



Le Vent d'est

Directors: Jean-Luc Godard, Jean-Pierre Gorin
Production Companies: Anouchka Films, Polifilm, CCC Filmkunst
Producers: Gianni Barcelloni, Ettore Rosbach
Screenplay: Jean-Luc Godard, Daniel Cohn-Bendit
Director of Photography: Mario Vulpiani
Editors: Jean-Luc Godard, Jean-Pierre Gorin
Sound: Antonio Ventura, Carlo Diotalleri
Cast:
Gian Maria Volonté (*soldier*)
Anne Wiazemsky (*whore*)
Glauber Rocha
Jean-Luc Godard
Götz George (*functionary*)
Christian Tullio, Marco Ferreri (*women in red*)
Rick Boyd (*Indian*)
France-Italy-West Germany 1969
100 mins
Digital

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Le Vent d'est

The cinema cannot show the truth, or reveal it, because the truth is not out there in the real world, waiting to be photographed. What the cinema can do is produce meanings, and meanings can only be plotted, not in relation to some abstract yardstick or criterion of truth, but in relation to other meanings. This is why Godard's objective of producing a counter-cinema is the right objective. But he is mistaken if he thinks that such a counter-cinema can have an absolute existence. It can only exist in relation to the rest of the cinema. Its function is to struggle against the fantasies, ideologies and aesthetic devices of one cinema with its own antagonistic fantasies, ideologies and aesthetic devices. In some respects this may bring it closer-or seem to bring it closer to the cinema it opposes than *Vent d'est* would suggest. *Vent d'est* is a pioneering film, an avant-garde film, an extremely important film. It is the starting-point for work on a revolutionary cinema. But it is not that revolutionary cinema itself.

Peter Wollen, extract from 'Godard and Counter Cinema: *Vent d'est*', *Afterimage* 4 (Autumn 1972)

A contemporary review

Shots of a prone, silent couple, of a cavalryman taking up a perfunctory guard duty, and of actors making up, are matched with a pointed and overlapping narration (in French and American) that initiates a critique of political cinema. In turn Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov and Third World cinema are re-evaluated. For the remainder of its first third, the film presents a fragmentary Marxist Western through a series of interpretative and titled sequences: a troupe of stock Western characters – the cavalryman, a girl in a shift (a prostitute?), an Indian agent, a fine lady, an Indian captive – act out skeletal Western scenes, rife with latent imperialism.

The second third of the film, approximately, is devoted to self-criticism and enquiry. The critique of political cinema is extended to Godard's own work, to *cinéma-vérité*, to the American Underground film, to socialist realism, and to Hollywood. Bourgeois realism and Third World cinema are unequivocally rejected. Glauber Rocha appears symbolically at the crossroads, his outstretched arms pointing one way to the cinema of aesthetic adventure, the other to that of the Third World. Cinema, in the person of a pregnant woman, hesitates then takes the first road. A 'Hollywood Star' is introduced and invites the audience to join him on the screen, attempting to persuade them of the reality of his bucolic dream world. Similar, cameo attacks on bourgeois values, on Titoist revisionism and on anarchism follow before we rejoin the Western. The Indians, it appears, have only played dead. They now rise up and eliminate their oppressors.

The 1968 Events were clearly crucial in forcing Godard to redefine his past career and present aims in terms of what cinema might contribute to the cause of proletarian revolution. Perhaps the most pertinent distinction to emerge from his films since *Weekend* is between the making of films about politics, the making of political films, and the making of films politically. His three most recent films to be seen in this country (*British Sounds*, *Pravda*, and now *Vent d'est*) would seem especially to make sense in terms of his continuing attempt

Laura Mulvey: Thinking through Film

The Bad Sister

Wed 26 Nov 21:00

Disgraced Monuments + discussion with Laura Mulvey + 23rd August 2008

Tue 27 Nov 18:10

Antonio das Mortes

O Dragão da Maldade contra o Santo Guerreiro

Sat 29 Nov 15:10

Big Screen Classics: Laura Mulvey Selects

Imitation of Life

Mon 1 Dec 20:30; Sat 13 Dec 15:00;

Tue 30 Dec 20:40

People on Sunday Menschen am Sonntag

Tue 2 Dec 20:50; Sun 21 Dec 12:20

Morocco

Wed 3 Dec 18:10 (+ intro by Laura Mulvey);

Fri 12 Dec 20:30

Notorious

Thu 4 Dec 14:30; Thu 18 Dec 20:45;

Sat 27 Dec 12:20

The Arbor

Fri 5 Dec 20:45; Sun 21 Dec 18:20

Man With a Movie Camera

Chelovek s kino-apparatom + (nostalgia)

Sat 6 Dec 15:30; Mon 15 Dec 20:45

Lives of Performers

Sun 7 Dec 18:30; Fri 19 Dec 18:20

Golden Eighties

Mon 8 Dec 20:50; Wed 17 Dec 18:20 (+ intro by

Laura Mulvey)

Daughters of the Dust

Tue 9 Dec 20:45; Sat 20 Dec 14:30

What Scoundrels Men Are!

Gli uomini, che mascaloni!

Wed 10 Dec 18:20 (+ intro by Laura Mulvey);

Tue 23 Dec 20:30

Under the Skin of the City Zir-e Pust-e Shahr

Wed 10 Dec 20:30 (+ intro by Laura Mulvey);

Tue 23 Dec 18:15

Xala

Thu 11 Dec 18:15; Sat 27 Dec 11:45

Through the Olive Trees Zir-e darakhtan-e zeyton

Sun 14 Dec 12:30; Mon 22 Dec 18:15

It

Tue 16 Dec 21:00; Sun 28 Dec 12:10

Pierrot le fou

Thu 18 Dec 20:50; Mon 29 Dec 18:00

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to effect a proper (i.e., Marxist-Leninist) relation between cinema and politics at the level of sound and image.

Both *British Sounds* and *Pravda* eschew all narrative and character elements for the form of the essay or tract, combining militant propagandist sounds with essentially documentary footage; *Vent d'est*, in its residual Western plot, returns to the desultory narrative and representative historical characters of *Weekend* and *Le Gai savoir*. In *British Sounds*, images and sounds are treated as complementary, in *Pravda*, there is a purposeful opposition between revolutionary sounds and imperialist images – the beginnings of a dialectical procedure which is nourished in *Vent d'est*, where the new revolutionary sounds of May 1968 interact with images of the old order, the stock characters and tableaux of the Western.

Vent d'est transforms the relation between sound and image from a presentational device to an analytic tool. Specifically, it analyses and thereby aims to subvert 'the bourgeois concept of representation', the illusionist conventions at the heart of the Western and of realism. To quote only two examples: the assault of the cavalryman on the girl, and the stock scene of a cavalry attack.

In the first, the appearance of synthetic blood has a distancing effect, and the violent gestures of taking the girl by the throat and then of locking her head from behind are defused through sparse dialogue and studied repetition. In the second, a single cavalryman spurs his horse back and forth along a small creek, harmlessly performing routine sabre cuts at scurrying Third World Indians, the camera abruptly paces the screen, horizontally, then vertically, anaesthetising the normal emotional turbulence of such a scene by its visual formality. Both scenes are stripped to their dramatic conventions, exposing their spurious and fictional violence. The audience is disabused and shown how visual images are brought to peddle repression and emotional release.

Vent d'est is conceived in the logic that to undermine a dominant rhetorical form is to undermine the ideology of the ruling class implicit in it. The scene depicting Glauber Rocha would suggest that in Godard's view, this is sufficient for the making of political film. Cinema takes the road of aesthetic adventure, not the path the Third World has taken towards a materialist cinema, concerned with practical issues of production and distribution. But the issue is posed too simply. Marxist-Leninism, and Dziga Vertov would suggest that for film to be revolutionary, it must express its position within the class struggle. It must reveal, that is to say, its own genesis and nature as a product rather than a privileged work of art. Godard shows us 'how things are real', but does he yet show us enough of 'How things really are'? Are the two roads incompatible? Must not revolutionary film both attack bourgeois aesthetics and ideology and express its relation to economics and social practice?

Pete Brooker, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, January 1972