do with music, with either classical music or contemporary musicians.

It has always amazed me, well, interested me, that musicians don't need images. The Band, all of them really, they don't need images, whereas people who make images need music. I've always wanted, perhaps in one of my next films this is what I will try to do, even though it's fairly difficult—in a big film, or a little experimental or art film, when you hear music, I've always wanted – when there's a battle scene, it doesn't matter what, whether it's an American film or a psychological film, a love scene, and suddenly you hear music – I've always wanted to be able to do a pan or a tracking shot and see the orchestra at the same time. Then you'd return to the scene. Meaning that the music could take over at the moment when you no longer need to see the image, and it can express something else.

*SERGE LOSIQUE: All right, I got things started, the people have the floor.*

*Are you satisfied?*

I'm satisfied to the extent that . . . well, it was the end of an era. I divide my life into periods of ten years. I'm at the beginning of my fifth life or, because I'm 48 years old, I'm pregnant with my fifth life, I'm at the end of my fourth life. This film was the beginning of my fourth life, or the end of my third, and I was completely lost. This film was shot at the same time as the events of May 68 in Paris, when people dumped on me for working abroad when all of France was on strike. It was a time, I think, when I was more and more lost. So I tried to glue the pieces back together or to find other pieces, and I began filming things somewhat separately. The reason there was music in this film was that it gave me the opportunity—I wanted to make the film with the Beatles, but that didn't happen, and then the Rolling Stones agreed. It was an entirely British production, I was just the director. That's how it was made.

What interested me was to divide it squarely into two. I was thinking that all the films I tried to make at the time—this one was the only one that got made. At the time I began a film that was called

'One American Movie' – I never finished it – which was also divided into two and in which I interviewed real people. There was Eldridge Cleaver, Tom Hayden, who is Jane Fonda's husband today, there was a secretary, a woman executive at IBM—there were four or five people, and alongside them there was another reel where I tried to have an actor act a text spoken by—why? I couldn't say, but I tried, I don't know, to look for, to deconstruct and reconstruct. But it didn't in the least make a film. In today's film I think it would have been better, instead of having little scenes, if there was a single story in different forms, and a single theme. I think I wouldn't do that today, but it would have been better at the time. But I didn't really have any idea, so I tried to fill it up with images between the music.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *Is 'One American Movie' the same film that Leacock and Pennebaker call One P.M.?*

Yes. Well, it's not the same film; I had called it 'One A.M.', 'One American Movie', and they, since they had the rights to what was shot, they tried to show a few rushes that weren't even finished. It was a little improper on their part, but I couldn't stop them.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *Leacock and Pennebaker came here a few years ago and showed this film. The people still have the floor, even if they are carrying a black flag.*

*Can you tell us why you called it One plus One?*

Because that was the subject. On one side was *one* – the Rolling Stones – and on the other side *someone else*. So that made *one plus one*. *One plus one* is an attempt to make two. Afterwards I realised that there is something that is the plus or minus between the two. There are never just two; there are three or something else. There are always three. That's why it didn't add up to a film, there was only *one plus one*, if you like. And that didn't make an equals sign; the most it made was that *plus one makes two*, which—because I didn't deal with it in this film. It was too—it was just pieces.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *So the people are not inspired, and as Jean-Luc says, neither am I. Is that because it's the end of a period of Jean-Luc's work, or is it the end of cinema?*

I could ask you that, those of you who have attended sometimes. But the next two visits, which will be something of a conclusion

everything that has been said here, everything we've screened, I'll try with Losique to make a book out of it that will be clearer, where you'll really be able – photographs being easier to find than a reel of film – we'll try to relate what happened here as an introduction, because what has happened here, and the next two visits I'll make, is a kind of introduction to a true history of cinema. In any event truer than the others, because it is an attempt to see what happened between one film and the next in the history of cinema. So we will try to keep some traces of what happened here, and it will be a little clearer in a book, where we can put two photographs together, and not necessarily put the text of everything that was said but put the theory of that text. And this will be visible, because at least we'll have the images together.

So for the next two visits, do you have an idea—I still have films of my own I can show. Are there some you would like to see or rather not see? There is *Tout va bien* (*All's Well*), I saw that they're showing it on television here tomorrow, or maybe even tonight, so those who want to see it can watch it. Does anyone want to see *Numéro deux* (*Number Two*), for example? I might like to show that, but I find myself in a bit of a hole because I don't know what to show as excerpts. I'm not finding any more films in the history of cinema as references. So we should maybe do something else. Maybe you have a suggestion you want to make, go ahead, you can always write them down and send them to the Conservatory, because we've kind of run out of ideas for the end, which is coming up all of a sudden. Now that I think about it, I realise that even after *Numéro deux* I don't have any more examples of other films to show. I don't want to show a film by Rivette or Straub, that's not what this is about. I feel completely . . .

What we should do is switch to television programs, but I don't have the money to transfer them to American standards. For the moment here in North America, Americans can't—Sony doesn't make, Sony cassettes, Sony systems exist all over the world, but in North America they're made only for North America. In Europe we have the right to receive American products, which is normal because the United States dominates, but here it's the opposite. Because it's the United States that dominates, there is no right to receive. You

have to adapt within, or bring in European equipment, which costs a lot also. Otherwise I would have shown the television programs I have made. And since there is six hours' worth, we could watch two or three hours per day, that would have made our program and we could have talked about it afterwards. It would have been interesting to talk about television. I think it is done quite little in film studies courses because television is seen as commercial cinema. So there is an approach to television that is completely—even though it is the most powerful.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *But we can transfer that. I've already done it for the festival's film market.*

No, it's very expensive.

SERGE LOSIQUE: Yes, it's very expensive. Or we could go to the CBC, but the room isn't very big, we couldn't fit everyone in. So it's a real problem.

We would have to ask the CBC to lend us a European system, and then have three or four monitors. But they must have a single colour monitor, which is very small, it's made for ten or fifteen people.

SERGE LOSIQUE: That's it.

It's that too.

SERGE LOSIQUE: A maximum of ten or fifteen. That's the problem. Well, we'll see between now and then. So as he just said: if you have any suggestions, because Jean-Luc will be back on the 28th of November, and he'll stay . . .

In December.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *I thought it was the 28th of November.*

No, it's December.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *Do you have the dates?*

No, I don't have the dates, but it's more like the 10th of December or something like that.

SERGE LOSIQUE: Yes, but watch out for the holidays, because after the 15th of December you won't find a soul in Montreal.

Around the 10th?

SERGE LOSIQUE: *The 10th. But are you coming once or twice?*

Twice.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *If it's the 10th the second time will be the 17th. So we'll put the exact dates in the newspapers. In any event, it will be early December. So, are there any more questions today? Nothing struck you watching the excerpts and One . . . Lots of things, but they're so clear that . . .? I account for this silence by the fact that the weather is so nice outside.*

You showed us an excerpt from the other Rolling Stones film . . . was it on purpose that you didn't show Gimme Shelter, which plays with television?

No, it wasn't on purpose, I think it was because we weren't able to get . . . I wanted to show a film more . . .

. . . the editing was something . . . perhaps to be used earlier . . . thus there is an equilibrium . . .

No, I didn't think of that, it was more to show the usual way people film musicians. They try to take advantage of their success to make a film and show it, which is much worse even than the music they're playing. A fairly interesting film I think is *The Last Waltz* by Scorsese, which is less well made than his other films. He had a lot of trouble doing anything other than film the songs one by one, whether well filmed or not. But what do you film? I mean, they're not actors, they're people playing music. I think it's interesting to think about it like that, you might be able to think about filming dialogues a little differently. That's sort of what I would like to do, for things that aren't expressed by words to be expressed by music. At that point you film the musician, who knows how to play, so you have to find the music that corresponds to the story, with the melody taking over from the story. A melody is a way of telling a story in a sense.

JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD: . . . the American voice . . .

Those were texts by Eldridge Cleaver.

JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD: [Inaudible]

I think the texts on music, if I remember correctly, were taken from a book by LeRoi Jones on the blues<sup>4</sup>—clearly white people stole black music.

JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD: Is it possible for the actor to communicate his idea of revolution to white people? White people imposed a language and then . . . as a result reinvented . . . between the musicians . . .

In the film I think it's more—it was somewhat unconscious and not very thought out. It was done more like a painter who puts two colours side by side because that's all he can manage to do for the moment. Many modern paintings were not understood in their day because they had a different—the painters were looking for something but they didn't say what they had found. The paintings were reproached for the same things you can reproach a certain kind of cinema for, which is not telling a story, not having a subject.

JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD: *One gets the impression . . .*

Yes, but in this case it was more having the sense that I had to go that route, which I later tried to do consciously with Gorin. It was rather arbitrary and rigid. It went on a little too—they were little films, like *British Sounds* and *Pravda*, and it came to an end with *Tout va bien*. And *Tout va bien*, it's quite clear that it's still the discourse of former activists who are trying to find a way out. Or the film we made on Palestine, which took me five years to complete.

JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD: *Can't we see it?*

Yes, we can see it, hasn't it been shown here before? We can see it, I thought of showing *Numéro deux* and the film on Palestine, *Ici et ailleurs* (*Here and Elsewhere*), yes.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *We've shown it.*

You've shown it here before? I don't know, we can show it again. We can also show *Comment ça va*, which is a very didactic film about language, but quite visual, which shows quite well—I did some experiments and then I stopped; I'm trying to apply them. As a film. It's made for a small audience rather than for television. It would also be good [to show] a few television programs I've made. We could show those to conclude. The annoying thing is that I would like to find some films which—and the only ideas for films would maybe be to show a few silent films from the old days, from the beginning, *L'Assassinat du duc De Guise* or the first pan in a gondola in Venice or an early, forgotten film by Griffith, when film people were trying—they were doing something and at the same time they were saying: 'All right, we're going to find something'.

JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD: *For example, Le Massacre de . . .*

Yes, precisely, I think we could show the earliest films ever made and then my latest films, which we could call the last. Now I have to

start filming again in a more normal way. It's as if I had passed to the other side of the lens; not of the mirror but of the lens.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *During the Jean-Luc Godard retrospective here in 1975 we showed Ici et ailleurs, I remember there was a person in the audience who wasn't happy with the film.*

In 75? So we'll show it.

SERGE LOSIQUE: Yes, 75 or 76.

In 76? Well then we can show it again.

SERGE LOSIQUE: Yes, *in the spring. I know that you've been working here for two years now.*

So in any event we'll show *Numéro deux, Ici et ailleurs* and *Comment ça va?*

SERGE LOSIQUE: Yes.

[Inaudible]

No, those films I think less so—oh, we can . . .

. . . *Numéro deux* . . .

Oh, much less so, no no, much less so, they're much more didactic films, experiments, they're films you'd show on video in a course as examples, but not as stages. *Ici et ailleurs* says as much and shows it better. They're films that analyse themselves and thus the work that was done is clearer for the viewer. But it's true, we'd have to find places where—but only Langlois was capable of saying: 'Here it would be good to show such-and-such a scene from such-and-such a film'. Places where people either started from zero or returned to it. In my case, I think I'm one of the only ones to return to it, because I was going nowhere and, well, I don't want to end up like the boy in Rossellini's *Germany, Year Zero* either. So I had to return to zero and destroy myself. There's a film by Marguerite Duras we could show, because in her own way—she's someone I like quite a bit, she's very independent and it doesn't bother her to—she needs to destroy in order to construct and she has destroyed much more than she's constructed. What's more, one of her first films was called *La Musica*; I don't think it's by chance. It came out of something like that.

SERGE LOSIQUE: Does that mean that after your destruction of cinema you're heading towards a kind of resurrection in your own way?

It's not the destruction of cinema; it's the destruction of forms. First of all, from the beginning, the destruction of the forms I was taught. I simply tried to destroy them right from the start. When someone tells me: 'Wash your hands first', well, in the cinema, I didn't wash my hands on purpose. Then afterwards I had to see what a hand is and what soap is, and then later something else; so it's also destroying the very forms I had acquired from which I thought I had freed myself, lots of things like that. And May 68 brought all that to light for me. There were a lot of people who saw themselves better in its light, as is always the case when there is a major social event. When everything comes to a halt, moreover, so you have time to see things. My memory of Paris in May 68 is hearing the sound of people walking in the street, simply because there was no gasoline, so you heard people walking in the street. It was an extraordinary effect.

JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD: [Inaudible]

Like Gorin said at the time, it was going back to zero, but seeing that zero had moved, it wasn't zero either. Then afterwards, I don't know, it's better to know yourself . . .

JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD: [Inaudible]

No, it's more—yes, we could—but I'd have to bring a copy. I think *Ici et ailleurs* sums up well—for me, between *One plus One* and *Ici et ailleurs* lots of other films could be interesting if we really studied this case, but it sums up fairly well what could have happened. And *Numéro deux* is a kind of experiment, a new departure to find stories to tell, because when you make a film you have to find a story to tell, but you need to know lots of things.

Music tells a lot of stories in a way that many people like, at the same time as it puts them to sleep and wakes them up. But there is a way of passing from one note to the next, and when I tell a story, I'd like to—I find this fairly intriguing, I'd like very much to—or drawing also: people use drawing very little in cinema whereas they could use it a lot. People, young people for example, like graphic novels a lot, but if they saw one on the screen and used it, they would find it a little intellectual because they were trained in disciplines—comic strips are for newspapers, music is this, cinema is that.









I'm trying to destroy what is preventing me from being what I believe myself to be inside, and at the same time not to overly dest— to reconstruct it in a different manner, but taking care that people don't see only the destruction either, because you find yourself all alone. If you make an object it's to sell it or use it or to communicate with your neighbour. If you make tables, they're for people to sit around. If you make a film it's for people to see it and for you to see what people saw, or for you to see together, or for you to have the sense of doing so in any event.

JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD: . . . work of fiction . . .

But it's very docu—I don't know, I'm talking about documentary again, at that point everything is documentary. Clearly, the Rolling Stones—I studied them, I studied, it's always the same thing: try to study. And stories, well, I study, I take a piece and I try—it's also to give me confidence. I've always thought—a film is a difficult thing, but at the same time everything is interesting. I could have invented something else and then you have to try to make something whole out of it. In this film everything is a little helter-skelter.

JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD: *One gets the sense watching today's film . . . reflective solitude compared to what at the time was a collective endeavour and ways of living . . .*

But all collective endeavours for showing are extremely solitary endeavours. Whether it's the Rolling Stones, who are like fascist emperors who have a completely sadistic relationship with their audience — who like it, moreover — and then, today, ten years later, you see—they're interesting films to make. When you see 'Black Power'—one film I have always wanted to make, as a kind of so-called political film — it's not up to me alone to make them, I always tell others to make them but — is a film which would be called 'Dix ans après' or 'Vingt ans après' ('Ten Years Later' or 'Twenty Years Later'), with all the political films that were made; I made a few. But to go and re-film the people you filmed, ten years later. In 'One American Movie', for example, I interviewed Cleaver. I went to see him at his home in Oakland with Tom Luddy, we were frisked more than in the airports here, they all had berets, sub-machine guns, and he agreed to be interviewed because Leacock had given him five hundred dollars and he really needed the money because

two days later he disappeared for Algiers or I don't know where. So today we would re-film him alongside Billy Graham in his white suit. And that's fine. I don't see someone who's contradicted himself. The little I knew Eldridge Cleaver, I see someone who is, I don't know, he's a musician; he's someone who likes to talk, he always . . . that's all. Anyway, both well-known people and unknown people. But today in France there is no one who would make a film about Lip.<sup>5</sup> At the time, there were five hundred. At a particular moment, and then afterwards suddenly you don't know what became of them. That's something I'd like to do. Like Alexandre Dumas, *Twenty Years Later*.

JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD: . . . retro fashion . . .

It wouldn't be retro, it would be showing what happened afterwards.

JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD: . . . comforting images . . .

Yes, but once a film brings something else—the reason Scorsese's *New York, New York* flopped is that, as a business deal, it was put together as a retro film. All the publicity said that it was after the war, people needed music and love or I don't know what. But in fact the film isn't retro at all. It's a real film that needs music, that's all. And that was enough for it to have absolutely no success. It was a film that resembled a film from a bygone time but it was a film from today, except that it took place at a certain time and simply tried to express the relationship between two people.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *Watching retro stuff always lets you down.*

Retro is business, it's industry launching a product, giving it a name, and that's it. It's nothing at all—it's not that it's nothing at all, it's extremely powerful, it's fashion, it's—the history of form is difficult, you have to—a history of cinema that showed a musical comedy—I don't see how you could do that unless the teacher and the students, if one of them is a musician – there should be an orchestra, or at least a piano. All we've proven here is that history—in the end all we'll show is that the history of cinema is the only thing that can have its own history because it's the only thing with its own traces of its own condition. People create images; the images remain.

But that's impossible because the way images remain is organised by the industry in such a way that you can't even recount the history.

because if you recount the history you might rouse the dragon which, in my opinion, cinema might have been. You might see that the monsters—I was quite happy with our session the other day, I found it was a really good session, except that we—it was by chance, but truly, we saw that the real monsters in *Dracula*, it wasn't Bela Lugosi, it was the bankers and the doctors. And that was thanks to the screening afterwards and to the light, the feedback, that a film by Rossellini cast on another monster.

You have to prohibit that, and the way the equipment is set up in universities—they hand out thousands of degrees, which will make thousands of unemployed or super-specialists. But how is it that—it's the simplest thing in the world, because you could do it with the equipment you have today, but given where they set it up and how it is set up, it's over, it's strictly impossible. So the history of cinema we'll do, first as a book and then on video cassette, will only show, using a few examples which, thanks to our energy and patience, Serge and I, and with other people's help—we've been able to assemble a few little moments, the moments we knew and the moments we were able to or wanted to know. Naturally, others will do it afterwards, and then once again it will be up to the people to continue on or not.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *We give the people ideas, the people continue the work.*

We take ideas from the people and show them to them closer up. That's why cinema is interesting; it shows things closer up. Even movie stars—this is what we'll say, stars are interesting, you see them closer up. It's like—for me, a camera is a telescope that lets you see far away and it's also a microscope that lets you see little things close up. It lets you see things a little closer. This corresponds to the expression 'Let's have a closer look to see what it really is'. That, for me, is what films are for.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *To return now to this film, something just occurred to me. Why do you always mix up, one gets the impression, say—I had never seen this film, the first thing you see, you demonstrated this of course, is that it's a documentary, and then very often you mix that up, both with revolutionaries, because you see 'Black Power', and fascists, you see a 'Heil Hitler' if I'm not mistaken.*

In fact *One plus One* is—I try, and in this film I placed two building blocks [*deux blocs*] like a child, and then afterwards I realised that I needed a third to make a construction, but unconsciously, having undone things outright [*en bloc*]—and little by little, moreover, the entire history, if I think back over the history of my films, there was a time when my films were plainly entitled, they were divided—*Masculin Féminin* was called ‘fifteen episodes’ – I don’t remember how many – ‘about such-and-such’, and was entitled ‘one of the hundred films’ – or one of the seventy-five films – ‘that television doesn’t make’.<sup>6</sup> Already I had the idea of breaking things into pieces, but which I tried to classify, like Cuvier or Linnaeus, or Auguste Comte in philosophy. *La Femme mariée* (*A Married Woman*) was called ‘Fragment of a film shot in . . .’ And now that I think of it, *Week-end* was called ‘A film in a thousand pieces’ in the credit sequence, or ‘A lost film’, ‘A film found on the scrap heap, lost in space and found on the scrap heap’.<sup>7</sup> So at times there was this sense, I take two things or two notes and I call it *one plus one* because—and connect them to ideas, to the Western philosophy that comes from Descartes and exists here in North America in people’s heads, if not in their work, which is ‘all or nothing’, always one thing or the other. ‘Choose one thing or the other’, the saying goes, but for me, it’s: ‘There are two things, don’t choose one’.

What I try to talk about in *Comment ça va*, when I show two photographs, one of a strike in France and another of Portugal, and I try to show how one, in fact, expresses in a different way what the other one didn’t succeed in expressing, and the work of the journalist—what’s tragic is that journalists don’t do that, because they have the means to do it, even more easily than cinema, which should use journalism or television, mixtures of writing and photography but in a way that can easily be manipulated by hand, because a layout is done by hand, and there’s a frame, and you turn the pages, meaning there is a sense of time. But that’s never done.

Tomorrow—today I read in *Le Journal de Montréal*<sup>8</sup> a crime story that interested me. A guy shot another guy from his balcony and was arrested. But what annoys me also, which means that sometimes I don’t read the papers, is that tomorrow I would like to know what happened next—when he got to jail, what he did there, what

people said to him. But then you'd have to tell the whole story, and if you had to tell the whole story there'd be too many things. You'd come to the conclusion that not everything should be shown, only a certain number of things. You'd come to the conclusion that you should make fewer films, fewer images, fewer newspapers. And that would change things a little.

I think with respect to *One plus One* it was also, to answer your question, to show—but without thinking, without trying to say: 'This is what is not working'. What doesn't work is to say that revolution is on one side and fascism on the other. In fact when you look at things in a slightly different way, you can't say that. It's better to know what happened and then afterwards see if that is what you should say. But it's better to know what happened. That's why I spent so much time in the end making *Ici et ailleurs*, which took me five years to get made. We took the title *Ici et ailleurs* insisting on the word 'and': the true title of the film is *and*, it's neither *here* nor *elsewhere*, it's *here and elsewhere* [*ici et ailleurs*], meaning a kind of process. No one is entirely good or entirely wicked. But people always think like that, even for techn—people say video and cinema. But that comes from Evil [*Mal*] and Good. On the one side they say: 'It's bad' [*mal*]; the others say: 'It's good'. It's a complete aberration—adults, children—what I mean is day and night even though together they make twenty-four hours. In this film, fascism and activists were, well, sometimes there is a lot of truth in the – or left-wing and right-wing for example – there is a lot of truth in the right-wing press, which says that things should be better. You see people's silence for example, today the news goes by at top speed; you see that when they cut and no one says anything, people are completely lost. About Cambodia, nobody knows anything. No less than about anything else, but there—no journalist would try to write an article and start out by saying: 'I don't know what's going on in Cambodia', trying to take the elements at their disposal, quoting sources, so we would see if all the sources were on one side or the other. Things like that. I have two sources on Cambodia: there are still Maoist or I don't know what bookstores where you can buy records from Democratic Kampuchea with a girl on the cover smiling while planting rice. Then you see another text or a speech, but you say: 'I don't know a thing'. You can very well write an article saying: 'I don't know anything', but they

think that you have to write—because they wouldn't know what to do. That would be much more interesting. But it would take work. And when there's work involved, people let labourers work in factories, but intellectuals don't like to work very much.

JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD: Letter to Jane.

A little, yes, which wasn't very good, but which was . . .

SERGE LOSIQUE: *With your films there's always work involved. My question is this, because we have to leave in a moment. In your country, because I was in Switzerland last year, I read an article from Moscow, it said: 'Jean-Luc Godard, the most reactionary filmmaker, a fascist', what have you, and in the 1960s, I read other articles, 'the greatest revolutionary filmmaker', etc. A legend, but precisely, I began this discussion by saying: 'When you see Godard's films, choose between the red and the black'. This is why in your films you practically have to be there to explain to people what you meant to say in your film, like you say. This is how I would pose the question.*

Yes, but in this film, honestly, I no longer wanted to say anything. I wanted to try to do things. I had cut myself off a lot from the audience. To try to make a go of it the producer put the song back on at the end, that's how he helped the film cheaply. In this film, if you like, the fascist—I don't know, what's apparent is that every order, fascist or *Black Power*—even so, there are internal montages, which are also divided into two, because each one is connected to sexuality. And I demonstrated my sympathies for one kind of sexuality over another. But of course one is tied to the porno magazines, because the text read by Iain Quarrier, who was the film's producer, is *Mein Kampf*, it's taken from *Mein Kampf*. So I put some photographs, and I took some texts by Cleaver, on sexuality precisely. In the end it was a kind of an attempt at opera, but it's very difficult to—clearly it's a little annoying that the song, you have to stop talking for the song, and today there are—often there are musicians I like a lot, female singers I like a lot, but the texts are so far below, they have so little to do with the quality of the voice or the orchestration. It's amazing that 99.99% of songs are still about 'you and me'. 'You and me, I lost you, I found you again', it's completely incredible that it still runs on that stuff. But it's . . .

SERGE LOSIQUE: All right, today the people were quiet and the leaders spoke. We'll see you in early December, thank you. Oh, finally!

[Inaudible]

SERGE LOSIQUE: Oh, that's right! Oh! Excuse me, I was already thinking far ahead. Excuse me, tomorrow, tomorrow, yes, yes, of course. We can clear up the dates tomorrow, I'll look at that with Jean-Luc for next time, for those of you who don't read the papers. Thank you.

Friday 20 October 1978

### Notes

1. As Godard explains below, this film, which he called *One plus One*, was released by the producer with a different ending as *Sympathy for the Devil*, which was screened for this class.
2. The reference is to the red and black flags seen flying from the camera crane at the end of the film. Red is associated with communism and black with fascism (but also with anarchism and Black Power).
3. Spoken in English.
4. LeRoi Jones (Imamu Amiri Baraka), *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (New York: W. Morrow, 1963).
5. Lip is a French watchmaker which in 1973 was hit by a wildcat strike over secret restructuring plans. The strike attracted national attention with, at one point, 100,000 people demonstrating in the street in support of the workers.
6. The subtitle of *Masculin Féminin* was '15 precise events' ('15 faits précis'), followed by the statement 'One of the 121 French talking films of which only three or four are made' ('Un des 121 films parlant français dont on ne fait que 3 ou 4').
7. The opening credit sequence of *Une Femme mariée* reads 'Fragments of a film shot in 1964' ('Fragments d'un film tourné en 1964') and that of Week-end 'A film lost in the cosmos/A film found on a scrap heap' ('Un film égaré dans le cosmos/Un film trouvé à la ferraille').
8. *Le Journal de Montréal* is a daily tabloid newspaper of the crime and sports variety aimed at a working-class readership and shunned most intellectuals.



# The People and Their Leaders

7

## *Les Carabiniers*

2

[*The Lost Patrol* John Ford (U.S.A., 1934)]<sup>1</sup>

*Alexander Nevsky*

Sergei Eisenstein (U.S.S.R., 1938)

*Rome, Open City* (*Roma, città aperta*)

Roberto Rossellini (Italy, 1945)

*The Green Berets*

Ray Kellogg and John Wayne (U.S.A., 1968)

*Les Carabiniers*

Jean-Luc Godard (France–Italy, 1963)

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SERGE LOSIQUE: [To audience] Can you call Jean-Luc? He's just outside. [Long pause] Can someone back there tell him—Jean-Luc is just outside, he doesn't know that the film is over. So let me remind you that next time, he'll be back on 1 December, so our next session is the 1st and 2nd of December, and then, what's the following Friday, the 7th–8th or the 8th–9th?

[Jean-Luc Godard arrives]

SERGE LOSIQUE: Ah, always arriving late. Because of the bearded guy [Jean Antonin Billard]. All right, this morning we showed several excerpts. For those of you who didn't see them there was the Rossellini film *Rome, Open City*, then *The Lost Patrol* . . .

JEAN-LUC GODARD: We didn't show *The Lost Patrol* because we were running late.

SERGE LOSIQUE: You were running late, fine, then *Alexander Nevsky* and *The Green Berets* by John Wayne. John Wayne showed his war one day and Jean-Luc showed his own.

Since we were running late, I told the projectionist not to show *The Lost Patrol* because I thought half an hour of a John Wayne film was enough to see how the Americans waged war. In fact *The Green Berets* was his war, John Wayne's war, but *Les Carabiniers* is not my war. My ambition, which was a little too grand for this film, was to show all wars, but certainly not mine; I'm a deserter, I was a deserter. I didn't want to do my military service. That's why I became Swiss; I chose Swiss nationality and deserted during the Indochina war. Then I returned to France as a Swiss citizen in order not to do my military service in the Swiss army either. In Switzerland it was easier because all you had to do was pay; if you haven't paid after thirty years, they overlook, they strike your name off the list. That's when I went back to Switzerland. Above all to avoid my military service. This is something that has always intrigued me about boys: what pushes them, or attracts them? If they are pushed, who kicks them in the ass so they'll do their military service? Or if they go on their own, what attracts them? Because if boys didn't do their military service there would be no wars, we would have had no film to show today.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *That's too bad. If you had done your military service you could have gone to war instead of making war with postcards.*

I don't think so; I think that I tried to tell the story of many wars just as well by taking very precise documents. As for postcards, what do soldiers send? What do tourists send? That's another way of making war. You only have to look at the way tourism is dominated by Germany today. Germans have always enjoyed invading other people a lot. When they can do it through war, they do it through war, and when they do it other ways—if you go to some African countries, Tunisia for example, which has completely sold out to tourism the way some countries sold out to Germany or the way some countries sell out to the United States today. So you see countries completely devastated without any need for war. That must be another kind of war.

This morning when I arrived—anyone who didn't know what cinema is, if you told them: 'We're going to watch a war movie,' and they came here this morning and saw people playing cards, they'd say: 'What, is that war? Is that a war film?' [Laughs] They'd see a

huge card game. So why go play cards in Phnom Penh if you're born in Kansas or Missouri? We might wonder if there isn't a kind of pleasure just the same, which must be a pleasure very specific to boys. Because women who make war do it like boys I think. There are very few of them; I don't think the rest of women are interested. They aren't interested in invading somewhere else—they're interested in . . . I don't know, I'm not a—but I think that invading a foreign land—and so it was interesting today to see an American film. We saw quite well how it was done. Then afterwards show a Russian film. But the Russian film was more about the defence of Russia, because Alexander Nevsky was someone who halted the armies of the King of Sweden I believe, who defended his land. Then afterwards in *Les Carabiniers* I tried to—it was quite carefully made. It was a complete flop, worse than a complete flop when it was made, although it was made very carefully, even from the point of view—it was post-synchronised for each sound. If it was an Italian Beretta machine gun, we didn't put the sound of another machine gun. Or the sounds of the planes. All the texts written by the soldiers are taken from Himmler's directives to his underlings. One phrase in particular, someone says: 'We are ready to die'. Well, instead of the *führer*, I said the king, we are ready to die for the—look, in Canada, you are still subjects of the Crown, you still make war in the name of the crown of I don't know who still exists, and because there are still kings in quite a few countries as well, the film is quite relevant.

SERGE LOSIQUE: So, we might say that this morning, by choosing these excerpts, you wanted to show what a patriotic war is, because you mentioned a defensive film, the Soviet film, and we could say your film is a film about the absurdity of war, if I'm not mistaken, and then as far as the American film is concerned, I would say it's not a patriotic war, it's more a war—watching The Green Berets this morning, and watching American war films in general, you realise that they are always about the defence of the puritan American mentality. One might say that they are always a drama about conscience. The proof this morning – it struck me in a funny way this morning when watching the film – was when they played with the children. How for example American soldiers look after a little Vietnamese girl and then a drama about conscience when the little girl is supposedly assassinated by the Viet Cong. Am I wrong?

No, no, that's very—I agree. I have nothing in particular to add, but there should be—how is it that Hollywood makes so many films—without the Germans for example a large part of Hollywood would go bankrupt. Even today people are still making war films about that period. And the funny thing is that they have less of a problem—they didn't have any moral qualms about making war films about Germany, they exploited that like a script mine. Because basically they're pretty facile adventure stories. There are no royalties to pay; they should be paying royalties to Himmler or Martin Bormann, who today is in Argentina. They should at least pay him a little something for having invented all that, because Hollywood was incapable of inventing it. When they waged their own war, like they did recently in Vietnam, well, it took quite a long time. Whereas at the time of the Korean War, they didn't hesitate, as soon as war was declared, a week later little studios like Republic had already made three films about it. So they have always been closely tied. In the case of wars where they had to, let's say, talk about their conscience, they had more trouble because the story wasn't enough. In Japan they made hundreds of films during the war. Four months after Guadalcanal there was a film on Guadalcanal. With Vietnam, we had to wait a very long time, because in the end it affected the United States.

Something curious is that John Wayne made his film about his point of view of Vietnam before Jane Fonda for example. Yesterday we talked about the Left and the Right, and I think that things aren't so simple. We might say that John Wayne was, in a sense—was he braver or more of a jerk, or shrewder, I don't know. But he was ... well, I don't know what. This is where I would like to discuss *One plus One*, to put the two of them together, not to judge only John Wayne or only Jane Fonda, but to have the opportunity to put the two of them together. Without trying right away to criticise. That will come on its own afterwards. But to try to see how it is that right-minded Americans took—and you have to look at the films they're making about Vietnam today. It's a minor vogue and it will last, but what films are they making? In a sense, John Wayne is more courageous because you really see, in my opinion, the piece of garbage he is, his repulsiveness, because at times they're so sure of themselves like the Germans, that they don't hesitate to commit atrocities.

You see that as plain as the nose on your face. He's not afraid to show a little girl, things like that. It resembles a lot – you also have to compare them – the films the Germans made back then, which you may not have seen but which I saw when I was little, and Italian films.

SERGE LOSIQUE: All right, the leaders have spoken a lot, the people have the floor.

*Perhaps for those of us who arrived late, at the very beginning of Les Carabiniers you quote Borges, can you remind us what was said?*

No, remind me, because I wasn't here in the early afternoon, so remind me. I remember that there was an intertitle that quotes Borges. Borges is half-blind, I liked him a lot, but I can't say where, you'd have to tell me the exact phrase.<sup>2</sup>

I remember that I tried to make a film that would make the viewer – at least this was my script idea – make them think about everything from Napoleon's Russian campaign to his Egyptian campaign to the wars in Asia—which I didn't know, otherwise I would have had them go through a few swamps and things like that. The film was shot on the outskirts of Paris. It was about all wars in a sense, from our day but also from the Middle Ages, from long ago; that's why I used names of wars from Roman times, why I used names like Cleopatra and made the film start in the neighbourhoods of Paris, so that people would think of the idea of war, would ask themselves . . .

I think it wasn't successful because people like to make war, or guys like to make war and women let guys make war; it must suit their interests too. That's why it wasn't successful, because there was no—if you simply show war, coldly, a little idiotically like that, mostly it's a bit annoying. That's what I notice when you tell the truth, without trying to speak well or badly of something, without trying to have a cause, letting it be understood—now I have more ideas on the topic by showing that people really do like to invade someone else, they like to give them a whack, to get whacked a little but not too much. Lots of things like that. In *Les Carabiniers* I showed it more like stating a fact, simply by showing typical scenes you see in every war film, but simply showing them differently. At a certain point I out-and-out copied a scene from *Potemkin*.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *Did Rossellini influence you?*

Certainly, because Roberto had a fairly didactic style that I quite liked at the time. This film was a play that Rossellini had staged at the Spoleto theatre festival and which he modified considerably. The script of my film was by Roberto Rossellini; I didn't change a thing in the script. I shot it, I put in my own dialogue, but the way the script was organised, the idea of the two peasants – or the two peasant-thugs, it's not too clear what they are – and the gendarmes come, they go off to war, they come back, they aren't given what they were told, or they realise that what they were told, the decorations and all that, the titles, was worthless, and the government had changed, so they are liquidated. They didn't understand anything, they are a part of, I don't know . . .

SERGE LOSIQUE: *Rossellini was always moralising, no matter what the film. Can we say that you are also moralising a little in this film?*

Yes, my impression is that I moralise, but from the other side. I think that morality exists, that it's a sure guide because we don't do things like that, we have to find it. Morality isn't all about complete good or complete evil. In this film I was showing things as completely good or entirely evil, like in a clinic. When a doctor operates, he forgets morality. He operates, it's a technical matter. In war too, at a certain point, morality is forgotten. There is something about war that greatly resembles civilian life, which is that people obey orders. The army is something that has always both horrified and fascinated me. It has so many orders you have to obey, so many uniforms, which you now find a lot everywhere in civilian life. If you show up in some countries with your hair too long, it's no good; if you show up with your hair too short, that's no good either. If you wear blue jeans it's no good, if you don't wear blue jeans in some places it's no good. So it's much more systematic. That comes from the army. Justice is dressed like the army. It's like long ago, there were nobles who purchased their status, and nobles who earned it by fighting. I know that we no longer use these terms, but on the other hand, when you want to speak well of someone, you say: 'What noble feelings!' So we cut off the nobility's heads and yet we still say: 'He has great nobility', etc.

[Inaudible]

Where?

[Inaudible]

What do I mean to provoke with the images of women in all my films? I don't know, you'll have to be a little more precise, because . . .

[In English] What are you trying to say when you're showing all this . . . all these magazines, what are you trying to say about women?

You're referring to, in the porno shops, to all these, uh, in the sequence,<sup>3</sup> yes, but it was to show that, I don't know, not to show but to let it—but always 'one plus one': at the same time as the porno images there was a text by Hitler; there was *one plus one*. At the same time, there were images of the Viet Cong. Once we had finished with the porno images, once in a while a girl came and smacked a Viet Cong and said to him: 'Till victory'.<sup>4</sup> We might say that it's another way of [showing] the Vietnam War, different from *The Green Berets* and different from *Coming Home* also. I prefer to align—in the end I'm quite content, because I'm one of the few filmmakers who saw himself as a leftist in his own way but who was refused admittance to Vietnam at the time. I had asked to go to make a documentary on Vietnam—this was when Chris Marker made his film *Far from Vietnam*, in which I played a small part, which consisted in filming myself saying: 'I did not go to Vietnam'. And I think cameras, their cranks, can resemble old anti-aircraft guns a little. The only thing I told myself was that until there is peace – well, it's a strange kind of peace, because the war is starting up again in a completely new way, and nobody is saying a word – at that point, it would be interesting to see films by both Jane Fonda and John Wayne, because after all people in Hollywood are there to invent stories and don't hesitate to invent stories in three-quarters of the world. So we might ask ourselves why John Wayne or Jane Fonda doesn't make a film on the war between Cambodia and Vietnam. What was the point before if today all of a sudden it's over, just like that? It seems everyone invades Vietnam for their own good cause, and sometimes there isn't much difference between war and peace.

And so in *One plus One* the images of women are there for people to have a sense, within a totalitarian text, of pornography as being a part of totalitarianism and totalitarianism as being a part of pornography. When you see a pornographic image—it's a horrifying image,

you can't look at it, and yet it depends on who you are. Because if you went to a porno cinema you might be startled at who you see. Go and see who goes there: sometimes you'll see older couples, sometimes you'll see groups of people sneering, young people sneering. But why are they sneering? Because there is so much sexual poverty that you have to bang your head against the wall or something. What I did, if you like, was align things. It was a time of destruction; I tried to rid myself of theories in order to be able to do something—which I don't yet feel completely capable of doing, or more gently. The pornographic images in *Numéro deux* (*Number Two*), for example, I tried to insert them more gently, as part of family stories, because sex is a part of family life.

JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD: We didn't see *Le Petit Soldat*. Did you consider this gap in the film series?

No, we showed *Le Petit Soldat* right at the beginning, the second day I think. But we hadn't yet found the system of showing excerpts from films, and we showed a film in the morning before *Le Petit Soldat*, which was—I don't remember, but I remember we showed it the second day.

JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD: [Inaudible]

We could have shown excerpts from *Le Petit Soldat* this morning. I made this film back in the time of the war in Algeria. At the time I wanted to do something that wasn't being done, what I felt wasn't being done. Unconsciously, like a mosquito drawn to the light that ends up getting burned. In order for the mosquito to learn not to get burned, first of all it has to learn to avoid doing this, and then if it likes the light, to learn electricity to make another kind of electricity if it wants to warm itself by the light, etc. That's my story in a nutshell, to change something you have to—if you're drawn to something that burns you or destroys you, you have to learn how to build, how not to be destroyed, and at the same time to change.

JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD: Fabrizi's role as the priest in *Rome, Open City* and the coherence . . . poetry . . . these two roles are parallel . . .

Yes, you could say that. I had an aptitude, I privileged an artistic and poetic element, which came from my education. It was also Truffaut's bad influence on me, always the 'poetry is harmless' business, something good poets like Lautréamont didn't share. The film

I'm making on Mozambique will begin with a shot of the sea and then you'll hear someone say: 'All the water in the sea would not be enough to wash away an intellectual blood stain'.<sup>5</sup> Poets have always been seen as having the right to remain neutral, and yet writing is dangerous. Those who have spent time in prison for writing know this. Or those who died.

JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD: *For example the execution . . . it's the same refusal; poetry doesn't die and in the end Fabrizi may be executed in the night . . .*

No, what always drew me to Rossellini – and which I still have today because that's the only way I construct my scripts – is this kind of somewhat scientific logic. To look for—when there's a situation, for it to evolve only out of its internal logic and by adding more elements. Before, I put my own elements in. When I watch this film again—watching all my films again, when I found them bad it was because I obeyed my own logic and not the logic that I was trying to show, by trying to see if there wasn't more to show to make the situation evolve. But I didn't know; I put in what I wanted on the pretext that it was poetic or was a nice colour or something like that.

SERGE LOSIQUE: Yes, but the difference between you and Rossellini is that with Rossellini you sense, whether you like it or not—as I mentioned earlier when talking about morality, with Rossellini the Vatican is always looming in the background, whereas in your work . . .

Well, Rossellini was Italian, and religious. He was what he was, and at a certain point he was had also. I mean he tried, he succeeded for example in doing something that filmmakers and artists as original as Buster Keaton or even Chaplin, or Orson Welles, didn't succeed in doing. Roberto was someone who was adulated at first and completely detested later. For me for a time he was a kind of spiritual uncle, I didn't know him well but I took up his defence. Because sometimes you need people when you are—when everyone is dumping on you, when they tell you you're an idiot, a poor sod, a thief, and if there is someone who tells you: 'I like what you do a lot', you're touched a little. That was the case between the start of *Cahiers*—and afterwards there was something—he was banished, he placed himself in that position. He didn't have the strength either, because you need to be more than one person. He was always

quite alone. And sometimes you don't realise you're alone, so you continue working with people, who in Rossellini's case were big foundations and things like that, and his final films—religion was all he had left, if you like; in my opinion the least attractive aspect of religion. His film on Jesus, his film on Socrates, which is no good at all. Socrates was someone exactly like Roberto; they poisoned him simply because he asked people questions. He accepted everything; all he wanted was to talk to them. In Athens he was completely unbearable, not because he asked questions but because he followed people and talked to people, he annoyed everyone, simply by developing, by going a little further. He had nothing; he took things from others and adjusted them. *One plus one*, except he went much further, and people said to him: we want to remain at *one*, we don't even want to add *plus one*.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *In any event, when we do the editing on Rossellini for the 'Introduction to Cinema', I have a ninety-minute video cassette in which he discusses his cinematic legacy. Once again, the people have the floor.*

*In your film Les Carabiniers . . . it's a fairly general picture, something I found interesting is historically specific, the name Karl Liebknecht.*

Which name?

*Liebknecht, Karl.*

Ah yes, Karl Liebknecht.

*Was there a reason for that?*

No, it's a moment at the end, and I mix things up historically. I mean I'm not educated, I gave myself an education while making films. I went to school because my parents sent me. For a while I thought I would continue; I went to university for twenty minutes, then I left and found myself at zero, except that I was already twenty years behind myself if you can say that. I spent twenty years afterwards remaking myself somewhat to coincide with myself, despite my work and through my work, and work is good for that. That's why it's quite nice when work can do this. Cinema is a place where you can do this work sometimes; it can no longer be done in an automobile factory, or practically anywhere else. That's why I think that cinema or that kind of thing, remains extremely powerful. That's why films

are so powerful on television, whereas television delivers up hours of programming by the ton. Even in poorly made films, there is still a sense of working in freedom. John Wayne can make a film about the Vietnam War and say: 'I'm doing it'. Or someone else could have; Rossellini could have.

It's important also to destroy a myth about *Rome, Open City*, about Italian neo-realism as poor films made with bits of string. They were films made with proper means. You'd have to show production photos to see the cranes, the tracking dollies, the crew. Fine, for their day. But they were much more expensive films than New Wave films, when we said: 'It's better to make something with nothing because this nothing represents more, and even so we can do something'. This nothing is not true—meaning we didn't want cinema to be at all like the way it is made, but that doesn't mean there is nothing left. At the time, however, a film like *Bicycle Thieves*, for me, is a rich film, even today. *Rome, Open City* is a rich film. It was shot both in the street and in the studio. They're very strong. A film like Roberto's *Il generale della Rovere*—he's an absolutely remarkable technician, he invented technical devices for himself like a zoom, out of laziness but which let him remain seated and to do the zoom while watching—like television does today, but adapted to film. A film like *Il generale della Rovere* for example is a film made entirely in a studio, but you almost don't notice it, it's so well done, much better than American films for example.

What I find interesting about war films—it's difficult to talk about, it's like music yesterday. I thought about why it is that we had nothing to say yesterday. In part it was because there was nothing to say, but, I don't know, if yesterday we had simply closed our eyes and tried to talk with our eyes closed, I think we would have been able to say things. That's what music is too: we could have looked for and found things. But nobody wants to remain in front of someone else with their eyes closed. Yet there was nothing to see, we were only talking. We could close our eyes; there is nothing to look at. And because of that, the fact that we watch—I watch the audience, I grant it too much importance, or a degree of importance. When we joke round we say: 'You're the people, and I'm the prime minister' or things like that, but the people watch the prime minister too much.

But all you have to do is close your eyes and you won't see him. Then even the prime minister's words would be felt; you'd listen better.

It's hard; I'm beginning to realise when I write a scene or I try to find the right shot, I begin by using another principle. Rather than saying to myself: 'I'm going to film the person who speaks', I tell myself I'm going to begin by showing the person who listens. At that point, simply for that reason, I'm forced to say to myself: 'But what are they listening to?' And I say to myself: 'But what am I going to write?' And I think about what I'm going to write, because if right away I think of someone, Marilyn Monroe – or anybody at all, an unknown – right away I have an idea. I think that sometimes you have to do exactly the opposite, not because the opposite is better but because—it's like a seesaw. It lets you—and films about war should be—but it's complicated, we have to study them, because the history of forms—form is important; war shows this, the military machine shows this. The civilian machine today, which we might say—in the Middle Ages, in the time of the Three Musketeers, there was a great difference in the appearance and ideas and things between a peasant and the Three Musketeers. Today, we can say that there is not a lot of difference between a military person and someone who works in civilian life. The forms are the same. The passport you have to show when you travel, all forms, the fact that we don't dare speak to each other, that there are hierarchies, all that.

There's something very interesting about war, and that is that they tried the leaders of Germany and Japan but [not] the others, because they were obeying orders. But the leaders didn't kill anyone. Eichmann was completely right in saying: 'I'm not the one with blood on his hands'. Yet he's the one they kill. If they had the courage to kill the underling with blood all over his hands—but that would change civilian life entirely. So we might say that war exists only as an extension of civilian life.

I've always asked myself why there are tanks; how it came about that they invented tanks. Because a tank is truly the stupidest object there is: you can't see anything, you're at the mercy—you can be burned to a crisp inside simply by being hit with a little Molotov cocktail made by a child. It's incredibly stupid. When there are gro-

tank battles, with five hundred tanks in the desert or the plain or I don't know where, and four hundred on the other side, they fire on each other and only ten remain on one side and twelve on the other. Finally I thought: why do they use tanks, why do they fight wars? To use military materiel, and military materiel serves no purpose during a war, because afterwards they reconstruct, they sign a treaty, it starts all over. But in fact military materiel is all about civilians, it is used against civilians who might want to change an established order that's too entrenched. And a tank, even against a thousand people, is very powerful; everyone's afraid. They shoot into the crowd; and that's Budapest, that's what happened in Nicaragua. But if people were to say: 'We're not going to build tanks because they'll be used against us if we ever want to do anything'. So they pretend that they can be used in a war.

*SERGE LOSIQUE: Still, a tank, we showed this morning in The Green Berets for example, the tanks were transformed into bulldozers. Because these days there are too many bulldozers levelling our cities also, building highways, so military products aren't used against civilians only, they are also used today for civilians, because they're based, they were invented based on tanks.*

Still, it's civilians who wage war. It's still boys who go to war.

*And armaments?*

But armaments are built by workers.

*They're a bit like toys.*

That in fact is the power of the image. A film on the war in Vietnam—I haven't made one, but if I made *The Green Berets*—or a helicopter, the power of the image or the editing—or what you mustn't do. When you shoot a helicopter, you should show the brand of helicopter, you should show the factory, you'd say 'Hughes Aircraft' for example, or another company, and then you'd show workers coming out and a worker going home with his salary and what he buys. Then it starts all over and continues on.

If the image was free, if it was what it was, then this would be the starting point, not the end point but the starting point. And the lack of success of the cinema that I make, that we make, is that we try to say honestly, to start out at the point where it's possible to start,

but people take this as the end point and understand it very poorly. They ask you: 'What did you mean by this?' Or: 'Why did you put a piece of tail there?' They say—I'm not sure what they say. I try, but there has to be more than one person trying, otherwise it has the appearance of a finished product, which it isn't, and you can't avoid the fact that you can only look at it as a finished product. But today you see, for example with the Vietnam War, no one has absolutely any idea what is going on, why they've started fighting each other again. All you can say is that the Americans brought them the plague, and now they've got the plague and that's what happened. This is what Freud said when he fled Germany and arrived in New York, there were people there to welcome him saying 'Bravo' or I don't know what, and he said to one of his friends: 'Poor sods, little do they know we are bringing them the plague'.<sup>6</sup>

JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD: *It's interesting to see, for example . . . I didn't know, I didn't know' . . .*

But I think these things are true, they're true these 'I didn't knows'. They're both true and false. We don't know, we know very little. We don't know much more than in the Middle Ages.

JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD: . . . *intuitive approach . . .*

The fact is, one can be amazed that things take so long to happen, but it's simply because information is made in such a way that it's not supposed to provide information; it's made to provide information because people need it, but at the same time it's made to confuse everything. I think we know fewer things. Yesterday I said that we don't know what is happening in Cambodia. But do you know what's happening in your neighbour's house? You know absolutely nothing, you don't speak to them, they live three metres away. You don't know.

JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD: . . . *Rossellini or Eisenstein . . .*

But in fact at a certain point it's the weight, the way things operate that makes the work of artists who are more democratic or neutral, but neutral in the sense—electrical current is the simplest example of communication. There is a neutral and two poles, and the neutral is called the ground. It's not by chance that we say: 'To have your feet on the ground'. This is not playing with words. Someone like Roberto, or like me, who says: 'Films should be neutral'—but

neutral means being run through by both poles, otherwise there is no current. Neutral doesn't mean not taking sides, because the advocates of 'you have to take sides completely for good or completely for evil'—the Red Cross is there not to take sides. The Red Cross is financed by the big Swiss trusts, to the great benefit of the big Swiss trusts.

JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD: . . . women are a third pole . . .

I think that women are more neutral in fact, to the extent that they are more complete and have a part in both poles. And the two poles, or the men who occupy the two poles, are always appropriating the neutral or making it not exist, either by despatching them as witches or by creating Golda Meirs or I don't know what.

Today I find—this is one of my favourite themes: how we dress. What I mean is that we live in a completely militarised society that has succeeded in making people wear its decorations and its taste for uniforms in civilian dress. It's always amazed me, here and in France we made fun at first of the Chinese, or even the Russians, by saying they all wear the same clothing. Here all you see is blue jeans, but nobody thinks of them—they're all wearing the same uniform. So you see that everyone is dressed the same way, a sweater and blue jeans, and in the evening, bam, they change their uniform and put on something black or I don't know what. It's exactly like that. But people have become so incapable of seeing this that . . .

. . . your film *Les Carabiniers* . . . against war . . . You said that Alexander Nevsky was about a war to defend the homeland, a just war.

No, I didn't say that it was a just war. I think Alexander Nevsky was a great tyrant. I said that compared to *The Green Berets*—I chose films to show genres, films in the genre we call war films, and then show my film, somewhat like the way I showed *Week-end*: to show genres – monstrous films, films that talk about monsters – and then a film that claims to be monstrous itself as a film. A little bit like *Les Carabiniers*. Of course it's against all wars—it's not against all wars, I don't see how you can be against a war. We can see the need to go and learn how to stand at attention and wear a uniform and all that is particularly stupid and lazy, and what's more unpaid. It's amazing there are no trade unions in the army. Unpaid. At least the mafia is

more honest: when they ask you to kill someone, at least they give you a lot of money. It's the least they can do. [Laughter]

*The Dutch army is unionised.*

Well, I don't know, maybe.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *Which army is unionised?*

*The Dutch army.*

But how much are they paid?

*That I don't know.*

Do bosses go into the army? At least the generals are paid, the colonels, the people who do that all the time. But afterwards, when you don't do that all the time, you're not paid, and then . . .

SERGE LOSIQUE: *We might say jokingly that this is why no one has ever heard of the Dutch army.*

No, I think in Indonesia there are people who have heard a lot about the Dutch.

JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD: *This year the German government decided to send cabinet ministers to the army to do training in order to prove to the German people that vacations aren't the only way to see Europe, as tourists. You could also work . . .*

But tourism, it's quite clear, could be something other than what it is. It's a peaceful form of conquest; moreover it's become a part of the language to say 'an army of tourists'. You just have to look at the charter planes, the jumbo jets—when you go to Tunisia you have a hard time – it's a place that has been conquered by the Germans, there are others, like Puerto Rico and some South American countries that have been conquered by the United States – in Tunisia you have a hard time finding even an English newspaper, or in Greece an English newspaper. Everything is in German; the menus are in German, everything is in German.

*We also have to call Germans tourists . . . this morning you could have shown . . . Voyage en Afrique . . .*

By whom?

*. . . Voyage en Afrique . . .*

Yes, but that's form; all you have to do is look at what clothing has become, because even the absence of a style of dress has become

uniform. It represents something. We dress to represent something, not because we are all right but in the end the other is stronger and you're the one who ends up representing something. Even if you no longer even like the power that this freedom represents, with which you're just trying to be all right, to move well, or on the contrary to disguise yourself. We no longer disguise ourselves, we say that Indians and Blacks disguised themselves, so they had something of the other.

SERGE LOSIQUE: But what's so bad about this new conquest, this new kind of warfare, the tourist war you mention? If, as someone said, the Germans send cabinet ministers to do military service, they're sending Germans to conquer Arabs? What's wrong with all that?

What's bad about it is that they're destroying a culture, they're destroying agriculture, they're destroying things that you people take pleasure in destroying. McDonald's: there's enjoyment in eating at McDonald's, yes, but those who don't always want to eat at McDonald's shouldn't be forced to eat there. They should have . . .

SERGE LOSIQUE: Do you eat pizza?

Of course, but excuse me, pizza is not—first of all, it's made by Italians, and then pizza doesn't destroy your stomach like McDonald's does. We could try to find out. Advertising films could say how things are made. Advertising films are the most interesting films to make. They're the only thing I'd like to make, because they'd be scientific films that study things. Except that it's forbidden to study. You're allowed to study for a brief moment so that you can then become a machine; but truly study, like Socrates, that doesn't last long.

SERGE LOSIQUE: Yes, but that's one theory among many. Just last week Gloria Swanson was here, so they called me and said: 'Are you coming to see her?' And I said no, because she wasn't coming for cinema, she was coming for nutrition. She doesn't touch sugar, and I like cakes. So what would you like me to do? [To audience, with a tone of concluding the discussion] On that note, the people have understood. [To Godard] We have understood you too. [To audience member with a question] Oh! Yes?

You spoke about the resources in Rossellini's films . . . the film 'Les Quatre Saisons' ('The Four Seasons') . . . Are there a lot of films like that?

Oh yes, absolutely, the films I haven't made—in the end I preferred to make another or grab onto another. In fact I think my best films are the ones I haven't made. I once wanted to make a film about myself that would be called 'Mes films' ('My Films') and which would simply talk about the films I haven't made and will never make. That was an idea I had. 'Les Quatre Saisons' was like that a little. There are two films; well, perhaps now the moment has passed, but there was 'Les Quatre Saisons d'un C.R.S.'<sup>7</sup> ('The Four Seasons of a C.R.S. Cop'), which was a little like that, to show—the first season would be beating up protesters; the second season spending the day travelling and doing nothing because you and your family are being moved from one garrison to another; the third season watching over people swimming and saving those who drown; and that's it. Then the fourth season, well, I don't know. I may have found something. That may be why I was never able to do it. Once I had made *Les Carabiniers*—I could have made 'Les Quatre Saisons d'un C.R.S.' instead of *Les Carabiniers*.

There is another film I always wanted to make. No, which I have often thought about making and which I would now like to make. Not with unknowns but with huge stars and lots of money, because it would be a lavish production. It would be a film on the concentration camps, but I'd like to do it as a blockbuster, a lavish production, and that of course will never be done. Or I won't do it because it would be very expensive. Just like the way it also cost a lot—killing six million people, or even four hundred a day, costs money. You have to have a system; it's a real super-production. And to show it like that. Also tell the story of the secretary who types 'four gold teeth, five hundred grams of hair' and then comes back the next day. They knew and didn't know. This business of not knowing, it's true. The Americans never knew what was going on in Vietnam. At a certain point they knew that a lot of Americans were starting to die. At that point they began to have an image. Because before then they saw them every day on television, because American television has a different system for camouflaging things than European television: they show things in order to conceal them. To conceal something in Europe you don't show it. But in the end it's the same thing. When you receive a certain number of blows you end up saying: 'Hey, the other person may be fairly strong'. In his film John Wayne said, he

had people say when he saw the choppers arrive: 'That's how we're going to win the war'.

But forms today are rather violent. Look at tanks; three-quarters of the tanks in the Vietnamese army, and their helicopters, they took them unchanged. They kept the same star, they painted the American star red. Then they send them to Cambodia, and Cambodia didn't pull it off as well as they did. They have less military materiel. But the history of forms—you see their tanks, they kept the same little flags, they didn't even repaint the star, they just changed the colour. The history of forms is very inter—and embryology, moreover, is the history of the human body.

I think, to answer your question, that if someone really wants to make a film they can. You can make a ten-dollar film; with ten dollars, but you have to realise that it's only a ten-dollar film. You can't try to show it to millions of people. But you can. A Polaroid photograph is a film for the price of a photograph, it's a movie show. You show it and throw it away afterwards. If you want to make films, the fact that you throw it away afterwards may make you wonder: 'So it wasn't much use to me if I threw it away immediately afterwards?' But at that point the ten dollars may have been worth it if you learned that.

SERGE LOSIQUE: So you would argue that in cinema there is never a crisis?

Oh no! It has always worked fantastically. Cinema and television aren't industries—they're expense industries, not revenue industries like cars or refrigerators or tables, or objects. They're image industries. And an image is a certain amount of energy in reserve at a given moment which travels and then goes back in and disappears.

SERGE LOSIQUE: Yes, but . . .

And they're inventing other technologies than cinema because at a certain point there was a danger in cinema and in celluloid which the industry, or the industrial unconscious, tried to destroy, which was the chance it could be preserved. Now that there is paper to create reserves, it's all right. Signs and paper are all you need to write the Tablets of the Law, exactly the way Cecil B. DeMille did in his film, *bam*. They're still the best at that. Whereas celluloid and

things—images are more dangerous; they're not the law. You could write the law with images, but at that point you'd be obliged to put two images, and you'd have to judge. Whereas when there's a law, it's written on paper, there's no need to judge. It's a decree, not a law. It's a decree, an order. Whereas images aren't orders. You put them in a certain order for a certain manner of living to come out of them. Between two poles there is current; an image is the ground, which can be led to varying degrees—this is why it's extremely powerful. And celluloid holds up fairly well. After a hundred years, it's not too clear. At a certain point it breaks down. But they still think it lasts too long, there are too many films and at a certain point it may be a bit of a nuisance because there is paper and ways of printing decrees, so there is no need for something else which might change things. So unconsciously they have invented other media. They could have perfected the one they had, but they invented others: magnetic tape, which lasts a shorter length of time. Today Kodak and Ilford are no longer making photographic paper, to the great despair of true photography lovers, who prefer paper, the quality of its image, and who want to preserve the photograph for sixty, a hundred or two hundred years. They do it on plastic, with the stated goal on the part of the manufacturers that it will last only ten years. But you can understand why things are made like that. In the end, it may be a good thing. What I like are two images together to make—for there to be a third, which is not an image but which you make out of the two images. Exactly like the justice system, or what it is forced to do somewhat, with the prosecution and the defence, and then the jury or a certain truth. A truth is made out of a moment when it is possible to be.

*SERGE LOSIQUE: What you say is true, but let's return to the crisis in cinema, which you talk about in newspapers, where you always argue that there is no crisis in cinema, something I believe too. But what is also called a crisis—take for example the case of filmmakers, I could cite the names of two or three filmmakers here in Quebec who have made films with a certain budget – a million dollars, I don't know – and who suddenly find themselves out of work. That's the tragedy, because those people are no longer able to make the films they've become accustomed to making.*





tous les cadrajes naissent  
égaux et libres, les films  
ne seront que l'histoire  
de leur oppression;

cadre par exemple un  
décadrage de Bergman, ou  
l'absence de cadre chez  
Ford et Rossellini, ou  
sa présence avec Eisenstein,  
tu verras qu'il s'agit  
toujours d'apaiser  
quelque chose, son  
amant, les dieux, ou  
sa faim







Today, with a Polaroid or an Instamatic, and if they don't have one of those then with four colour crayons, or if that's too expensive with a black-and-white pencil with an eraser to make corrections, to rub out. So you always need three things: a pencil, an eraser and a sheet of paper. And they can do something: they can draw, they can talk about their unemployment, and if there are other people like them, who need them, well, they'll find them, they're there. Rockefeller is unemployed; that's why he's so powerful. And all the others—there is always work; it's not true. As for unemployment, there are always other [things]. I have always thought – I've argued about this with lots of people – I've always thought it, well, indecent – this is my moral side coming out – that film people make out that they're unemployed. The head of Fox studios can say he's unemployed; it's a business, and if it goes bankrupt, he has to do something else. Or a laboratory technician, that's what people mean by 'unemployment'; they have the same problems as a letter carrier and people like that. But actors and film directors—there is no written rule that a film director should make three films per year, or four or two or eight, and why them instead of—it's not at all clear, you don't have the right to use that word the way other people use it. There are norms for referring to things that everyone is familiar with. You can't say that in the cinema. All you can say—myself, I don't talk about it. I prefer to say: 'It's indecent, it's not true. You can always find other work'. Making a film is not the same thing. If you're an employee at Fox and you're fired – which is no longer the case today, it doesn't work like that any more – you can say: 'I was fired, I have to find another job'. Back then, the scriptwriters who worked at Fox—recently I read Harry Cohn's memoirs, a book on Harry Cohn;<sup>8</sup> he

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### Illustration page 407:

every frame is born free and equal, films are only the history of their oppression;

frame for example a de-framing by Bergman, or the frame's absence in Ford and Rossellini, or its presence in Eisenstein, you'll see that it is always a question of appeasing something, your lover, the gods, or your hunger

demanded—all the big studios were like that. You went to the office at nine o'clock, you had to turn in fifteen pages by evening and if you didn't you weren't paid. So that person could say they were unemployed if they had no work; they could say: 'There's a crisis' or something, use those words, because they resemble most other people. If it's me who says that, or Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, or I don't know who, Glauber Rocha, or Rivette, or Hitchcock, they can't say that.

SERGE LOSIQUE: Well, they say it.

Well, they're liars, or they're not honest people, or I don't know what. Something—it's not true.

JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD: *There is a filmmaker for example, they banned his films for five years . . .*<sup>9</sup>

'They?' 'They'?

JEAN ANTONIN BILLARD: *His employers, his employers.*

Well, maybe he shouldn't have made that film either. I mean, there's a relationship—it's not exactly the same relationship. I mean, people who work in an automobile factory, where they make—but someone making a film has opportunities for thinking about making the film a different way, and that's why they are marginal and different. But they have to get a kind of strength out of that, not be weaker than someone else. This is why—sometimes it's a question of your milieu, I don't know . . . [Break in tape]

*How do you see independent filmmakers compared to filmmakers who work for big companies?*

But this cinema no longer exists today. Everyone is an independent filmmaker. Steve McQueen is an independent filmmaker. He has a company, he joined up with Barbra Streisand, they called it First Artists.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *Paul Newman too.*

All of them. The little guys, everyone is independent. That said, they're dependent on Morgan,<sup>10</sup> which controls one thing or another. They obey orders. As for their independence, they have the same problems as independent countries. An independent country like Mozambique, which I'm familiar with a little, they have to sell half their electricity, three-quarters of their electricity, to South Africa, which is their worst enemy. For that reason they have a little bit to

eat. But that's not—you're independent, you're—in cinema, I think, it's less serious, because there are lots of other trades you can do, and cinema is about looking or looking at yourself. So if you remain all alone, you have only yourself to look at, and make something of it. And sometimes it won't be lost; at least it will serve for that purpose. Today, technically, moreover, making an hour of film is infinitely more possible than it was in our day. In our day it was more possible than thirty years earlier, when 16mm film didn't exist. When I began to want to make films—even after the war, ten years after the war, you didn't have the right to buy a reel of 35mm Kodak film if you weren't a professional—a member of a trade union in the film industry. If you wanted to become a member of a trade union, you had to have made a film. But to make a film, you had to—so, what do you do? At that point, you do what every people does . . .

*Doesn't the number of films produced create the same barriers?*

But when you have ten dollars, today you can make an image with ten dollars. You'll say: 'An image is not a film'; no, but you can make an image. Then perhaps, if you can save up ten dollars per year, you can maybe make a second image. It's not true, there are other similar jobs, you can look for one of them. When we wrote criticism I think our strength lay in never looking at criticism as—for us it was making cinema. In itself it was so miraculous just to be able to write—and that lasted a long time. I had to do battle with Bazin to get an article published in *Cahiers du Cinéma*. To me, Bazin was like the head of United Artists or something to a young filmmaker today. He wasn't even a friend, just someone kindly, but you had to do battle. The review I wrote of *Le Plaisir* by Max Ophüls was turned down by Bazin. You couldn't say good things about that film, it wasn't true. 'It's very bad and I don't want to publish this article'. But for me that article was my film in the form of an article. I never thought that it wasn't cinema. But what people are defending is their weakness more than anything. If it is a weakness that comes from a complete exploitation against which they have no defence, yes, you have to defend them. But three-quarters of the time—I don't think that independent filmmakers who complain about the government or how a certain person is wicked—which may be quite true, but that's not going to change. You can say that the Germans were wicked; in France, at least de Gaulle got in a rowboat and went to London; he

tried—he spoke very poor English, which must have been a problem, everything he said must have been incomprehensible. He must have spoken English the way you see people speaking French in English movies.

[Inaudible]

No, there are ways. The people who are really unemployed are critics, who are truly, well, I don't want to use overly rude words, when you see *Comment ça va* you'll hear them. But basically they're paid to do nothing.

*Filmmakers who have made 300,000-dollar films . . .*

Yes, but just the same, 300,000 dollars, go ask someone if 300,000 dollars is a sum of money or not. You'll have a hard time getting 300,000 dollars; they won't give it to you just like that, not even 10,000 dollars. Try simply asking a friend for ten dollars, they won't give it to you right away. But it's true, people want to be in film—there are two ways of making films or of making something that isn't—I think that women are much more—that's why they—I don't know, sometimes women would like to make films but they keep a critical distance in order not to be caught in a system in which they would be beaten. Because at a certain point I think a woman can figure out that you can make films for 100,000 dollars or make very expensive films, just like she can figure out that you can fry an egg well or make much more expensive dishes. This depends on your wallet and your desire to feed someone; people's desire to eat is different. But guys think they've been disgraced, but what they want is to live in the world of cinema, which is a pleasant world, rather than to make an effort, which is tiring, because they find themselves all alone. And why do they need a film? They need a film to be able to show it, but show it to whom? In what form? In order to earn them what? A little something just the same.

. . . film school . . .

SERGE LOSIQUE: *There you go! What is a real film school?*

[Inaudible]

What we've done here, I have no pretension, I believe it may be a certain part – and at the same time we can see its limitations very quickly – a certain part of a certain school. There are lots of others,

there are lots of often quite interesting things being done. I have no hard and fast rule. I think it should be closely connected to—much less to watching films like we did here and much more of a mixture of practice and screenings, but screenings where we show what we need to see for what we are in the process of shooting.

... prints ...

Oh yes. You need prints, you need the means to project them, you need an entire structure, an infrastructure, whether big or small. But it's like school, like all schools. Should there be schools? Why do children go to school? Because the government and the parents have agreed to take them off the parents' hands for eight hours a day. Because you need prints. But who is going to pay for them? And then, if say you don't have prints, you can make them; if you don't have a print you can make one. You can start from there. If the film belongs to you, you can at least project what belongs to you. At some point there will certainly be other people with the same problems, so you can ally yourself with them. If we need a school it's because we need to learn, and if we need to learn we need to know a little about what we want to learn and why.

SERGE LOSIQUE: Yes, but if you look at artistic creation in general, whether it is painting, music, etc. Or cinema say, Jean-Luc Godard didn't go to IDHEC<sup>11</sup> or a film school. So what does that prove, even if luckily...

Luckily, I was refused admission to IDHEC. For me that is still a happy moment in my life. The two happy moments in cinema that I have had are the failures I have had to this point, starting with my second film. So my very existence proves—I've always wanted to do that, I must be—it's not at all to boast because I wish there were others like me, but I must be one of the few directors who manages to live by making only failures—financial failures. Only *À bout de souffle* (*Breathless*) was a financial success. I didn't earn anything from it, but the producer did. All my other films lost money.

Pierrot le fou?

*Pierrot le fou* lost money for the French producer. The American distributor made money on it because the French producer, who was losing money, agreed—or, because he didn't live here, didn't have any way of managing the situation. At that point, he sold the film for 10,000 dollars because it was the only means presented

to him. And 10,000 dollars, after ten years at 300 dollars per screening – because the film had a degree of success on university campuses – the American distributor made money. But not the producer. Exactly like countries that produce oil and take a while to take ten, fifteen, twenty and then a hundred percent. After a while they realise that it serves no purpose because with the money they earn they buy U.S. Treasury bonds.

*If you don't make money, you won't have any money for the next film.*

Me too, I'm the living example—and on that account Rossellini helped me a lot, because he was someone who had been thrown out of cinema. And rather than feeling sorry for himself, he went to see the television networks at a time when film people scorned television. And he's very crafty, very charming, so he succeeded in getting much larger sums of money from television companies than he ever would have from film companies. Afterwards he was also thrown out of television for this reason; in this sense he was truly an extraordinary person. So then he went and asked for money from foundations, from the Vatican, the Red Cross, anywhere he could.

*Is it true you helped finance the film by Straub called The Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach?*

Oh, I don't think I helped very much, once I gave—I bumped into Danièle Huillet in Paris, she had no money and I had two thousand francs on me. I gave her two thousand francs, which is not much.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, a film I'm happy to have helped, especially the contract, because—it was the film by Joris Ivens and Marceline Loridan on China.<sup>13</sup> At a certain point I helped them find ten million francs, which, I don't know, is around 25,000 dollars,<sup>14</sup> and the contract—all we did was draw up a contract that said that we were lending 25,000 dollars for a film on the Chinese cultural revolution and popular revolution – I don't know what it was called – and that the money would be returned to us when this revolution was not only complete but successful. [Laughter]

SERGE LOSIQUE: *But how do you explain the commercial failure of your films, and yet you're the filmmaker about whom the most books and articles have been written, even more, say, than André Malraux? How do you explain that?*

Well, it's true, it's a bit of a mystery. All that is my capital, which is made up of other things and which is exaggerated because I'm too small to contain it all myself. At times it makes me crazy, nasty or unpleasant, or simply a little stupid, simply because one is only 1.8 metres high and thirty or forty centimetres deep, with ideas that can go as far as twenty or thirty metres, and you can't contain the whole world, even in your imagination. I would like it better if other people—that's why I prefer to talk to people who are always at the extremes, for example in the cinema, people who have had very little success and lots of problems, or others who haven't had a lot. Someone like Marilyn Monroe was very marginal, to such an extent, in the place she was, that she was extremely marginal and perhaps much more unhappy than a simple Mozambican with little to eat.

It's true, my very existence proves – this is Rossellini's influence – to look elsewhere and not to be afraid sometimes to make films for very few people. I'm always happy to—I don't like being in a packed bus, for example, or a plane full of people, or in a room where a dozen people are squeezed in. If I were in prison, I would prefer being with no more than one other person, even if it were a tiny little cell. In the hospital, I didn't like—a hospital is different, sometimes I preferred rooms with one or two people, to be almost alone but for there to be someone else in the same situation. Three-quarters of people in the hospital preferred being around a lot of other people. That, I think, is a class difference, because poorer people, or people below a certain level, preferred to be in large wards, even if the conditions weren't good, simply because they had a neighbour who couldn't stand being alone. Whereas in my case, given that I was already sick, and for me the sickness and me already made one, if there had been too many people it wouldn't have worked. But in a cinema—I find we're beginning to have too many people here now, for example. [Laughter] I liked it better when there were five or six; at least I wanted to ask them: 'But by what incredible chance are you here? What are you doing?' There are twelve<sup>15</sup>—how on earth can I talk to twelve people? Only dictators can do that.

*We could have made a hospital room . . .*

Yes,

SERGE LOSIQUE: *All right, thank you very much, and come back in force for the final sessions, I mean the first final session because what we're doing now is just an introduction to cinema. We're just getting started, because no matter what he says he likes it here in Montreal. So thank you Jean-Luc and bon voyage.*

So the next time is the first?

SERGE LOSIQUE: *I said that earlier.*

Ah, all right.

SERGE LOSIQUE: *Yes, the 1st of December, we'll be here waiting for you. And I hope the journalists will take note of that.*

Saturday 21 October 1978

#### Notes

1. As Godard remarks, excerpts from this film were scheduled but not shown because the class was running late.
2. After much searching, the present translator has concluded that this much-quoted 'Jorge Luis Borges epigraph' to *Les Carabiniers* is apocryphal, a conclusion Suzanne Liandrat-Guigues and Jean-Louis Leutrat also reach. Edgardo Cozarinsky, normally very thorough in tracking down references to Borges in cinema, contents himself with the remark that the quotation has 'a conversational tone which suggests the source [is] an interview'. The epigraph, mistranslated by Tom Milne, reads as follows: 'Plus cela va, plus je vais vers la simplicité. J'utilise les métaphores les plus usées. Au fond, c'est cela qui est éternel: les étoiles ressemblent à des yeux, par exemple, ou la mort est comme le sommeil. (Borges)'. (Translated perfunctorily in the English subtitles of the current DVD version as: 'More and more I strive for simplicity. I use worn-out metaphors. It's what's basically eternal. For example, stars resemble eyes or death is like sleep.') Borges did, however, write something similar which surely would have pleased Godard, in a volume quoted in *Alphaville*: 'Quevedo never believed that; for him, language was, essentially, a logical instrument. The commonplaces or iterations of poetry – water compared to crystal, hands compared to snow, eyes that shine like stars, and stars that gaze down like eyes – annoyed him because they were facile, but much more because they were false. When he criticized

them, he forgot that the metaphor is the momentary contact of two images, not the methodical likening of two things'. See Jorge Luis Borges, *Other Inquisitions 1937–1952*, trans. Ruth L.C. Simms (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964 [1952]); Edgardo Cozarinsky, *Borges in/and/on Film*, trans. Gloria Waldman and Ronald Christ (New York: Lumen, 1988 [1980]), 88; Jean-Luc Godard, *Godard on Godard*, trans. Tom Milne (London: Secker and Warburg, 1972), 280; and Suzanne Liandrat-Guigues and Jean-Louis Leutrat, *Godard simple comme bonjour* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004), 61.

3. Spoken in English.
4. Three times in the scene in the porno shop a customer slaps the two 'Viet Cong' (young white men with 'bloodied' faces): each time the person slapping them is silent and they reply in turn 'Peace in Vietnam'; 'Long live Mao'; and 'Victory to the NLF' (National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam, or Viet Cong).
5. A slight misquotation of the original. Godard says: 'toute l'eau de la mer ne pourrait pas effacer une tâche de sang intellectuelle' whereas Lautréamont wrote: 'toute l'eau de la mer ne suffirait pas à laver une tâche de sang intellectuelle'. See Lautréamont and Germain Nouveau, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), 270. The published English translation is deficient; the translation provided here is the translator's own rendering of the correct French quotation. See Lautréamont, *Maldoror and Poems*, trans. Paul Knight (London: Penguin, 1988), 267.
6. The standard account of this anecdote is that Freud said these words to Jung as the two travelled to the United States in 1909 and not, as Godard suggests, when Freud left Austria for England – not Germany for the United States – after it was annexed by Germany in 1938.
7. Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité, a branch of the national police force associated mostly with riot control.
8. Bob Thomas, *King Cohn: The Life and Times of Harry Cohn* (New York: Putnam, 1967).
9. The questioner is most likely referring to Gilles Groulx, a central and relatively prolific figure in *cinéma direct* documentary filmmaking and 'new wave' fiction filmmaking in Quebec in the 1960s (his 1964 fiction film *Le Chat dans le sac* is one of the few Quebec films

Godard professed familiarity with while in Montreal, and Godard is recorded on videotape chatting with him after a screening during Godard's March 1977 visit to the city). Groulx's 1971 agit-prop feature film *24 heures ou plus . . .*, made for the National Film Board of Canada, was withheld for six years. Apart from a short documentary in 1973, after *24 heures* and before his death in 1994, Groulx was able to make only *Primera pregunta sobre la felicidad/Première question sur le bonheur*, a feature documentary co-produced by the National Film Board and Mexico in 1978, and a privately-financed feature fiction film, *Au Pays de Zom*, in 1983.

10. Godard is presumably referring to the commercial bank J.P. Morgan.

11. The Institut des Hautes Études Cinématographiques, France's state-run film school, now called La Fémis or the École Nationale Supérieure des Métiers de l'Image et du Son.

12. The equivalent of about \$400. Perhaps Godard meant \$2,000, not 2,000 francs. Jean-Marie Straub, discussing his problems raising money for the film, describes Godard's assistance differently. He called Godard and asked for help. Godard replied that he had 'one million old francs' at his disposal, or about \$2,000 (8,000 DM), which was used to buy raw film stock. See 'Andi Engel talks to Jean-Marie Straub, and Danièle Huillet is there too', *Enthusiasm* 1 (December 1975): 8.

13. *How Yukong Moved the Mountains*.

14. Godard is thinking here in old francs, in use prior to the 1960 conversion to new francs at a rate of 100:1 old to new. Ten million old francs, or 100,000 new francs, would have been closer to \$20,000 than to \$25,000.

15. A better estimate would be about twenty or thirty people at this final session. There were never only five or six people as Godard suggests. Generally there were between fifteen and thirty people at each session, with more on Saturdays than on Fridays.

# **Studies in Motion Pictures and Television**

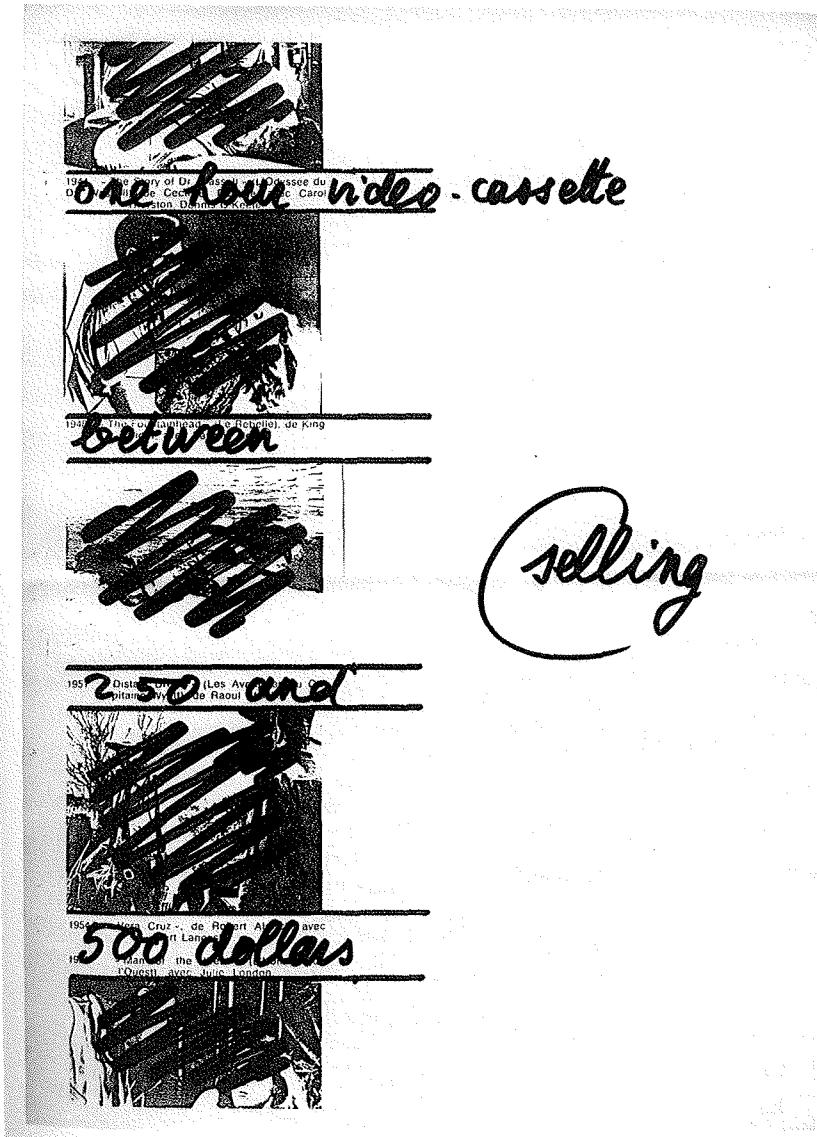
An undated (c. 1974–76) twenty-page visual prospectus in Jean-Luc Godard's hand for an educational series of video cassettes on the history of cinema and television.

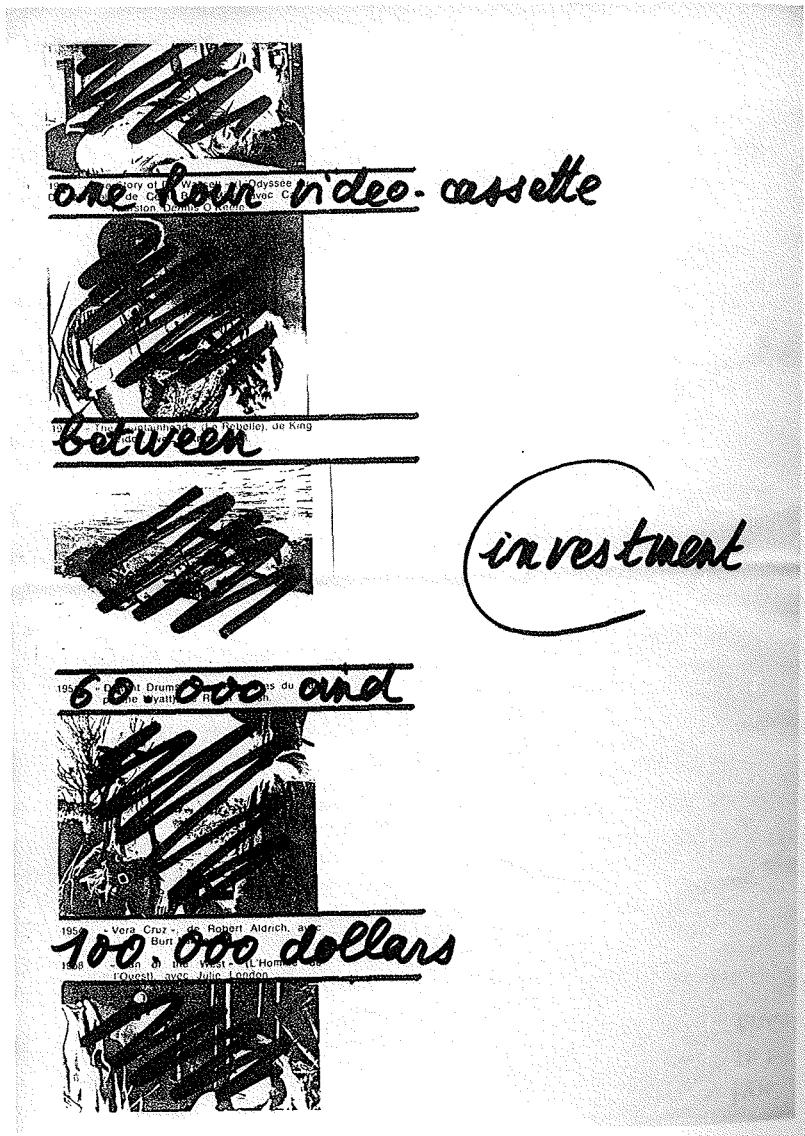
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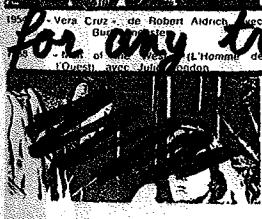


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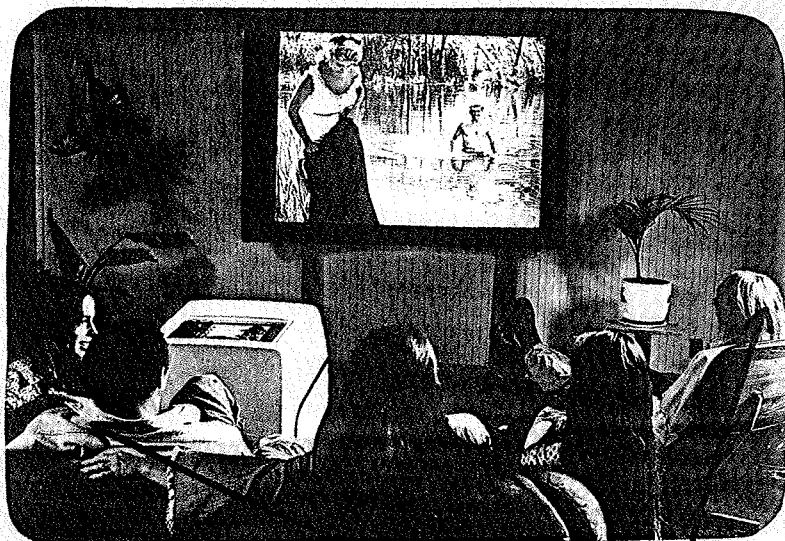
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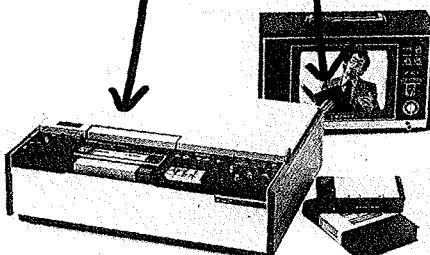
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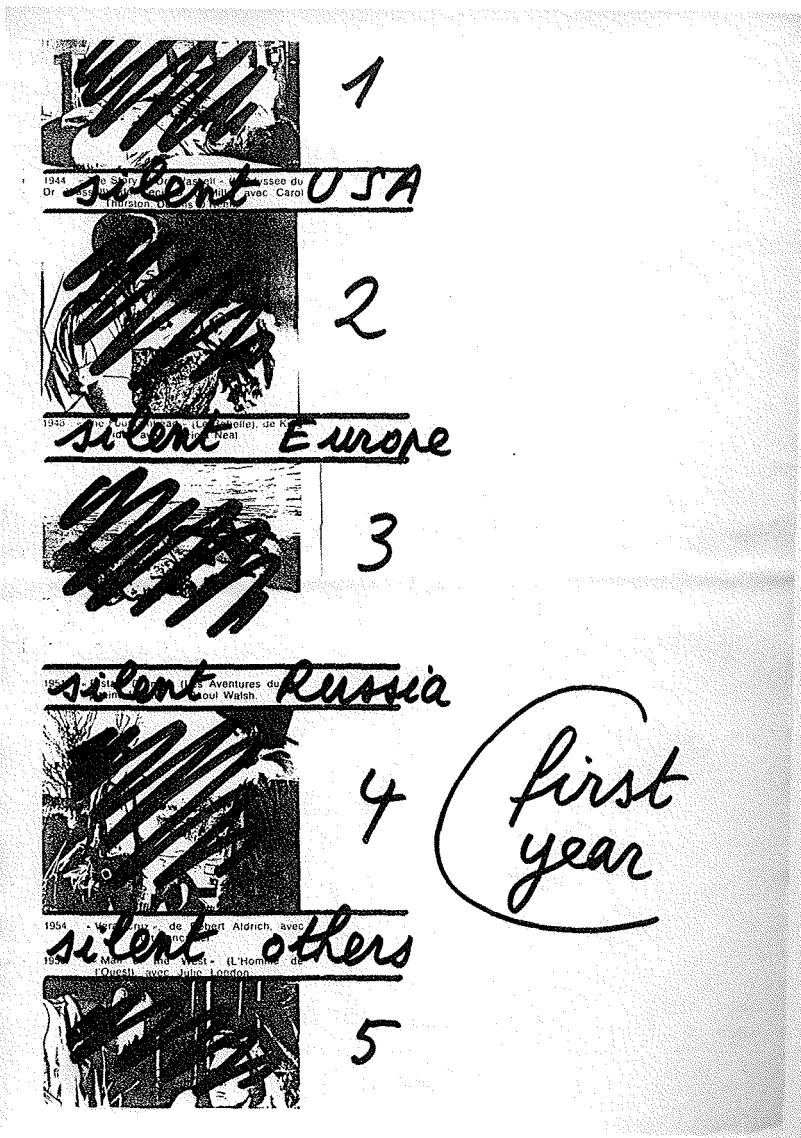
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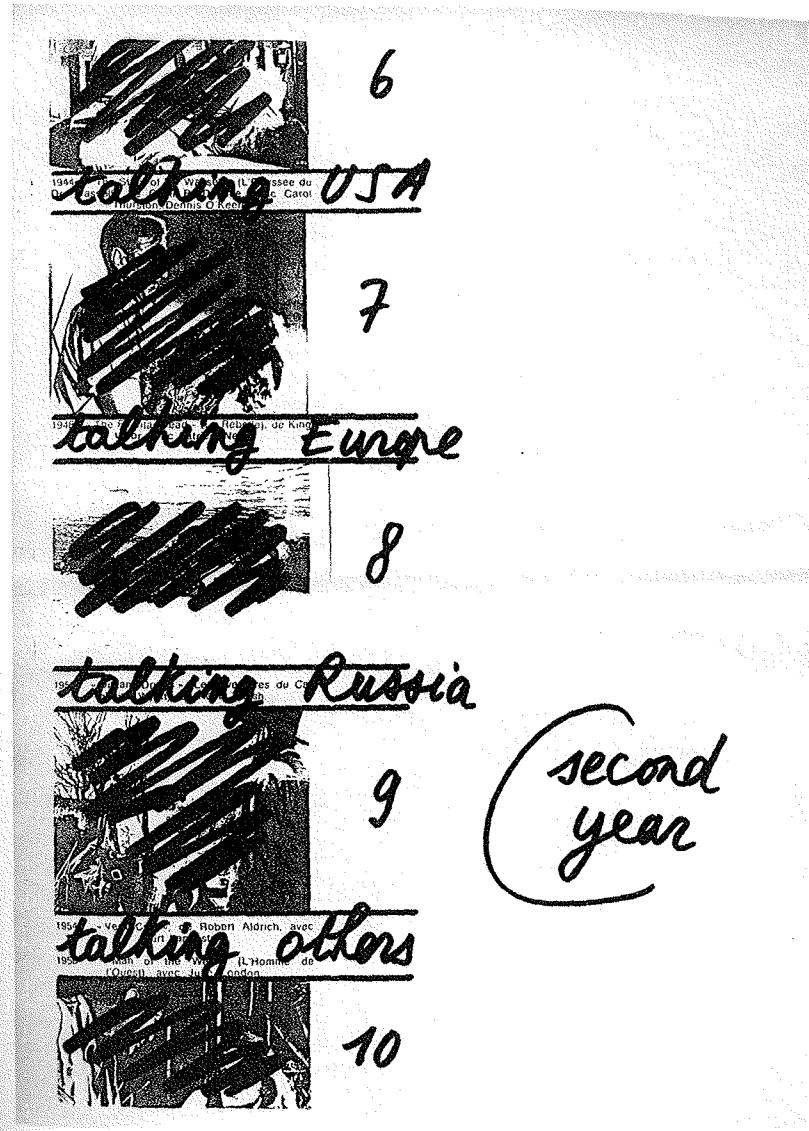


*Studies in art,  
economics, techniques, people*



Dans l'industrie de la production de films et de la vente de films, il existe de nombreux domaines d'étude et de recherche. Ces domaines sont étroitement liés entre eux et contribuent à l'ensemble de l'activité. Les domaines d'étude sont les suivants : l'art, l'économie, les techniques et les personnes.

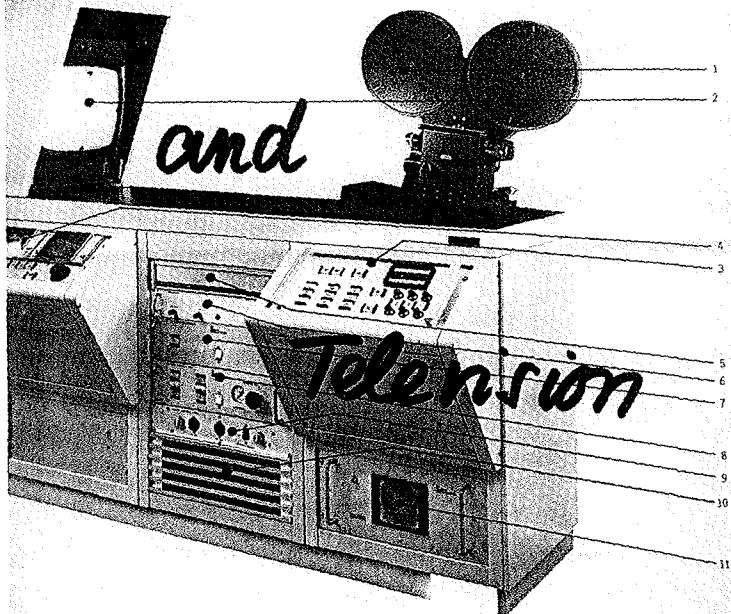
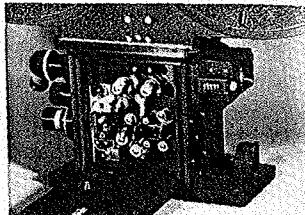




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*movies*



*practice and theory*

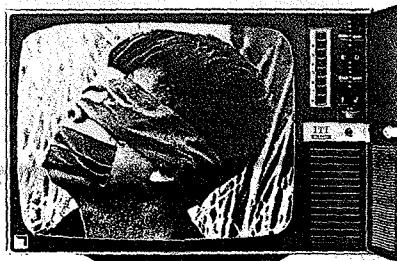
The power supply panel includes a 10 ampere operating fuse and a 10 ampere circuit breaker. The power input is 115 volt AC.  
10. The entire cabinet is cooled by air drawn through filters by three fans.  
11. The camera drive inverter supplies 500 watts of synchronous AC power to the camera.

*Studies in Television*

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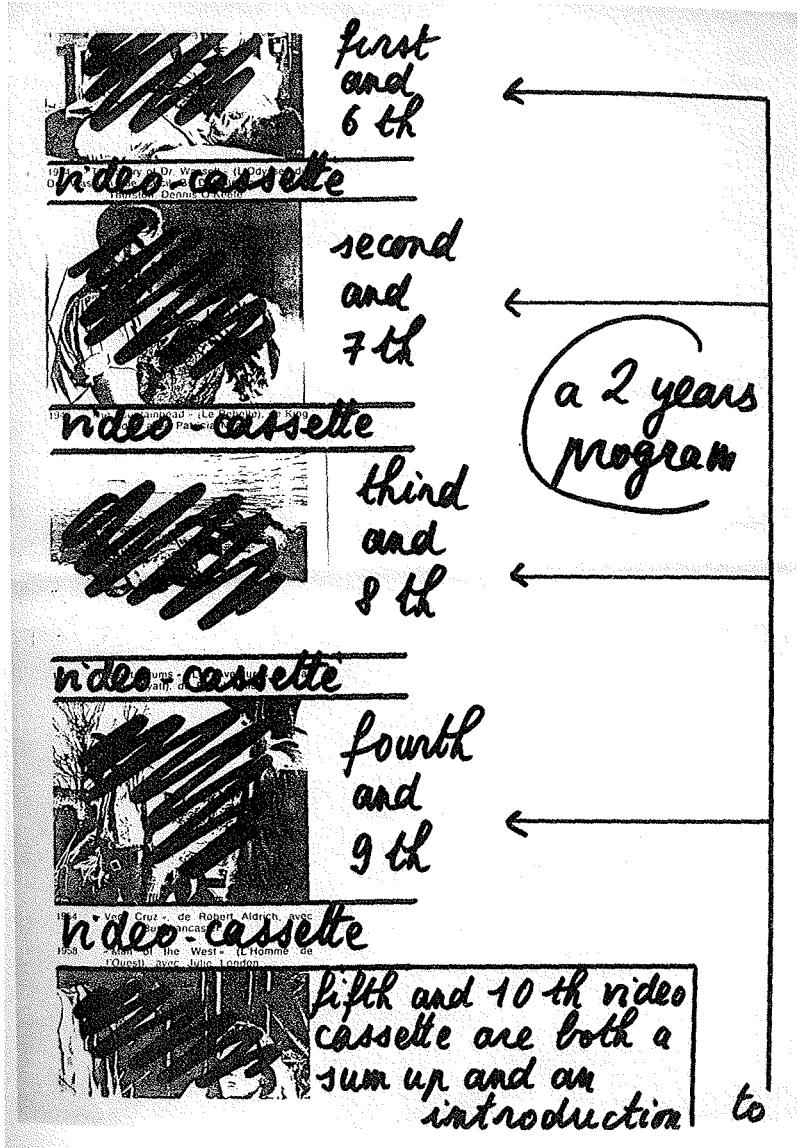
entrer dans la nouvelle génération des téléviseurs couleur. Son châssis modulaire "Sous le soleil" comporte 13 modules, facilite la maintenance et accorde à toutes les parties électroniques.

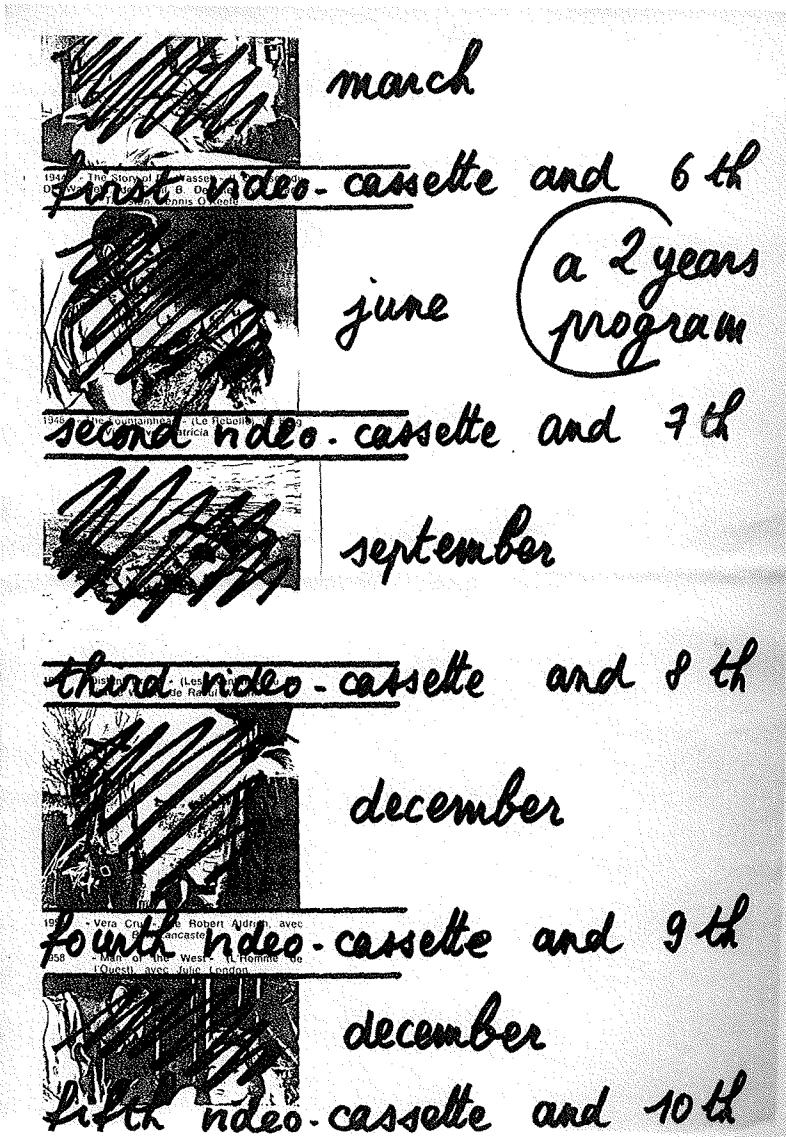
Le TOP-COLOR 51 est doté d'un écran à face plate et d'un boîtier en plastique. Il est simple et le plus sophistiqué. Le TOP-COLOR 51 possède une porte fermant à clé sur toutes les commandes de l'appareil. Le TOP-COLOR 51 ITT Océanic ne pèse que 22 kg. C'est un poids plume de la télévision couleur. Il est également doté d'un système de sécurité - une clé - lorsqu'il est débranché : le nouveau présentoir en bois. Où qu'il soit rangé dans une fenêtre ou un placard, ce présentoir solide, dissimulé dans sa coquille, le protège de l'œil et le capte d'antenne.



ITT Océanic  
fait progresser  
le son  
et l'image









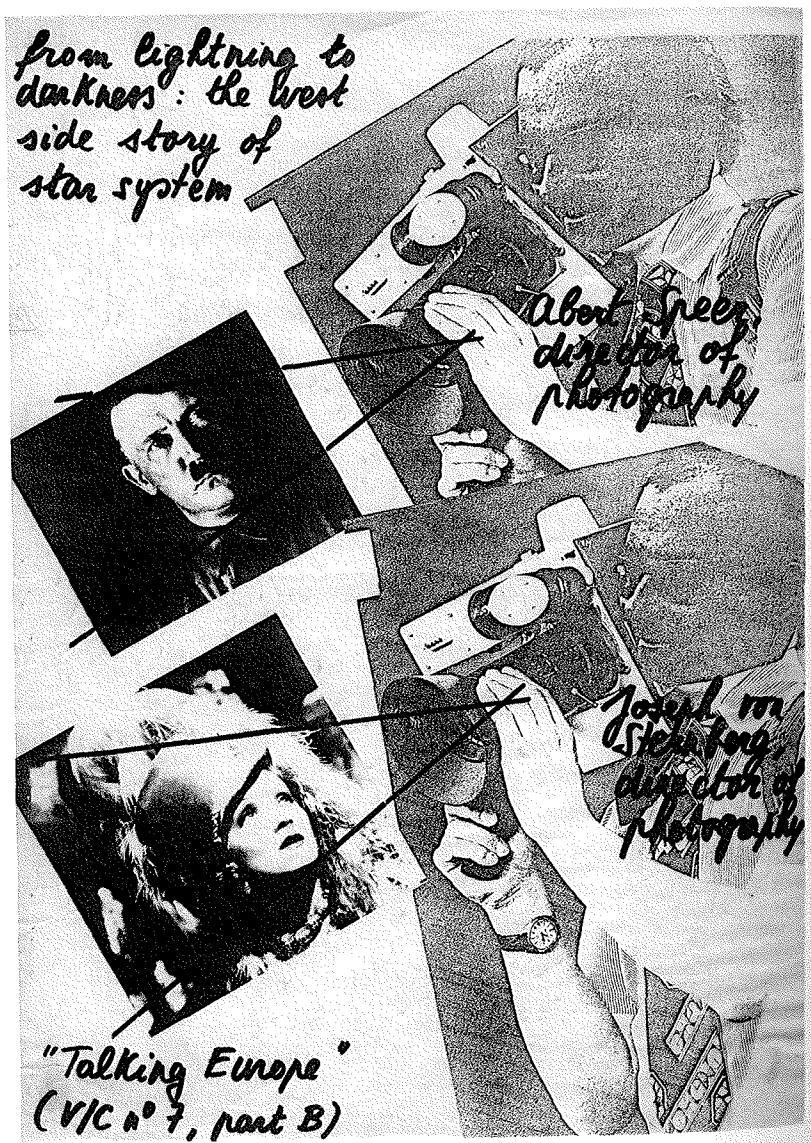




*looking (in search mode) for editing,  
Griffith discovers*

*the close-up*

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My time spent in the company of Jean-Luc Godard and his thoughts has been the privilege and adventure of a lifetime. Transcribing, translating and publishing these talks at the same age as Jean-Luc Godard when he gave them, and undertaking the work in a manner I flatter myself in believing to be true to the ideals he espouses around craftsmanship, creative independence and some of the larger questions posed by our lives, gave special meaning to my labours. Convinced of the universality of the author's message beneath the particularity and singularity of his experience, I hope and trust that the reader will be touched by and feel a part of the book in a similar way.

T.B.  
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In 1978, Jean-Luc Godard improvised a series of talks for a projected video history of cinema. These talks, published in French in 1980 and long out of print, have never before been translated into English. For this volume, the faulty and incomplete French edition has been entirely revised and corrected, working from the sole videotapes of the talks.

Godard screened for his audience his own famous films of the 1960s – watching them himself for the first time since their production – alongside single reels of some of the films which most influenced his work (by Eisenstein, Rossellini, the American directors of the 1950s and many others). Working at the dawn of the video age, a technology essential to his completion of the project many years later, as the visual essay *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, Godard projected pieces of 35mm film in an auditorium to approximate the historical montage he was groping towards. He then held forth, in an experience he describes as a form of ‘public self-psychoanalysis’, on his personal and professional relationships (with François Truffaut, Anna Karina, Raoul Coutard), working methods, aesthetic preferences, political beliefs and, on the cusp of 50, his philosophy of life.

The result is the most extensive and revealing account ever of his work and critical opinions. Never has Godard been as loquacious, lucid and disarmingly frank as he is here. This volume is certain to become one of the great classics of film literature, by perhaps the wittiest and most idiosyncratic genius the cinema has known.

When it was invented cinema fostered, or impressed, a different way of seeing called editing, which is to put something in relation to someone in a different way than novels or paintings. This is why it was successful, enormously successful, because it opened people’s eyes in a certain way. With painting there was a single relationship to the painting, with literature there was a single relationship to the novel, but when people saw a film there was something that was at least double – and when someone watched it became triple. There was something different which in its technical form gradually came to be called editing, meaning there was a connection. It was something that filmed not things, but the connection between things.

Jean-Luc Godard

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