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| **Godard, Jean-Luc (1930-)** |
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| One of the most important filmmakers in the latter half of the 20th century, Jean-Luc Godard’s reputation remains enduringly linked with the French *nouvelle vague* movement of the late 1950s and early 1960s, but his protean work in film and video has spanned more than six decades, from his first articles as a critic in 1950 to the planned release of *Adieu au langage* (*Good Bye to Language*) in 2015, and in the process he has repeatedly revolutionised conceptions of both his own work and of the aesthetic potential of the cinema as a whole. |
| One of the most important filmmakers in the latter half of the 20th century, Jean-Luc Godard’s reputation remains enduringly linked with the French *nouvelle vague* movement of the late 1950s and early 1960s, but his protean work in film and video has spanned more than six decades, from his first articles as a critic in 1950 to the planned release of *Adieu au langage* (*Good Bye to Language*) in 2015, and in the process he has repeatedly revolutionised conceptions of both his own work and of the aesthetic potential of the cinema as a whole.  File: Breathless.jpg  Figure 1.  Source: <https://bpicture.files.wordpress.com/2010/12/breathless.jpg?w=645>  Renowned for its on location settings, its improvisational shooting method, the performances of its two young leads (Jean-Paul Belmondo and Jean Seberg), and the introduction of the ‘jump cut’, Godard’s feature debut *À bout de souffle* (*Breathless*, 1960) was one of the landmarks of the *nouvelle vague*, and its wide-ranging formal inventiveness retains a freshness today. In some ways, however, the film represents a mid-point in Godard’s early career, sandwiched between a decade of short films and critical writing (above all for the journal *Cahiers du cinéma*, edited by André Bazin), and a nine-year period in which the prolific filmmaker released 15 features, a number of which notably featured his then wife, Anna Karina, in key roles.  File: VivreSaVie.jpg  Figure 2.  Source: <http://66.media.tumblr.com/c310ac6909abb0b0874b4249d51f2f36/tumblr\_  o1xyih6Y6n1qmemvwo1\_1280.jpg>  Enormously influential at the time, Godard’s work in the 1960s still constitutes a major pole of attraction for cinephiles and those interested more broadly in artistic modernism alike, and the impact of his films on world cinema has frequently been compared to that of Picasso in the visual arts or Mallarmée in poetry. Addressing the profound political and social transformations of France during this era, certain of his early films – such as *Vivre sa vie* (1962), *Le Mépris* (*Contempt*, 1963) and *Alphaville* (1964) – gained both critical and popular success. Others, however, were subject to marginalisation: his second feature film, *Le Petit Soldat* (1960), was banned for three years by the De Gaulle administration for its references to the war in Algeria, while *Les Carabiniers* (1963) gained a notoriously meagre box office return upon its initial French release, and drew such ire from reviewers that Godard felt compelled to issue a four-page riposte on the pages of *Cahiers du cinéma* (Godard, 1963).  If 1965’s *Pierrot le fou* marked a high-point in Godard’s preeminence within French cinema, it was also a moment of personal crisis for the filmmaker, reflected in a sentiment of formal impasse: a text accompanying the release of the film (Godard, 1965) plaintively asserted that ‘the only great problem in the cinema seems to me to be [...] where and why to begin a shot, and where and why to end it?’ Attempts to answer this question have consumed much of Godard’s subsequent career, and would initially lead him to make films in a more markedly essayistic, fragmentary vein, such as *Made in USA* (1966) and *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d’elle* (*Two or Three Things I Know About Her*, 1966).  [CLIP HISTOIRE(S) 4B]  The creative restlessness of this period was also marked by a deepening political radicalisation, which, in successive films, led to Godard presaging the rise of Maoist-inflected *gauchisme* in post-1968 France with *La Chinoise* (1967), before announcing the ‘end of cinema’ with *Week-End* (1967), a vitriolic laceration of middle-class French life which was also renowned for a 300-metre, 10-minute long tracking shot along a congested highway. From this point, Godard embarked on a feverish bout of militant filmmaking in collaboration with the young activist Jean-Pierre Gorin. Adopting the moniker of the ‘Groupe Dziga Vertov’, the duo’s work in this period culminated in the 1972 feature *Tout va bien*, which has since become a totemic example of Marxist-oriented cinema – although, after suffering a motorcycle accident in June 1971, Godard’s involvement in the film was limited.  File: ToutVaBien.jpg  Figure 3.  Source: <http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-O5VkFGnnaXo/UqB-KMGR55I/AAAAAAAAMk0/  ma74\_TNwRF4/s1600/godard%252Btoutvabien.jpg>  The mid- to late-1970s saw Godard move away from Paris (first to Grenoble, then to the Swiss village of Rolle) and dedicate himself to video-based experimental work, focussing on the politics of domestic family life and offering a critical interrogation of earlier models of radical cinema. This shift was to a large degree provoked by his encounter with Anne-Marie Mièville, who has since co-signed a number of Godard’s works and been integral to his output as whole. While this is the most critically neglected phase of Godard’s filmmaking career, notable works in this period include *Ici et ailleurs* (*Here and Elsewhere*, 1975) *Numéro deux* (1975), and two series of programmes made for television: *Six fois deux: sur et sous la télévision* (1976) and *France/tour/détour/deux enfants* (1978).  In 1979, the director made a high-profile return to commercial filmmaking with *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* (*Slow Motion*). This film initiated a series of works made in the 1980s, including *Passion* (1982) and *Je vous salue, Marie* (*Hail Mary*, 1985), which marked a thematic turn in Godard’s œuvre in a number of ways: the urban milieux of his earlier work tended to give way to more rural or natural settings, and a preoccupation with contemporary social and political subject matter ceded in favour of enigmatic ruminations on spirituality, art and European history.  Between 1989 and 1998, Godard’s activity was largely centred on what undeniably constitutes his magnum opus: the 4½-hour, eight-part video series *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, which fuses a wealth of found material – films, paintings, textual citations, musical pieces – into a multilayered, frenetically-edited audiovisual essay. As Michael Witt (2004) notes, however, this work can perhaps best be seen in conjunction with an array of satellite films, essays, lectures, photo-montages and even media interviews as a vast ‘multimedia art installation’, which can trace its origins as far back as 1969, and which has progressively elaborated and re-worked a central hypothesis concerning the history of the cinema.  In this hypothesis, more clearly enunciated in interviews with Godard than in the work itself, the cinema ‘died’ at Auschwitz – not, as the Adornoan thesis would have it, because of its inability to represent the death camps, but because it failed in its ‘historical mission’ to prevent the Holocaust by providing a warning of the impending cataclysm, or, at the very least, by showing the reality of the camps. Didi-Hubermann (2008) has convincingly argued, however that for Godard ‘showing’ Auschwitz requires more than mere filmed footage of the camps, but necessitates the intervention of a filmmaker to create acts of historical montage.  [CLIP HISTOIRE(S) 1A]  Indeed, the theory and practice of montage has been of central importance to Godard’s work since the 1970s. Paradoxically, he maintains, following Malraux (1939), that montage is essential to the cinema’s specificity as an art form, while at the same time insisting that it is a goal that has never truly been attained – even by such pioneers as Griffith, Gance and Eisenstein. In this light, *Histoire(s) du cinéma* can be seen both as a history of the absence of montage in the cinema, and as an attempt to retroactively rectify this absence through an innovatively polyphonic approach to the editing of film images.  The pessimism of Godard’s central historical thesis nonetheless leads him to a gloomy outlook towards the present state of globalised culture, dominated, in his eyes, by the homogeneous imagery of television, and this despair only seems to have been further accentuated in Godard’s work after the completion of *Histoire(s)* in 1998. Alongside the feature films *Éloge de l’amour* (*In Praise of Love*, 2001), *Notre musique* (2004) and *Film socialisme* (2010), the most recent period of Godard’s œuvre has been marked by a number of striking short films and, perhaps most notably, by the controversial exhibition in the Centre Pompidou, *Voyage(s) en utopie* (2006).  File: FilmSocialisme.jpg  Figure 4.  Source: <http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-YGSboMRgNEU/TzbAqqiz9UI/AAAAAAAAIug/JrS3FgXE0jE/  s1600/Godard+Llama+petrol++Balzac+Film+Socialisme.jpg>  While audiences for Godard’s work may have declined since the 1960s, the filmmaker retains a high degree of visibility in the mass media, and his loyal following among critics and academics has produced a wealth of scholarship on his work which, among a plethora of monographs, essays and journal articles, includes no less than three biographies. List of Works *À bout de souffle* (*Breathless*, France, 1960).  *Le Petit Soldat* (France, 1960).  *Vivre sa vie* (France, 1962).  ‘Feu sur Les Carabiniers’, *Cahiers du cinéma* 146: 1-4. (1963)  *Les Carabiniers* (France, 1963).  *Le Mépris* (*Contempt*, France, 1963).  *Alphaville* (France, 1964).  *Pierrot le fou* (France, 1965).  ‘Pierrot mon ami’, *Cahiers du cinéma* 171: 16-18. (1965)  *Made in USA* (France, 1966).  *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d’elle* (*Two or Three Things I Know About Her*, France, 1966).  *La Chinoise* (France, 1967).  *Weekend* (France, 1967).  *Tout va bien* (France, 1972).  *Ici et ailleurs* (*Here and Elsewhere*, 1975).  *Numéro deux* (France, 1975).  *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* (*Slow Motion*, France/Switzerland, 1979).  *Passion* (France/Switzerland, 1982).  *Je vous salue, Marie* (*Hail Mary*, France/Switzerland, 1985).  *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (France/Switzerland, 1989-1998).  *Éloge de l’amour* (*In Praise of Love*, France/Switzerland, 2001).  *Notre musique* (France/Switzerland, 2004).  *Film socialisme* (France/Switzerland, 2010). |
| Further reading:  (Didi-Hubermann)  (MacCabe)  (Malraux)  (Milne)  (Morgan)  (Morrey)  (Witt, Jean-Luc Godard: Cinema Historian)  (Witt, Shapeshifter: Godard as Multimedia Installation Artist) |