RESEARCH IN THE FORM OF A SPECTACLE:
GODARD AND THE CINEMATIC ESSAY

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This dissertation is a study of the aesthetic, political, and ethical dimensions of the essay form as it passes into cinema – particularly the modern cinema in the aftermath of the Second World War – from literary and philosophic sources. Taking Jean-Luc Godard as my main case, but encompassing other important figures as well (including Agnès Varda, Chris Marker, and Guy Debord), I show how the cinematic essay is uniquely equipped to conduct an open-ended investigation into the powers and limits of film and other audio-visual manners of expression. I provide an analysis of the cinematic essay that illuminates its working principles in two crucial respects. First, whereas essay films have typically been described in taxonomic terms – that is, through classification schemes that hinge on reflective voiceover commentary, found footage montage, and hybrid combinations of fiction and documentary – I articulate a more supple and dynamic sense of the essayistic through a detailed reading of Montaigne. As I treat it, the essay form emerges in complex acts of self-portraiture, citation, and a range of stylistic maneuvers that exhibit an impulse toward dialogical exchange. Second, I use Godard's prolific body of work to establish the essay as a fundamentally intergeneric and intermedial phenomenon. Godard figures as a privileged case in my argument because, as I show, he self-consciously draws on essayistic traditions from a broad spectrum of linguistic and pictorial media as he carries out experiments between film, television, and video. Through close engagements with his

works, I show that the essayistic, far from being a mere descriptive label, is crucial to our understanding of many of the most intricate features of his practice: how he retools antecedent materials and discourses; how he combines critical and creative faculties; how he confronts his own agency as both an author and spectator; how he perpetually revises his own earlier output; how he inhabits his work and achieves a consubstantial presence with the sights and sounds he handles; how he tests out ideas without offering a direct argument; and how he longingly pursues a dialogue with a co-operative viewer according to conditions of perceptual sharedness.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

I play
You play
We play
At cinema
        –Jean-Luc Godard, 1967[1]

In 2009 and 2010, the TIFF Cinematheque in Ontario hosted, in fall and winter

installments, an innovative film series under the curatorship of Jean-Pierre Gorin called

"The Way of the Termite: The Essay Film" (an expanded version of a retrospective that

Gorin assembled for the 2007 Vienna International Film Festival). On the face of it, the

series, which consisted of 36 films produced by 14 different countries in the years 1909-

2008, offered itself as a major event in the constitution of the cinematic essay as a fully-

fledged genre. In the program notes, Andréa Picard refers to Montaigne as the "father of

the essay" and confers on the chosen films a Montaignian spirit of skeptical inquiry that

balances "knowledge (ideas, facts, theories)" against the essayist's "personal experience

(feelings, desires)." She puts the term "essay film" in quotation marks, thus indicating its

uncertain generic status even as she judges it "one of the most exciting and elusive genres

in contemporary cinema."[2]

Gorin's introductory comments, however, immediately undercut the impression

that the series is out to set parameters for "the essay film" as a definite genre. Taking a

tone of outright contestation, Gorin says that his list is designed to induce controversy.

"The choice of this or that film will be contested, derided or even heckled, and a dozen

other titles will be deemed unjustly forgotten. More likely than not the hecklers will be

right; and yet the brouhaha, wherever it takes the viewers of this retrospective, will be in

keeping with the notion of the essay itself." Careful to avoid generic terminology, and to distinguish the series from a take-it-or-leave-it paean, Gorin situates his task as curator as one of channeling the provocative mood of his subject. His agile, indirect description of the films he has selected – including two of his own direction, *Poto and Cabengo* (1980) and *Routine Pleasures* (1986), and one that he authored with Jean-Luc Godard, *Letter to Jane: An Investigation About a Still* (1972) – is itself meant to evoke the essay, which he limns along the way as "playful," "ruminative," "unruly," "nomadic." The essay, he tells us, is a "meandering of an intelligence that tries to multiply the entries and the exits into the material it has elected (or by which it has been elected). It is surplus, drifts, ruptures, ellipses and double-backs. It is, in a word, thought, but because it is film it is thought that turns to emotion and back to thought." He considers the essay as not so much a genre but a form that "flirts with genres (documentary, pamphlet, fiction, diary … you name them) without attaching itself to one." Gorin refrains from rounding off a convenient definition. What he does make clear is that whether or not the films in the series cohere as a generic corpus (a prospect he highly doubts) is of less significance than the collective challenges they present to our traditional categories. In short, for Gorin, the cinematic essay, like his retrospective, is quite deliberately a "proposal for a tussle."[3]

A glance at the selection indeed raises several questions. Precisely what is it that separates these films from more typical documentary and fiction films? Haven't Dziga Vertov's *The Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) and Alain Resnais's *Nuit et brouillard* (1955) already been adequately examined as documentaries, without necessary recourse to the essay distinction? Why is France by far the most represented nation? Why are there more works by Godard (four, including all eight episodes of *Histoire(s) du cinéma* [1988-

98]) than by any other director? Doesn't Germany also have a rich tradition of this kind of cinema? The Berlin-based Harun Farocki is included, as he should be, but what about the German figures Alexander Kluge, Wim Wenders, or perhaps even Werner Herzog? How is it conceivable that D.W. Griffith's *A Corner in Wheat* (1909) shares an essayistic identity with films as varied in style, subject, and cultural context as Luis Buñuel's *Las Hurdes* (1933), the Venezuelan Margot Benacerraf's *Araya* (1959), Chantal Akerman's *Je, tu, il, elle* (1974), Chris Marker's *Le fond de l'air est rouge* (1977, 1993), Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet's *Trop tôt, trop tard* (1982), the Englishman Patrick Keiller's *Robinson in Space* (1997), and the Filipino director Raya Martin's *A Short Film about the Indio Nacional, or The Prolonged Sorrow of Filipinos* (2005)?

But Gorin's retrospective doesn't open up boxes and drawers. The purpose of the series – and this is where it departs from much of the recent critical writing on the essay-film, both scholarly and journalistic – isn't to come to grips with the elusive form through top-down classification exercises. Raising doubt as to the status of the essay as a discrete and coherent genre is nothing new. Literary debates have long recognized its inter-, intra- and anti-generic aspects, and most accounts of the cinematic essay likewise acknowledge its especially slippery and ambivalent character. Yet it is both peculiar and disappointing how often these same commentators, despite initially relishing the essay-film's stubborn resistance to classification, generic or otherwise, wind up *taxonomizing* the films and the filmmakers of their choosing, often relying on such feeble, default labels as "subjective," "personal," and "self-reflexive" while implicitly generating a checklist of traits that must be satisfied (e.g., a reflective voiceover commentary, experimental forms of montage, the imaginative use of found footage, and so on). The problem with this taxonomic approach

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is that we tend to come away with a picture of the work under inspection that is far more programmatic and orderly than is actually the case, and the "essay" designation functions as a kind of umbrella term that is ultimately incidental to the critic's or theorist's insights.

I begin by discussing Gorin's curatorial project because it offers two important lessons that inform my own approach to the cinematic essay in the chapters that follow. First, while the cinematic essay is indeed a specific, definable phenomenon, and while there are affinities of form and purpose that justify regarding several films and videos under a general heading as a (potential) group, the question of inclusion and exclusion should be a conversation-starter, not an endpoint. Like Gorin, I believe the "tussle" is what needs to be upheld and intensified, in the spirit of the essay form itself, if we hope to establish a richer and more complex understanding of its working principles. Gorin's welcome refusal to use the essay term as a pigeonhole is evident in the eccentric title of his series, "The Way of the Termite." Nothing in this title conjures up the hollow tropes and tautologies of "first-person" subjectivity that have enabled more than a few scholars of the cinematic essay to avoid necessary confusion through quasi-generic classification.[4] Gorin frames the essay as a "way," not a category, which in part suggests a martial art – a "way" of doing and thinking and being, a way of harnessing mental and physical energies developed through and contingent on relentless practice.

But what about the "way" of the essay is termite-like? This question bears on the second lesson I have drawn from Gorin's series – that the extreme intricacy at work in the cinematic essay demands from the critic an *intensive* examination of its properties. Again mirroring a tendency of the form he engages, Gorin appropriates ("wholesale," he claims) Manny Farber's idea of "termite art" (underground, intimate, unyielding) as diametrically

distinct from "white elephant art" (high-gloss, impersonal, numbingly formulaic). Gorin snatches a sentence from Farber's celebrated 1962 article and applies it to the work of the film-essayist: "The most inclusive description of [their] art is that, termite-like, it feels its way through walls of particularization, with no sign that the artist has any object in mind other than eating away the immediate boundaries of his art and turning these boundaries into conditions of the next achievement."[5] There is more to Gorin's appropriation of this concept than a rehearsal of a standoff between mainstream and marginal cinema: the way of the essay is termitic not just because it is subterranean and troublesome but because it processes its materials bit by bit, concentrating its resources into small points and spaces without urgent concern for attaining wholeness or resolving loose ends. The problem the critic must face, then, is not just one of establishing a corpus in spite of sharp disparities. Apprehending the essay form in cinema also requires us to engage closely and intensively with its micro-structural endeavoring, its moment-to-moment drift and drive.

In this regard, Gorin's reference to Farber runs deeper than a passing, "wholesale" requisition of a single famous concept. After all, the series is dedicated to the memory of the American critic and artist. Farber never used the term "essay film," and he rarely gave sustained attention to the sort of films in Gorin's retrospective (the work of Godard being one of the notable exceptions). But what Gorin appears to recognize through his tribute is that Farber characteristically deployed in his writings (whatever the film in question) the kind of roving, ruminative, detail-driven sensibility that the essay form both exhibits and *incites* through its address to the spectator. The very qualities and operations that Farber found in and imputed to the termite art he admired – if they apply to the cinematic essay, do they not also translate profoundly to his own style of criticism, which he once defined

as a protracted "struggle to remain faithful to the transitory, multisuggestive complication of a movie image"?[6] Through the allusion to Farber, Gorin suggests that the "way" of the essay extends to the manner of observation it urges. By quoting Farber on termite art and by assuming an "essayistic energy" in his own introductory comments, Gorin implies that the subject of his retrospective requires a certain manner of looking, a certain economy of attention, proportionate in intensity to the one it demonstrates.

In my study of the cinematic essay, I take Gorin's lessons to be methodological necessities. I have no intention of presenting a broad taxonomic argument, and I avoid wherever possible making observations at a comfortable interpretive distance from the shot-to-shot intricacies of the films and videos in question. As my title indicates, I am primarily (but not strictly) concerned with the practices of a single, prolific filmmaker, but my hope here is to show that Godard's particular affinities with the essay form have implications that bear – beyond his oeuvre – on a wider field of audio-visual production. Because I want the essay term to be more substantial to my examination than a heading under which I group the French-Swiss director's work, I make a concerted effort to stay faithful to the puzzling conditions within which his essaying *happens*. By emphasizing this point at the outset, I am not simply contending that Godard's work demands "close textual analysis" so as not to leave it short-changed. Rather, I am stressing that a crucial feature of the essay form is to prompt us into what I call a *synthetic* critical engagement with its processes. Godard's special affinities with the essay have to do not just with the intrinsic structural traits of his works but with their modes of address to the spectator, the kinds of interaction they spark. My account of Godard's use of the essay form is therefore

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largely *about* the difficult task assigned to the viewer – the task of "keeping up" with his work, of thinking through the many challenges as they surface and accumulate.

The Essay Form and/as Modern Cinema

The "tussle" of the essay in cinema, its unsettling of received categories, stretches beyond fiction and documentary to "modern cinema" as it has been variously understood since the emergence of radically new styles and subjects in the wake of the Second World War – a history in which Godard is a key participant as both a critic and a filmmaker. The cinematic essay, as most commentators have agreed, develops in concert with the modern cinema of the postwar years and remains one of its most important legacies. To be sure, a number of essayists in contemporary world cinema (particularly those working in France and Germany) continue to use variations on the essayistic styles that were devised in the immediate postwar period, and also to reckon critically with the mid-century horrors that initially motivated the search for new cinematic strategies of registering, discovering, and articulating both individual and social realities.[7]

In his recent manifesto *What Cinema Is!*, Dudley Andrew reminds us that André Bazin was among the first critics to respond sensitively to this new cinema by using the fraught but necessary terms "modern" and "avant-garde" in a fairly systematic fashion to observe a break from the "classical" cinema that had, during the interwar years, gained a special rapport with the attitudes and concerns of its enormous public audience. Andrew relates the essay-film, as pioneered by Resnais, Marker, and Agnès Varda, to a Bazinian "aesthetic of discovery" that – allowing for contextual modifications – reaches from the Italian Neo-Realists to the Nouvelle Vague to exploratory film practices in today's world

cinema, the common impetus being the use of the medium's resources to "filter" realities through "shots" (a notion Andrew adopts from Bazin's writings on Roberto Rossellini's work) rather than to render effects through "images" meant unambiguously to determine the spectator's response (a notion Andrew borrows from Bazin's critique of montage and levels against today's digital effects-driven cinema).[8]

Andrew's Bazinian lineage offers one way of conceiving the continued and vital connection between the cinematic essay and the postwar modern cinema that is central to its formation. Andrew is right to underscore cinema's link to social reality and its efforts to strike a relation with the audience on new terms of engagement as two important cross-threads in this common evolutionary history. However, for reasons that will become more apparent in the following chapters, I do not subscribe to Andrew's privileging of "shots" over "images" generated by montage (Godard's work complicates such an outlook, both in its early disagreements with Bazinian anti-montage theories and in its late embrace of montage as a method of historiography). More to the present point, the conception of the essay form in modern cinema that I want to flesh out isn't predicated mainly on a shared program by which the essay-film *subtends* the innovations of the feature fiction film from the postwar moment to the present. I am more concerned to demonstrate that an essayistic cinema is the modern cinema at its very essence – insofar as it is the modern cinema at its most acutely experimental and self-inquisitive.

As for the role of the essayistic in modern cinema, it is Jacques Rivette who, with his 1955 article "Letter on Rossellini," gives the earliest and perhaps the most percipient account from within the *Cahiers du cinéma* circle. Writing about *Viaggio in Italia* (1954), he declares that Rossellini's film marks an "unequivocal intrusion by the modern cinema,

in which we can at last recognize what we were vaguely awaiting."[9] His admiration for the film hinges on its departure from classical *découpage* and its awakening of "cinema, hitherto condemned to narrative, to the possibility of the essay," which for Rivette is "the very language of modern art; it is freedom, concern, exploration, spontaneity."[10] Rivette states that Rossellini's style in the film is driven by a "faculty of seeing" that "may not be the most subtle, which is Renoir, or the most acute, which is Hitchcock, but it is the most *active*," performing as it does "an incessant movement of seizure and pursuit."[11] Two of Rivette's assertions concerning this style accord with my working sense of the cinematic essay in this study: it "burdens" the viewer with its incompleteness; and its loose, sketch-like compositional form, far from being an idiosyncratic affectation, is an effort to engage the chaotic modern world through a style appropriate to its perceptual challenges. Rivette asks, "How could one fail suddenly to recognize, quintessentially sketched, ill-composed, incomplete, the semblance of our daily lives?"[12]

Is *Viaggio in Italia* an essay-film, then? Rivette deems it a "metaphysical essay, confession, log-book, intimate journal."[13] Still, it exhibits few of the requirements that hold sway in current critical accounts. We would be hard-pressed to compare it even to the films included in Gorin's retrospective, which proffers a more elastic definition. But maybe this is the wrong, or at least the less interesting, question to pose. Perhaps Rivette was prescient to grasp, then and there, a fundamental correlation between the essay form and "the very language of modern art." It seems to me the question his piece raises for us now isn't so much whether to consider *Viaggio*, on the whole, as an essay-film alongside definitive examples by Marker or Varda, but whether the modern cinema that comes into being after World War II is inherently given to essayistic procedures.

Yet this is a question that existing models for theorizing the cinematic essay are ill-suited to manage. The taxonomic, quasi-generic approach that I have already called into suspicion is, in fact, a three-faceted model. The taxonomic perspective implies and rests on a *holistic* understanding of the essay-film – that is, a view of the whole work as constituting an "essay," according to roughly the same logic by which *The Band Wagon* (Minnelli, 1953) can be identified as a musical through and through. And what cements the relation between these two theoretical perspectives is (in spite of the "hybridity" that the essay is supposed to exercise between fiction and nonfiction) an overemphasis on the documentary aspect of the essay-film, as though the elements of fiction and drama are in play merely to render documentary more "subjective," more doubtful of its claims to fact and truth, and thus to allow documentary to continue to evolve in a postmodern era where "the social persuasiveness of objectivity and authority" have greatly waned.[14]

For such a definition of the essay, exponents of the holistic-taxonomic view often credit Michel de Montaigne, the founder of the form in its literary and philosophical state. For instance, in her recent book *The Personal Camera*, which is perhaps the most cogent attempt to theorize the essay-film along these lines, Laura Rascaroli makes reference to Montaigne to lend credence to what she defines as the primary object of her study, "first-person essayistic documentary production," a category having the essential requirements of "reflectiveness and subjectivity." Rascaroli maintains that "the most important stamp that Montaigne left on the [essay] genre … consists in the sceptical evaluation (from the Latin *exagium* – meaning weight, test, trial) of the subject matter, which self-reflexively includes the evaluation of the author's same conclusions."[15] On this model, the essay-film

is Montaignian provided that, unlike traditional documentary, it is tentative with regard to its own arguments and markedly autobiographical in its motives.

But the problem with this attribution is that it misconstrues what the word "essay" actually entails for the sixteenth-century writer. Though Montaigne's use of the term does carry the etymological meaning that Rascaroli mentions, the sense in which it operates is pointedly non-holistic: it refers not to a piece of writing that conforms in its entirety with a generic designation but rather, on a more concentrated level, to *the act of essaying*. The *Essais* are not a "collection of essays" in our familiar sense. Montaigne's text consists of three "books," each containing many "chapters." Each chapter includes multiple "essays" that overlap and exceed the unitary divisions of chapter and book. In other words, the title Montaigne gives to his work indicates an elaborate network of essaying that outstrips the holistic organization of the individual sections. "On Physiognomy" isn't a single *essay on* its stated topic; more precisely, its title marks a textual space, in the twelfth chapter of the third book, within which numerous essays intersect.

In my account, using Godard's films and videos as my chief examples, I attempt to excavate a properly Montaignian way of the essayistic that finds expression in audio-visual terms. My claim is that although there are "essay-films" in the holistic-taxonomic sense, there are also acts of essaying in projects that fail to satisfy such criteria. Over the span of his output, Godard moves readily between both of these circumstances, and such maneuvering, I aim to show, is bound up with his participation in and continuation of the modern cinema that his generation had such a strong hand in defining. Thus, I will argue that Godard's investments in the essayistic have to do with how his work manifests links between what I term the "narrow" and "wide" histories of the form. By "narrow," I mean

the specifically filmic context of the essay as it arises and gains cultural currency in post-World War II France, crystallizing (according to most definitions) in the examples of the Left Bank figures, namely Marker, Resnais, and Varda. And by "wide," I mean the more extensive (and deeper-rooted) context in which essayistic impulses in literature, criticism, and philosophy trace back to Montaigne's path-breaking endeavor.

Observing intensively how these histories interweave in Godard's essaying will give the "essay" term the weight and substance it lacks in accounts that use it mainly as an appellation conferred before or after the work of analysis. The approach I enlist will furnish insight into some of the most demanding features of Godard's sound-and-image practice as it evolves across and between his separate career stages. In particular, it will shed light on how Godard presents and explores concepts, raising stakes without offering a concise and tidy thesis; how he cites (typically without attribution) the works of authors before him; how a critical dimension carries over from his written film criticism; how he engages the viewer through forms of address that are implicitly or overtly dialogical; how he refigures the political aspects of his work at certain stages; how he obsessively revisits his own prior output; and how he experiments with self-portraiture. While my focus is on Godard, I establish a broader, more dynamic set of variables through which to understand the cinematic essay in general and its unique possibilities.

The title of my study, which I borrow from a remark by Godard, condenses the main purposes of the essayistic that I want to investigate. In his lengthy 1962 interview with *Cahiers*, he asserts: "Cinema, Truffaut said, is spectacle – Méliès – and research – Lumière. If I analyse myself, I see that I have always wanted, basically, to do research in the form of a spectacle."[16] This statement could be interpreted as one of Godard's several

challenging quips to the effect that in cinema, fiction and documentary are deeply inter-reliant, contrary to the familiar generic-historical separation of "Méliès" and "Lumière" dating back to the technical beginnings of the film medium. But the words "spectacle" and "research" frame this interdependence – this contact zone of fantasy and reality, of magic and science, of theatricality and the world viewed (caught) as it is – in a particular light that goes beyond simple provocation. "Spectacle" names, more than fiction, a *show*: actions performed before an audience, gestures given to be viewed at a certain angle and juncture, according to a specific rhythm and mood. It's worth noting that Godard doesn't use the term "narrative": the emphasis is on *optics*. On the other hand, "research" names, more than documentary, careful, extended inspection and experiment; it bears a scientific implication that Godard has long claimed for cinema's resources, not merely its recording function but its capabilities of montage.

A cinema that combines "spectacle" and "research" invests all the elements that make up the former with a more properly investigative task; moreover, it brings showing and spectating into the domain of contingent process. I adopt this formulation to describe Godard's work in particular and the cinematic essay in general because the essay form is indeed a kind of staging of research, in which the viewer is called on to share in the work to a much greater than usual extent. "Subjective" and "personal" may be necessary terms, but what most distinguishes the essay from the neighboring styles and genres from which it selectively borrows is the fact that the "finished" object presented to the viewer is less a fully-realized construction than an open-ended inquiry.

More than idiosyncrasy goes into the maneuvers, the gambles that compose the cinematic essay; its "way" follows from a belief that the means chosen are indispensable

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to the concepts pursued. In "research in the form of a spectacle," projects are conducted through contradictory drives; realities and histories have a touch of the fantastic, and the findings of quasi-scientific trials are not divorced from emotions, or from the paradoxes and ambiguities of poetic thinking. In this practice, reception is centrally at stake, but the essayist's search for a diligent spectator doesn't neatly submit to an abstract theorization of the viewer's conversion from passive to active viewing, as though this transformation happens as a calculable result of the work's textual features (a "phantasm" that has been at the center of much film theory[17]). The joining of research and spectacle also involves spectatorial wavering among multiple modes: pensive, possessive, ruminative, synthetic, analytic.[18] For the spectator of the cinematic essay, passivity and activity are not directly opposed. Rather, they are co-extensive and mutually informing. As we'll see, in the case of Godard, keeping up with the research, responding to its sallies and contentions, takes a little abandon on our part. There are risks for us as well.

<p style="text-align:center">Essaying beyond the Essay-Film</p>

Most discussions of the cinematic essay recognize Godard as one of the form's major practitioners. But because this attention has been mostly in a holistic-taxonomic vein, the full sense in which he works as an essayist, over the span of his career, has not been sufficiently examined. Certainly, Godard has made films and videos that meet the restrictive criteria of the "essay-film" – projects that feature Godard as "himself," either in body or voice; that mix fiction and documentary while promising allegiance to neither; that self-consciously address the means at their disposal; and that advance claims outside the bounds of direct, rational disquisition, typically through the use of found footage and

<p style="text-align:center">14</p>

voiceover commentary. But such work is merely the most *patent* register of his essayistic output. In conjunction with my claim that quasi-generic classification gets us only so far (and that such a perspective tends to preclude the intensive engagement that our object of study requires), I pursue the argument that Godard's acts of essaying are also manifest in his feature productions: films that, because they lack some of the structural traits needed for taxonomic inclusion, and because they exhibit a greater quotient of fiction and drama, are not as commonly labeled "essays."

On this score, it is worth considering Godard's own claim to compose essays in the language of cinema. His self-description as an essayist, also stated in his long 1962 interview with *Cahiers*, is oft-cited. But his comment bears repeating, as its full and long-term implications are not always acknowledged.

> As a critic, I thought of myself as a film-maker. Today I still think of myself as a critic, and in a sense I am more than ever before. Instead of writing criticism, I make a film, but the critical dimension is subsumed. I think of myself as an essayist, producing essays in novel form or novels in essay form: only instead of writing I film them. Were the cinema to disappear, I would simply accept the inevitable and turn to television; were television to disappear, I would revert to pencil and paper. For there is a clear continuity between all forms of expression.[19]

Well before *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle* (1967), the film most often suggested as his initial cinematic essay, Godard considers himself an essayist, and he does so not only to challenge prevailing distinctions between fiction and documentary but also to sketch a continuous line of investigation from his experience as a critic. In this statement, which still goes some way to frame Godard's entire body of work, the essayistic component is that which allows an interchangeable relation between criticism and filmmaking. What's more, his self-definition as an essayist is charged with a sense of fluidity between media, which may sound strange coming from a director who (unlike Chris Marker, with whom

he is often contrasted on this point[20]) is identified so closely with cinema. Undeterred by media change or media difference, the essayistic here names a spirit of inquiry that shifts with relative ease between the linguistic and the pictorial, between the cinematic and the televisual. It refers to a principle of work that allows Godard to continue his experiments even pending the cinema's disappearance.

This isn't to say that cinema ever fades from the center of Godard's thinking, or that he ever stops believing in its special position in our spectrum of artistic and cultural forms. While the essay is inter-generic, it is also inter-medial, and thus it permits Godard to assess the limits and powers of cinema even as he finds himself operating outside the film medium, that is, when he finds himself removed from conditions of production and reception that factor into his definition of "cinema," as when he ventures into television and video. In this way, the essayistic explains the distance (and yet also the connection) between the kind of cinema Godard values in his reflections on the medium and the kind of work he himself carries out. And because the essayistic bears the generative impulse to continue in spite of all, it also helps to account for the sense in which Godard's invariably stunning inventiveness outshines his melancholic remarks concerning the multiple deaths and ends that befall the medium he loves.

This essayistic attitude, I claim in my first chapter, is indeed audible and visible from the beginning of Godard's career. I argue this by showing how his work during the 1960s relates both to the "narrow" and "wide" histories of the essay form: to the postwar French cinematic context and to a Montaignian literary-philosophical lineage of the form. Gorin has stated that when he and Godard made films together in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Godard often spoke of his ambition to emulate Montaigne.[21] And Colin MacCabe,

who finds significant parallels between Godard and the late sixteenth-century writer, has said that one of Godard's thumbnail descriptions of his own practice, "to show and show myself showing," could apply just as suitably to Montaigne.[22] Though Godard has made surprisingly few direct references to Montaigne over the duration of his career, in a 2004 interview, he asserts: "Descartes is saying, in short, 'I believe,' and Montaigne is saying, in short, 'I doubt.'" He then aligns himself with Montaignian doubt.[23]

While I trace certain links between the two essayists, it is not mainly or implicitly on the level of influence that I make a case for Godard's activation of a Montaignian way of the essay. I lay the foundation for my excursions into Godard's projects by pointing up key aspects of the *Essais* that translate in revealing ways to what Godard is out to achieve in his films and videos. In particular, I stress Montaigne's adventurous and reflective self-portraiture; his appeals (both tacit and direct) to dialogue and friendship as he seeks out a relationship with a kind of reader he longingly calls "diligent"; his poetics of citation that ushers in a distinctively modern practice of criticism; his style of writing that imparts an impression of spontaneous and fickle thought; and his inquisitive regard for banal details of living as potential sources of wonder and insight. My discussion of Montaigne brings into view a set of aims and drives that compel us to consider essayistic activities outside of the strict taxonomic definition. I conclude the chapter by exploring Godard's films of the New Wave years in the light of this Montaignian tradition and by offering a thorough inspection of *2 ou 3 choses*, which both breaks new ground for the director and amplifies formal elements already in play in his previous films.

Chapter 2 examines Godard's use of citation over the course of his body of work. How Godard draws on ideas and materials he gleans from antecedent sources is an issue

as daunting and potentially hazardous as it is unavoidable. I seek to gain traction on the matter by inspecting two abiding currents in his enterprise that enlist citation for critical purposes: citation as a mode of political critique, and citation as a way of extending film criticism into sights and sounds. In both cases, I concentrate on acts of *material citation*, as opposed to intertextual nods that merely evoke without seizing the "stuff" in question. Tracking these currents, I show how Godard's use of the essay form allows him to go on operating as a critic in film and video. More specifically, I address the political import of his citational maneuvers through comparison, vis-à-vis the technique of *détournement*, to the films and arguments of Guy Debord, whose hostility towards Godard has become not only legendary but central to critical claims for the neglected brilliance of Debord's work in film.[24] The thrust of the chapter, which moves between early, middle, and late Godard, is to accentuate a certain tentative style of address to the viewer (as distinct from a more self-assured didactic mode of communicating truths to would-be disciples) that bears out Godard's deep alignment with the Montaignian essay and that lies at the crux of his turn to cinema history in his late work, when his citation-based, videographic montage serves as one of his most valuable critical instruments. While cautioning against the tendency to sift his citations and discuss them apart from the material process through which they are transformed, I examine the montage in *Histoire(s) du cinéma* and his attempt to discover resonant ensembles (testifying to historical relations) that might, in turn, bring together *at least two* spectators able to share in the way of seeing he exhibits.

The negotiation of "two-ness" is a core impulse of the essay form as Godard uses it, conducting research into possibilities of dialogue. Chapter 3 studies in depth one of the central tropes around which this research progresses: Godard's treatment of the couple at

different stages in his career, which ties in closely with his larger conceptual investments in interpersonal exchange through speech and gesture. Two claims organize my thinking in the chapter, which comes to focus on Godard's work during his personal and creative partnership with Anne-Marie Miéville: that questions of coupling and dialogue open up vital cross-feeds between his feature films and his more peripheral experiments in video; and that Godard and Miéville's couplehood is indispensably linked to the sense in which he operates as an essayist in his late period. I argue these claims by attending to three of their co-directed videos – *France/tour/détour/deux/enfants* (1978), *Soft and Hard* (1985), and *The Old Place* (1999) – and examining how their exchanges and performances (they appear and speak as "themselves" in two of these videos) both enlarge on and shade back into projects for which Godard is credited as the sole director.

My fourth and final chapter continues to explore the main themes that crop up in the previous chapters through a more pointed consideration of Godard's gestures of self-depiction in his late period. The essay, in its truest Montaignian sense, is nothing if not a self-portrait – and yet, the "self" written or pictured is given to extreme fluctuations and divisions, such that the work offers less a stable, unitary, autobiographical subject than a dispersive body of ideas, desires, attitudes, citations, and performances through which the essayist interrogates his or her image, while looking to draw the reader or the viewer into a co-operative engagement. One tendency in critical discussions of Godard's late projects has been (whether as a point of critique or adulation) to play up the impenetrability of his films and videos and to interpret his self-depictions as signs of his disengaged retreat into obscurity. However, my inspection of three of his late works, *Scénario du film Passion* (1982), *JLG/JLG: autoportrait de décembre* (1995), and *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, argues

that an impulse towards striking an exchange with a diligent spectator, through a certain means of seeing he seeks to share, is sharply evident. These projects, in which Godard's figure occupies so much of what he shows, indeed totter on the edge of abstruseness. At the same time, they each strive, in their own peculiar ways, towards dialogue and social interaction. I show how Godard inhabits his sounds and images primarily in the role of a spectator, and I argue that the stakes of these experiments in self-depiction are decidedly public and interpersonal, rather than private and solipsistic. The chapter further contends that if Godard holds a privileged position for himself as an artist, this isn't to shore up his status as a famous auteur. His self-portraiture insists that the work of creation bears great responsibilities. His gestures are self-*implicating*, not merely self-reflexive; they bind him ethically to the sounds and images he offers. As an essayist, he isn't safely lurking behind what he does: his gestures inscribe him in the doing and its consequences.

In speaking to Godard's early, middle, and late career stages through examples that reveal abiding ambitions, I don't mean to suggest that the essayistic runs the whole gamut of his work in film and video, or that my investigation is comprehensive. My aim is to illuminate certain aspects, certain principles, of the director's work through closely examining how he adapts and extends a Montaignian notion of the essay. I want to take into account the way in which he actively maintains his corpus as he moves through his career, reflecting on his own past deeds and histories (successes and failures), revisiting this or that scene with a view to refashioning his authorial image, and setting trajectories for further experiments (the essay form always carries this open-ended futurity). Thus my study, while acknowledging the important shifts that Godard undergoes across his career, considers his body of work less as a succession of discrete stages than as a perpetual and

relentless reworking. The essayistic activity on which I focus isn't framed exclusively at the level of the entire-film-as-essay; this activity, I intend to show, occurs in the intricate texturing of specific moments as well as in the critical gestures that are interwoven across Godard's oeuvre as he persistently tends to and revises it.

Godard at his Word and Image

In her book on the cinematic essay, Rascaroli maintains that all examples of the form "posit a well-defined, extra-textual authorial figure as their point of origin and of constant reference … and they set up a particular communicative structure, largely based . . . on the address to the spectator, or interpellation."[25] Her case studies center on a play of rhetorical tropes by which the essayist, whose presence is inscribed in the work as an "enunciator," conveys a subjective viewpoint or "line of reasoning" that the spectator is asked to accept and "connect with," or else refuse.[26] While she is right to place emphasis on the negotiation between essayist and spectator as a key feature of the essay, she uses a theoretical framework (imported mostly from narratology) that affirms her classification scheme but stays comfortably at the macro level, leaving much of the complex work that goes into this negotiation untouched. When she turns to Godard's *Notre musique* (2004), for instance, she situates the film as an essay on "the structure of exchange itself, and on the difficulty of the process,"[27] but in her inventory of the film's many interpellations, we are offered a rather slight picture of how the work moves and meanders, of how Godard's poetic logic inflects this address to the spectator, on a shot-to-shot basis. Godard's lecture in the film, to cite just one scene that she summarizes too distantly, is shown to thematize performance and direct exchange while the ambitious material shape of the scene – from

its reflective treatment of shot-countershot to its layering of the sound track – begs for an analysis that never occurs, and this analysis never occurs because in Rascaroli's argument reaching the point of categorization is an end in itself.

My hope in this study is to do better justice to the difficulty of communication that characterizes the essayistic. Godard, however legendary a director, is not exactly a "well-defined" authorial origin. His voice, figure, and commentary function in zones of obscurity (in both the semantic and perceptual senses of the term). And "interpellation," with its rootedness in a structural system, doesn't capture the interplay of responses that receiving and grappling with Godard's essaying entails. Further, such a view fails to note the risks involved. Godard's discourse, in particular his ludic way of voicing ideas in and around his output, can be as treacherously seductive as it is irritatingly opaque. We often have to meet him more than halfway, and once we get there, the work seems to resist our interpretive grasp and to offer up ways of thinking towards which Godard's own attitude is uncertain (a problem that his use of citations only complicates). What T.S. Eliot wrote of Montaigne's enticing, evasive, and "indestructible" manner pertains no less to Godard:

> You could as well dissipate a fog by flinging hand grenades into it. For Montaigne is a fog, a gas, a *fluid, insidious element*. He does not reason, he *insinuates, charms, and influences*; or if he reasons, you must be prepared for his having some other design upon you than to convince you by his argument.[28]

With Godard, as with Montaigne, we run the risk of being over-charmed; and yet our playing along requires that we be charmed somewhat and willing to step outside our familiar critical bearings. An author who takes up essayistic means does have thoughts to pass on, points to underscore, claims to stake, but through a willful and poetic embrace of contradiction in the face of rational argument. Instead of a thesis, or a set of nugget-like, elucidating aphorisms, we encounter unexpected changes in position, captivating insights

tempered with equivocations and digressions that make for a curious impermanence of meaning.[29] Hence the challenge handed the critic: because the work refuses to yield to hermeneutic categories of coherence, and because we can't quite play by the same rules within our own discursive limits (of course, playing by those rules would take no small poetic and intellectual feat), the essayist tends not only to escape us but also to outshine us. Reflecting on Varda or Marker reflecting on their own topics can seem redundant and tiresome. As Chris Darke puts this nagging predicament: "The trouble with writing about Godard is that the director has all the best lines."[30]

The way in which the essay form configures authorship calls for special critical measures. The cinematic essay compounds the interpretive dilemma of whether or not – and to what extent – to invest in the author's comments around his or her projects. Or to put it more accurately, once the authorial commentary becomes an internal, endogenous component of the work, "whether or not" is no longer a reassuring option. Godard is an especially troublesome case in this respect. His "lines," in or around his productions, are indeed often "good," but they waver between the brilliant and the silly, the offensive and the nonsensical. While his verbal comments and his inscribed pictorial presences must be confronted, taking him at his word and at his self-image is a dangerous game.

I handle this challenge by bearing in mind two critical perspectives as I reckon with Godard's authorial voice and self-inscription. First, what Godard declares must be considered within a range of audio-visual parameters over which the verbal has no certain priority. If voice and language are particularly important in an essayistic cinema,[31] it is no less true that they obfuscate, distort, and confuse as much as they transmit a subjective viewpoint. This isn't to discredit Godard as a valid commentator on or in his own work –

I often use his "lines" as springboards for my own investigations – but it is necessary to avoid the critical tendency to decode moments of difficulty by turning to "explanatory" words of an authorial source. Godard's remarks are more performative than explicative, and the essay form frequently puts the voice of the author in tension with what is, at the time of utterance, exhibited onscreen. Relying primarily on what Godard says is thus less a decoding than a dodge of essayistic significance. Second, Godard's appearances in his films and videos – and this is especially true of his late work – are devoted to putting his legendary status and his authorial privileges into question. Even as his work projects the thoughts and actions of an individual author, his use of the essay form does not deposit a unitary expressive self as the source of meaning. With its double rejection of an absolute origin (in creative genius) and an absolute finish (in telic closure), the essayistic compels attention to the volatile particulars of its unfolding, and it seeks our diligent co-operation in that register. To read Godard's words and gestures in terms of a monadic subjectivity is to miss how the essay form troubles authorial expression and makes room for different circumstances of exchange between essayist and viewer – as fellow perceivers potentially able to share in the research process and its discoveries.

Notes

[1] Godard, *Godard on Godard*, trans. and ed. Tom Milne (New York: Da Capo, 1972), 242.

[2] On the use of quotation marks by critics in the cultural process of "genrification," see Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: British Film Institute, 1999), 72-82.

[3] The film selection and program notes for the series are viewable at http://www.cinemathequeontario.ca/programme.aspx?programmeid=271. For part two, see http://www.cinemathequeontario.ca/programme.aspx?programmeId=300&archives=1&season=Winter2010.

[4] For examples of this view, see Paul Arthur, "Essay Questions," *Film Comment* (January-February 2003): 58-62; Phillip Lopate, "In Search of the Centaur: The Essay-Film," in *Totally, Tenderly, Tragically* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 280-311; Laura Rascaroli, *The Personal Camera: Subjective Cinema and the Essay Film* (London: Wallflower Press, 2009); Michael Renov, *The Subject of Documentary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

[5] For the original, see Manny Farber, "White Elephant Art vs. Termite Art," in *Negative Space*, expanded ed. (New York: Da Capo, 1998), 135. The substituted pronoun in brackets is Gorin's.

[6] Farber, "Introduction," in *Negative Space*, 9.

[7] In his recent book on cinematic modernism, András Bálint Kovács observes that the essay is a major development in post-World War II modern cinema, but there are several problems with his account, starting with his crudely inhesitant reference to the "genre" of

the essay-film, and his innacurate claim that "[t]he goal of the film essay is to build up a system of arguments, not to explore a mental universe," which he has to make in order to distinguish the essay "genre" sharply from the "mental journey" genre in his typology of the modern cinema. Marker's *Sans soleil* alone would prove that distinction false. Further, while Kovács refers to Godard as a leading practitioner of the cinematic essay, this view is based mainly and vaguely on what he takes to be Godard's use of cinéma-vérité techniques. Kovács book is useful for the way it sorts through prevailing notions of modernism and the avant-garde in its opening chapters, but its discussion of the essay-film is quite weak, and it builds to an egregious conclusion: "The film essay disappeared quite quickly starting from the late 1970s, and virtually the only European director continuing this tradition has been Nanni Moretti, who started his career in the mid-1980s." Kovács, *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema, 1950-1980* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 116-119.

[8] Dudley Andrew, *What Cinema Is!* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

[9] Jacques Rivette, "Letter on Rosselini," in *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave*, ed. Jim Hillier (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 202.

[10] Ibid., 199.

[11] Ibid., 197, my italics.

[12] Ibid., 195.

[13] Ibid., 199.

[14] Laura Rascaroli makes such a case for the essay-film as a mode of continuing the project of documentary in a "postmodern, globalized world" marked by what she

nebulously terms "fragmentation." I'm guessing that it is for this reason that she keeps

asserting, without really explaining, the increasing "relevance" of the essay-film.

Rascaroli, *The Personal Camera*, 3-7.

[15] Ibid., 21-23.

[16] Godard, *Godard on Godard*, 181.

[17] For a compelling rethinking of the activity-passivity dynamic, see Jacques Rancière,

"The Emancipated Spectator," in *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliot

(London: Verso, 2009), 1-24.

[18] A recent trend in film scholarship that overlaps with interests in cinephilia and the

evolving place of cinema in today's media landscape has been to focus on the changing

dynamics of spectatorship. Perhaps the best example of this convergence of interests is

Laura Mulvey's book *Death 24x a Second*, which both contributes to the never-ending

debate around photographic indexicality and brings into consideration notions of pensive

and possessive spectatorship that she borrows from Raymond Bellour and inflects with a

reading of Roland Barthes's concept of the *punctum*. For Mulvey, these new forms of

spectatorship, which she attributes to home viewing technologies (in particular, and I

must say unconvincingly, the pause feature), are ways of countermanding the narrative

flow and address of the original work. I would argue that the essay form, by contrast,

already invites, in fact relies on, these pensive and possessive modes of spectatorship.

Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion, 2006).

[19] Godard, *Godard on Godard*, 171.

[20] A parallel statement by Marker, the essayist with whom Godard has most in common

despite their great differences, can be found in his 1978 description of the equally

versatile William Klein: "The trouble with people like this is that we tend to cut them into pieces and to leave each piece to the specialists: a film to the film critic, a photograph to the photographic expert, a picture to the art pundit . . . Whereas the really interesting phenomenon is the totality of these forms of expression, their obvious or secret correspondences, their interdependence. The painter does not really turn to photography, then to the cinema, he starts from a single preoccupation . . . and modulates it through all the media." Quoted in Catherine Lupton, *Chris Marker: Memories of the Future* (London: Reaktion 2005), 10.

[21] See Gorin's comments, included as s special feature of the DVD of Marker's films *La Jetée* and *Sans soleil*, released by The Criterion Collection. He mentions Godard's "dream to be Montaigne" in the section marked "Que sais-je?" of the features for *La Jetée*.

[22] Colin MacCabe, *Godard: A Portrait of the Artist at Seventy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 241. MacCabe's comparison comes with one major distinction that Godard, in his late work stationed in Rolle, allows and welcomes the presence of his partner, Anne-Marie Miéville, whereas Montaigne excluded his wife and daughter from his "masculine" place of work and reflection.

[23] Mark Feeney, "Godard Talks About the Music of Filmmaking," *Boston Globe*, December 28, 2004. In a 2005 interview, Godard, repeating a version of the same claim, attributes it to the philosopher Léon Brunschvicg's book *Descartes et Pascal: Lecteurs de Montaigine* (1944). Godard, while riffing on his notion of a "third image" that is not actualized except in thought, recommends this text to his interlocutor (Elias Sanbar who was Godard's local guide on his trip to Palestine in 1970) and says: "I remember a

sentence (I do not read books in their entirety, no more than I see films in their entirety, one can't see everything on one go): Montaigne said 'I doubt'; Descartes said 'I know'; and Pascal says 'I believe.' A good image – this is a good combination of the three in comparison …" Godard with Sanbar, "Jean-Luc Godard – Elias Sanbar," *Politis*, January 16, 2005, http://www.france-palestine.org/article3140.html. It's also worth noting here that Brunschvicg is the figure credited, by Miéville in *The Old Place*, as the source of a key notion for Godard and Miéville that has both aesthetic and ethical significance: "One is in the other, the other is in the one, and these are three persons."

[24] Building up Debord by tearing down Godard (and by unhesitatingly embracing what the Situationists said of Godard's work in the 1960s) is a common gambit in studies of Debord's films, as though the fate of Debord's proper reception hangs on the exposure of Godard as a less inspired copycat of strategies Debord developed and put to more radical use. A welcome exception is Nicole Brenez's account of experimental French cinema in the years surrounding May '68, which has no difficulty seeing the crucial contributions of both figures. Brenez, "For it is the critical faculty that invents fresh forms," trans. Michael Temple, in *The French Cinema Book*, ed. Michael Temple and Michael Witt (British Film Institute, 2004), 230-246.

[25] Rascaroli, *The Personal Camera*, 3.

[26] Ibid., 12-15.

[27] Ibid., 95-103.

[28] T.S. Eliot, "Pensées of Pascal," in *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1950), 362.

[29] It is important to distinguish Godard's pithy remarks, as well as his more extended verbal reflections, from the logic of the aphorism, if "aphorism" is understood to be a morsel of insight, such as those crafted by Hippocrates, Erasmus, La Rochefoucauld, or Chamfort. Let's take what is arguably Godard's most famous "line": "Photography is truth and cinema is truth twenty-four times a second," which is spoken by the main male character in *Le petit soldat* (1963). Although this line is often taken as a kind of concise expression of Godard's view of cinema, it is more precisely a question that the film puts in play, something to puzzle over (and Godard doesn't vouch for it directly – the actor and character are hardly unproblematic mouthpieces for his own outlook). If Godard is an aphoristic thinker, he is more in the vein of Friedrich Schlegel or Nietzsche: his words and thoughts break open and unsettle as they gropingly move forward. Etymologically, "aphorism" comes from *aphorizein* (*apo-* "from" + *horizein* "to bound"). The term thus carries a sense of boundedness and self-contained definition that does not correspond to Godard's practices.

[30] Chris Darke, *Alphaville* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 4.

[31] Lopate, "In Search of the Centaur," esp. 283-285.

CHAPTER ONE

Towards a Form that Thinks:

The Essayistic from Montaigne to Godard

Godard quite frequently is an essayist . . . That the actual ideas expressed in his films are often specious is a fact of less importance than the way in which they are paraded before us; it is this element of intellectual spectacle that is irreplaceable, not the ideas themselves. This might appropriately be called a "cinema of ideas," but his approach is also and principally an aesthetic attitude, in the same sense that Sartre's essay on Baudelaire is a work of art, no matter what one's opinion of the ideas expressed and despite Sartre's own distinction between art and literature.

-Noël Burch[1]

I am an essayist with a camera . . . A self-critical one. But in self-criticism there is criticism. The modern novel is always at the same time a novel and a search for an answer to questions such as: "Why write?", "What is writing?" And painting too conveys an anxiety about the empty canvas and about the meaning of the act of painting. It is the same in the cinema. "Why does this shot stop here rather than there?" "Why show this rather than that?" You want a complete object but you never get anything but silhouettes.

-Godard, 1967[2]

Though Jean-Luc Godard is routinely invoked as one of the essay-film's major innovators, it is still a matter of debate just what an essay composed in the language of cinema is and does. Godard is famously by his own description an essayist, and he has framed his output in such terms since the start of his career. But in critical overviews of this elusive and fast-developing form at the intersection of fiction and documentary, the example of Godard is brought in to support definitions and categories that are not always consistent beyond necessary but ultimately insufficient labels of "personal," "reflective,"

"subjective," "self-reflexive," and "unorthodox." Godard's work, depending on the aims of the critic or theorist, alternately typifies an essayistic cinema that is primarily verbal in its expressive mode and thus owes to literary and philosophical models,[3] or that is chiefly a heretical offshoot of documentary that rejects the Griersonian ethos of "lucidity" and its unswerving faith in the objective import of the film image.[4]

Following Godard's own remarks, reviewers and scholars have used the "essay" term in reference to his work quite liberally, but only a handful have offered sustained discussions of the essayistic components of his practice, and across those accounts are considerable discrepancies as to what the term reveals and which films and videos (and which stages in Godard's oeuvre) are to be counted. This confusion, coupled with a lack of critical rigor, has led some to doubt the usefulness of the term and others to dismiss it entirely. For instance, David Bordwell, in an analysis of Godard's films up to *Week-end* (1967), contends that it is "relevant to Godard's work only as a filmmaker's historically conditioned alibi for unusual narrational strategies."[5] Finding the term "comforting but empty," Bordwell argues that it poorly explains what motivates "the orneriness of these films' styles and forms." For Bordwell, an essay "organizes reflections around a body of evidence or examples and proceeds in logical or emotional order to a conclusion," and so to consider a Godard film as an essay is to reduce it to banal assertions, such as "modern life commodifies human relations," and to ignore the actual "conditions within which the difficulties emerge and have consequences."[6] Bordwell does concede that Godard's post-1967 films indicate "the emergence of truly essayistic forms," but he offers a vague sense of what this means; the "essayistic" names a general, politicized "mixing of modes" taken from documentary, art cinema, and "historical-materialist narration."[7]

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While I agree that critics have tended to apply the "essay" term imprecisely and unconvincingly, I intend to show that it does, in fact, have a strong bearing on Godard's sound and image practice, and that his self-description as an essayist is entirely relevant, even crucial to our understanding of his work. My contention in what follows and in the chapters ahead is that the "essay" concept, if pursued rigorously enough, can illuminate some of the most complex and challenging aspects of Godard's enterprise – its methods, its underlying ambitions, and its "element of intellectual spectacle," the peculiar manner in which ideas and arguments "are paraded before us." In my view, the essayistic names an abiding *principle of work* that is visible in Godard's practice from the very beginning. I do not dispute the generally accepted notion that *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle* (1967) marks Godard's initial foray into the essay-film, broadly conceived as a distinct category of filmmaking in which imaginative, subjective investigation into actual events and social situations supersedes (or dispenses completely with) a narrative pretext. But in this study, my understanding of the essayistic is not confined to the species of the essay-film. While Godard has produced a number of audio-visual sketches, "scenarios," and research notes that meet the generic criteria of such a form, I believe that he works in an essayistic vein even in his more fictional feature-length projects. Indeed, one of my aims in this study is to demonstrate how the essayistic spans and opens a communicative channel between his feature films and his peripheral experiments in both television and video.

Before we can perceive and adequately describe the features of this essayistic manner in Godard's body of work, a stronger foundation is needed. That is, we need to establish a more precise conception of what an essay is and does. I propose to do this by sketching out both a "narrow" and a "deep" history of an essay form that is more or less

specific to France, [8] observing the ways in which Godard takes up and inflects traditions that precede him, both in cinema and in a deeper genealogy of the essay tracing back to the *Essais* of Montaigne. If Godard's place in these two histories is often alluded to, it is seldom discussed in detail. Fleeting mentions of and quotations by Montaigne are rather common in critical accounts of the cinematic essay, but no commentator has taken time to examine the principal traits of the Montaignian essay beyond quick comparisons with essay-filmmakers who, purportedly like the French founder of the essay, carry out open-ended "tests" and "trials" as they engage in continuous self-monitoring. I aim to provide a more substantial juxtaposition of figures and practices while acknowledging important differences of historical situation and means of expression that are evident between them (I don't want to cast Godard simply as a remade version of Montaigne, or, in the obverse, to describe Montaigne as a perfect Godardian prototype). By delving deeper into certain dimensions of Montaigne's *Essais*, we can gain a more thorough conception of the essay form that will, in turn, bring Godard's practices into sharper detail. In particular, looking closely at Montaigne will help us to see and understand how Godard continues to operate as a critic in audio-visual terms, how he draws on and reworks existing texts, voices, and materials through inventive citation, how he inscribes himself, in body and voice, into the fabric of his work, how he experiments with multiple forms of dialogue across his corpus, and how he establishes a dialogical mode of address to the spectator.

First, however, I will give a concise account of the cinematic essay as it emerges in France following World War II – within the conditions of an incipient modern cinema. It's important to have this "narrow" history in mind not only because Godard is preceded by other French film artists who engender essayistic styles within the shifting institutional

and aesthetic structures of French postwar film culture, but also because their endeavors unfold alongside critical articulations, most presciently by Alexandre Astruc and André Bazin, that begin to sketch in the contours of an essayistic cinema, identifying some of its defining features while gesturing towards its unrealized possibilities.

The Primary Material is Intelligence

In histories of postwar French cinema, Alexandre Astruc's article "The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Caméra-stylo," published in *L'Ecran français* in 1948, invariably figures as a manifesto of sorts. And rightfully so: its twelve paragraphs issue an eloquent but abrasive demand for an altogether new kind of cinema devoted to the expression of thought, a cinema in which the filmmaker is finally the equal of the novelist and painter. Wavering between descriptive and prescriptive moods, Astruc believes he has glimpsed the germinal traces of a new cinema that will surpass in imagination the narrative-driven, ploddingly conventional cinema of the sound period and that will have no recourse to the "heavy associations that were the delight of silent cinema." While his critique anticipates Truffaut's famous assault on the "tradition of quality," it also dovetails with some of the basic views of André Bazin, in particular Bazin's "evolution" of film style. Astruc shares with Bazin a dislike of associative montage and the poetic "image for its own sake," and like Bazin, he embraces instead the films of Welles, Renoir, and Bresson as examples of a "new avant-garde."[9] Astruc, similar to Bazin, believes that cinema is poised to become a full-fledged, versatile "language." He states: "By language, I mean a form in which and by which an artist can express his thoughts, however abstract they may be, or translate his

obsessions exactly as he does in the contemporary essay or novel. That is why I would like to call this new age of cinema the age of *caméra-stylo* (camera pen)."[10]

Astruc's scriptural metaphor is more than a blueprint for auteurism – it is, above all, a demand for an audio-visual "means of writing just as flexible and subtle as written language." What Astruc has in mind by "writing," a term he uses with a subdued Sartrean emphasis, is primarily a mode of articulating thought, writing as an *adaptable* intellectual activity that, as Sartre had recently argued in his "Situation of the Writer in 1947," should not confine itself to the book or journal article but should venture into newer, *more public* media forms.[11] Astruc insists that the film medium

> can tackle any subject, any genre. The most philosophical meditations on human production, psychology, metaphysics, ideas, and passions lie well within its province. I will even go so far as to say that contemporary ideas and philosophies of life are such that only the cinema can do justice to them. Maurice Nadeau wrote in an article in the newspaper *Combat*: 'If Descartes lived today, he would write novels.' With all due respect to Nadeau, a Descartes of today would already have shut himself up in his bedroom with a 16mm camera and some film, and would be writing his philosophy on film: for his *Discours de la Méthode* would today be of such a kind that only the cinema could express it satisfactorily.[12]

Astruc contends that since thought entails the detection and construction of relationships between people, between objects, and between objects and people, cinema can perform this process formally *within* images – through gestures, camera movements, and spoken dialogue – without having to rely on juxtaposition. If associative montage won't suffice, neither will stagy renderings of existing texts. For Astruc, a veritable cinema of thought awaits the filmmaker who undertakes philosophical explorations in their own right, the goal being to "produce works which are equivalent, in their profundity and meaning, to the novels of Faulkner and Malraux, to the essays of Sartre and Camus."[13] Weighing this possibility, Astruc envisions nothing less than a sweeping transformation of film culture:

It must be understood that up to now the cinema has been nothing more than a show. This is due to the basic fact that all films are projected in an auditorium. But with the development of 16mm and television, the day is not far off when everyone will possess a projector, will go to the local bookstore and hire films written on any subject, of any form, from literary criticism and novels to mathematics, history, and general science. From that moment on, it will no longer be possible to speak of *the* cinema. There will be *several* cinemas just as today there are several literatures, for the cinema, like literature, is not so much a particular art as a language which can express any sphere of thought.[14]

While Astruc's wishful forecast overshoots the reality of how the cinematic essay comes into distinct existence and evolves over the following decades, he anticipates one of its key defining components, beyond its aspiration to match literary and philosophical discourse with its cinematic "writing": its public vocation and its part in the cultivation of what Timothy Corrigan terms a "dynamics of interactive reception."[15] Corrigan positions the development of the essay in postwar French cinema squarely in the context of altered conditions of exhibition and audience engagement, from the resurgent ciné-club scene to the setting up of "Art et essai" theaters specializing in innovative, experimental films and documentaries would otherwise have trouble finding distribution. According to Corrigan, an essayistic cinema, first witnessed in earnest in the short films of Resnais, Marker, and Varda, arises as a performance, through appropriated and "retimed" forms both fictional and non-fictional, of an "unsettled subjectivity" raising questions meant to inspire public debate; there is an amplified emphasis on audience participation in an exchange of ideas. Corrigan's sense of the essayistic turns on a "structure of a mobile subjectivity, dispersed through public experience, as a forum for thinking ideas."[16]

The essayistic cinema of ideas that Astruc sees on the horizon and that Corrigan has recently theorized takes form and gains currency in the unprecedented flourishing of experimental and non-fiction short films in France during the 1950s. Generally classified

as the "court-métrage," these shorts, while using montage more extensively than Astruc

had prescribed, covered a vast spectrum of social topics and problems while serving as a

laboratory of stylistic innovation. Astruc himself, as a member of the Groupe de Trente,

was directly involved with the cadre of artists and intellectuals at the heart of this "école

du court-métrage français." The group – which also included Resnais, Marker, Georges

Franju, Jean Painlevé, Yannick Bellon, Roger Leenhardt, Jean Mitry, and Jacques Demy

– was instrumental in securing, within the newly reshaped French film industry, a stable

climate for the production and exhibition of short films. More than a training ground for

the direction of features, the *court-métrage* proved itself an especially resourceful format

by forging rather fluid connections between fiction and non-fiction and giving way to an

intense questioning of perception, memory, documentation, and the capacity of cinema to

ensnare actual events and provide objective facts.[17]

Some of these short films were financed and distributed independently and many

were state-commissioned to publicize and encourage a certain point of view. Franju and

Resnais were skilled interventionists in this latter respect, as their assigned topics, from

notable French figures and artists to the treatment of animals to contemporary industrial

and agricultural systems, cannot be prized apart from the *poetic* sensibility that pervades

them and sculpts them into anything but clear-cut "official" messages.[18] The same can be

said of Varda's shorts sponsored by the Office Nationale du Tourisme, which undermine

the notion of a cozy tourist gaze – *Ô saisons, ô châteaux* (1957) with its strangely lyrical

weave of impressions, not all of them flattering, of the Loire Valley castles; and *Du côté

de la côte* (1958) with its sober reflections on death in the midst of its charming overview

of the French Riviera and its ultimate "barring" of the viewer from the Eden-like gardens, described by the voiceover commentary as artificial in the first place.

Resnais, Marker, and Varda, who would soon make up the core of the Left Bank faction of the Nouvelle Vague,[19] are the chief exemplars of an essayistic cinema that rises up in the short film and eventually crosses over into features. It's in their films the we see an imaginative retooling of documentary (from the marshaling of facts and records to the use of voiceover narration) coupled with the imperative to confront pressing social issues. Resnais and Marker's collaboration *Les statues meurent aussi* (1953) mounts an incisive attack on colonial attitudes in the collection and consumption of African artifacts, and its not-so-thinly-disguised critique of French policies regarding the war in Indochina and the growing tensions in Algeria were not lost on the Centre Nationale de la Cinématographie, who censored the film until 1963.[20] Between Resnais' *Nuit et brouillard* (1955, for which Marker served as assistant director, while also contributing to Jean Cayrol's lyrical script for the commentary) and his next film *Toute la mémoire du monde* (1956, for which both Marker and Varda are credited as collaborators), we find inventive aesthetic strategies of superimposing the traumatic horrors of the recent past onto inadequate stockpiles of facts and documents, or onto spaces of absence, spaces described with the slow, searching but measured tracking shots that distinguish Resnais' work. In most discussions of the essay-film, including those by Corrigan, Phillip Lopate, and Dudley Andrew, *Nuit et brouillard* serves as a defining instance of the form, on account of its "self-interrogatory voice" that has its uncanny counterpart in Resnais' formal maneuvers.[21] For many, what ushers in the essayistic is the way the film critically raises and works through questions regarding "not only the holocaust, but our obligation to confront it."[22] Acknowledging from the outset an

impossibility of documentation by conventional means, the film enacts a complex and increasingly horrific series of oscillations – between color and black-and-white stock, between the present and past in both visual material and verb tense, between still and moving images, between speaking and not speaking, showing and not showing ("With the bodies … but words fail"), plenitude and ellipsis, remembering and forgetting – to address and provoke public reflection on the resounding question: "Who is responsible?"

These formative essay-films from the Left Bank speak to a crisis in the wake of the mid-century traumas, a crisis of knowing the world, of representing, reporting, and grasping real events. In this respect they are intimately in concert with the aims (ethical as much as formal) of an insurgent modern cinema – a cinema calling and searching for new articulations of time and space, new ways of figuring thought in relation to images, sounds, gestures, affects, situations. If Resnais is the pivotal director whose innovations extend between the essay and the fiction film during the 1950s (no definition of modern European cinema could be complete without covering *Nuit et brouillard* and *Hiroshima mon amour*, 1959), it's Marker who becomes the most nimble and prolific essayist over the next several decades, according to the set of practices he had developed and refined alongside Resnais and Varda. Because of his contrapuntal, intensely witty and reflective commentaries that impart a "first-person" interiority despite their use of multiple voices and characters, and because of his cartographic montage that so strikingly evokes, if not replicates, the vicissitudes of thinking and memory, Marker is commonly regarded as *the* quintessential essayist working in film and other audio-visual media.[23]

Marker's output has also been most responsible for the continued currency of the term "essay film" in film criticism. Nearly every account of the form that has appeared in

recent years takes cues from Bazin's enthusiastic and insightful 1958 review of Marker's *Lettre de Sibérie* (1957). There, Bazin insists on the radical newness of Marker's project, calling it "an essay documented by film. The important word is 'essay,' understood in the same sense that it has in literature – an essay at once historical and political, written by a poet as well."[24] Ten years after Astruc's expectant plea for a cinematic equivalent of the literary and philosophical essay, Bazin enlists the term to set Marker's achievement apart from traditional documentaries lacking a poetic and self-critical sensibility. His argument for the radicality of Marker's film hinges on two interrelated features: its use of voiceover commentary, and its "absolutely new notion of montage."

Bazin claims that in a typical documentary, even those with a politically engaged program, points are made through images whose documents and meanings are shored up by a voiceover that nonetheless remains subordinate to what is pictured. "With Marker, it works quite differently," he argues. "I would say that the primary material is intelligence, that its immediate expression is language, and that the image only intervenes in the third position, in reference to this verbal intelligence."[25] To this logic of organization, he gives the name "horizontal montage": meanings and ideas arise not so much from shot-to-shot successions as from lateral, tension-laden relays between what is seen and what is spoken in the commentary, that is, from the intelligence that "flows from the audio element to the visual. The montage has been forged from ear to eye."[26]

Bazin singles out as an example of this ear-to-eye montage a moment in *Lettre de Sibérie* that discussions of the essay-film tend to regard as paradigmatic – the moment in which Marker repeats the same sequence of shots filmed in the city of Yakutsk, each time laying an alternate commentary over it. Three events comprise this sequence: a public bus

passing a luxury car on the street, the vehicles headed in opposite directions; workers on

their hands and knees mending the street; and a man with "a somewhat strange face, or at

least, little blessed by nature," as Bazin puts it, walking past and shooting a glance at the

camera. On the first pass through the sequence (there are four altogether, not three as is

commonly described) the voiceover, offered from the perspective of a traveler-observer

taking in his immediate impressions, raises a question as to how one might "objectively"

catch the sense of hope in the air without either embracing or maligning the ideological

views that foster it: "While recording these images of the Yakutsk capital as objectively

as possible, I frankly wondered whom they would satisfy. Because, of course, you can't

describe the Soviet Union as anything but 'the worker's paradise,' or, as 'hell on earth.'"

Figures 1-3. *Lettre de Sibérie* **(Marker, 1957)**

On the second pass, the voiceover, now accompanied by ceremonial trumpets, takes the

tone and timbre of a pro-Soviet pitch:

> Yakutsk, capital of the Yakutsk autonomous Soviet socialistic republic, is a
> modern city, in which comfortable buses made available to the population, share
> the streets with powerful ZIMs, the pride of the Soviet automobile industry. In the
> joyful spirit of socialist emulation, happy Soviet workers, among them this
> picturesque denizen of the Arctic reaches, apply themselves to making Yakutsk an
> even better place to live.

The third pass is set to deeper, drearier-sounding horns, and the voiceover turns caustic:

> Yakutsk is a dark city with an evil reputation. The population is crammed into
> blood-colored buses, while the members of the privileged caste brazenly display
> the luxury of their ZIMs, a costly and uncomfortable car at best. Bending to the

task like slaves, the miserable Soviet workers, among them this sinister looking Asiatic, apply themselves to the primitive labor of grading with a drag beam.

Then, finally, what seems a more neutral tone is taken, without music:

> In Yakutsk, where modern houses are gradually replacing the dark older sections, a bus less crowded than its London or New York equivalent at rush hour passes a ZIM, an excellent car, reserved for public utilities departments on account of its scarcity. With courage and tenacity under extremely difficult conditions, Soviet workers, among them this Yakut, afflicted with an eye disorder, apply themselves to improving the appearance of their city, which could certainly use it.

Marker's strategy here isn't to "correct" the partisan standoff of the middle two passes with a more objective description. Rather, as Bazin points out, these successive passes effectively show us "that objectivity is even more false than the two opposed points of view; that, at least in relation to certain realities, impartiality is an illusion." For Bazin, the "horizontal montage" from voice to image works by a dialectic: the same images are subjected to three separate "intellectual beams" (four, counting Marker's own essayistic discourse) cast onto them by the commentaries, and each outcome, each valence taken by the sequence, absorbs the "echoes" of the others while giving off its own.[27]

Central to Bazin's conception of the film as an essay is his point that the relation of image to spoken word is by no means one of illustration or exemplification. He is not simply saying that the commentaries shape our perception of the cut-together events; nor is his point merely that truth is malleable in the hands of ideologues or that impartiality is itself a fiction having its own codes and conventions. His point is that Marker, through an adroitly sustained "dialectic between word and image" in which "cutting irony plays hide and seek with poetry," upholds a dynamic tension between what he shows us and what he tells us (through the filter of a vocal artist performing the scripted narration – only in rare instances do we hear Marker's own voice in his body of work). With Marker, where each

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observation, each argument, passes through the prism of poetry, this tension is sometimes cloaked by the eloquence and forthrightness of the voiceover comments, and often by the charming humor (as Bazin notes, Marker is quite likely to "say the most serious things in the most comic way"). From the standpoint of a critic, his films can often seem as though Marker himself has already amply thought through the issues he addresses, so as to make any further analysis redundant, if not dry and sophistic by comparison. As Adrian Martin puts it, Marker's work poses a serious challenge to the critic: "*what can you say about an essay film that it doesn't already say about itself*?"[28] But the power of Marker's narration is often held in check by images that it can't quite place or explicate: intelligence indeed flows from ear to eye, but it meets with material resistance (and often historical distance). Hence the need, exhibited by Marker in the Yakutsk sequence and elsewhere in his work, not only to speak for images that refuse to speak for themselves but also to make several passes through the same gleaned and mounted footage, as though endeavoring to give the spectator an editing room experience. What makes *Lettre de Sibérie* essayistic is that this trouble of making images speak becomes part and parcel of the perambulating discourse: the purpose of the multiple and conflicting commentaries is less to declare the superiority of Marker's own, somehow more authentic voice than to urge us to consider: How is this voice operating relative to what is shown? How sure can we be of its distinction from the other three, ostensibly more flawed voices? Would these images be entirely ambiguous if not referred "laterally" to a verbal authority that fastens them into context and gives them certain meanings at the cost of diluting their manifest significance? The essayist lets these questions resonate without facile resolution. Marker at once relies in large measure on the force of the commentator's voice and calls this authority into question.[29]

It might come as a surprise that Bazin, who is generally thought to espouse a strict "anti-montage" position in his criticism and theory, should predicate his assessment of Marker's "unprecedented enterprise" on a style of montage he locates at the crux of the film's essayistic spirit. But if Bazin never quite budged from his rejection of associative montage (its faith in the image above reality, its manipulative effects on the viewer), his analyses of specific films reveal a more flexible stance on editing and inter-shot relations than is typically believed.[30] In his review of *Lettre de Sibérie*, which he wrote just weeks before his death, Bazin shows a sharp sensitivity to a new poetics of montage that did not neatly confirm his theorized "evolution" with its apex in the immediate postwar films of Rossellini. But it's precisely because of the newness of Marker's montage, its qualitative distinction from the more associative modes of the Soviets and the French impressionists, that Bazin applauds it without reservation. Neither a plastic, aestheticist indulgence nor a violent imposition of sense through juxtaposition, Marker's "horizontal montage," while poetic and assertive in its circuitous treatment of a novel subject, retains rather than tries to blot out the ambiguity that Bazin so often champions: "ambiguity" not as some vague fogginess of meaning but a condition within which the stubborn intricacy inherent in the world's things and events and in our perceptual engagement with them is acknowledged, quite openly, as the basis for choices and strategies that make do with the incompleteness and partiality that inhabit the construction of meaning.[31]

Problems of Definition: Godard as Essayist

From this fairly synoptic account of the cinematic essay in France, which I have retraced with some nuance, we could derive a set of characteristics that delimit the essay-

film as a genre or "hybrid" form, as it is frequently called, whose common elements stem from its very troubling of generic categories. What links the examples by the Left Bank figures and other practitioners of the *court-métrage* exhibiting essayistic tendencies is a pervasive blurring of fiction and non-fiction practices, an attitude of social commitment in a public forum of ideas, the use of voiceover in dialectic tension with the image track, a proclivity for digression and fragmentation carried out through fresh forms of montage, a making-palpable of the medium's limits of representation, and a poetic and wandering manner of both articulating and complicating viewpoints.

However, such a list of traits is haunted by several pressing questions. Are these criteria enough to separate the essay-film from documentary, even in the French context alone? Isn't it possible to accommodate such work within existing theories and domains of documentary, such as "experimental documentary," and "poetic documentary"? What, ultimately, is the advantage of defining these films as essays? Doesn't this definition rely on an oversimplified view of documentary as a rather staid, hopelessly "objective" set of precepts from which the essay-film diverges? Once we use this criteria to group together a multifarious range of figures as cinematic essayists, what then? To what degree do such gains in taxonomy translate to gains in critical insight?

If we take seriously Godard's pronouncement that he works as an essayist in his earliest career stage, then these are questions that must be wrestled with. On the basis of the taxonomic view of the essay-film that springs up in the 1950s and crystallizes in the Left Bank examples, Godard's initial foray into the form would be *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle*. But my conviction in this study is that Godard requires us to recalibrate our sense of the essayistic and to consider its place and function outside the province of the

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"essay-film." Godard, to be sure, has contributed an abundance of films and videos over the span of his work that accord with and lend support to what I'm calling the taxonomic view of the cinematic essay, from various short works comprising a "peripheral" field of research feeding back into his more prominent efforts, to his eight-volume *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988-1998) that forms the centerpiece of his late period; yet these consummate "essay-films" share an essayistic spirit of inquiry, densely textured into the fabric of his work, with his feature films that are not typically classified as essays, including those he undertakes prior to *2 ou 3 choses*. While I am not claiming, with respect to Godard, that critical use of the term "essay" is too restrictive (if anything, it's often too wide-ranging), I do believe we need a more supple view of what working in an essayistic manner entails.

Godard, as a critic, was highly aware of the experimental shorts that brought the essay-film into greater critical and public consciousness; he was one of the few critics at *Cahiers du cinéma* to discuss the *court-métrage* at significant length. While admitting an ambivalence as to the special, autonomous status of the short vis-à-vis the feature, he saw the short as a valuable site of investigation into cinema's elemental powers. The short, he claims in a 1959 article, "only remains cinema insofar as it no longer is." By this, Godard means that the short, whose brevity precludes the use of rigorous plot structures common to the feature-length fiction film, allows the filmmaker to return to cinema's origins when "cinematographic invention was based on spontaneity." At the same time, Godard sees in this creative gesture a profound contradiction: where the spontaneity of early cinema was "natural" and "instinctive," the short film carries off the same effect through "purposeful intelligence." For this reason, he thinks that making short films "has become synonymous with attempting the impossible." By Godard's lights, the experimental short is not cinema

so much as a sketch-like probing of cinematic possibilities.[32]

By 1959, Godard, on the verge of making his first feature, had made five shorts

himself in the preceding four years, but none of these films displays the level of mastery

or the inventive force he admiringly attributes to the shorts of Varda and Resnais (and to

those of Franju in his other articles). To Varda he ascribes an eccentric way of delicately

weaving together impressions and witty observations gathered, "sketched," on the move.

Her shorts "are above all journals, on each page of which irony makes a triple somersault

to land on the following page at the feet of beauty, luxury or delight" (*GG*, 113). Resnais'

short films are, for Godard, unique in giving the "impression of having started completely

from scratch." In addition to praising Resnais' "musical" and "scientific" montage (which

he likens to Eisenstein's), Godard says that Resnais' shorts "*invented* the modern tracking

shot" and thus enabled him to "move on to features with a clear conscience."

> From *Van Gogh* [1948] onwards, a movement of the camera gave the impression
> that it was not simply a movement of the camera but an exploration of the secret
> of this movement. A secret which André Bazin, another solitary explorer, also
> starting from scratch, by a moving coincidence discovered at the same time but by
> different means. (*GG*, 115-116)

This observation is telling of Godard's own disposition in the months leading up

to his debut with *À bout de souffle* (1960). As the comparison to Bazin reveals, what he

admires is the critical, or more specifically, the metacritical component of Resnais' film

practice. In several of his reviews and articles in the late 1950s, he is at pains to show us

that in modern cinema, critical and creative faculties are manifestly entwined, each made

visible in the formal choices that compose the work, as when he insists – in his very next

piece for *Cahiers* – that Anthony Mann's *Man of the West* (1958) is a "lesson in cinema –

a lesson in modern cinema" in that it simultaneously "criticizes and creates," offering the

viewer both "course and discourse," reinventing the Western shot by shot, just as Griffith "gave one the impression that he was inventing cinema with each shot" (*GG*, 117). This metacritical aspect, with its object of radical invention (again he invokes early cinema to signal a return to the primal elements of the medium), has nothing to do with the kind of careless self-referentiality that Godard's early films are often said to exhibit. Nor is it in concert with the Greenbergian view of modernism in which a foregrounding of means is chiefly affirmative. The critical thinking directed to and made palpable in the medium is, on Godard's terms, more interrogative than affirmative. The modern cinema he responds to in his written criticism and soon participates in directly is a cinema of questioning and self-questioning – with an eye to inventing new forms *as if* starting from scratch while in fact drawing critically, and in Godard's case abundantly, on existing forms and traditions.

For Godard, this metacritical tinkering with the film medium necessarily entails citation – citation not merely in the narrow sense of alluding to or borrowing from other works of art and literature (though he of course does this) but in the more comprehensive sense of integrating and re-mixing entire styles and genres and their sets of conventions, spanning both documentary and fiction (and both high and low, popular and avant-garde). This peculiar alliance of citation and criticism, which I take to be central to his essayistic formation (and which I will discuss in greater detail below), is a stark point of difference from the Left Bank essayists, none of whom has as pronounced an investment in popular cinematic forms.[33] If Godard, as a critic preparing to make his own films, is quite eager to find evidence of a metacritical attitude not only in the work of an experimental filmmaker like Resnais but also in the more conventional practice of a Hollywood genre director like Mann, he is equally keen to break down categorical boundaries between the documentary

and the fiction film by contending, as he does all through his critical writings, that the one inevitably relies on and folds into the other, and that their practices can be shared in spirit even where technique varies; take, for instance, his comment in a review of Jean Rouch's *Moi, un noir* (1958) that Rouch "sees that reportage derives its nobility from being a sort of quest for the Holy Grail known as *mise en scène*. Accordingly in *Moi, un noir* there are a few crane shots worthy of Anthony Mann. But the wonderful thing is that they are done by hand" (*GG*, 129). Here too juxtaposing the experimental and the popular, Godard uses the term *mise en scène*, typically reserved for fiction, to point out a "quest" shared by the mobile framing of Rouch and Mann, one deploying a crane, the other a handheld camera.

As much as criticism and citation, this crossing of fiction and documentary lies at the foundation of Godard's essayistic temperament. Those who classify the director as an essayist invariably recognize this trait, but in most analyses the fictional aspect dissolves into notions of subjectivity and "generic hybridism" that end up privileging, despite this acknowledged blurring of boundaries, the documentary side of things, as though his use of characters and story elements have no bearing on his "communication of an essayistic argument."[34] But just as "documentary" is not always or simply an imparting of facts that aspires to objectivity, "fiction" is not always or simply a staging of a drama according to an intelligible plot built around psychologistic characters. It's my feeling is that to grasp more fully how Godard works as an essayist, we have to refrain from making straw men out of fiction and documentary. That is, we need to inspect how Godard keeps them both in play, how instead of rendering them indistinguishable, he explores the discordance that their co-presence generates (which, after all, is a kind of montage.)

Godard's aphoristic challenges to the film-historical split between the Lumières

(actuality, documentary) and Méliès (fantasy, artifice) are well known; in fact, it is now almost as much a cliché to recite his claims on the subject as it is to go on believing that fiction and documentary have evolved along entirely divergent paths. And yet, it is rare that the motivations behind his objections to this split are dealt with. In his early critical writings, Godard frequently insists that fiction and documentary interpenetrate, as when he asserts favorably of Hitchcock's *The Wrong Man* (1956): "We are watching the most fantastic of adventures because we are watching the most perfect, the most exemplary, of documentaries" (*GG*, 49). While Godard's sensitivity to the documentary aspect in each film owes in part to the views of Bazin,[35] it is more deeply indebted to his experience in Henri Langlois' Cinémathèque, "the only museum where the real and the imaginary meet at last," as Godard says in a 1966 speech given in honor of Langlois (*GG*, 236). It's with Langlois' programming strategies in mind – strategies that placed fiction films alongside documentaries to show their affinities through juxtaposition – that Godard argues against the Lumières/Méliès bifurcation by positing that Méliès filmed "the reception of the King of Yugoslavia by the President of the Republic. A newsreel in other words," whereas the Lumières filmed "a family card game in the *Bouvard et Pécuchet* manner. In other words, fiction. Let us be more precise and say that what interested Méliès was the ordinary in the extraordinary; and Lumière, the extraordinary in the ordinary" (*GG*, 235).[36]

There is more to Godard's argument than a *reversal* of figures that undermines received knowledge, as weighing what he says here against his previous remarks on the subject (and against the elaborate forms of combining fact and fiction in his films of the decade) makes apparent. In another 1959 discussion of Rouch's films, Godard – passing off as his own a line that François Reichenbach told him in earlier interview (*GG*, 93) –

writes: "All great fiction films tend towards documentary, just as all great documentaries tend towards fiction. *Ivan the Terrible* towards *Que viva Mexico!*; *Mr. Arkadin* towards *It's All True*, and conversely." So far Godard's point seems to be that within and across a single filmmaker's body of work, fiction inevitably leads to documentary, which in turn leads back to fiction (this holds as a direct progression for Eisenstein but not for Welles, whose examples occur several films apart). But his next lines complicate this picture by posing stakes that are at once ethical and aesthetic: "One must choose between ethic and aesthetic. That is understood. But it is no less understood that each word implies a part of the other. And he who opts wholeheartedly for one necessarily finds the other at the end of his journey. *Lola Montès* is the opposite of *Jaguar*, but they support and vindicate each other because they are pure films, films by free men." Not everything he says in the piece adds up to a single, consistent position, but his basic point here is that one must choose to pursue, in a given film, the direction of fiction or that of documentary, *committing* to this choice firmly while knowing, however, that that an absolute, either/or distinction between them is false, since the one leads to and implies the other. It's the commitment to one that allows the other to surface of its own accord, unplanned, as if a discovery, which is what Godard praises in Rouch and takes Malraux's *L'Espoir* (1945) to task for not doing. "No half-measures," he insists (*GG*, 132-133). What makes this point somewhat hard to rope in is that Godard distributes it – without intervening clarification – across three different situations: a director's movements between films (Welles, Eisenstein); progressions and shifts within a single film (Rouch); and the comparison between films that, despite being "opposites" in terms of the choice the director has made (Ophuls, Rouch), affirm the rule.

Instead of simply inverting the traditional separation of documentary and fiction,

Godard sets up a dialectic interdependence that serves as an armature for the experiments in his own features of the period, his "research in the form of a spectacle," as he phrases it memorably in his 1962 interview with *Cahiers*, again challenging the Lumières/Méliès bifurcation (*GG*, 181). In the same interview, Godard calls himself a critic and essayist working in the film medium, and he asserts that what distinguishes the Nouvelle Vague – within which he includes the Left Bank figures, while situating the *Cahiers* group as the "nucleus" (*GG*, 172) – is a fundamentally new conception of the relation between fiction and reality (coupled with "nostalgic regret for a cinema which no longer exists," namely the classical Hollywood cinema that had just gone into eclipse). "Generally speaking," he again avers, "reportage is interesting only when placed in a fictional context, but fiction is interesting only if it is validated by a documentary context" (*GG*, 192).

Godard has long said that when he was writing articles, he was already making films; and indeed, the concept of modern cinema he articulates in the pages of *Cahiers* carries over into his features: it registers in their metacritical inventory and retooling of existing forms, codes, and conventions, as well as in their sociological (and increasingly collage-form) sketches of Paris in the midst of postwar modernization.[37] Godard's early films do not abide by a taxonomic notion of the essay-film, as it has come to be defined in film theory, but their elements of "research" that intrude on and inflect their fictional worlds were, during the 1960s, seen by more than a few important critics as traces of an essayistic film practice. For instance, Italo Calvino, writing in *Cahiers* as part of a 1966 symposium on "Cinema and the Novel," calls attention to the "questionnaire-aspect" of *Masculin féminin: 15 faits précis* (1966) and to Godard's interrogative engagement with the disciplines of both sociology and historiography:

> The basic point is this: the sociological-inquiry film and the historical-research film make sense only if they are not filmed explanations of a truth that sociology and historiography have already established, but intervene in some way to contest what sociology and historiography are saying … For the true essay-film I envisage is an attitude not of pedagogy but of interrogation, with none of that inferiority complex toward the written word that has bedeviled relations between literature and the cinema.[38]

Calvino identifies the questioning and sense of sought possibility that inspires Godard's trespassing, through cinema, onto fields and properties outside conventional uses of the cinema; and this ambition to rescue the research capacity of the medium, not as a device for illustrating ideas on loan from other critical disciplines but rather as a means of both generating and exploring critical ideas in its own right, isn't far from the task that Astruc had prescribed in his 1948 manifesto. In a more formalist vein, Noël Burch, in his 1969 book *Praxis du cinéma*, considers Godard (as well as Franju) as a major progenitor of an essayistic cinema. Burch describes *Vivre sa vie* (1962), *Masculin féminin*, *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle*, and *La Chinoise* as audacious and intriguing (if not wholly successful) efforts to realize a "cinema of true reflection, where the subject becomes the basis of an intellectual construct, which in turn is capable of engendering the over-all form and even the texture of a film without being denatured or distorted."[39]

Figures 4-7. *Masculin féminin* **(Godard, 1966)**

In these early definitions, what counts as essayistic is Godard's inventive use of documentary forms within ostensibly more fictional worlds. To stay with the example of *Masculin féminin*, the questionnaires at once evoke the interviews of Rouch and Morin's *Chronique d'un été* (1960) and Marker's *Le Joli mai* (1963) *and* conceptually shade into and contend with popular cinematic conventions of representing dialogue, such as shot-countershot (which Godard persistently emphasizes, rather than obliterates, by avoiding: when he essays other forms of dialogue, he makes formal choices that implicitly keep in play the discarded convention). The disparity between this view of Godard as an essayist and the taxonomic view that excludes his early films comes down to a lingering presence of character and story structure, which is not part of the trailblazing examples of the Left Bank directors. Their essay-films are, more properly, documentaries that bring in artifice and poetry to question the veracity of their documents. Godard, on the other hand, brings documentary into the permeable worlds of his dramaturgies to explore a dialectic of truth and falsity, life and theatricality, research and spectacle. His early films also fail to satisfy the taxonomic view because they lack, until *2 ou 3 choses*, a reflective, critical voiceover commentary. But these terms of omission both undervalue the fiction part of the hybridity

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that the essay form is said to sustain and neglect to consider how the voice of Godard that

is such a prominent feature of *2 ou 3 choses* stems from the resourceful ways in which he

uses his authorial voice (and figure) in his previous work.

While we are closer to discerning Godard's use of the essay form, we still lack an

adequate set of traits by which to categorize the director. In fact, thinking in broad terms

of what he shares with other cinematic essayists will only take us so far. We need a more

robust sense of what constitutes an essay, and we need a much sharper sense of precisely

how and *why* Godard works in such a manner. I propose, then, to pursue a deeper history

of the essay form by investigating its literary and philosophical source in the writings of

Montaigne, a figure whom Godard has long cited as a key influence. Establishing points

of contact between Godard's cinematic project and the Montaignian essay will bring into

view certain stakes and motivations that are vital to our understanding of what Godard is

up to. Moreover, a close look at the *Essais* will prime us to reckon with the complexity of

style and discourse that distinguishes all of Godard's output.

Montaigne and the Act of Essaying

From Genre to Gesture

When Montaigne gave the title *Essais* to his volume of self-reflective writings

(first published in 1580, then, in revised and expanded editions in 1582 and 1588), this

was not to indicate that each unit in his text was an essay in the now-common sense of

the term, a self-contained piece of writing on a given topic. For the numbered and titled

sections, he used the words *chapitres* ("chapters") and *contes* ("stories"). His main title

refers not to a distinct prose genre but to the fundamental impetus of his project: *the act*

of essaying.[40] His work is less a collection of discrete articles than an overlapping series of trials, tangents, riffs, exercises, digressions, inquiries – within and across the chapters that generally take their own stated titles as jumping off points and that are linked more strongly by manner and attitude than by theme and content. (The overlap is quite literal and concrete when multiple strata of original and revised writing are at once present in a chapter that Montaigne has reshaped between successive editions, in the light of his later, sometimes appreciably changed thinking.[41])

The noun *essai* and the verb *essaier* – from the Latin *exagium*, a "weighing" of ideas or objects – already carried certain connotations by the late Renaissance. Common sayings were *faire l'essai* ("try out") and *mettre à l'essai* ("put to the test"). Montaigne's opting for the term has to do with its connections to apprentice-work, to the humble and imprecise stumbling of a beginner: *essai* and *coup d'essai* referred in common parlance to the work of the artisan-in-training rather than that of the master. Explaining and, with false modesty, apologizing for his strange method, he tells his reader, "If my soul [*âme*] could only find a firm footing, I would not be assaying myself but resolving myself. But my soul is ever in apprenticeship and being tested. I am expounding a lowly, lackluster existence."[42] Time and again, Montaigne asks the reader to forgive what must appear to be a vain pursuit, even a "daft undertaking," but there is a purpose to his setting forth of "ignorance" as his "master-form" (I.50: 338). "I freely say what I think about all things – even about those which doubtless exceed my competence and which I in no wise claim to be within my jurisdiction," he writes. "When I express my opinions it is so as to reveal the measure of my sight and not of the thing" (II.1: 460). To proceed from ignorance, to trespass on fields in which others claim their expertise, is to throw into question the basis

of any knowledge, scientific or otherwise, that does not come from one's own mental and (no less important for Montaigne) physical impressions, from one's observations made in the erratic flow of daily existence.[43] He claims understanding only in one subject (which he believes opens onto all others), that of self-study. "Authors communicate to the public by some peculiar mark foreign to themselves," he writes. "I – the first ever to do so – by my universal being, not as a grammarian, poet or jurisconsult but as Michel de Montaigne . . . In that subject I am the most learned man alive!" (III.2: 908).

In its expressive mode and its striving for a more intimate relation with the reader, Montaigne's writing stems from certain ancient forms: the aphorism, the apothegm, the moral lesson, and especially the missive and the dialogue, both of which typify an *ordo neglectus*, an "open" form of exposition. The *Essais* draw on Attic prose, developed in Latin (Seneca) and Greek (Plato), and its rhetorical aim to convey *the verve of seeking out truth* instead of imparting, in a refined manner, the already known, the settled-upon.[44] Montaigne conceives of his essayistic writing as a marriage of conversation and poetry. He declares a strong preference for "the kind of speech which is simple and natural, the same on paper as on the lip; speech which is rich in matter, sinewy, brief and short . . . gnomic rather than diffuse, far from affectation … not schoolmasterly, not monkish, not legalistic …" (I.26: 193). Elsewhere, he writes that he "loves the gait of poetry, all jumps and tumblings." Including both prose and verse in his conception of poetry, Montaigne cites Plato's Socratic dialogues as a model that "sparkles throughout with poetic power and daring, and presents the characteristics of its frenzy." In other words, he uses Plato's ecstatically poetic writing against Plato's own rejection of poetry as an activity marred by the fact that the divinely inspired poet has no knowledge of, and little control over, what

he produces (or what he "interprets" at a remove from its source). Montaigne's task in the *Essais* is, in part, to render false the generic partition between poetic expression and the seemingly more proper disciplines of inquiry. "If you do not want more dullness," he tells us, "you must accept a touch of madness" (III.9: 1125-1126).

Montaigne was not alone among late Renaissance thinkers in choosing the term "essay" to describe his investigations. Francis Bacon, from his *Essayes* (1597) to his *The Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall* (1625), formulates the essay as a tautly aphoristic and, above all, didactic form of reflection – one addressed primarily to moral conduct in "civil business." The essay for Bacon, in its counseling of entrepreneurs, politicians, and institutional bodies, is fundamentally allied with a utopian-modernist project of scientific enlightenment. By contrast, Montaigne's essays, while no less inclined to pass judgment on moral issues, and to take institutions to task, are more deeply skeptical with regard to the acquisition and transmission of knowledge (as is reflected by his unsystematic prose style). In his lengthy and tortuous chapter "Apology for Raymond Sebond," he comes to the conclusion: "We ourselves, our faculty of judgment and all mortal things are flowing and rolling ceaselessly: nothing certain can be established about one from the other, since both judged and judging are ever shifting and changing" (II.12: 680). For Montaigne this position isn't defeatist but enabling: in dispensing with the self-certainty of human reason and all claims to truth and wisdom stemming from it, he lays the groundwork for his even more intense self-questioning.

Self-portraiture

In strict generic terms, the *Essais* are not autobiographical. They do not recount

lived events by imposing a narrative with Montaigne as its protagonist. In his address to the reader, he uses the metaphor of painting to define his project: "Here I want to be seen in my simple, natural, everyday fashion, without striving or artifice: for it is my own self that I am painting [*c'est moy que je peins*]." But this isn't a portrait for which he sits still. He tries to capture the *mobility* of the self he is testing; he is a painter of *transience*. "I do not portray being," he explains, "I portray passing [*je peinds le passage*]: not the passage from one age to another . . . but from day to day, from minute to minute. I must adapt this account of myself to the passing hour" (III.2: 907-908, trans. modified). The *bios-graphia* that Montaigne takes up with regard to himself is a sustained effort to confront, and treat appropriately, a living subject that is by definition unstable, mobile. "[L]ife," he says, "is material motion in the body, an activity, by its very essence, imperfect and unruly: I work to serve it on its own terms" (III.9: 1118).

Montaigne contends that once he manages to capture, "in the flimsy medium of words," the erratic and spontaneous shape of his thinking, what results is not so much a record of his deeds (which, he professes, would tell more about "Fortune" than himself) as an inscribed *corpus*: "I am all on display, like a mummy on which at a glance you can see the veins, the muscles and tendons, each piece in its place … It is not what I do that I write of, but of me, of what I *am*" [*mon essence*] (II.6: 426). His stress on the corporality of his text extends to its content: everywhere set on portraying himself sincerely, he does not shy away from writing vividly about his bodily functions, his sexual proclivities, his illnesses, his injuries, and his own approaching death. As Erich Auerbach observes, these details are "essential ingredient[s]" of Montaigne's self-portrait – they are "so intimately fused in their concrete sensory effects with the moral-intellectual content of his book that

any attempt to separate them would be absurd" (and for Auerbach, these details undercut the "formal systems of moral philosophy" which dally in abstraction while ignoring the "random contingencies" of life as experienced).[45] Montaigne goes as far as to assert that the *Essais* and their writer are composed of one continuous, vital substance: "I have not made my book anymore than it has made me – a book of one substance [*consubstantiel*] with its author, proper to me and a limb of my life" (II.18: 755).

With his *Essais*, then, Montaigne is also a progenitor of the literary self-portrait, the poetics of which have been carefully studied by Michel Beaujour.[46] This is to say that Montaigne's self-portraiture, rendered in essayistic language, looks forward to other such notable examples as Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Rêveries d'un promeneur solitaire* (1782), Friedrich Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* (1888), Michel Leiris's *L'Age d'homme* (1939) and *La Règle du jeu* (1948), André Malraux's *Antimémoires* (1967), and Roland Barthes' *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* (1975) – all works in which the author is "bodied forth" as a dense patchwork of thoughts, impressions, and citations, not so much an autobiographical subject whose life assumes the shape of a linear chronicling.

Address, Dialogue, and Friendship

For Montaigne, sequestered in his library tower at his family estate, the study of oneself is neither solipsistic nor socially irresponsible. Famously he claims that to look at himself so thoroughly is, in effect, to investigate humankind in general, given that "Every man bears the Form of the human condition" (III.2: 908). Montaigne's retreat into private life was not without interruption – in the intervals between his work on the three editions of the *Essais* published in his lifetime, he traveled regularly and performed his local and

national duties as mayor of Bordeaux, serving two two-year terms. His direct interactions

with the world of contemporary human affairs – civil war, religious conflict, the plague,

economic instability – factors greatly into the overall development of his *Essais*, which

increasingly (with altered passages and additional chapters) vacillate in interest from the

self to others, from the question "What do I know?" to "What am I?"[47] If his first passes

through Books I and II reveal a condescension towards the common people ("witless" by

accident, or by a lack of self-cultivation), in his later passes, and in Book III, Montaigne

embraces them as part of a common human fabric, and he carefully works to espouse an

interplay between self and other, his emphasis on maintaining an equilibrium of relations:

of personal freedom and commitment to others, of distance and closeness.

This need for human interaction, essential to Montaigne's self-questioning, plays

out in the poetics of the *Essais* – through its intimate address to the reader, its insinuation

of an ongoing dialogue and its deliberately "open" structure that seeks to draw the reader

into a collaborative exchange. More specifically, Montaigne's project, from its genesis to

its last installments, is haunted by a desire for friendship – for *amitié*, to use the term that

appears often in his chapters (its root in *aimer*, "to love"), for affectionate bonds in which

two souls are "blended" so thoroughly as to "efface the seam which joins them together,"

yet neither person fully losing oneself in the other, their "wills work[ing] together" (I.28:

209-213). This is the kind of friendship Montaigne claims to have shared with Etienne de

La Boëtie until it was cut short by the latter's premature death in 1563. Montaigne in fact

frames the *Essais* as an attempted continuation of the intellectual exchanges he enjoyed,

in both direct and epistolary form, with his good friend. "If I had somebody to write to I

would readily have chosen [the letter] as the means of publishing my witty chatter [*mes*

verves]," he says. "But I would need some definite correspondent, as I used to have, who would draw me out, sustain me, and lift me up. For to correspond with thin air, as others do, is something I could only manage in my dreams" (I.40: 283, trans. modified).

The *Essais* are a search for a certain kind of reader, one attuned to Montaigne's task and manner. At times Montaigne writes as though his books will be of limited use, interest, and access to the public. In his address to the reader, he claims that the work is written primarily "for the private benefit of my friends and kinsmen so that, having lost me (as they must do soon), they can find here again some traits of my character and my humours," and he closes by advising the general reader not to waste leisure time on so "frivolous" a subject. In Book III, while expressing his fondness for the "poetic gait" of Plato's dialogues, which are *made to seem* "fortuitous and casual," he suddenly asserts, with a touch of defiance, "It is the undiligent reader who loses my subject not I" (III.9: 1125). This appears to suggest that Montaigne revels in misdirecting his readers, all the while withholding for himself the threads linking his digressions. Elsewhere, however, in a passage woven into the third edition of Book I, he complicates this view by formulating more of a give-and-take between writer and reader:

> I may be wrong but there are not many writers who put more matter into your
> grasp than I do and who, with such concern for this matter, scatter at least the
> seeds of it so thickly over their paper. To make room for more, I merely pile up
> the headings of argument: if I were to develop them as well I would increase the
> size of this tome several times over. And how many tacit *exempla* have I scattered
> over my pages which could all give rise to essays without number [*en produira
> infinis* Essais] if anyone were to pluck them apart with a bit of intelligence.
> Neither they nor my quotations serve always as mere examples, authorities or
> decorations: I do not only have regard for their usefulness to me: they often bear
> the seeds of a richer, bolder subject-matter; they often sound a more subtle note
> on the side, both for me, who does not wish to press more out of them, and also
> for those who get my drift. (I.40: 281-282, trans. modified)

This statement follows from Montaigne's complaint about readers who, in discussing his

Essais, attend only to the language and not the "matter." He stresses that his writings are in fact teeming with subject matter – it's just that topics, episodes, quotations, and ideas are "scattered" and only partially developed by Montaigne himself, instead of presented as examples within a treatise-like argument. Seen in this light, the "undiligent reader" is one who, in taking Montaigne to be offering evidence for a claim that pertains directly to the heading, ignores the sense in which these "matters" open out onto "infinite" essayistic possibilities, if intelligently "plucked" and pursued further.[48]

We can single out three basic operations in Montaigne's poetics that speak to and attempt to cultivate a diligent reader with whom he might "correspond." First, Montaigne makes frequent use of *asyndetic* structures, deliberately leaving out conjunctions between cumulative propositions and clauses. As Auerbach well describes this device, Montaigne "often omits . . . syntactic connectives, but he suggests them. He skips intermediate steps of reasoning, but replaces what is lacking by a kind of contact which arises spontaneously between steps not connected by strict logic." Or, in Montaigne's own words, "I intend the subject-matter to distinguish itself . . . without my words stitching things together for the benefit of weak and inattentive ears" (III.9: 1126, trans. modified). This device works not only to conjure up an atmosphere of conversation but to urge the reader to "cooperate" by supplying the missing steps: "at every moment [the reader] is expected to pause, to check, to add something."[49] Secondly, dialogue is not merely suggested but inscribed in the flow of the text, with Montaigne either using quotations (the sources generally unidentified) as if they are interjections that prompt a response (e.g., the Virgil quotation that prefaces his explanation of poetic prose in Book III: "Where are you heading, so far off course?"), or raising questions himself and using quotation marks as if temporarily donning the voice

of an interlocutor (e.g., "Since I cannot hold my reader's attention by my weight, *manco male* [it is no bad thing] if I manage to do so by my muddle. 'Yes, but afterwards he will be sorry he spent time over it.' I suppose so: but still he would have done it!" III.9; 1126). And thirdly, Montaigne vividly portrays himself *as a reader* in the midst of his essaying. He describes for us with great pleasure his eccentric reading habits and the specifications of his circular library, the beams of its ceiling inscribed with some fifty quotations from the Bible and from classical Latin and Greek texts, its shelves lined with many volumes, some given to him by his late friend La Boëtie. It's as if to grasp the *Essais* conceptually, we need to have a definite sense of the "lair" in which they are produced – the site where reflection takes the form of reading and writing and rereading and rewriting continuously, where Montaigne works as the first, diligent reader of the *Essais*, withdrawn and yet still, of necessity, invested in human interaction (hence Rousseau's need to set apart his own, more private project: "I shall carry out the same enterprise as Montaigne, but with a goal entirely contrary to his, because he did not write his Essays except for others, and I do not write my reveries except for myself"[50]).

Modern Criticism

Montaigne's portrait of himself as a reader involves a curious poetics of citation, one that departs radically from the way in which other sources are invoked in literature prior to the Renaissance. When reflecting on the citations that proliferate in his writings, which he does quite often, Montaigne calls them *emprunts* or *allegations*, as though to underscore and respect their status as materials on loan from authorities. But in practice he aggressively transforms what he "borrows," sometimes concealing or misquoting the

original source, sometimes skewing it for his own purposes. And he defends each of these operations as fair game for his *Essais*, since they follow naturally from his "treacherous memory" (II.10: 469) and from his inclination not to study books but to "dip into" them: "as for anything I do retain from them, I am no longer aware that it belongs to somebody else: it is quite simply the material from which my judgment has profited and the ideas and arguments in which it has been steeped. I straightway forget the author, the source, the wording and the other particulars" (II.17: 740). Using a cultivation image, he writes of how he "transplants" pre-existing material into his "own soil," where the ideas take root in one field. He admits that his appropriations result in "some of the richer flowers" in his garden, thoughts and "reasonings" he could not have mustered himself. Even still, he instructs us: "Do not linger over the [borrowed] matter but over my fashioning of it" (II.10: 458). Ultimately, the citations, whether taken verbatim or creatively transfigured, belong to Montaigne and to the *Essais* as much, he implies in another metaphor, as honey belongs to the bees that have "ransacked flowers" to produce it (I.26: 171).

Montaigne's memory, of course, is not as defective as he claims it to be, and one reason for using this form of citation in which the source is "forgotten" is to fold what he integrates into the *spontaneous* temporality of his own writing. Montaigne attempts in the *Essais* to preserve what Michel Beaujour calls "the euphoria of self-presence in writing," and the *impression* that his reflections stream forth of their own volition, without *a priori* design and without concentrated effort. To treat a citation as a "foreign" substance from a preceding, more or less authoritative discourse – a substance requiring him to pause and make certain to incorporate it faithfully, or to recall it from rote memory – would "break the charm" of this impression by sacrificing the "primacy of the present," the ephemeral

unfolding (*le passage*) in which he locates himself and his work.[51] Moreover, this poetics of citation, relying as it does on creative transformation more than reiteration ("in honour, invention takes incomparably higher precedence over quotation" [III.12: 1197]), refuses a subordinate role to the text from which the matter is drawn.

With Montaigne, the genre of compilation, central to Renaissance literature and its mining of classical antiquity, gives way to creation and judgment, and the essayist is in no sense diminished by his secondariness to the works he engages, whether they are poetic, scientific, or philosophic. The *Essais* announce "the advent of modern citation," as Antoine Compagnon puts it; and given that Montaigne refuses the strictly interpretive role of the commentator and places his work on the same poetic and conceptual plane as the texts he cites, he also anticipates modern criticism as variously defined and practiced by such figures as Friedrich Schlegel, Denis Diderot, Walter Pater, and Oscar Wilde.[52] In Wilde's dialogue "The Critic as Artist" (1891), the persona of Gilbert insists not only that criticism is, itself, "creative in the highest sense of the word," but that "the critical faculty invents fresh forms," sparing mere creation from dull reiteration. There is a Montaignian echo in Wilde's assertion that criticism is essentially independent from the works it treats "simply as a starting-point for a new creation." For Wilde's Gilbert, the task of "criticism of the highest kind" is not interpret, explain, or analyze (activities he relegates to a "lower sphere") but to concern itself with synthetic impressions, and to "deepen" and "intensify" the "mysteries" of other works. Gilbert's major point is that a "critical spirit" is needed to make art works speak vitally to the present age and thus to the hopes of the living – a task for which creation by itself is ill-equipped.[53]

Under the influence of Wilde's views, Georg Lukács sets out in his 1910 piece

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"On the Nature and Form of the Essay" (written as a letter to his friend, Leo Popper) to legitimate his own critical project – that is, to establish the unity of a book of essays he intends to publish – by defining the essay as an autonomous art-form. He elaborates the idea that the greatest essays, from the imaginary diaries of Kierkegaard to the *Essais* of Montaigne to the dialogues of Plato, address their penetrating questions "directly to life itself," without need of "the mediation of literature or art." Lukács claims the essay is an "intellectual poem" (a phrase lifted from Schlegel), and whatever prior work the essayist takes up is merely a "springboard" for inventive reflection.[54] Lukács finds in the hero of Plato's dialogues a perfect embodiment of the essay form: Socrates is to the essay what Oedipus is to tragedy, and what Socrates embodies is decidedly not tragic, since no final meanings are crystallized by a dramatic conclusion. Plato's Socrates gives expression to an endless setting-forth of questions, of "the question of all questions," each one of them pitched to "the ultimate problems of life." Just as the dialogues often abruptly break off due to external events having nothing to do with the issues at hand, so too the execution of Socrates is an intrusion from the outside and irrelevant to his questioning except as an ironic gesture of termination. What Socrates embodies for Lukács is, above all, "longing" in form – a longing that does not have its legitimation in the eventual fulfillment of what is longed for, namely different values, a different "system." As an art-form unto itself, the essay in Lukács's formulation is inhabited by a two-fold irony. First, it speaks to the most urgent matters of life-as-lived while seeming to be speaking only of "pictures and books," the "pretty ornaments of real life."[55] Second, it gives form to an attitude of yearning for a possible system of order irrespective of its achievement at some point and time down the road. This yearning is, for Lukács, what an essay *is*. Secondariness becomes an indefinite

precursiveness, and the activity of reflection takes priority over the outcomes. "The essay is a judgment," he states, "but the essential, the value-determining thing about it is not the verdict (as is the case with the system) but the process of judging."[56]

Style and Method

The originality of the *Essais*, for all its borrowings, resides in this idiosyncratic and tentative exploration of a middle, uncharted territory between criticism and poetry: Montaigne refuses to side wholly with either while summoning the resources of both as he measures and describes his volatile thinking in action, rarely failing to offer reflective commentary on what he's doing as he's doing it. The layered and subtly peripatetic form his writing takes compels us to consider the *how* as much as the what. Scanning a chapter in the *Essais* solely for its ideational content is as senseless as it is undiligent.

Montaigne recurrently comments on his "style," as opposed to his rhetoric, the formality of which he criticizes.[57] "I change subject violently and chaotically. My style and my mind both go a-roaming" [*mon stile, et mon esprit, vont vagabondant de mesmes*] (III.9: 1125, trans. modified). Far from being mannerist, the style he adopts in the vulgar tongue of French is, he stresses, keyed to the perpetually shifting nature of both humans and the phenomenal world. "We are entirely made up of bits and pieces, woven together so diversely and so shapelessly that each one of them pulls its own way at every moment" (II.1: 380), and likewise: "The world is all variation and dissimilarity" (II.2: 381). What appears to be stable and consistent is, rather, a trick on our perception: "Constancy itself is nothing but a more languid rocking to and fro" (III.2: 907). These tropes permeate the *Essais* and reappear regardless of topic, distilling Montaigne's cosmic vision even where

the "matters" are left in the lurch. Repeated terms thread a Heraclitean conception of flux throughout the separate chapters: *blanler*, *branle*, *discordance*, *dissemblance*, *diversité*, *mutation*, *ondoyant*, *varieté*. For Montaigne, if the world is ever-changing, and if he is part of the world, it follows that the means by which he studies himself should be keenly sensitive to fluctuation, digression, contradiction, and infinitude.[58]

This brings us to three interrelated points concerning his style. First, because his self-portrait must capture erratic changes in his character, Montaigne must allow errors and statements he no longer agrees with to go uncorrected in subsequent versions.[59] The necessity of continually reworking is coupled with the necessity of letting things stay as they are. "I distrust my present thoughts hardly less than my past ones and my second or third thoughts hardly less than my first," he says. "We are often as stupid when correcting ourselves as others" (III.9: 1091). Elsewhere he remarks that if he does reshape an earlier assertion or two, his intent is to modulate, not to remove. "I want to show my humours as they develop, revealing each element as it is born" (II.37: 858). The essayist must revise, and yet, in doing so he must preserve a feeling of spontaneity – what Hugo Friedrich calls "the fecundity of the instant," the ground-level temporality of the *Essais*.[60]

Montaigne must craftily *effect an impression* of spontaneous thought even when his thinking is more labored and more planned out than he would like to admit. Thus, a second aspect of his style is a will to dissolve his method, his organizing system, into the present-tense unfolding of the *Essais*. This is what Diderot once called "the grand art of Montaigne," to work methodically while effacing all remnants of a method, to leave no sign of the "scaffolding" by which the work was created, not so as to produce a seamless line of reasoned argument but, quite the opposite, to let thought and imagination continue

to flourish without the constraint of presupposed order: ultimately, the mind's mobility is intact.[61] There is something of a ruse, then, in Montaigne's recurring claim that he has no master plan except for submission to chance and to the fickleness of his own thought, all judgments being fortuitous, contingent. What matters is that the *Essais appear* as though this is the case, that the course of investigation *seems* "blown along by the wind," which is how he qualifies his love for the "poetic gait" of Plato's dialogues (III.9: 1125). In fact, "method" is perhaps too strong a term for Montaigne's interplay of will and accident. As Adorno argues in "The Essay as Form" (1958), the essay, as it develops from Montaigne, is diametrically opposed to the Cartesian assuredness of "method": instead of proceeding from the simplest to the most complex problems with a view to total comprehension, the essay *begins with complexity*. It leaves its matters unexhausted and remains stubbornly in the register of "open intellectual experience," treating fragments *as fragments*, refusing to recuperate the ephemeral into permanent, theoretical truths. In Adorno's richly instructive phrase, the essay operates "methodically unmethodically."[62]

Given the severe fragmentation of the *Essais* and their perception of a world in flux, it would not be difficult to view them as a forerunner of aesthetic modernism; and certainly they have been framed in this light by scholars and by modernist writers from Walter Pater and Virginia Woolf to Philippe Sollers and Michel Butor.[63] It must be said, however, that Montaigne developed his style largely in response to the times in which he lived. In particular, the religious wars that raged in France for the better part of his adult life amplified his skeptical attitude and, for him, demanded a complex rethinking of self-other relationships. His search, through the medium of his writings, for new possibilities of dialogue and friendship on the principle of reciprocal exchange should be understood

as part of his ethical mission to address and reveal the folly of the antagonistic thinking at the source of the bloodshed.[64] Montaigne is perhaps most "modern" in the sense that he looks to antiquity for durable models (ethical as well as aesthetic) while simultaneously acknowledging their ill-suitedness to the modern world. We can detect in his attribution to La Boëtie and to their uncommon friendship all the traits that seem to have dissipated with his passing (the traits of a bygone classical age: firmness, balance, order, plenitude) a resignation to the fact that potential interactions mediated by his *Essais* cannot partake of the same miraculous harmony. If his project originates in the mourning for a lost ideal, it takes into its own procedure the unruliness and inconstancy of the world as Montaigne sees it. Dialogue and understanding are only possible, his work implies, to the extent that we make ourselves "at home in existence without fixed points of support,"[65] and his style, his thinking, tries to orient us to this task, while asking for a diligent response.

Writing the Quotidian

Taking the cosmic wholeness pursued by philosophers as a lifeless abstraction, Montaigne's skepticism constantly draws his and our attention to fragments: to details and gestures that are forcefully particular and contingent. Montaigne carefully studies these things, these features of quotidian life, in "ignorance," that is, without preformed notions as to their use and value for his essaying. "Everything has a hundred parts and a hundred faces: I take one of them and sometimes just touch it with the tip of my tongue or with my fingertips, and sometimes I pinch it to the bone. I jab into it, not as wide but as deep as I can; and I often prefer to catch it from some unusual angle" (I.50: 337-338). Between sketches of himself in private or public life and his equally acute observation of

others – peoples of various language, geographic location, education, and social position – Montaigne keeps his ambulant perceptions focused on the ordinary. Across the *Essais* he regards day-to-day customs and attitudes both as sources of wonder and as utilitarian grounds for knowledge, relishing the paradoxes they point up within and between social situations. In the last chapter of his last book, fittingly titled "On Experience," he argues that "the most ordinary things, the most commonplace and best-known can constitute, if we know how to present them in the right light, the greatest of Nature's miracles and the most amazing of examples, notably on the subject of human actions" (III.13: 1227-1228).

Built into the structure of the *Essais* is a radical leveling of what merits serious reflection and leads to insight. Montaigne's essaying takes inspiration as saliently from arbitrary details of living as from ancient thinkers and authorities. As a result, there are stretches in his chapters in which the reader has to endure tedium, as though to share in the speculative, wait-and-see method that gives each object a chance to cast its shadow. And this goes not only for what Montaigne recounts of his own experiences but also for what he culls from existing histories.[66] The facts, anecdotes, and testimonies woven into Montaigne's writing are not made to illustrate higher abstract principles (universals have little currency in the *Essais*); they are instead treated, in all their unyielding particularity, as sources of *newly discovered* significance. As Hugo Friedrich well observes, Montaigne "undulates in the stream of what is always new, or newly interpretable."[66]

A Certain Impulse in Early Godard

In each of these respects, Montaigne's form of essaying is a distant but profound forerunner of Godard's cinematic practices. I don't want to impose a simple, one-to-one

comparison effacing their differences and neglecting the important historical and cultural transformations that intervene in the four centuries between them. Yet their affinities in manner and purpose are considerable, their different media of "writing" notwithstanding. It's possible to take a long view and position Godard on the other side of developments – in literature, criticism, and philosophy since the Renaissance – through which the ghost of Montaigne is raised repeatedly and with great consequence as the essayistic infiltrates other modes and genres seemingly foreign to it, working its skeptical, unsettling force in the face of entrenched attitudes. Tracing such a reticular history, the scope of which too immense for us to take on here, would have to include, among other nodal moments, the soliloquies of Prince Hamlet and their contrast to the adage-based reasoning of Polonius; the Jena Romantics, Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis in particular, and their animations of the interlinked concepts of paradox, fragmentation, and infinite becoming; Diderot's and Baudelaire's art criticism; the critique of system-building philosophy undertaken, to most devastating effect by Nietzsche, in the compositional form of fragments or aphorisms; the literary self-portraiture (as opposed to more traditional autobiography) that I have already mentioned; and the presence of essayistic, non-narrative discourse in the novels of Proust and Flaubert, passages of what Robert Musil's man without qualities will call "essayism."

Writing of Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, Roland Barthes – whose self-portraiture and criticism are deeply significant in this history of the essayistic – stresses a "hesitation" that Proust shares with his novel's digressive narrator:

> Proust seems to be at the intersection of two paths, two genres, torn between two 'ways' he does not yet know could converge, any more than the Narrator knows, until a very long time – until Gilberte's marriage to Saint-Loup – that Swann's Way meet Guermantes' Way: the way of the Essay (of Criticism) and the way of the Novel."[67]

But for Barthes, who throughout the piece juggles a complex "identification" with Proust in terms of shared authorial drives between them (Proust the "worker," he specifies, not the eminent personality), this abiding vacillation opens a "*third form*," neither novel nor essay and yet somehow "both at once." According to Barthes, this third form unleashes a "discoursing person" whose selfhood – whose "I" – is everywhere "uncertain, displaced." The book's narrator is "*another* Proust," a Proust doubled but refracted, "often unknown to himself."[68] This discoursing "I" throws off the chronological structures governing both narrative and (auto)biography. For Barthes, Proust's third form enables a "rhapsodic" (in the sense of sewing) "disorganization" of biography into a "work-as-life" whose ordering logic consists of discontinuous "correspondences" and "reappearances." And for Barthes, Proust's reluctance to chose *either* the path of novel *or* the path of the critical essay winds up "abolish[ing] the contradiction" between them.[69]

Godard's vast body of work also exhibits disinclinations that yield "third forms." Looking back on the shape of his career in a recent interview, Godard maintains: "I've always been divided between what is commonly called the essay and what is commonly called the novel."[70] The essayistic emerges and thrives in these ambivalent generic and stylistic conditions, the neither/nor that results, strangely, in a both-at-once while giving Godard uncommon authorial possibilities. His strayings and strivings do more than mix modes and "hybridize": they stage and work through categorical confrontations between documentary and fiction, criticism and creation, "course" and "discourse" without letting one element fully subsume the other. Proust, at the end of his extended, undecided search, comes to know, in a flash of epiphany, that to write a novel is indeed his "vocation," that he has just written the novel he has hesitated to write; and yet he has this revelation while

writing in an *analytic* mode, explaining, rather than poetically animating, the resources of involuntary memory. Godard, in the late 1990s, not long after completing his *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, which is at once a critical engagement with twentieth-century cinema and an exercise in self-portraiture, claims in an interview that he has finally decided he is better suited to "writing an essay" than "writing a novel."[71] But he has since made three feature films that have narrative circumstances and fictional characters. His vocation, it seems, is to labor between these options, at times working in one vein more intensely than the other but always bringing to bear their impure interrelations.

Of all the cinematic essayists I have discussed in this chapter, Godard is arguably the most Montaignian in style and purpose – that is, if we consider his *essaying* over the duration of his career, and not just a handful of works meeting the taxonomic conditions of a single, self-contained "essay." While Godard, according to Jean-Pierre Gorin, is on record as declaring his "dream to be Montaigne,"[72] there are surprisingly few references to Montaigne in Godard's corpus and interviews. The most famous is the epigraph at the start of *Vivre sa vie* that accompanies a profile close-up of Nana/Karina: "It is necessary to lend oneself to others and to give oneself to oneself." Plucked from Montaigne's "On Restraining Your Will" (III.10: 1134), this isn't an unaltered quotation. Godard trims off "in my opinion" and seems to lend the sentence the feel of a motto rather than a heuristic proposition. But Godard explores the implications of this statement through several types of social transactions, including prostitution and filmmaking,[73] while Montaigne himself doesn't settle into a one-note argument but weaves through examples looking to discover a graceful equilibrium between public and individual life, in a continual interplay of self and other (modifying the line Godard cites, he says in the chapter: "He who does not live

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a little for others hardly lives at all for himself").[74] There is nothing in Godard's allusions to Montaigne here and there in interviews to indicate a template of essayistic inquiry he follows, or to suggest he has read Montaigne any more extensively than the incalculable other writers whose ideas he scavenges.[75] To be sure, it's easier to perceive the stylistic and conceptual impact of Rossellini or Rouch or Nicholas Ray on his film practices than it is to sort out distinctly Montaignian features.

But the question of direct influence is not my concern here – in fact, whether or not Godard has read Montaigne is of minimal importance. The affiliation I am drawing between these two figures is the result, partly, of complex continuations and adaptations of the essay form through literature, philosophy, and eventually the cinema; and, partly, of a common (not to say identical) attitude and *impulse* that crops up in their respective histories and manners of expression, each figure with his own, idiosyncratic reasons for working as he does. The challenge of situating Godard as an essayist along Montaignian lines is two-fold: we need to discern acts of essaying at the micro-levels of how he uses sounds and images on a shot-to-shot basis in single projects, and we also need to have a good sense of how his entire corpus evolves as an ongoing series of recursive, accretive, never-quite-finished experiments, with Godard incessantly revising, re-thinking, and, in his late period, often re-using his own past work, while gesturing towards more work to come.[76] I propose to consider his films and videos as having parameters similar to those of the chapters in Montaigne's *Essais*, that is, less as fenced-in units than as open fields in and across which these provisional, intersecting exercises take shape.

It's with Godard's late projects, in and around his *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, that his voluminous "work-as-life," to borrow Barthes's apt phrase, is confirmed and crystallized,

not as a direct, algorithmic progression but as fits and starts that manifest a great diversity of concerns and commitments, and a need, whatever the risks, to start anew, to return to square one. My analysis over the following chapters will focus mainly on the director's later works and the ways in which they enact this essayistic maintenance of a corpus. In what remains of this chapter I want to look at his early stage and to show that while *2 ou 3 choses* is his first "essay-film" thoroughly conceived as such, the elements that make up his essayistic style are visible and audible across his prior endeavors.

It is not enough to define the essay form as "subjective," "personal," and "self-reflexive." These labels, as the case of Montaigne makes evident, are so broad as to be tautological. More specifically, the essay form is, perhaps before it is anything else, an enduring exercise in self-portrayal, and the writer of the *Essais* goes as far as to claim a quasi-corporeal link between himself and the work he produces. As for Godard, there are two registers of self-portraiture ever-present in his work: his body and voice.

Well before he depicts himself in his *Histoire(s)* and *JLG/JLG: Autoportrait de décembre* (1995), well before he plays fool-like versions of himself in *Prénom Carmen* (1983), *Soigne ta droite* (1987), and *King Lear* (1987), Godard inhabits his creations in multiple capacities. That he has cameo roles in *À bout de souffle* (as an informer) and *Le Mépris* (1963, as Fritz Lang's assistant) is well-known; less so are his short appearances in *Le Petit soldat* (1963) and *Alphaville* (1965). His need to show up in his work is often treated by critics in cinephilic terms (as a nod to Hitchcock or, in the later cases, Jacques Tati and Jerry Lewis), or as a self-reflexive gesture that ruptures the illusionistic spell of the film and its fiction and draws the spectator into a more "participatory" mode (an arid

concept if reduced to a repertoire of techniques). Yet there is also in Godard a striving for

an immediate, bodily continuation between *ouvrier* and *ouvrage* (what Montaigne calls

"consubstantiality"), between himself and the acoustic and visual substances he handles.

This bond assumes increasingly pivotal stakes for Godard, and (as I argue in my fourth

chapter) by his late films and videos, the general thrust of his self-portraiture has moved

from self-reference to issues of *self-implication*, with Godard reflecting on and exercising

public responsibility for what he brings into the world.

Already in *À bout de souffle*, Godard's self-portraiture is not limited to images.[77]

The scene in which he identifies Michel (Jean-Paul Belmondo) from a photograph in a

newspaper unfolds as an interplay between Godard's bodily presence and vocal absence

from the frame. First, he casually crosses the street, brushing past Michel's car, which is

parked on the curb. He stuffs his pipe with tobacco, then slips out of frame. As Michel

buys a copy of *France-Soir* from a street vendor, Godard's distinctively soft and brittle

voice calls from off-screen for the vendor, who then moves in the voice's direction. We

cut to a split-second shot of Godard buying a newspaper, then to Michel in his car with

his paper open. We cut to an insert of the paper, presumably (it seems on a first viewing)

from Michel's perspective as the camera steadily traces his photo and the text in all caps

describing him as a "police killer still at large." Cut to Godard smoking his pipe, reacting

to the news story (the preceding point-of-view shot now seems ambiguously determined,

possibly belonging to either of these two men), and craning his neck to see if the man he

sees matches the photo. Cut back to Michel, suspiciously looking at Godard in return. A

couple of shot-countershot alternations occur, and in a graphic match between the shots,

their tilted heads and dark eyeglasses share the same position of the picture plane. Once

Patricia (Jean Seberg) returns to the car and Michel drives away, Godard strolls back into frame, crosses back over the street, and points out Michel to a couple of police officers, his gesture accented by an iris and a swell of horns in the musical score. While Godard portrays himself, not very flatteringly, as an informer,[78] he negotiates a physical relation to his work through both body and voice, which are never present in the shot at the same time. And at other moments in the film, Godard's voice remains bodiless in the scene (on the radio reporting the time; on the other end of a phone line conversing with Michel; at a press conference asking, "Are men more sentimental than women?").

Figures 8-9. *À bout de souffle* **(Godard, 1960)**

In Godard's early films, the body and the voice are instruments of self-inscription that, as Roland-François Lack observes, are sometimes involved in an intricate game of "ventriloquism" in which a "montage" takes place between Godard's voice and someone else's body.[79] For instance, in *Vivre sa vie*'s twelfth tableau, when the young man (Peter Kassovitz) holds a copy of Edgar Allan Poe's complete works (translated into French by Baudelaire) in front of his face and recites "The Oval Portrait," it is Godard's voice that we hear reciting the story, and his voice is, once again, indefinitely located in the scene. The scene commences with a muting of voices as the dialogue between young man and

Nana (Anna Karina) is given to us in subtitled French – until a fade-to-black and a more gradual fade-in indicate the return of audible speech. Then, because the young man's lips are hidden from view by the book, we cannot tell whether the recitation of Poe's story is read aloud for Nana to hear, or if it is the young man's voiceover, that is, until he pauses to fetch a cigarette and gives her one too and they converse in reference to the story, the implication being that she has been listening. The young man, or rather Godard, tells her, "It's our story: a painter portraying his love. Shall I go on?" Poe's story concerns an artist who, "wild with the ardor of his work," paints an image of his young and beautiful wife so life-like that its completion results in the actual woman's death. Critics have generally

Figures 10-11. *Vivre sa vie* **(Godard, 1962)**

read this scene in autobiographical terms: Godard intrudes on the story world and, while filming his radiant wife Karina, admits his culpability in being preoccupied with her film image to the detriment of her actual well-being and their off-screen relationship. But it's important to note that in "The Oval Portrait," there are two tales and two narrators, both of which are part of Godard's recitation. The first tale is told in first-person by a vaguely "wounded" man who is astonished on seeing the portrait revealed to him by a flicker of candlelight in a bedchamber; the second tale is a third-person account of the painter and

his wife, which the earlier narrator reads from a text describing the artworks in his room. This is worth our attention because Godard's voice, here citing the original text faithfully but in carefully chosen fragments, switches fluidly (leaving out Poe's transition) between the story's two parts, between the first-person perspective of the beholder and the third-person account of the portrait's creation. Godard, then, inscribes himself in the roles of both beholder and artist in the scene – in voice and through the filmed body of Kassovitz, who acts as both the young man *and* as a ventriloquist medium.

Throughout his work, Godard's bodily and vocal self-inscriptions are enmeshed in subtly wrought acts of citation, as this scene from *Vivre sa vie* attests. The taxonomic concept of the essay-film poorly accounts for this fundamental, Montaignian dimension of his essaying, and none of the other film-essayists I have discussed in this chapter is in keeping with Godard on this score. While Marker, for instance, does integrate snatches of literary and philosophical discourse into his verbal commentaries, and film and television clips into his own audio-visual weave, he usually names the sources of his citations, like an essayist in the more familiar sense of term (e.g., in the remarkable montage that opens *Le fond de l'air est rouge* [1977, 1988], we are told right away that the clips we're seeing remixed with documentary scenes of political protest are from Eisenstein's Odessa Steps massacre; or in the first episode of *L'héritage de la chouette* [1989], his narrator credits Chekhov with defining the problem that haunts documentary: "to say things that clever people already know and that morons will never know"). Godard is a more prolific and virtuosic practitioner of citation without quotation marks.[80] As with Montaigne's *Essais*, his work fosters a vertiginous ambiguity between what is cited and what is newly made. Citations conduct an intimate dialogue with antecedent texts and voices, but not through

direct illustration: the sources are severely tinkered with, as if by compulsion, and it's this "re-fashioning," as Montaigne says, that demands our attention.[81]

Godard's vocal performance undergoes a metamorphosis through the mid-1960s as he draws closer to his political activist stage. As Lack argues, *Bande à part* (1964), *2 ou 3 choses*, and *Le Gai savoir* (1968) together comprise a "narration-trilogy" in which Godard's voice loses its attachment to dramatic personae and moves into reflective and inquisitive commentary, expanding and refining its range of inflections, "from deadpan through murmur to whisper."[82] The voiceover narration that figures in many of Godard's works that are typically categorized as essays thus has its roots in his earlier films where there is still a semblance of narrative. In *Bande à part*, his sporadic comments flirt with omniscient narration as used in *policiers* by Jean-Pierre Melville and Claude Sautet, but they perform several other, more eccentric functions: he offers terse plot summaries for spectators who have arrived late; he reports thoughts and actions of characters that are at times redundant or at odds with what is shown onscreen; and he veers into a more poetic delivery while citing, among others, Rimbaud or Queneau without attribution. This voice, as a register of self-inscription and an agent of citation, already shows itself to be flexible enough to assume a more interrogative role.

2 ou 3 choses, his thirteenth feature, indeed stakes out new territory for Godard and, in connection with *Made in USA* (1966), which he filmed simultaneously, it brings his Nouvelle Vague period to a close. But its essayistic elements do not spring forth full-blown; they grow out of certain impulses and stylistic tendencies on display in his prior features. What is markedly different is the amplified intensity with which he commits to conducting a sociological study, which entails a more forceful and more anxious putting

of perception on trial (his and ours), one shot after the next. Traces of his early work are still apparent in the film – there are semi-chaotic café scenes that in some ways rework those of his Nouvelle Vague projects; there are a few scattered references to films, such as posters for Mizoguchi's *Ugetsu* (1953) and Resnais's *Muriel* (1963), and a painting of Karina as Nana in *Vivre sa vie* – but with *2 ou 3 choses*, Godard has become much more acutely invested in examining the social structures that govern modern life, and in finding a way to grasp this complexity in day-to-day events and interactions.

What *2 ou 3 choses* initiates for Godard is a patent and thoroughgoing essayistic *address*, through which he seeks to pass from a paralyzing self-doubt and self-absorption to a complex perceptiveness of the modern world that, through the instrument of film, can be shared. The movement from "what do I know?" towards dialogue and social exchange is, as I have shown, built into the Montaignian essay, as is the need to confront the world, in all its chaotic permutations, through a style-as-thinking that makes itself at home in the uncertainties, instabilities, and ambiguities of experience. I want to conclude this chapter by observing how Godard essays this possibility in the film. There are, in particular, two scenes that I will focus my discussion around: a scene in which the main character visits her husband at his place of work, a Mobil filling station; and the more famous coffee cup reverie, set in a café, that precedes it by several minutes. My descriptions of these scenes and the events and gestures that comprise them will risk excessive detail by the standards of most film analysis, but Godard's use of the essay form compels such attention through its meticulous shot constructions and its strangely resonant opacities. I want to delve into how Godard's essayistic work happens on a moment-to-moment basis, while maintaining a sense of the difficult struggle assigned to the spectator.

An Attempt at Cinema, Presented as Such

In an article published in *L'Avant-scène du cinéma* shortly after the film's release, Godard defines *2 or 3 choses que je sais d'elle* as an exercise in "pure research, since it is a film in which I am continually asking myself what I'm doing." He says that his earlier films are all in a sense "newsreel documents," but that *2 ou 3 choses* lacks all semblance of plot and narrative action. "There is, of course, the pretext of life itself – and sometimes prostitution – in the new housing complexes," he writes. "But the real purpose of the film is to observe a huge mutation" (*GG*, 238-239).

There is a certain context for this "mutation": the film takes inspiration from an article by Catherine Vimenet in *Le Nouvel Observateur* on the subject of prostitution in the *grands ensembles*, the high-rise housing projects on the outskirts of Paris developed hastily in the mid 1960s as part of a national re-planning initiative. Godard, shooting on location in the Sarcelle region as the buildings are being constructed, sets out to observe, and to document through a drawn-from-life fiction, a particular woman, Juliette (Marina Vlady), in her activities as a part-time prostitute over a twenty-four hour period. But her character is part of an elaborate "complex [*ensemble*]" of social relationships and events to which Godard devotes attention. The term "ensemble" carries both social and aesthetic meanings in the film. Godard makes this apparent in the *L'Avant-scène du cinéma* article where he outlines a rather schematic approach to his topic in "four principal movements," which I will quote and paraphrase in brief.

1. "Objective Description": of objects; of subjects

2. "Subjective Description": of subjects; of objects

3. "Search for Structures": the sum of the two previous movements "should lead to the discovery of certain more general forms; should enable one to pick out, not a generalized overall truth, but a certain 'complex feeling' [*sentiment d'ensemble*], something which corresponds emotionally to the laws" one must follow to live in a society which is not, however, "harmonious."

4. "Life": the sum of the preceding movements and their descriptions of complex things, emotions, events will, hopefully, "bring us closer to life than at the outset."

Godard stresses that these movements are not steps to take in succession – they "must be mixed up together" if they are to yield discoveries. *2 ou 3 choses* won't be the final outcome of this process; it will be the process itself. "Basically, what I am doing is making the spectator share the arbitrary nature of my choices, and the quest for general rules which might justify a particular choice," he says. "I am constantly asking questions. I watch myself filming and you hear me thinking aloud. In other words it isn't a film, it's an attempt at film and is presented as such."

Despite its schematism, and its grand ambition to arrive at "life," this four-part approach is shot through with doubt. In parentheses, Godard qualifies each descriptive movement as "at least [an] attempt at description." True to an essayistic disposition, we find a profound tension between rigorous design and uncertainty over how to proceed, a tension that becomes, and remains, part of the film's texture. Godard, not quite knowing what to label his experiment, says that "a film like this is a little as if I wanted to write a sociological essay in the form of a novel, and in order to do so had only musical notes at my disposition. Is this cinema? Am I right to go on trying?" (*GG*, 239-242).

Such uncertainty cuts across the film, starting with its title. There is a slippage as to what "elle" signifies, as the object of what is known. Presumably the "elle" is Juliette, or the actor Vlady (Godard's voiceover says both), but the opening intertitles refer "elle" also to "the Paris region." Godard had already, in his trailer for the film, established this slippage, between Juliette and her social environment, with intertitles across which "elle" refers to "the cruelty of neo-capitalism," "prostitution," "the Paris region," "the bathroom 70% of the French don't have," "the awful legislation on *grands ensembles*," "the physics of love," "the way we live today," "the Vietnam War," "the modern call-girl," "the death of human beauty," "the flow of ideas," "the Gestapo of structures." The singular feminine pronoun covers one and all of these things, and its multiplication suggests the "complex" perception that Godard asks of us as well, as co-investigators. As Douglas Morrey points out, the shifting valences of "elle" exert pressure both on the verb "savoir" (to know) and on the "je" (I) that professes to know a couple of things, or maybe three things. Godard's project is thus largely "about the necessary uncertainty that inhabits knowledge, about the difficulty of knowing."[83]

All this extends to Godard's whispery voiceover, which intermittently cuts into the action, sometimes blending with other sounds, sometimes filling pockets of silence as Godard "thinks aloud" for the viewer to share in his weighing of decisions: it invites our close attention in part because its faintness urges us to listen more carefully and in part because it seems charged with the capacity to shed light on the mysterious relations between the sounds, images, bodies, and urban landscapes before us.

The people on which the camera's inquisitive gaze falls often address it directly, reporting the details of their lives, their daily routines, and offering opinions on subjects

that come up seemingly arbitrarily, as if engaging in a running conversation, responding to questions by Godard that remain inaudible to us (one could call this "breaking frame" if a fictional world were established firmly enough to break in the first place). Godard's questions, however, do not lead conveniently to unequivocal findings, to knowledge he can pass along. And what registers in his voiceover is an anxious hesitation over how to progress from one moment to the next – where to place the camera, what to concentrate on, when to begin shooting and when to stop – since each maneuver on his part will be at the expense of other complex factors that impinge on what he isolates.

But however much Godard stresses the limitations of what he can show and the "arbitrary" character of his decisions, the scenes in which his research is most poignant are orchestrated with rigorous staging and cutting: fictionalized scenes, with perplexing distributions of beats and accents, that are composed to a rhythm of intense observation. If he has already processed each shot, each segment, each location in the film with acute and methodic care, the "horizontal montage" (the relays and dissonances set up between what he shows us and what he says in voiceover) has the effect of keeping the film in the mood of a contingent, unresolved search. Godard stakes his work on the principle that by inspecting these highly wrought events and their quotidian details, we can obtain, through little epiphanies, a "complex feeling" that encompasses the social reality.[84]

Three quarters into *2 ou 3 choses*, Godard asks, "How to render events? How to show or say that at 4:10 p.m. this afternoon, Juliette and Marianne came to the garage at the Porte des Ternes where Juliette's husband works?" This poignant event is already in process – the two women, in a bright red Austin driven by Juliette, trace a semi-circle as they whip into the carwash of a Mobil filling station with a distinctively blue, white, and

red color scheme. This is one of two main happenings that make up the event; the second, which unfurls subsequently, involves Juliette, an attendant at the gas pump she has pulled up to, and her husband, who comes to window, kneels, chats with her (dialogue we can't hear), checks his wristwatch, then gives Juliette a kiss. The chronology of these incidents is in no way definite and Godard complicates matters further by showing them twice, not repeating the same shots but presenting slight variations on them: he repeats some of the same *setups* but the figures inhabit the frame differently, their gestures are different, and there are different synch points between image and sound (e.g., the first time the married couple kiss, it triggers, just this once, a cut to a "Friction Proofing" sign and a piercingly loud car horn). "Right way, wrong way [*sens et non-sens*]," Godard cuts in.[85] "Yes, how to say precisely what happened. To be sure, there is Juliette, her husband, the garage. But are these the words and images to use? Are they the only ones? Are there no others? Am I talking too loud? Am I watching from too far or too close?" He considers whether to take note of the leaves in the trees surrounding the station, or the cloudy sky, or letters painted on the walls, or a woman standing nearby. Again, he has already made his choices during shooting and editing, but the coupling of the "result" with this indecisive voiceover marks each fragment as one of a virtual range of possible views.

"In images," he states, now over a shot of the car being washed, "everything is permitted, the best and the worst." At this point in the scene, it may look as if Godard, crippled by self-consciousness, resigns himself to the fact that the objects and subjects under his observation outstrip his abilities to rein them in, to sum them up. But seconds later, as we watch the gas pump incident play out a second time with subtle changes, he divulges the underlying poetic and political ambition of his project:

I am doing nothing other than searching for reasons to live happily. And if, now, I push the analysis further, I find there is simply a reason for living because there is, first of all, memory and, secondly, the present and the facility for stopping to enjoy it, in other words, for having caught in passing a reason to be alive and for having kept it for several seconds after it has just been discovered in the midst of the unique circumstances surrounding it. The birth into the human world of the simplest things, their appropriation by the mind of man, a new world where men and things will at one and the same time know harmonious relations: that is my aim. It is in the end as much political as poetic. And it explains, in any case, this longing for expression. Whose? Mine: writer and painter.

Godard here states his desire to awaken our senses, through memory and perception, to a "new world" of possibilities lurking, but hidden, in the world whose routines and cycles are enslaved to the logic of consumerism. And he continues to pursue this "birth into the human world of the simplest things" in the seconds that follow. The last few lines of his commentary fall on a shot of swaying tree limbs reflected on the hood of the red Austin, sunlight glinting through the foliage. This gorgeous, almost abstract shot is trailed by an insert of the fuel pump meter with its large numbers rotating, counting francs. For all the elliptical skips in Godard's montage, this is a case where two shots that follow each other do in fact follow each other – they juxtapose two orders of time that belong to contrasting modes of being in the world.

The shot of the meter suggests time as a measured quantity (that is, as a category of space), a notion accented by the repetition of Juliette's husband glancing at his watch while kneeling next to the pump: in other words, clock time – the time of habit, custom, schedule. The shot of the meter gives this sense of time a monetary value, and thus it is bound up with Godard's critique of consumer capitalism. The inhabitants of the *grands ensembles* turn to prostitution in order to live far beyond their means, to purchase luxury items that range from stylish garments to household products that come packaged in pop art designs. *2 ou 3 choses* tropes on the idea that in the market economy, the consumer is

in a sense "occupied" by a flow of merchandise in which the obtaining of desired things immediately redirects attention and desire towards things as yet unobtained. As Douglas Morrey puts it, "The serial production of merchandise creates a linear, irreversible sense of time that always appears several steps ahead of those trying to *live* in it."[86] At stake in the film, then, is our sensitivity to the fleeting present, *le passage*.

Figures 12-13. *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle* (**Godard, 1967**)

Godard's strategy is not merely to capture or reconstitute events. Instead, in a scene structured on imperfect repetitions, he emphasizes an interplay of memory and alertness to what emerges in a contingent present. He espouses a "facility" not only to "stop" and "enjoy" but also to "discover." This is what Godard, as "writer and painter," refers to in the segment as "living happily." The shot of the tree limbs reflected on the

Austin figures in the scene as a lyrical release from the time of daily habit and routine.[87] Godard transforms the hood of the car into a canvas, and suggests that a "new world" is latent in the shapes, surfaces, and colors of the fractured modern world he investigates.[88] Over the shot of the meter, he whispers, "It is 4:45 p.m." We cut abruptly to a shot that zooms in on a cluster of trees over the Mobil sign (reversing a zoom-out from the same tree limbs several shots earlier). Godard says: "Should I have talked about Juliette or the leaves, since in any case it's impossible really to do the two together? Let's say that both trembled gently at this beginning of the end of an October afternoon." Saying more than he can show us at once, Godard suggests a "trembling" that includes both the leaves and Juliette. The zoom pushes in until the Mobil sign disappears and the foliage, buffeted by a light wind, fills the frame. This gesture brackets off the garage scene and its epiphanic inklings. At the instant the zoom halts, a transitional phrase from Beethoven's sixteenth string quartet fades up, then leads into a shot of a young woman stepping out of a taxi on the Champs-Élysées, escorted by a man we know at this point to be a pimp – back thus to the cycles of prostitution and consumerism.

This scene at the garage echoes an earlier, more profound scene in the film that occurs inside a café in inner Paris, a scene in which Godard's endeavor to describe and reflect on an ensemble of social relations surfaces more intensely. Godard prefaces the scene by commenting over shots of construction workers and of Juliette crossing a busy street: "I examine the life of the city and its inhabitants and the links that unite them with as much intensity as the biologist examines the relations of the individual and the race in evolution. It's only thus that I can attack problems of social pathology, forming the hope of a truly new city." The scene begins as Juliette enters the café, walks past a young man

to her left playing pinball, and says hello to the bartender and shakes his hand (his figure otherwise out of frame). She turns and reports, to no particular character in the scene and without meeting the gaze of the camera: "To define myself in a single word? Indifferent." She then makes her way to a seat where a woman has just called her, and Godard matches on action as they shake hands.

So far the scene has more or less stable bearings, and the basic premise seems to be that Juliette, a regular at the café, has come to attract another client. But as the scene continues to unfold, things, exchanges, and gestures become more and more mysterious, and at the same time more arresting, as the searching (yet exacting) camera and rhythmic orchestration of action infuse each partial detail with a feel of escalating suspense. It will steadily become evident, albeit through indirect and complex means, that the scene pivots in part on a dimly apprehended relation between Juliette and the man playing pinball.

As Juliette gets up to buy a pack of Winstons from the bar, the camera pans and focuses on another woman seated at the bar. While smoking, she comments on the "new shoes" of a man wearing glasses (a pimp we soon learn) who quickly passes through the shot with his hand on the shoulder of another woman; then she addresses the camera and tells how often she visits the city. She turns to look off-screen and we cut on the direction of her look to a shot of Juliette buying cigarettes: it is, more precisely, a two-shot that she shares with the man playing pinball, the noises of which have acoustically dominated the scene up to this point. They are almost silhouettes against the natural light from the street window, where cars pass, at inconstant intervals, in the pictorial space between them. He glances at Juliette casually, then she moves towards a jukebox and lights her cigarette as the camera follows. Off-screen, we catch an exchange presumably between the girl at the

bar and the pimp. He says: "Yes, they're American shoes!" She says: "It's with those that they step on the feet of the Vietnamese." He says: "And the South Americans." Juliette turns and walks straight into the camera, nearly blacking out the frame (an effect that is synched with the ringing of a telephone). We cut to Juliette walking past the pimp, who pulls her back into the shot and offers her representation at a 10% cut. She declines and says that she hopes what she's doing is temporary (meanwhile the man who was playing pinball walks through the shot, taking a drag on his cigarette). Juliette then again exits the frame as the pimp takes a drink and looks in her direction; and we cut on his eyeline.

The shot that follows initiates a brief segment within the scene – an "ensemble" towards which the preceding actions appear vaguely to point. In a medium shot, we see the man from the pinball machine now seated and reading a newspaper, flanked on either side by Juliette (to his left) and a young woman we haven't seen yet who is smoking and leafing through a magazine, while reflected in the wall mirror behind Juliette. We cut to a close-up of Juliette sipping her coke and then looking in the direction of the other woman (who is shown out of focus in the mirror) and furrowing her brow in puzzlement. We cut to a shot, from Juliette's vantage, of the magazine pages turning, then Godard's voiceover intrudes to address problems of angle and perspective: "Here is how Juliette, at 3:37 p.m., saw the pages of that object which in journalistic language is called a magazine." We cut

Figures 14-15. *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle* **(Godard, 1967)**

to the same pages now shown from above. "And here is how, about 150 frames further along, another young woman, her fellow creature [*semblable*], her sister, saw the same object. Where is the truth? In full face or profile?" The two women, doubled by painted illustrations in the magazine, exchange looks while the noise of the pinball machine fills the café, until the incipient bars of a Beethoven string quartet (the same piece sampled in the garage scene) momentarily take over the audio track.

We cut to a shot, angled slightly downward, of a spoon stirring a cup of espresso. The music stops with the cut and Godard whispers: "Perhaps an object is what allows us to relink . . ." We cut to a peculiar two-shot of the young man in profile, French-inhaling cigarette smoke, turning to look at Juliette whose face, in soft focus, is nestled in the top-

Figures 16-17. *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle* (**Godard, 1967**)

left portion of the frame over his shoulders, imbalancing the shot given that its right half

is now conspicuously vacant. Godard's commentary on what an object is continues: ". . .

to pass from one subject to the other, therefore to live in society, to be together. But then,

since social relationships are always ambiguous, since my thought divides as much as it

unites, since my speech brings nearer by that which it expresses and isolates by that about

which it is silent, since a wide gulf separates my subjective certainty of myself" – we cut

back to the espresso, pictured from a steeper angle, its foam swirling clockwise – "from

the objective truth I represent for others, since I always find myself guilty, even though I

feel innocent, since each event changes my daily life, since I always fail to communicate,

I mean, to understand, to love, to be loved" – a spoon briefly enters the shot and stirs the

liquid – "and each failure makes me experience my solitude more deeply . . ." On the last

syllable of "solitude" we return to a close-up of Juliette and her look back towards the bar

triggers a short interlude of shots of the bartender, who apparently looks back at her while

going about his work.

We return to the coffee cup and the spirals of foam, this time an extreme close-up

from directly overhead. Godard continues: ". . . since I cannot escape the objectivity that

crushes me, nor the subjectivity that expels me, since I cannot rise to a state of being, nor

Figure 18. *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle* **(Godard, 1967)**

fall into nothingness, I must listen, I must look around more than ever, at the world, my

fellow creature [*semblable*], my brother." We cut back to the two-shot setup of the man

smoking and turning to look at Juliette, who stares back and then turns away as he does

(in brushing his hair back behind his ear with his hand, he mirrors a gesture that Julliete

performs earlier in the scene). We return to the extreme close-up of the coffee. The foam

has dissolved and left a dense pack of bubbles in the center of the frame. Godard asserts:

"The world alone … today, when revolutions are impossible, when bloody wars threaten

it, when capitalism is no longer sure of its rights and the working class is in retreat, when

the progress, the lightning progress of science makes future centuries hauntingly present,

when the future is more present than the present, when distant galaxies are at my door …

my fellow creature, my brother." As he speaks, the bubbles pop and other particles draw

towards the center, collecting until they rupture (into an accidental formation I can't help

but describe as resembling parted lips).

A split second after the cluster explodes, we cut back to the two-shot of the man

and Juliette, again exchanging looks; this time we hear an upsurge of traffic noise from

the street. When the young man looks down, we cut back to the espresso, just as a sugar

cube, barely discernible, sinks into the dark liquid, which is now for the most part free of

swirls and bubbles. The sound falls silent with the cut, until Godard says: "Where does it

begin? But where does what begin? God created the heavens and the earth, sure. But that

is a bit cowardly and facile. One should be able to put it better … to say that the limits of

language are those of the world, that the limits of my language are those of the world and

that in speaking, I limit the world, I end it, and that one logical and mysterious day, death

will come to abolish that limit and there will be neither question nor response, it will be a

blur." Meanwhile new bubbles have risen and collected and the shot's focus has wavered

not simply due to a technical problem but as a figurative counterpart to Godard's worries

about vagueness. "But if by chance, things again become sharp" – with the word "sharp,"

the shot's focus returns to maximum clarity – "this can only be through the appearance of

consciousness. After that, everything will connect [*s'enchaîne*]."
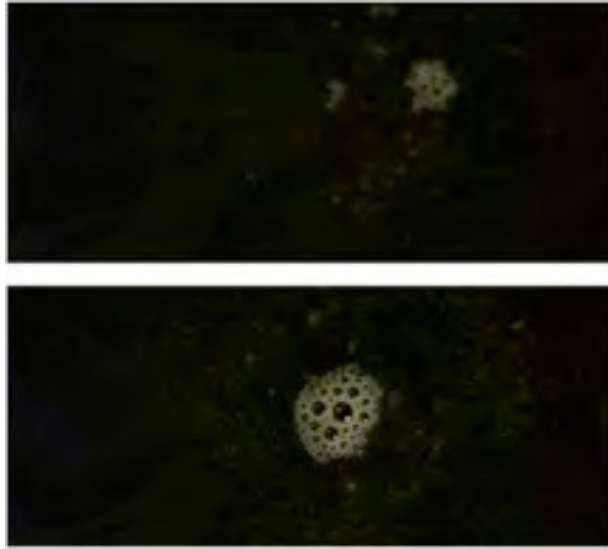
Figures 19-20. *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle* (**Godard, 1967**)

Godard's last few lines and the focus pull are punctuated by a gradual rise of the opening of the third movement of a Beethoven string quartet (again, his sixteenth). And with a cut we pass suddenly, exhilaratingly from the espresso to three successive shots of Juliette walking swiftly through the same stretch of cityscape, each time from an alternate angle and with varied commotion in the shot as the camera pans left-to-right, all while the music plays on. Across these three shots, Juliette, speaking for the first time in voiceover, says: "I don't know where or when. I remember only that it happened . . . It's a feeling I searched for the whole day . . . There was the smell of trees . . . That I was the world, and that the world was me." In the third shot, just as Juliette walks hurriedly out of the frame,

loud construction noises drown out and replace the Beethoven, and she says cryptically in voiceover: "The landscape is like a face."

In this exceedingly strange, beautiful, and intricate scene, the questions stack up without resolutions. What is the nature of the "connection" Juliette appears to make with the young man? A business proposition? Something more sincerely amorous? What does Godard mean by the terms "sister," "brother," and "fellow creature"? What is the relation between the epiphany he seems to have over the espresso and the unrestrained lyricism of the shots of Juliette walking that follow? Whose coffee cup is it? And what is the incident Juliette half-recalls that moved her to feel at one with the world?

Still another question, one Godard himself asks, presents itself: where to begin? As so often with his work, it's difficult to know, from the standpoint of analysis, which precise bits to latch onto – in part because there is so much happening in the scene (my description is, of course, incomplete), and in part because, in the absence of a narrative giving each element a hierarchical role, emphasis and significance are distributed widely and mysteriously across the scene, right down to the merest sounds, the slightest editing transitions, the most innocuous and unobtrusive movements. I have taken the trouble to describe what occurs in "excessive" detail both to highlight the micro-work of Godard's shot-to-shot essaying and to take into direct account the difficult task of the viewer this manner of inspection demands and relies on. From the second Juliette enters the café, it figures as more than a social hangout filmed on location: the space of the café becomes, in cinematic terms, a laboratory of perception, within which small, inter-corporeal details are studied and restudied, mined for their potential suggestiveness.

Let's start with what is most salient, the coffee cup. Critical readings of the scene tend to argue that while the film suggests that the coffee belongs to the young man, this is actually never disclosed. It's true that we never see the young man raising the espresso to his lips, and that Juliette and the other woman in this ensemble are drinking a coke and a beer respectively. Godard, who sporadically plays with classical film syntax in the scene, implies it is the young man's coffee by cutting to it after the young man looks down. Yet there are stronger material indicators. The shot that establishes the ensemble closes with the young man raising a spoon and stirring: we can hear the sound of a utensil scraping a saucer and clinking the sides of a cup. The cup itself is out of frame and it's easy to miss this subtle gesture if we're focused on the other side of the shot where Juliette returns her appointment book to her purse. Then, in the close-up of Juliette following Godard's vocal reflections on angle and perspective regarding the magazine pages, we can see just to the left of her face, reflected in the mirror, in hazy focus, the young man's right hand stirring something (again, *we can hear it as well*). In fact, the very next shot, the initial image of the espresso, is matched-on-action with his blurred gesture in the mirror as he withdraws the spoon and rests it on the saucer. Through this slight but significant maneuver, Godard curiously enlists conventional film syntax to *inquire into the possibility of connection and continuity*, right at the moment he says in voiceover, "perhaps an object is what allows us to re-link …" (audio-visual synch points are of immense importance in the scene), instead of imposing continuity as a matter of narrative course.

Placing the coffee in front of the young man, however, does little to clear up this endlessly perplexing scene. The closer we move down into the cup, the more the liquid – the quotidian object – is transformed, rendered abstract, the more it becomes something

like a cosmic field of elements swirling, collecting, dispersing. Both the voiceover and the extreme proximity trouble the sense in which the shot registers as the viewpoint of a particular person or character. It is tempting to argue that the close-up of the espresso is *Godard's* viewpoint as he tries to inscribe himself in this complex scene, pairing a look with his vocal self-inscription.[89] And it's tempting to say that the shot, whether from the viewpoint of Godard or of the young man, is emblematic of the "alienation" that results due to the social structures governing the modern world. But the coffee, once it is made to evoke the formation and dispersion of an "ensemble" by mysterious forces, *gives rise to* Godard's poetic reverie and to his hope for the awakening of consciousness, which, he believes, will bring new forms of interconnection into relief.

This epiphanic feeling, sustained by the string quartet, is not restricted to Godard-the-narrator: it extends and suffuses the shots of Juliette walking, in which her voiceover bears out the "consciousness" and vital attunement to the world at the source of Godard's reverie. "That I was the world, and that the world was me." This is the only sequence of the film in which Juliette seems freed from the mechanical rhythms of her daily routines, as though the "indifference" by which she defined herself at the start of the café scene has for the moment evaporated. The cause of this awakening on her part is impossible to pin down, as she herself acknowledges. Near the end of the film, while back at her apartment in the *grands ensembles*, Juliette thinks back on this fleetingly transformative experience, and she again has trouble placing and understanding it. "It was while I was walking with the guy from the Metro who was taking me to the hotel," she says, facing the camera and standing on her balcony, another high-rise complex looming in the background, flattening the shot. "I've thought about it all day, a sense of my ties with the world." Her head turns

to her left and the camera pans, following her glance: as she speaks, the pan takes in 360 degrees and underscores a feeling of enclosure. Her remarks repeat those from the earlier segment almost verbatim, but what "guy from the Metro" is she talking about? We're left to wonder whether she has forgotten what actually occurred, or whether she's referring to an incident Godard has omitted from his description.

2 ou 3 choses offers itself as a rigorous investigation into one of the problems that very much still preoccupies Godard's work, namely, the problem of how to give material expression to a transformative moment whose causes and effects are not entirely evident, whose logic escapes the formulas of plot and character development, and whose lingering implications go beyond the personal, the individual. There is no question that something happened – an epiphany, a discovery (Godard will later explore this question through the notion of the miraculous) – but the problem lies in locating the contributing factors and in coming to terms with the aftermath. This is not a mystery that Godard, as essayist, solves. His reverie over the coffee cup is a call to his spectators to "listen and look around" even more intensely – to seek out the connective potential of the simplest gesture, the humblest object. Indeed, Godard stakes his utopian project of escaping the "Gestapo of structures" in capitalist society and awakening consciousness to latent possibilities for "a new world" on this keen, "complex" perceptiveness he both exhibits and hopes to pass on.

"My fellow creature, my brother": this phrase – timed to the swell of the string quartet over the new-formed coffee bubbles – is taken from the last line of Baudelaire's "To the Reader," the poem that prefaces his 1857 volume of verse, *Les Fleurs du mal*.[90] For Baudelaire, the words signal an identification with the reader through a mutual state of boredom, and with it, "stupidity, error, sin, avarice"; his lyric poetry bears immanent

and unsparing witness to the charms, torments, disharmonies, and degradations of lived experience in industrial capitalism while trying to awaken a deadened receptivity to the fleeting instant. Godard's use of the phrase stresses the dividual character of the sudden epiphany as it extends not only to Juliette but to the viewer, without whose collaboration, whose strenuous perceptual labor, it could not be effectuated.

The essay form has depended on this kind of intimate address to the receiver-as-collaborator since Montaigne, who in his own prefatory "To the Reader," says he offers his "frivolous" and "vain" *Essais* primarily to his dearest "friends" and "relatives." The essayist, by definition, self-portrays and self-scatters, longing for "friendly" interaction, leaving things undone, enticing a constructive response through gaps and suspensions in what is said or shown. What *2 ou 3 choses* commences in Godard's body of work is the *sustained* articulation of this kind of exchange in terms of seeing the world – not just the images of the world Godard chooses – unencumbered by social habits of perception that dull and deaden (and perpetuate clichés of thought). In 1967, this commitment to seeing and seeing anew goes by the name of "consciousness," a phenomenological concept that Godard will cast off in the years to come. What endures, as I will argue in the chapters ahead, is an investment in perceptual discoveries through audio-visual processes that are, in keeping with the Montaignian essay, explicitly or implicitly dialogical.

Notes

[1] Noël Burch, *Theory of Film Practice*, trans. Helen R. Lane (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 162.

[2] Godard, interview by François Châtelet, in *Anatole Dauman: Pictures of a Producer*, ed. Jacques Gerber, trans. Paul Willemen (London: British Film Institute, 1992), 115.

[3] Phillip Lopate writes, "Say all you like about visualization being at the core of thinking, I cannot accept an utterly pure, silent flow of images as constituting essayistic discourse." Lopate, "In Search of the Centaur: The Essay-Film," in *Totally, Tenderly, Tragically* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 283.

[4] Paul Arthur, "Essay Questions," *Film Comment* (January-February 2003): 58-62; Michael Renov, *The Subject of Documentary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004. See Also Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001; Nora M. Alter, "Essay Film," in *Encyclopedia of the Essay*, ed. Tracy Chevalier (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1997), 262-264; Timothy Corrigan, "The Cinematic Essay: Genre on the Margins," *Iris*, no. 20 (Autumn 1995): 85-91; Alter, "Memory Essays," *Stuff It: The Video Essay in the Digital Age*, ed. Ursula Biemann (Vienna, Austria: Springer, 2004), 12-23; Laura Rascaroli, "The Essay Film: Problems, Definitions, Textual Commitments," *Framework* 49, no. 2 (Fall 2008): 24-47; Rascaroli, *The Personal Camera: Subjective Cinema and the Essay Film* (London: Wallflower Press, 2009).

[5] David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 312-313.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid., 332-334.

[8] The cinematic essay is part of many national traditions, the two richest being French and German. In this study I am focusing on the French context, but an argument could be made that the essay in cinema is a transnational development with particularly strong ties and relays between French and German practices.

[9] Alexandre Astruc, "The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La caméra-stylo," in *The New Wave: Critical Landmarks*, ed. Peter Graham (Garden City: Doubleday, 1968), 18-19. This view of radical innovation includes the popular and dismisses as "old hat" the French avant-garde strains of the 1920s, the surrealists as well as the exponents of "pure cinema" and its satellite concept, *photogénie*. Though Bazin similarly uses the term "avant-garde" in his writings of the period, his reading of the surrealists is much more receptive. In fact, it is possible to argue that the merger of film and surrealism lies at the core of Bazin's thought about cinema. See Adam Lowenstein, "The Surrealism of the Photographic Image: Bazin, Barthes, and the Digital Sweet Hereafter," *Cinema Journal* 46, no. 3 (Spring 2007): 54-82.

[10] Astruc, "The Birth of a New Avant-Garde," 18.

[11] "How shall we incorporate some of our potential readers into our actual public? Books are inert. They act upon those who open them, but they cannot open by themselves . . . To be sure, the book is the noblest, the most ancient of forms; to be sure, we will always have to return to it. But there is a *literary* art of radio, film, editorial, and reporting. There is no need to popularize. The film, by its very nature, speaks to crowds; it speaks to them about crowds and about their destiny . . .We must learn to speak in images, to transpose the ideas of our books into these new languages." Jean-Paul Sartre, "What is

Literature?" trans. Bernard Frechtman, in *"What is Literature?" and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 216-217. It's worth adding that Astruc's denigration of the surrealists is also, at some level, a Sartrean gesture.

[12] Astruc, "The Birth of a New Avant-Garde," 18-19.

[13] Ibid., 20-21.

[14] Ibid., 19.

[15] Timothy Corrigan, "The Essay Film as a Cinema of Ideas," in *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories*, ed. Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 218-237.

[16] Ibid., 227.

[17] Ibid. I should add that certain daring producers associated with the Nouvelle Vague, namely Pierre Braunberger and Anatole Dauman, had a strong role in the protection and cultivation of the *court-métrage*.

[18] For a study of Franju's short films in the context of the French postwar school of the *court métrage*, see Kate Ince, *Georges Franju* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2005), 11-45.

[19] Whether or not the Left Bank should be counted as part of the New Wave is still open to debate among critics and historians, but it is clear from his comments at the time that Godard, while framing the *Cahiers* group as the inner circle, considered Varda, Resnais, and Marker as fellow New Wavists.

[20] Nora M. Alter, *Chris Marker* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 57-61.

[21] Lopate: "It was a self-interrogatory voice, like a true essayist's, dubious, ironical, wheeling and searching for the heart of the subject matter … Meanwhile Resnais's

refined tracking shots formed a visual analog of this patient searching." Lopate, "In Search of the Centaur," 286. See also Corrigan, "The Essay Film as a Cinema of Ideas," 227; and Dudley Andrew, "A Film Aesthetic to Discover," *CiNéMaS* 17, no. 2-3 (2007): 64-67.

[22] Andrew, "A Film Aesthetic to Discover," 64-65.

[23] The films of Guy Debord deserve attention in this context of early essayistic endeavor. Despite being frequently left out of accounts of the essay-film and of postwar French cinema more broadly, Debord's films were just as vital to the development of the cinematic essay as works by the Left Bank figures; and they arguably had a more direct and lasting influence on Godard's methods. I take up the comparison between Godard and Debord in the following chapter.

[24] André Bazin, "Bazin on Marker," trans. Dave Kehr, *Film Comment* 34 no. 4 (2003): 44.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid., 44-45, trans. modified. See the original in André Bazin, *Le cinéma français de la Libération à la Nouvelle Vague*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Petite bibliothèque des Cahiers du cinéma, 1998), 257-260.

[28] Adrian Martin, "Chris Marker: Notes in the Margin of His Time," *Cineaste* 33 no. 4 (Fall 2008): 7.

[29] See Jacques Rancière, "Documentary Fiction: Marker and the Fiction of Memory," in *Film Fables*, trans. Emiliano Battista (New York: Berg, 2006), 157-170.

[30] For another key example of Bazin's receptivity to editing over and above his preferred techniques of the long take and composition-in-depth, see his essay "Death Every Afternoon," trans. Mark A. Cohen, in *Rites of Realism*, ed. Ivone Margulies (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 27-31.

[31] In her re-reading of Bazin, Karla Oeler provocatively argues that the realist poetics that figures in Bazin's embrace of ambiguity is "much closer to the modernism and formalism with which it is so often contrasted. Like other instances of modernist fragmentation and abrogation of meaning, this ambiguity can serve to remind us of the partiality of what we see and hear, and the uncertainty of the meanings we draw from it." Oeler, *A Grammar of Murder: Violent Scenes and Film Form* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 101.

[32] Godard, quoted in *Godard on Godard*, trans. and ed. Tom Milne (New York: Da Capo, 1972), 112, hereafter cited parenthetically in text as *GG*.

[33] This is not to make light of Marker's fascination with Hitchcock, or of Resnais' move towards popular genres, including the musical and the melodrama, in his later work.

[34] In her effort to integrate *Notre musique* (2004) into her definition of the essay film, Laura Rascaroli sidesteps the fictional elements of the film and maintains that they do not "impinge on" Godard's essayistic argumentation. Rascaroli, *The Personal Camera*, 95.

[35] See Steven Ungar, "'Radical Ambitions': Bazin's Questions to and from Documentary," in *Opening Bazin*, ed. Dudley Andrew (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming.

[36] A version of this argument appears in *La Chinoise* (1967), where Guillaume (Jean-Pierre Léaud), in a lesson concerning how to report the news, repeats Godard's Langlois-

inspired reversal of directors, situating the Lumières as filmic purveyors of a socially

disengaged impressionism with shared subjects as those painted by Manet and Renoir,

and arguing that Méliès, on the other hand, filmed current events and thus serves as a

more Brechtian model.

[37] For an interesting account of how Paris figures as Godard's "set, playground, and Petri

dish right from the start," see Chris Darke, *Alphaville* (Urbana: University of Illinois

Press, 2005), 1-35.

[38] Italo Calvino, "Cinema and the Novel: Problems of Narrative," in *The Uses of*

Literature, trans. Patrick Creagh (San Diego: Harcourt, 1987), 79.

[39] Burch, *Theory of Film Practice*, 162. Susan Sontag also refers to *Vivre sa vie* as a

"film-essay" in her 1964 piece, "Godard's *Vivre sa vie*," in *Against Interpretation, and*

Other Essays (New York: Picador, 1966), 204.

[40] On Montaigne's conception of the term *essai*, see Hugo Friedrich, *Montaigne*, trans.

Dawn Eng, ed., Philippe Desan (Berkley: University of California Press, 1991), 340-345.

[41] To be precise, the layers of subsequent writing were not made explicit to the reader

until editions published after Montaigne's death. Montaigne, in fact, concealed his work

of revision and addition by always writing in the present tense.

[42] Michel de Montaigne*, The Complete Essays*, trans. and ed. M.A. Screech (New York:

Penguin, 2003), 908, hereafter cited in text by book, chapter, and page number.

[43] For a brilliant discussion of Montaigne's humanist critique of "specialized erudition,"

see Erich Auerbach, "L'Humaine Condition," in *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality*

in Western Literature, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press,

2003), 285-311.

[44] Morris W. Croll, *Style, Rhetoric, and Rhythm: Essays*, ed. J. Max Patrick et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966).

[45] Auerbach, "L'Humaine Condition," 303-311.

[46] Michel Beaujour, *Poetics of the Literary Self-Portrait*, trans. Yara Milos (New York: New York University Press, 1991).

[47] For accounts of Montaigne's interest in the other and in various forms of social interaction, see Friedrich, *Montaigne*, 239-257; and Patrick Henry, "Recognition of the Other and Avoidance of the Double: The Self and the Other in the *Essais* of Montaigne," *Stanford French Review* 6 (1982): 175-187.

[48] See Réda Bensmaïa's instructive reading of this passage in his book *The Barthes Effect: The Essay as Reflective Text*, trans. Pat Fedkiew (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 3-14.

[49] Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 289-291.

[50] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Reveries of a Solitary*, trans. John Gould Fletcher (New York: Burt Franklin, 1971), 40.

[51] Beaujour, *Poetics of the Literary Self-Portrait*, 107-114.

[52] Antoine Compagnon, *La Seconde main, ou Le Travail de la citation* (Paris: Seuil, 1979), 11. For Montaigne as a precursor of modern criticism, see Claire de Obaldia's impressively thorough and insightful study *The Essayistic Spirit: Literature, Modern Criticism, and The Essay* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995).

[53] Oscar Wilde, "The Critic as Artist," in *The Artist as Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Richard Ellmann (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 357, 364, 368, 372.

[54] George Lukács, "On the Nature and Form of the Essay," in *Soul and Form*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge: MIT press, 1978), 3, 16, 18.

[55] Ibid., 9-10.

[56] Ibid., 18.

[57] Beaujour argues that Montaigne's writing carries out a "coup" with regard to traditional formalized rhetoric by transgressing *inventio*, *dispositio*, and *memoria* so as to "liberate *elocutio*, which is style." Beaujour, *Poetics of the Literary Self-Portrait*, 108.

[58] Jerome Schwartz provides an insightful account of Montaigne's perception of the world in flux in *Diderot and Montaigne: The* Essais *and the Shaping of Diderot's Humanism* (Genève: Droz, 1966), 68-79.

[59] Claire de Obaldia makes the intriguing point that Montaigne, as though to anticipate the *bildungsroman* as typified by Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, incorporates error and errancy as structuring principles. De Obaldia, *The Essayistic Spirit*, 42.

[60] Hugo Friedrich, *Montaigne*, 338, trans. modified.

[61] Denis Diderot, quoted in Schwartz, *The* Essais *and the Shaping of Diderot's Humanism*, 122-123.

[62] Theodor W. Adorno, "The Essay as Form," in *Notes to Literature*, vol. 1, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 13-16.

[63] See Dudley M. Marchi, *Montaigne Among the Moderns: Receptions of the* Essais (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1994).

[64] For a shrewd study of Montaigne's investment in dialogue as a form of "yielding," seen in the context of his so-called "conservative" advocacy of submission to both political and religious authority, see David Quint, *Montaigne and the Quality of Mercy:*

Ethical and Political Themes in the Essais (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 101-144.

[65] Auerbach, "L'Humaine Condition," 311.

[66] History and history writing are of substantial importance to Montaigne. History, he tells us, is the very "anatomie de la philosophie" in that it confronts and dissects "the most abstruse parts of our nature" (I.26: 176). Elsewhere he confesses, "The historians play right into my court . . . Man in general whom I seek to know appears in them more alive and more entire than in any other sort of writing, showing . . . the variety of ways in which he is put together and the events which menace him" (II.10: 467). History is then, for Montaigne, less a progression of incidents concerning nations and institutions, less a record of memorizable examples, than a form of *observation* focused on the ground level of human experience. And if Montaigne is himself an historian, his *chapitres* dissolve the classical distinction, passed down from Aristotle, between historical and poetic discourse. Aristotle argues in the *Poetics* that the historian speaks in his own person and deals with particular events that have already happened (a drab pursuit), while the poet speaks in the voice of others and is concerned, much more nobly, with universal truths that are rational probabilities. By contrast, the *Essais* bring together the historical (the particular) and the poetic (the possible) within a project of discovery. Ann Hartle makes this dimension of the *Essais* central to her assessment of Montaigne as a philosopher opposed to "deliberate philosophy." See her *Michel de Montaigne: Accidental Philosopher* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 78-82.

[67] Roland Barthes, "*Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure …*," in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), 278.

[68] Ibid., 282.

[69] Ibid., 283-284. This observation forms the basis of Barthes's self-alignment with Proust, as though to claim for himself a similar, half-accidental, undecided course towards writing the novel that he desired to write but wound up never writing before his untimely death. Elsewhere Barthes states: "I will probably never write a 'novel,' a story fitted out with characters and events; but if it's so easy for me to deprive myself of this activity (after all, it really must be quite enjoyable to write a novel), it's doubtless because my writings are already full of the novelistic (which is the novel minus the characters); and it's true that at present, looking ahead to a new phase of my work as straightforwardly as possible, what I would like to do is to *try out* novelistic forms, to essay them, in such a way that none of them would be called a 'novel' but each one would keep, and if possible renew, the title 'essay.'" Barthes, *The Grain of the Voice: Interviews 1962-1980*, trans. Linda Coverdale (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 176. For an account of Barthes's thwarted ambitions to write a novel near the end of his life, see Antoine Compagnon, "Roland Barthes's Novel," trans. Rosalind Krauss, *October* 112 (Spring 2005): 23-34.

[70] Godard, interview by Emmanuel Burdeau and Charles Tesson "The Future(s) of Film," in *The Future(s) of Film: Three Interviews 2000/01*, trans. John O'Toole (Bern: Verlag Gachnang & Springer AG, 2002), 21. Godard has also cited this indecision as a deciding factor in his lack of commercial success. This calls to mind his earlier statement in a 1965 *Cahiers* interview concerning *Pierrot le fou*: "Flaubert and Proust can't tell stories. They do something else. So does the cinema, though starting from their point of arrival, from a totality. Any great modern film which is successful is so because of a misunderstanding.

Audiences like *Psycho* because they think Hitchcock is telling them a story. *Vertigo*

baffles them for the same reason." *GG*, 223. Here it is worth nothing that Montaigne, in

the *Essais*, writes that "nothing is so foreign to my mode [*stile*] of writing than extended

narration" (I.21: 120).

[71] Godard, quoted in Jonathan Rosenbaum, "Trailer for Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma*,"

http://www.jonathanrosenbaum.com/?p=15760.

[72] See Gorin's comments, included as a special feature on the DVD of Marker's films *La

Jetée* (1963) and *Sans soleil* (1983) released by The Criterion Collection. He mentions

Godard's "dream to be Montaigne" in the section marked "Que sais-je?" of the features

for *La Jetée*.

[73] Adrian Martin's audio commentary on the Criterion Collection's DVD edition of *Vivre

sa vie* is especially good at sussing out the complex ways in which Godard reflects on this

line from Montaigne instead of posing it as a "message" or "moral" to be illustrated.

[74] Discussing the film with Harun Farocki, Kaja Silverman cites Godard's remarks in an

interview prior to the release of the film: "*My Life to Live* will prove Montaigne's saying

that you have to give yourself to others and not only to yourself." She takes this to be a

"productive misreading of Montaigne," when in fact Godard, wittingly or not, exhibits a

more accurate understanding of Montaigne's interplay of self and other than Silverman

does. Silverman and Farocki, *Speaking about Godard* (New York: New York University

Press, 1998), 3.

[75] In a fleeting, hermetic sentence in his fragmented prose piece "Words /Criss-Crossed /

+ Rebus = Cinema / Therefore:" Godard writes, "Those of Lacan, Althusser and Barthes

were rendered outmoded by those of Montaigne." What does "those" refer to? Essays?

Godard, *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard, tome 1: 1950-1984*, ed. Alain Bergala (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1998), 412 (my translation).

[76] Dan Morgan proposes a fascinating way of organizing Godard's corpus of films and videos into overlapping "series," both within and across projects, and he uses the term in the sense of modernist musical compositions. Morgan, *A Feeling of Light: Cinema, Aesthetics, and the Late Films and Videos of Jean-Luc Godard*, forthcoming.

[77] My take on the role of Godard's voice in his films is informed by Roland-François Lack's impressively detailed essay, "Sa Voix," in *For Ever Godard*, ed. Michael Temple, James S. Williams, and Michael Witt (London: Black Dog, 2004), 312-329.

[78] That Godard's character has a direct hand in the course of the film's action sets the cameo apart from Hitchcock's walk-on roles, which, by contrast, are more often than not excluded from the action, as in *North by Northwest* where, having arrived too late for the bus, he is (comically) left behind.

[79] Lack, "Sa Voix," 318-320.

[80] This is not to say that Marker doesn't make subtle allusions, like those to Hitchcock's *Vertigo* in *La jetée* (which are ultimately revisited and made more direct in *Sans soleil*), but in spite of Marker's use of multiple narrators and alter egos, Godard is much more prone to aggressively alter what he "borrows" while refusing to clarify what is a citation in his work and what isn't.

[81] I will say more of the citational vocation of the essayist in my second chapter, but here, the point to be emphasized is that what situates Godard more firmly in the tradition of Montaigne than Marker, Varda, or Resnais, is an all-out embrace of secondariness that becomes an infinite precursiveness.

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[82] Ibid., 319.

[83] Douglas Morrey, *Jean-Luc Godard* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 61.

[84] *2 ou 3 choses* is an important step in Godard's career-long study of gestures and their social and inter-corporeal implications. Watching the film with a view to its enduring significance in his body of work, one almost expects the scenes of Parisians toing and froing about their daily activities to be, at any moment, intensively reworked with the video stop-starts that Godard and his partner Anne-Marie Miéville will later employ to both poetic and critical ends.

[85] "Sense and nonsense" is an allusion to Merleau-Ponty's book *Sens et non-sens*, and with it Godard implies that sense is inextricably bound up with and arrived at through nonsense. Godard visually tropes on this notion in the garage scene when he shoes an insert of feet walking over an arrow painted on the asphalt, pointing in the opposite direction. See Alfred Guzzetti, *Two or Three Things I know about Her* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 197.

[86] Morrey, *Jean-Luc Godard*, 64.

[87] The best critical definition of lyricism with respect to Godard's work, is given by Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier in her remarkable essay (which Martin draws on), "Form and Substance, or the Avatars of the Narrative," in *Focus on Godard*, ed. Royal S. Brown (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1972), 90-108.

[88] In his commentary for the Criterion Collection DVD of the film, Adrian Martin notes that Godard's interest in finding the poetry in a broken, modern world carries over from

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Godard's earlier films and later reemerges with variation in Godard's late films starting in the 1980s.

[89] See Guzzetti, *Two or Three Things I Know about Her*, 135-136.

[90] These words of Baudelaire's are cited, most famously, in Eliot's *The Waste Land*, but also in Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*.

CHAPTER TWO

Bring in the Evidence:

A Critical Poetics of Citation

All the texts, sounds, shots and cuts in [Godard's] work are citational and, if they ever appear original, it is simply because we have not yet come across the reference. But his general project, enriched by the formally sumptuous manner of the invocation, remains totally original, indeed it is the greatest systematic interrogation of the image undertaken by cinema in cinematic terms.

-Nicole Brenez[1]

Godard leaves the impression of an earlier film, rejected, contested, defaced, torn to shreds: destroyed as such, but still "subjacent." The film only functions in relation to simultaneous referents, more or less tacit but proliferating, encroaching on each other so that they themselves ravel up and weave the entire filmic texture, since ultimately one can feel that there is nothing, no phrase, shot or movement, that is not a more or less "pure" citation or referent: the important thing being, during the course of the film, not to try to identify all these referents, which would be both impossible and pointless, but to realize (to see within the perspective of the idea) that *everything* is referential; though the referents are set with traps and dissembled, deconsecrated . . .

-Jacques Rivette, on *Made in USA* (1966)[2]

Everything is a citation. If I shoot a scene of the Arc de Triomphe it's a citation.

-Godard,[3]

Godard's abundant use of citations has always been one of the most remarked on features of his practice. Allusions, references, salutes, parodies, borrowings, and outright appropriations: these variant modes of pointing to or reworking already existing material form an intrinsic part of his cinema from *À bout de souffle* (1960) on. As we noted in the last chapter, the Montaignian essay deploys a form of citation which, instead of deferring to an authority on a specific subject, invests the cited matter with radically new meanings and operations. Like Montaigne, Godard has often professed not to remember the sources

of his citations and not to be able to distinguish what he has invented from the lines and materials he has obtained from others.[4] Characters in his films sometimes identify their sources, as in *Le Mépris* (1963) where Fritz Lang cites verses by Brecht ("Hollywood") and Hölderlin ("The Poet's Vocation"), but Godard, here again like Montaigne, tends to cite without identifying the original, and without clearly marking the citation as "found" material. A more recent tendency of his films and videos is to delay attribution until the end credits, where the names of composers, writers, and philosophers sometimes appear (a partial list without direct references), but still more often than not he avoids attribution altogether. Jean-Pierre Gorin has fittingly summed up Godard's entire body of work as a tireless "assault on the notion of intellectual property."[5] Indeed, French courts have more than once found Godard in violation of copyright laws, inspiring him to argue for a legal distinction between "citations" and "extracts." In a 1997 interview with Alain Bergala, he claims that while an "extract" involves the unaltered use of existing property, a "citation" is an inventive gesture, a creative act in its own right that should therefore require no fees or duties.[6] Hence the title that recurs periodically in *2 x 50 ans de cinéma français* (1995), his video co-directed with Anne-Marie Miéville, made up largely of images gleaned from cinema history: "No Copyright." Similarly, in the press kit for *Film Socialisme* (2010), an FBI warning against copyright infringement is captioned by the text (spoken at the end of the film, as a riff on Pascal): "When the law is wrong justice comes before the law."

Commentators on Godard's films often handle his practice of citation as a matter of intertextual reference stemming from his cinephilia. This, certainly, is a salient aspect of his work, especially in his New Wave films, and we would not have to labor too hard to situate and interpret *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988-1998) as a magisterial example of the

cinephilic impulse to seek out and collect "crystallizingly expressive details" from films loved and remembered.[7] However, in taking this tack, critics tend to indulge in a game of reference hunting. In the least productive cases the acoustic and visual texture of the film or video is abandoned while the critic tracks down the source and considers the possible meaning of the citation at a remove from Godard's work. And this problem is amplified when the intertexts are viewed as straightforward models for what Godard is doing – the basic assumption is that if Godard cites Benjamin or Proust somewhere in *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, for instance, then we can decipher *Histoire(s)* as a version of the *Passagenwerk* or of *À la recherche du temps perdu*. In this way, even as citation is recognized as being absolutely central to Godard's practice, the specificities of his work are given short shrift.

Godard's methods of citation change and evolve across his corpus and undertake a wide range of tasks both aesthetic and political. Faced with the challenge of separating his work over six decades into relatively distinct phases or periods, critics tend to invoke his shifting habits of citation and to categorize those shifts according to broader cultural and intellectual trends through the latter part of the twentieth century. Critical interest in and support of "late Godard" has in many instances rested on a comparative dismissal of "early Godard": the argument is that whereas the New Wave films, in keeping with their tendency to revel in "surface play" and "pastiche," use citation superficially and without sufficient political or historical engagement, the later works (as though to atone for these prior mistakes) exhibit a form of citation that is primarily historical, historiographic, and committed in its very constitution to social critique and to ethical responsibility. Marking this difference in citational strategies serves to distinguish early Godard as "light" (stylish and inventive but detached and naïve) and late Godard as "heavy" (admirably philosophic

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and critical in its esoteric reflections on history and the history of cinema). Closely allied with this perspective is the idea that in graduating from his early to his late work, Godard undergoes – strangely against the tide of contemporary thought and practice – an inverted transition from an incipient and prophetic postmodernism to a belated modernism or what Fredric Jameson has called a "survivor's modernism."[8]

While this way of construing Godard's oeuvre imparts a general truth about his changes in mood and agenda – after all, the director does come to seriously rethink his earlier work, its historical significance, and the aesthetic basis on which the New Wave was founded – it smoothes over a rough terrain much too quickly. Citation is indeed a point of differentiation that should affect how we think about Godard's development in and across discrete stages, but his shifts in means and motivation require a more supple consideration of the *critical* faculties that span them. It may be true that Godard's early films, *À bout de souffle* in particular, are politically confused and disengaged from some of the most urgent social issues of their day, but this doesn't mean they lack criticism of *any* kind and thus reflect "the superficiality of a postmodern eclecticism."[9]

In this chapter, I will look primarily at how citation works as an instrument of criticism in Godard's early, middle, and late phases. This will allow us to move beyond cinephilia and intertextual allusion to consider more pressing questions concerning the poetic and political implications of Godard's citational methods. There are two kinds of citation-driven criticism that I have in mind here: on the one hand, citation as a function of political critique taking the form of "collage" and *détournement* (it will be my task to negotiate the particular features of Godard's work between these competing procedures);

and on the other hand, citation as a means of pushing film criticism into an audio-visual register, so that sounds and images are used to comment directly on sounds and images.[10]

The essay form, I want to show in this chapter, has an important place in both of these critical contexts, and not merely because Godard's ample use of citations is similar in regard and gesture to Montaigne's. The collection and alteration of found materials as a means of political critique brings Godard's film practice into a heated conflict between two different expressions of the essayistic – one more resolutely didactic, the other more speculative and hesitant – in the years leading up to his militant turn and his experiments with Gorin and the Dziga Vertov Group. This conflict comes to the fore in the venomous attacks on Godard's films of the 1960s carried out by the Situationists under the direction of Guy Debord, whose properly instructive and subversive practice of *détournement* they accused Godard of co-opting. I will revisit the key points of this dispute and compare the citational methods of Godard and Debord, as doing so will make evident, and force us to reckon with, the poetic and political implications of Godard's use of citation at a moment when there is mounting interest in "making films politically," as Godard famously puts it.

But first, I want to address an earlier moment in Godard's career when criticism, specifically film criticism and its possible extension into sounds and images, is close to his self-conception as an essayist. It's no coincidence that when he says, in his oft-cited 1962 interview with *Cahiers du cinéma*, that he is "still a critic" despite having moved from writing critical articles to making films, he also claims in the same breath to be an "essayist" (working in film for the time being but capable of venturing into other media "were the cinema to disappear"). In the initial section of this chapter, I will speak to how Godard imagines in his earlier films and his remarks around them a possible alliance, in

audio-visual terms, of film criticism and film practice, but I argue that it is not until his late period, and his *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, that he provides a genuine and thoroughgoing response to his own expressed demand for such a form. Thus, the analysis that follows is concerned to track a poetics of citation across Godard's body of work, observing how it supports and interweaves these two kinds of critical activity in and across distinguishable yet connected stages (that is, I highlight a recursion in his later, historical phase without necessarily dismissing his earlier projects by contrast, and without relegating his middle, militant phase to an isolated set of events having little impact on how we view Godard's early and late work and the complex points of revision and exchange that arise between them). By examining Godard's progression in this light, we can understand both how he continues to operate as a critic, as he frequently declares, and how the essay form serves as a vehicle for manifesting this critical dimension in multiple capacities in and across the major shifts in concern, milieu, and ambition that his practice endures.

Towards Material Intimacy

Over a number of articles, Jonathan Rosenbaum has advanced the argument that a critical aspect does, as Godard himself claims, carry over from Godard's written criticism into his films and multimedia projects. Rosenbaum frames this continuity largely in terms of citation, as the means by which Godard confronts and passes comment on other works, often the same works he discussed in *Cahiers du cinéma*. Along these lines, Rosenbaum maintains that *Alphaville* is one of the most important studies of German Expressionism: "Criticism composed in the language of the medium, it brings social and aesthetic insight equally into focus, and certainly deserves a place next to Eisner and Kracauer."[11] He also

takes care to separate Godard's mode of citation from the "postmodernist appropriation" of other directors that fall short of critique (as culprits he lists Quentin Tarantino, Martin Scorsese, Paul Schrader, Woody Allen, and Brian De Palma[12]). Godard, he writes, evokes as a critical gesture, as in *Made in USA*, where echoes of Hollywood crime thrillers are cross-woven with cartoons and nods to Disney so as to make apparent their shared traits: "tendencies toward sadism and hysteria, idealization of types with occasional right-wing implications; the wish-fulfillment and fantasy of the crime thriller, the primal violence and terror of the cartoon."[13] What counts as criticism for Rosenbaum is an elaborate web of references in which other films, and entire genres, are shrewdly observed, paraphrased, transformed, estranged – operations that exceed *hommage* and cinephilic in-joke.

Rosenbaum puts us on the right track. Criticism, regardless of medium, depends on citation, strives towards it, or else tries to compensate for the work's absence through ekphrastic description.[14] But we need to go one step further in tracing Godard's moves from one means of criticism to another. We have to consider citational practices where the source – the substance undergoing critique – is not just evoked but materially seized and integrated.[15] To put it another way, we need to look closely at how Godard answers his own call to "bring in the evidence," a phrase he uses in his 1981 debate with Pauline Kael to name a critical method in which sounds and images are the principal matters *and means*. "What have we seen?" he asks of film criticism confined to the word. "We should look at it. A real critic would project it now."[16]

This demand for the critic to work in audio-visual terms, oft-repeated in Godard's interviews of the past thirty years or so,[17] traces back to much earlier in his career. In his digressive and densely allusive prose piece, "Pierrot my friend," which was published in

Cahiers in 1965 (and which Godard cites at length, with revisions, in the last episode of

Histoire(s) du cinéma), Godard responds with ambivalence to an invitation from *Cahiers*

to discuss his most recent film: "You say, 'Let's talk about *Pierrot*.' I say, 'What is there

to talk about?'" His point is that something about cinema, unlike literature, is inherently

elusive of verbal discussion. Criticism, he says, is "a matter of understanding the poetic

structure of a film, a thought that is, of managing to define that thought as an object, of

seeing whether or not that object is living, and of eliminating the dead." But since film

criticism, confined as it is to language, has no direct way of grasping the "attributes" of

its object – which Godard specifies as "scope and colour" – it has considerable trouble

meeting the demands of criticism and achieving poetic understanding. Godard, alluding

to Epstein, writes: "Difficult, you see, to talk about cinema, the art is easy but criticism

impossible of this subject which is no subject, whose wrong side is not the right, which

draws close as it recedes, always physically, let us not forget."[18]

In "Let's Talk about *Pierrot*," an interview in the same 1965 issue of *Cahiers*,

Godard states his thoughts on the limits of film criticism in more concrete terms. When

his interviewers (Jean-Louis Comolli, Michel Delahaye, Jean-André Fieschi, and Gérard

Guégan) complain about the "repetitive and impoverished" vocabulary of contemporary

film criticism, Godard agrees and offers that

> the problem of film criticism arises because, like art criticism, it is not a genre
> which exists in its own right. All the great art critics have been poets. Only
> literary criticism exists in its own right, because its object blends with its subject.
> Otherwise, all the interesting books of criticism on painting or music have been
> written by great creators from another art. Film criticism is much the same. (*GG*,
> 229)

This statement begs the question: How might film criticism function "in its own right"?

How might film criticism pass into film form? How might sound and image be used to

comment directly on sound and image? After Godard repeats his claim that he is still a

critic despite no longer writing articles, an interviewer says, "With films like *Pierrot le*

fou and *Le Testament d'Orphée* [Cocteau, 1960] it is as though there were two columns,

one of images, the other of comments explaining the significance of the images." Godard

then subtly but importantly alters this view:

> The commentary on the image forms part of the image. One then could imagine
> criticism similar to [Michel] Butor's novels, which are more or less critical
> commentaries on events. One could imagine the critique of a film as the text and
> its dialogue, with photos and some commentary: the ensemble would form a kind
> of critique, an analysis of the film. (*GG*, 230, trans. modified)

Earlier, in his enthusiastic review of Anthony Mann's austere *Man of the West* (1958) for

Cahiers, Godard had argued that criticism and creation could intertwine in the same film.

He had called Mann's film "an admirable lesson in cinema – in modern cinema" insofar

as it offered both "course and discourse": it sustained a dramatic sweep while engaging

critically, "discursively" with the simplest parameters of the medium (*GG*, 117). In this

formulation what counts as criticism is a stock-taking of formal possibilities, with an eye

to "reinvention," on a shot-to-shot basis – a task Godard would soon undertake in his own

feature films, which *displace* and *recast* the conventions of mainstream cinema (instead

of completely demolishing or refuting them, as is often suggested).[19] However, in "Let's

Talk about *Pierrot*," Godard seems to have a more drastic conception in mind: he implies

(in part by referring to the work of Butor[20]) that cinema makes room for criticism through

its fragmentariness, its multiple registers, and its capacity to mix heterogeneous materials.

After describing this hypothetical ensemble of criticism and filmmaking, Godard,

prompted once more to modify the ideas of his interviewers, advocates a kind of criticism

that consists of "giving examples":

> I believe that what one needs today is to be able to say, here is a film, what is good about it and why it is good, by giving examples. Said very simply, like a conversation, a straight dialogue. For a long time criticism was chiefly a matter written articles preoccupied with problems of style. In *Cahiers*, in any case, whatever the style used in all the genres, there was always a literary side, some seeking after effect. But now I think instructional criticism would be better. Of course, explaining to people why Skolimowski is good isn't easy. (*GG*, 230)

Godard characteristically refrains from giving us a thorough explanation, but it's clear enough that between his two contributions to this 1965 issue of *Cahiers*, he entertains two possible mergers of cinema and criticism: 1) a formal "ensemble" in which *cinema takes on a critical dimension*; 2) an instructional form of *criticism that takes on cinema*, "giving examples" from the film, in a rather straightforward manner, without linguistic embellishment, the ideal of which – as becomes apparent in his later call to "bring in the evidence" – is to take material possession of the elusive film object.

Godard's comments here bespeak a desire for what Raymond Bellour has called "material intimacy" with cinema, a condition whereby the critic has at his or her disposal the same "matters of expression" as the work under analysis. Famously, Bellour makes the argument that the "text" of a film is – unlike that of a poem or novel, which the critic can extract and incorporate with the advantage of an "undivided conformity of the object of study and the means of study" – is "peculiarly unquotable, since the written text cannot restore to it what only the projector can produce."[21] In fact, Bellour singles out Godard's remarks in "Let's Talk about *Pierrot*" as a signal moment in the articulation of this desire for a "between-the-two" of film criticism and film practice.[22] And Bellour notes that his own search for a materially intimate form of analysis took inspiration from the television program *Cinéma de notre temps* (1964-1974, 1989-2006), which came close to Godard's notion of a "critical ensemble" in sound and image. Co-produced by Janine Bazin (widow

to André) and André S. Labarthe, the series varied in its scope and format, permitting its contributors to experiment with ways of engaging the work of other filmmakers and with methods of integrating clips and stills.[23] Often this led to a mix of commentary, dialogue, and citation in which cinema – despite being routed through television – functioned as the medium of its own criticism. In Bellour's words, the series provided "the only significant example of a discourse sustained on cinema by cinema itself."[24]

Between his comments in the mid-1960s and his late video essays, which consist of material citations cobbled together and reworked from cinema history, Godard, more than any other critic-turned-filmmaker, is a lighting rod for the genesis and development of an audio-visual form of criticism.[25] Among film critics who have made the leap from writing journal articles to making films, perhaps only Harun Farocki rivals the extent to which Godard has converted cinema into an all-out laboratory for critical investigation, not only continuing to explore the issues and questions that concerned him in his written articles (a trait he shares with Truffaut, Rivette, Rohmer, Chabrol, Paul Schrader, Nagisa Oshima, Edgardo Cozarinsky and many others) but endeavoring to remake cinema and its forms into instruments of inspection and analysis, tools to be applied to other films, to the film he is currently making, or thinking about making, and to the films he has made in the past (citation within his own corpus being a key practice of Godard's and another register of reflective self-portraiture and self-implication).

In "Let's Talk about *Pierrot*," Godard's ideas about the possibilities of criticism issue from a general sentiment, shared by others at the time, including his associates at *Cahiers*, that new cinematic forms are emerging which in turn demand new models of criticism. Over the course of the decade, in the years following the Nouvelle Vague, the

innovations of Rouch, Straub and Huillet, Makavajev, Pasolini, Cassavetes, and Godard among others led to an extended debate in *Cahiers* about "new cinema" and the need for "new criticism" in appropriate response.[26] This feeling is manifested in "Let's Talk about *Pierrot*" when Godard's discussants state that the critical "war horses" of the New Wave years – namely, auteurism and the concept of *mise en scène* – have served their purposes and that new concepts and vocabularies are needed: "For ten years *Cahiers* said that *mise en scène* existed. Now one has to say the opposite instead." Godard unequivocally agrees: "Yes, it's true. It doesn't exist. We were wrong" (*GG*, 231). For Godard, it is crucial that criticism adapts to remain keenly sensitive to formal invention, feeding back into cinema with its precise discoveries, suggesting possibilities of future work (indeed, in his debate with Kael, he dismisses her reviews of his work because they fail to offer ideas as to how he might improve the next time out). By the middle of the decade, he had lost faith in the ability of *mise en scène* criticism to do this,[27] and just as he advocated a critical approach that moves closer to its object, he felt that cinema itself was moving towards and thinking through matters of criticism: "The New Cinema, which began as a cinema of references, has moved on, because it now poses the problem of criticism itself . . . " (*GG*, 232).

It's with *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, the centerpiece of his late period, that Godard's impulse to bring in the evidence reaches its culmination. Godard himself has referred to the video series as a work of criticism, and it does, in stunningly inventive and affecting ways, implement the ideas about audio-visual criticism he expressed in somewhat rough terms in the mid-1960s.[28] But Godard's use of citation in his late videos is also informed by another prior strand of research and experiment across his early and middle work that involves methods of collage. While Godard himself has never, to my knowledge, stated a

preference for the term, commentators have often used "collage" to define certain aspects of his practice since the 1960s: a set of gestures by which he appropriates found materials and the paratactic form of composition that results from these and other maneuvers that disturb narrative continuity, diegetic stability, harmonization of sound and image tracks, and scenographic coordinates of time and space. Before we can understand how Godard's late videographic style works to criticize and critically transform cited materials, we need to examine how it grows out of a poetics of "collage" that is also, as its rather contentious critical reception attests, a matter of politics.

Citation and/as Collage

In Godard's earliest feature films we find citations in material form – not mere allusions or referential reenactments (evocations) but film fragments drawn from their original sites and re-linked according to Godard's designs (appropriations).[29] *À bout de souffle* samples the audio tracks of Preminger's *Whirlpool* (1949) and then Boetticher's *Westbound* (1959) to pass comment on Michel and Patricia's love affair as they watch a "cowboy film" together (the *seeming* dialogue of which slyly combines and rewrites two poems by Louis Aragon).[30] Equally intricate is the use of Dreyer's *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* (1928) in the third tableau of *Vivre sa vie* (1962). Reflecting on the affective power of the close-up, Godard intertwines a scene of Jeanne (Renée Falconetti) being told of her execution with shots of Nana/Karina looking up at the screen in a theater, her face adding a third term to the alternation of close-ups (at wrenched angles) between Jeanne and the character played by Artaud. Godard craftily excises a third character from Dreyer's scene and eventually starts to print the intertitles as subtitles, so that the juxtapositions of faces

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are immediate, and so that Nana's close-ups respond to those of Jeanne like countershots, effecting not simply an identification on Nana's part but a kind of figural transference, on the basis of mutual suffering and a grim fate, "written" in Godard's framing and cutting and in Nana's glycerin tears.[31] These two examples of citation are not at odds with the cinephilic evocations and allusions that saturate Godard's work, but they do belong to a more specific order of citation, one in which the material is "brought in" and transformed.

Figures 21-24. *Vivre sa vie* **(Godard, 1962)**

In his early work, Godard's poetics of citation reaches well past film fragments. Increasingly through the 1960s, he cites a heterogeneous range of readymade materials, dissolving barriers between "high" and "low" and lending his films the distinct feel of a loose patchwork of "cut out" and "pasted" elements from which – despite their apparent

incompatibilities – new, surprising links and tensions emerge. Neon signs, record sleeves, cartoon strips, billboards, book covers, cleaning products, and magazine advertisements co-exist, as aesthetic things, with photographic reproductions of paintings and drawings by Picasso, Renoir, Matisse, and Modigliani among other, mostly European masters. It's as if Godard, to satisfy his own stated demand to "put everything into a film" (*GG*, 239), converts the frame from a window on the world to a volatile canvas on which the debris of the world affix and compete, as compositional surface.

It is largely this eclectic "cut-and-paste" method that calls for the designation of "collage," which critics have liberally applied to Godard's work since its earliest stages, sometimes as a point of praise and inter-art comparison, sometimes as a point of critique (depending on the commentator, Godard figures variously as an artist in critical dialogue with larger traditions of aesthetic modernism[32] and as an uninspired peddler of formalist clichés.)[33] While "collage" is a necessary if contentious term in the analysis of Godard's practice, the challenge lies in charting its specific effects and grounding them in specific moments. There are, in addition to the heterogeneity of materials we have already noted, two main characteristics of his collage method. First, "collage" more appropriately than "montage" describes the way in which Godard's films persistently destabilize, over both micro- and macro-levels of arrangement, the kind of pictorial and scenographic unity on view in more conventional cinematic styles. With their flagrant discontinuities on sound and image tracks, Godard's early films recast the role of the shot, stripping it of its usual relay mechanisms (even as his films occasionally flirt with a more conventional, analytic *découpage*).[34] By disengaging the shot – which is always a fragment, no matter the film, before it is rendered sequential and synthetic; that is, before it is made to suggest a larger

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contextual field – from its usual duties of transport and representation in narrative-driven cinema, Godard allows it to exercise its radical, inherent fragmentariness. The shot gains (or keeps) its autonomy and at the same time is intruded on more intensely from all sides, its frame now more permeable and open to disjunctive flare-ups of sound (sounds having their own cuts that rarely coincide with those on the image track). Despite the mechanical *défilement* of the film strip and the succession of shots onscreen, the shot now falls into a paratactic weave of elements. So loose and *seemingly* arbitrary (this is always something of a ruse in Godard's work) are the inter-shot connections that much of the film comes to seem rearrangeable – almost like the collage of postcards that Ulysses and Michelangelo assemble in *Les Carabiniers* (1963), in their illustration of "order and method" that at one level reflects Godard's own ordering procedures.

Figures 25-26. *Les Carabiniers* **(Godard, 1963)**

Across Godard's films of the 1960s, this collage style increasingly furnishes the basis for the entire composition. *Made in USA* is pieced not quite together as a collage of the Ben Barka affair (not quite its reality but an impression of it one might have gathered from reading about it in the newspaper[35]) and the generic formulas of a pulp crime novel (not quite a specific novel, though the film is credited as an adaptation of Richard Stark's

The Jugger, but a whole field of events common to such fiction). On a shot-to-shot level, it consists mostly of free-floating scraps, and it moves (when it doesn't settle into relaxed long takes) according to odd jumps and collisions. For instance, what, besides a roughly continuous color palette and a graphic match-on-motion, links shots of Karina swiveling her head against a flat, red backdrop with shots of another, younger woman putting on a lab coat in a separate location?[36] Parataxis often marks succession as a false progression and grants to each shot the full potential for "vertical" linkage. It may be that these shots of Karina are "followed," reprised, countered, or otherwise responded to by shots situated several scenes apart in the film's "horizontal" unfolding.

Second, Godard's collage method has the cumulative effect of making his films' implied fictions and dramaturgies more permeable as well, so that documents, clippings, and prosaic things from an "outside" freely enter into the texture of the work and keep a single diegesis from holding sway. Simply put, collage is the art practice of the twentieth century that not only seeks to engage, through its broken, fortuitous forms, the disjointed character of modern experience but that shows once and for all that the realms of art and daily life are deeply, fundamentally connected; "an expression of the advanced industrial age," Harold Rosenberg explains, "[collage] appropriates the external world on the basis that it is already partly changed into art."[37] In Godard's films, the fluid relation between artifice and life – and between fiction and non-fiction – provides the conceptual grounds for some of the director's richest and most intriguing experiments. Consider, for instance, how in *Une femme mariée* (1964) the married woman (Machel Meril), as Gilles Deleuze words it, "merged with the pages of the weekly that she was flicking through, and with a catalogue of 'spare parts.'"[38] Deleuze's remarks alert us to the fact that Godard is doing

something more complex in the film than thematizing the main character's self-definition with respect to the consumer images and signs that fascinate her. In the scene in question, which takes place at a café, the married woman, Charlotte, flips through an *Elle* magazine that is chock-full of lingerie ads, and she suddenly notices two photos of herself: covering her breasts in a coy, stylized pose in one, and leaping "joyfully" into the air, in housewife attire, a duster in each hand, in the other. As she does this her attention (and ours) is split between the magazine and a conversation under way just behind her between two young women who, in their bathing suits, echo the lingerie ads (one is telling the other what to expect in a sexual encounter with a man). Also working on our senses are the jangling of a pinball machine presumably somewhere out of frame, and sampled bits of a Beethoven string quartet. Gradually – through Godard's framing and cutting – the magazine and the space of the café collapse into each other, without stable distinction. As Charlotte glances over her shoulder at the women talking, phrases culled (out of order) from their dialogue appear as typographic text in the middle of the frame, which now seems part of a *mise en page*. She turns back to the *Elle*, a pop tune replaces all other sounds for the moment, and a series of shots describe figures and words up close, breaking them into spare units until,

Figures 27-33. *Une femme mariée* **(Godard, 1964)**

eventually, we see the married woman merge with the commercial images again – except

this time, in a surprising play on scale, she enters the frame in long shot and walks across

the torso of a woman painted on the side of a building. The convenient but facile reading

of this scene is that it illustrates how deeply Meril's character confuses her life with the

images of femininity in her magazines and environment. Godard is, to be sure, casting a critical eye on how consumer society induces certain concepts of feminine sexuality and "industrializes" the female body in the process,[39] but the form this critique takes explodes the view of character on which any psychologistic interpretation would rest. That is to say, the function of collage in this segment, through its putting of fiction into paratactic contact with documents (the magazine is less a "prop" than a readymade), is to put into irresolvable conflict all of the elements that are conventionally, in a narrative film more assured of its diegetic borders, fused together (for instance, "character," "body," "figure," and "agent"[40]) or categorically kept distinct ("actor" and "role"). The effect – and this is Deleuze's point – is not to integrate the things of art and life into a synthetic continuum, with implicit part-whole relationships, but to let each fragment exercise its "dissonance" and "unlinked" status in the face of such a once-viable conception now understood to be unsustainable and a cliché.[41] If an "interior" and "exterior" to Charlotte and the fictional world she inhabits are difficult to mark, this is because, in Godard's "fragments of a film shot in 1964 in black and white" (the subtitle of *Une femme mariée*), the criteria by which such distinctions are typically made (or assumed) have lost their place.

Between Collage and *Détournement*

While relatively unique in the context of the Nouvelle Vague, Godard's use of collage in cinema reflected broader aesthetic currents of the 1960s. From Pop to newly emergent appropriation forms in "neo-avant-garde" painting and sculpture taking either loose or direct inspiration from Cubist, Dadaist, Surrealist, and Constructivist precursors, collage was visible in a number of guises, and its "cut-up" logic had been vulgarized and

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mainstreamed by advertising (as Pop artists conceded, often without seeming to set their strategies apart). Thus, to use the term "collage" and to enlist it as a method was to raise a thorny set of questions concerning the inheritance of the work and its attendant social and political agendas. It is not surprising, then, that in criticism of and around Godard's films of the decade, "collage" is the subject of much confusion and debate.

Entering the fray with his piece "What is Art, Jean-Luc Godard?" (1965), Louis Aragon comes to Godard's defense by taking a long view that emphasizes the *art*, not the cinema of the French-Swiss director. Aragon employs the term "collage," preferring it to "quotation," to point out affinities between Godard's work and painting – not just Cubist painting (Braque and Picasso) but, going back further, paintings that include, within the depicted scene, one or more other paintings: the "reproductions" lining the shop walls of Watteau's *L'Enseigne de Gersaint* (1721); Seurat's inclusion of his own *La Grande Jatte* (1884) in *Les Poseuses* (1888), a scene of models undressing in his studio; and Courbet's integration of Baudelaire, released from his earlier 1848 portrait, in his densely populated studio scene and self-portrait, *L'Atelier du peintre* (1855).[42]

With reference primarily to *Pierrot le fou*, which he considers a veritable "*system of collages,*" Aragon insists that Godard's collages are not "illustrations" that support the film; they are, rather, "the film itself."[43] Aragon, himself a one-time member of Breton's Surrealist Group, implicitly puts Godard in a lineage of Surrealist poetics traceable to the literary experiments of Lautréamont and to the landscapes of Delacroix: "What is certain is that there was no predecessor for the *Nature morte aux homards* [Delacroix, 1827], that meeting of an umbrella and a sewing machine on a dissection table in a landscape, just as there is no other predecessor than Lautréamont to Godard."[44] For Aragon, collage names

the manner in which Godard's art systematically reveals "the order of what by definition cannot have any order," and renders its shocking and "sublimely beautiful" effects within shots (simultaneously) as well as between them (successively).[45]

Aragon's enraptured, lightly polemical article is somewhat rare for the period in that it attempts to specify Godard's collage method while describing, in some detail, an aesthetic lineage to which it belongs. His argument, however, doesn't seem to have had much winning influence on the views of Godard's detractors – least of all the views of the Situationists, whose hatred of Godard's cinema and person was unequaled in French culture of the 1960s (by comparison, the critics affiliated with *Positif* almost seem polite).

The Guy Debord-led Situationist International – founded, in 1957, as a dissident branch of the Lettrist International, and also as an offshoot of the Imaginist Bauhaus (led by Asger Jorn), on the grounds of confronting and negating the machinations of advanced capitalist society (their professed ancestors are Dada and Marx) – found Godard's collage to be a false, retrograde version of their own core strategies. Their anti-Godard argument turns on the use and abuse of *détournement*, which translates roughly as "a high-jacking," "a re-routing," "a deviation," "a turning-aside." In their "User's Guide to Détournement" (1956), Guy Debord and Gil J Wolman describe the practice as the transformative use of antecedent materials aesthetic or otherwise ("anything can be used") so as to bring about, through distortion and re-linkage, a "synthetic organization of greater efficacy."[46] They oppose *détournement* to respectful, to-the-letter forms of "citation" (which they consider the mainstay of imbeciles) and call, instead, for outright plagiarism, invoking the famous Lautréamont dictum, "Plagiarism is necessary, progress implies it."[47] So as to reduce the confusion that inevitably surrounds appropriation in the twentieth century – which legacy

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is being drawn on? the readymade? Dadaist collage? the *objet trouvé*? – they contend that

it is not enough to paint a moustache on the *Mona Lisa*, or indulge in clever reversals and

lampoons, the upshot being mere scandal.[48] For *détournement* to attain to "revolutionary"

activity (as Debord and Wolman feel it must), it must go beyond altering or defacing the

original – it must "push this process to the point of negating the negation." That is to say,

the process must entail a *devaluing-revaluing* of the chosen material, and the force of the

conversion must be "educative" – it must attune the public to possibilities of contestation

lurking within even the most debased artifacts of industrial capitalism. Brecht, they insist,

is much closer in spirit to this re-functioning than Duchamp.[49]

Debord and Wolman point to cinema as an exceptionally capable instrument of

détournement, including it within the higher realm of "deceptive détournement," which

takes an object already freighted with cultural significance (e.g., "a film sequence from

Eisenstein") and "derives a different scope from the new context."[50] They then consider

possible strategies of detourning *The Birth of a Nation* (Griffith, 1915), such as adding a

spoken commentary that condemns "the horrors of imperialist war" and "the activities of

the Ku Klux Klan, which are continuing in the United States even now." They maintain

that "most films only merit being cut up to compose other works," and they suggest that

snippets from other films could be recombined with a heterogeneous mix of detourned

materials, "musical or pictorial, as well as historical," to achieve a "cinematic rewriting

of history," didactic and insurrectional in its aims.[51]

If Debord and his pupils are adamant about the revolutionary powers of the film

medium (René Viénet goes as far as to stipulate that each Situationist should "be as able

to shoot a film as write an article"[52]), they are just as adamant that Godard's cinema is a

prime example of how *not* to proceed. Whenever Godard's name appears in the pages of their journal *Internationale situationniste*, it is invariably in the form of an excoriation or insult. In a 1961 essay, Debord attempted to fizzle the hype surrounding *À bout de souffle* by arguing that Godard's seeming innovations were in fact complicit with the "dominant cultural mythology," as were critiques of the film that failed to understand this and take Godard to task for it.[53] This argument becomes even more stringent and aggressive in a short, unsigned 1966 article entitled "The Role of Godard." There the authors write that Godard "currently represents formal pseudofreedom and the pseudocritique of manners and values – the two inseparable manifestations of all fake, coopted modern art." Godard and his devout supporters, they claim, are allies in a game of confusion and arbitrariness of judgment, with a shared spectrum of consumable culture which they are all too eager to flaunt. The authors are irritated by Aragon's defense of Godard's collage method and by the vector of influence that places Godard as a descendent of Lautréamont, whom the Situs regard as their own forebear. They argue that what Aragon celebrates as collage is nothing more than "an attempt to interpret *détournement* in such a way as to bring about its cooptation by the dominant culture." Collage, they maintain, is in essence a one-step procedure: "it is displacement, the *infidelity of the element*." Whereas *détournement*, as it follows from Lautréamont's formulation, involves as a crucial second step "a return to a superior fidelity of the element." Godard's collage is faux *détournement* because it lacks this second step, because it is devaluation without revaluation. In the end, his techniques perpetuate the "modernist snobbism of the displaced object" by juxtaposing "*neutral* and indefinitely interchangeable elements," with consistently "boring" results.[54]

The Situationists' scorn for Godard revolves around two points. First, in their

view (which they share with several of Godard's other staunch detractors), Godard is unjustifiably indifferent towards the scraps that make up his collages, and his ideas, his "points," so far as they can be told apart from those that he imports, are too inconstant and mish-mashed to offer up a position, a "communication" to which the viewer might attribute his intentions. If Godard does critically transform preexisting materials, this is by no means as evident as it needs to be to pass for true *détournement*. Godard stands in serious violation of what Debord and Wolman outline as one of the basic "laws" of the practice: "*The distortions introduced in the detourned elements must be as simplified as possible, since the main impact of a détournement is directly related to the conscious or semiconscious recollection of the original contexts of the elements.*"[55] Another law tells us that the greater the contextual distance crossed by the detourned element, the sharper the resulting impact. It is therefore of key importance that the source be "recollected" – a *trajectory of distortion* must be perceptible to an audience.[56] The Situationist critique of Godard's work implies that it disallows this potential, through its confused and gratuitous "complexity" and the increasing murkiness of its references.

Second, Godard's filmmaking, they believe, is not acceptably instructive. In the writings of Debord and the other Situs, the social function of *détournement* is above all didactic. And forcefully so: they are quite comfortable with describing it as a weapon of "propaganda." Godard drew further caustic responses from the Situationists on the 1968 release of *Le Gai savoir*, which Godard shot prior to the student upheavals in May and edited afterwards. The project, commissioned for French television as an adaptation of Rousseau's *Émile*, consists of a series of dialogues between two young students, Émile Rousseau (Jean-Pierre Léaud) and Patricia Lumumba (Juliet Berto), filmed elegantly in

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pockets of light in a pitch-black TV studio, as they discuss and test out, over seven days, a three-part plan: 1) the collection of sounds and images; 2) the decomposition, critique, and re-composition of those sounds and images; 3) the construction of models for future work. Their late-night meetings are sporadically interrupted and punctuated by rapid-fire collage exercises comprised of all manner of "collected" materials: advertisements and photographs from magazines and newspapers, book covers of contemporary theoretical texts, documentary footage of Paris, radio static, stills from *La Chinoise*, political posters, cartoons, sound bits of political speeches and demonstrations, and a Mozart piano sonata revisited at various intervals. On many of these documents Godard has sketched diagrams and scribbled phrases in red, blue, or black felt marker, many of which are citations and familiar Marxist slogans.[57] As in *2 ou 3 choses*, his whispery voice erratically intrudes, now transmitted with electronic squelches, his thoughts half-formed and chaotic. At the end of the program, just as Émile and Patricia part ways and exit the shot on either side, leaving a black void, Godard's voice acknowledges the lack of clarity and concreteness of the experiments and states: "This is not the film that needs to be made, but shows how, if one is making a film, it must follow some of the paths indicated here."

In their review of the film, an unsigned article called "Cinema and Revolution," the Situationists again direct their vitriol at both Godard, whom they call a "Maoist liar," and the critics ignorant enough to be fooled by his "pseudoinnovations" and in this case by his fashionable and pompous imitation of a "deconstructive style." They again pursue the charge of plagiarism, citing not just his co-opted, regressed form of *détournement* but also his periodic use of stretches of black leader, a device that Debord had already used extensively, in more or less the same manner. As in their prior attacks, they characterize

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Godard as a vulture feeding on the dried-up corpse of Art. They see him as a hypocrite condemning the spectacular operations of a cinema he once participated in. The clashes of May, they argue, only confirm his outmodedness. They contend that it is up to Debord to supply effective models for a revolutionary cinema, which he will no doubt accomplish in his forthcoming adaptation of his own text, *La Société du spectacle*.[58]

Godard, Debord: Competing Essayistic Styles

This critique, which supporters of Debord are quick to take up and rehearse, is worth our attention beyond petty questions of who did what first (the anteriority thesis) because it speaks directly to the social and political stakes of Godard's film practice at a transitional moment in his career, and because it casts his peculiar methods of citation as central to those stakes. Revisiting this dispute in the context of the essay-film obliges us to consider the place of his militant work with the Dziga Vertov Group, to which *Le Gai savoir* is a prelude, if not an assertion of principles. In his detailed discussion of the films of Debord, Thomas Y. Levin claims not only that Godard passes off several of Debord's strategies as his own but that long before Godardian "counter-cinema" became, in many intellectual circles, the most promising and sophisticated model of a radically subversive film practice, Debord had already established and methodically explored such a model, in the process exposing and evading its gravest pitfalls: "formalist essentialism, aestheticist myopia, politically naive fetishism of reflexivity, and so on."[59] By Levin's lights, Debord "dismantles" both the dominant cinema and the techniques meant to undermine it.

At a distance of forty years, when Godard himself has dismissed his militant turn and moved in other, less overtly "engaged" directions with his work, when history seems

to have proven Debord's hard-line theories of spectacle prophetic, it is easy to look back on Godard's effort to "make films politically" as an ineffectual stunt separating his early and late stages. And it's easy to disparage Godard's openly uncertain trials and exercises by comparing him with a strategist as unshakably convinced of his game plan as Debord, the assumption being that the filmmakers have a shared mission and that Godard should be judged according to the Debordian strategies he stands accused of filching (which is a curious charge in the first place, coming as it does from a group who plainly encouraged the appropriation of their methods[60]). Without rigging the comparison so as to maintain a mostly one-sided antagonism, I want to outline three basic points of disparity between the practices of these two figures, points where neither arises as victorious over the other but where two alternate conceptions of the essay form are thrown into relief – each having its own range of political and aesthetic limits and possibilities.

The first point here is that of didacticism, which, as we have seen, is built into the very notion of *détournement*. The instructive tenor of Debord's voice and delivery never wavers in his films – we understand throughout, whatever the challenges of the montage, that a guiding agent is intent on communicating a message, a set of principles, arguments, concepts to be learned. Like those of Chris Marker, the transcriptions of Debord's spoken commentaries (which is how his films were primarily known and "accessed" in the years when they were withdrawn from circulation at Debord's request) hold up as autonomous works of literature, as discursive threads of eloquent and at times aphoristic reflections, and in Debord's case, in particular the scripts of his later films, *La Société du spectacle* (1973) and *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni* (1978), they read as near-systematic critical theory. By his own account, Debord is both a filmmaker and *strategist*, the latter

term having a military connotation he indeed embraces. *In girum*, for instance, abounds with references not merely to struggle but combat, and Debord, citing both Sun Tzu and Karl von Clausewitz (whose writings inspired Debord's chess-like board game, *Le Jeu de la guerre*), portrays himself less as a theorist than as a commander of insurgents.

Godard instructs, or rather handles the idea, the process of instruction, by very different means.[61] Even before his projects with the Dziga Vertov Group – when he and Gorin took to describing the screen as a blackboard – he concerns himself with showing scenes of instruction, with the *dispositif* of the classroom. Between *Bande à part* and *La Chinoise*, "school" for Godard changes from a place to be lured away from to a place of serious attention and involvement. As Serge Daney observes in his essay on "Godardian pedagogy," the movie theater, or more precisely Langlois' Cinémathèque, had once been for Godard and the New Wave cinephiles the only classroom worth attending, but by the end of the decade Godard had completely reversed his viewpoint:

> For the most radical fringe of filmmakers – those farthest to the left – one thing is certain in 1968: one must learn how to leave the movie theater (to leave behind cinephilia and obscurantism) or at least to attach it to something else. And to learn, you have to go to school. Less to the "school of life" than to the cinema as school. This is how Godard and Gorin transformed the scenographic cube into a classroom, the dialogue of the film into a recitation, the voiceover into a required course, the shooting of the film into a tutorial, the subject of the film into course headings from the University of Vincennes ("revisionism," "ideology") and the filmmaker into a schoolmaster, a drill-master or a monitor. School thus becomes the good place which removes us from cinema and reconciles us with "reality" (a reality to be transformed, naturally).[62]

School, the "good place," unlike cinema, is a place where there is no immediate pressure to resolve one's confusion about things, words, sounds, sights: there is time to study and reflect. And for Daney, Godard's role as "drill-master" consists not of instilling lessons or imparting knowledge gained from experience or his own studies; rather, it entails the

convoluted, often arbitrary-seeming orchestration of *given* materials and discourses that interest Godard (a resiliently topical and "barometric" filmmaker[63]) in large part because they already exist, as "statement-objects" for the taking. For Daney, Godard's pedagogy doesn't worry itself with where these things come from or what lends them authority, but instead busies itself with the search for what might possibly countervail them.

> The *already-said-by-others* confronts us with a *fait accompli*: it has in its favor existence, solidity. By its existence it renders illusory any approach which would try to reestablish behind, before or around it a domain of enunciation. Godard never puts to the statements that he receives the question of their origin, their condition of possibility, the place from which they derive their legitimacy, the desire which they at once betray and conceal. His approach is the most anti-archeological there is. It consists of taking note of what is said (to which one can add nothing) and then looking immediately for the *other* statement, the other image which would counterbalance this statement, this sound, this image. "Godard," then, would simply be the empty place, the blank screen where images, sounds come to coexist, to neutralize, recognize and designate one another: in short, to struggle. More than "who is right? who is wrong?" the real question is "what can we oppose to this?" The devil's advocate.[64]

Godardian pedagogy is thus marked by what is, for many, certainly the Situationists, a maddening "undecidability" of position, even when Godard happens to agree with the "good" discourses he takes up and conducts: Marxist-Leninist teachings, for instance.[65] According to the "logic of school" – and with Godard it seems always to be the first day of the course, "square one," a few trajectories plotted but not quite embarked upon – the drill-master doesn't have to divulge where his ideas come from or to what specific ends they should be learned. Godard, unlike Debord, doesn't strategize through a theoretical discourse he has mastered or generated himself (and further unlike Debord, he doesn't always seem to have actually consulted the literary texts he cites beyond the first or last twenty pages or so). "He is only interested in (re)transmission," as Daney puts it.[66] And yet there is an urgent point to all this channeling and conducting of givens. Godard takes

refuge in the *dispositif* of the classroom because it offers him a place where images and sounds can be "retained" (that is, arrested from the televisual flow of "information") long enough to inspect them, and because it comes with a "detained" audience of students who can observe, and perhaps take part in, this assiduous process.[67]

Didacticism is bound up with a second question, that of *address*, and here, too, Godard and Debord work in significantly different modes. If Godard tends to bewilder and frustrate (Manny Farber once said of Godard, "In short, no other film-maker has so consistently made me feel like a stupid ass"[68]), Debord tends at times to talk down to an audience he regards with contempt, showing little faith in their ability to understand him or to catch his allusions without him having to signal them bluntly in quotes; and in one instance, he dedicates an entire essay-film to the "refutation of *all* the judgments, pro or con" concerning his film version of *La Société du spectacle*. There is little in Debord's address to the viewer that could be said to partake of Montaigne's self-positioning with respect to what he tells and shows us: "I speak as ignorant questioning man . . . I am not teaching; I am relating" (*Je n'enseigne point, je raconte*).[69] The verb Montaigne opts for here, in direct contrast to *enseigner* (to teach), is *raconter* (to relate, to retell, to narrate, to re-account), whose range of meanings carries a stronger link to the already-said-and-done, a stronger sense of *repetition*. Debord of course repeats in his films, but he does so with recourse to an assured, declamatory voice (his own) that neither exudes "ignorance" nor wants it to linger in his audience. Godard, by contrast, addresses us through a greater number of filters and mediations, not just through appropriated discourses but through the use of characters – or better still, "reciters" – who speak them, relay them, refigure them, and we are never quite sure of the degree to which their statements and gestures conform

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to what Godard himself believes, or means. It's only in his most dogmatic efforts (*British Sounds* [1969], *Pravda* [1969], and *Lotte in Italia* [1970], all with the Vertov Group) that Godard and his collaborators risk becoming mouthpieces.[70]

This is to say that the Montaignian essay, with which Godard has much closer connections than Debord, neither flourishes in conditions of activist involvement, nor favors a didactic address assured of its content. If Debord is a major artist of the essay-film as polemical tract, then Godard, I believe, is more at home when his inquiries are manifestly sketch-like and self-critical, when the "messages" are indirect and tempered with an obstinate lyricism (the "poetic gait" that Montaigne values so highly). In *Ici et ailleurs* (1974), his first collaboration with Anne-Marie Miéville and his first completed work after the dissolution of the Vertov Group, Godard takes a more tentative turn. The project, in fact, is a perceptive rethinking and *unmaking* of a film that Godard and Gorin conceived and began to make four years earlier, a film about the Palestinian revolutionary cause to be titled presumptively, *Jusqu'à la victoire* ("until victory"). With *Ici et ailleurs*, and with a different partner, Godard continues to develop a critical poetics of citation that expands on the collage methods seen in his earlier work, subjecting the scraps of his own unfinished and discarded project to rigorous scrutiny alongside other found elements. The effect of this recalibration is to plot the coordinates for a passage into Godard's late stage and its philosophical concerns with (cinema) history of the twentieth century. He persists in having things to say, show, reveal, recite, and report (he is still a "pedagogue" of sorts) and in having antagonistic claims to level against the mass media in advanced capitalism, but he undertakes this work in an essayistic form that is neither doctrinaire in its positions nor reliant on Debordian hectoring in its address to the spectator.

Ici et ailleurs is presented as a critical duet, as the voiceover remarks of Godard and Miéville alternately bring into question the approach taken by Godard and Gorin in 1970. With Miéville's comments in particular taking a corrective tone, and with Godard willing to admit his mistakes, they uncover how, on close inspection, the events that he and Gorin filmed during their visit to Jordan and Lebanon fail to bear out the model of revolution that he and Gorin map onto them, a five-part plan that appears in French and Arabic intertitles: "the will of the people / armed struggle / political work / a prolonged war / until victory." We are shown a little girl reciting a resistance poem while standing in front of rubble, but Miéville points out that the image is plainly "theatrical" and that the actor performs a ritual of public protest on loan from the French revolution of 1789. We are then shown a group of fedayeen discussing, as Godard puts it, "how to combine revolutionary theory and practice." Miéville corrects him: they aren't speaking of theory and practice but of something simpler, a sense of feeling linked to the soil when they dig their trenches. We are then shown a woman we are told is illiterate, doing her part for the revolution by repeating a text in front of the camera, but as Miéville observes, the woman visibly becomes "bored, morose" as the activity drags on. Next we witness a Fatah leader delivering a speech in celebration of a previous victory, but Miéville remarks that there is too great a distance between the speaker and the people he is supposed to represent, and a whip pan underlines her point. We then see a "pregnant woman" telling the camera she is proud to give her son to the revolution, but Miéville reveals that the woman is not really pregnant, that she is an actress chosen for her beauty. Further, Miéville says that Godard is at fault for not showing himself, as the director of the scene. We merely hear his voice

telling the woman, from out of frame, to adjust her pose and clothing, and a black screen

acknowledges, in 1974, that a countershot *ought to be* present.[71]

Motivating this trenchant critique of the 1970 project is not just the break-up of

the Vertov Group and the passage of four years but an historical gap between the time of

shooting and the time of the montage – a gap marked by a particular traumatic event, the

massacre at Amman of the feyadeen by Jordanian forces in September of 1970. Godard at

one point adapts Cocteau's notion of cinema capturing "death at work" to remind us that

the freedom fighters we are seeing were killed soon after they were filmed. As Miéville

comments, the footage is alarmingly "tragic" in that Godard and Gorin failed to perceive

this looming outcome – blinded as they were to the "simple" realities in front of them by

an idealistic view of Marxian struggle. And for Godard and Miéville, such a tragedy calls

for research into new ways of inspecting images and their possible links and implications.

Figures 34-35. *Ici et ailleurs* **(Godard, Miéville, 1976)**

Hence the pivotal importance in *Ici et ailleurs* of the video mixer, which appears

for the first time in Godard's body of work.[72] The video mixer introduces operations of

simultaneous linkage – keying, wipes, patchy dissolves, multi-layered superimpositions,

all texturally distinct from filmic editing – that take on a critical, investigative role, with

Godard and Miéville reworking both found and newly shot material and seeking relations

(not simply affinities but differences and discordances) between them. And these new procedures are complemented by other inventive forms of linkage in and across single shots (stacked rows of television monitors, multiple and shifting slide projectors, actors holding photos and queued like photograms to form a series, passing in front of a video camera). The key conceptual figure here, denoting a zone of attractions and repulsions between the materials brought under inspection, is the "ET" ("AND") – a figure of both conjunction and contrast that most explicitly appears in the body of the film (it is already part of the film's title) in the shape of two, what look to be wood-carved letters, placed on a pedestal in a dark studio and filmed under a flashing light.[73]

Figures 36-39. *Ici et ailleurs* (**Godard, Miéville, 1976**)

It's important to note that while the "AND" responds to the call for research into new forms of perceiving the world (as electronic intertitles stress, "learning to see, not to read"), the thinking it animates is exploratory, and the combinations it offers up in stride are provisional: suggestive, challenging, argumentative, but inconclusive. Deleuze, while discussing Godard's later work in television with Miéville, has well captured the probing spirit of this "method of AND" already on view in *Ici et ailleurs*, defining it as "creative stammering." For Deleuze, Godard pursues the "AND" in the face of the "IS," traversing a constantly proliferating series of ideas and relations, suspending a "therefore" even as it appears imminent.[74] "Stammering" indeed describes the essayistic way in which Godard and Miéville gropingly work through their materials and arguments, the fits and starts in their on-the-move linkage. In fact, the "AND" and the search it impels are situated in the film over and against the false calculations of a prescriptive Marxism, as when we see the hand of Godard entering the dates of past and longed-for revolutions – 1789, 1917, 1936, 1968 – into a calculator and finding that they don't quite add up to expected comparisons.

In the same passage we see a complex series composed according to raised-hand gestures in photos of Lenin, Hitler, Léon Blum with other members of the Popular Front, and Golda Meir. Tracking the hands in each still with wipes, keys, and superimpositions, Godard and Miéville indicate a controversial trajectory of relationships and antagonisms. After intermingling Communism (Soviet, French) and National Socialism (via an eerily continuous choreography of gesture and a questioning emphasis on the term "popular," which marks all three contexts in blinking text and registers acoustically in snippets of a crowd singing a Soviet anthem and Hitler ranting at a public rally), the ensemble implies, or admits as one of its possible ideas, that the modern state of Israel, born in the wake of

the century's most brutal atrocities committed against the European Jews, became a racist and oppressive operation in its own right by casting the people of Palestine in the role of the victimized. The word "Palestine," formed with letters reused from "Israel," flashes in the frame as though an utterance from Meir's parted lips (addressed to a nation). Richard Brody and other critics have interpreted this segment as plain evidence of Godard's anti-Semitism disguised as a critique of Israeli foreign politics.[75] But in zeroing in on a single juxtaposition of Hitler and Meir, this view tends to misjudge what Godard and Miéville are doing, and to couch the "AND" method at work in the passage as crudely analogical.

Figures 40-47. *Ici et ailleurs* **(Godard, Miéville, 1976)**

The whole passage, interspersed with Godard's voiceover, unfolds as a denial of identity thinking (the "IS") and an attempt to discern other kinds of relations through images and sounds. "Too simple and too easy to simply divide the world in two," Godard says while arranging photos (Nixon, Brezhnev, My Lai, the Soviet invasion of Prague ...) around the recurring "AND" shot. The tone of Godard and Miéville's work here is interrogative but not declarative. It's by no means unclear that their sympathies are with Palestine (and the view of history as a tragically repeating series of "projected" reversals and oppositions is something that Godard will suggest again in his late self-portrait, *JLG/JLG*, with its "law of stereo" exercise), but the "AND" between National Socialism and Israel isn't a simple or direct equation (it, too, doesn't entirely "add up"). The question it provokes is: how to understand, in historical terms, the relation between the nation of Israel's brutal othering

of Palestine and the history of the Jews as a brutally othered people. In the context of the

enchaînement of sounds and images in the passage, the larger and more urgent question

being raised is whether the inclusive spectacle of "popularity," of a unitary body politic,

be it in the shape of the revolutionary mass or the fascist crowd, must of necessity have a

remainder of massacre and catastrophe visited on the excluded.[76] To ignore this aspect of

the passage while conveniently latching on to one link (as a simple analogy rather than as

an interval raising a question within a larger, unfolding series of questions) is to miss the

political valence of Godard's somewhat oblique remark that "the images of the total will

have nothing to do with the totality of images …"[77] It's this sort of relational discrepancy

that *Ici et ailleurs* works to make perceptible, between here (*ici*) and elsewhere (*ailleurs*).

Between Collage and Historical Montage

A palinode on Godard's part, *Ici et ailleurs* acknowledges former errors and takes

critical measures that light a path for experiments to come. The film, with its resourceful

use of the video mixer, builds on the collage methods on exhibit in Godard's earlier films

while inaugurating a different kind of politics that coincides with his move with Miéville

to Grenoble, where together they relocated their small and uniquely artisanal production

company Sonimage ("sound/image," or "his/her image"). Far from a retreat from political

concerns, *Ici et ailleurs* and the other Grenoble works that follow (*Numéro deux* [1975],

Comment ça va? [1975], and the TV series *Six fois deux (Sur et sous la communication)*

[1976]) attest to a newly intensified attempt to work against the damaging effects of the

images and sounds churned out by the media industries, in particular television, on daily

living and human interactions in both public and private spaces. The "lessons" continue

but the terrain of resistance has shifted from the "school" to the living room, the factory, the studio – sites where Godard and Miéville take on and reconfigure the various setups, formats, and conventions of television so as to skew them towards what they pretend to offer in the first place, "news," communication, and dialogue.[78] Video is indispensable to this *competitive* enterprise: as an instrument of analysis and detection, it retains, pauses, slows, repeats, stammers, strobes, interleaves, alternates; and each of these maneuvers is charged with the capacity to draw out links and resonances latent in ordinary events and gestures – matters that would otherwise flit by unnoticed. What Godard undertakes with Miéville is an urgent endeavor to let us examine the world and images afresh: as Philippe Dubois words it, to let us feel "the pleasure of a perceptual revolution, the 'aha' effect of 'so that's what's *in* images, and what I'd never before seen *that way*.'"[79]

This emphasis on sharpening perception – and with it, the investigative use of video as a tool to decompose and transform existing materials – provides a bridge into Godard's late period, which begins roughly around 1980 (on the heels of his move with Miéville to Rolle, Switzerland where they have remained stationed since the late 1970s) with the theatrical release of his feature film *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* and the publication, in book form, of transcriptions of his series of lectures on the history of cinema given at Montreal's Conservatoire d'Art Cinématographique in 1978, *Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma*. His experiments with video and his ever-deepening disgust with the televisual lead him to a renewed historical interest in cinema and its direct entanglement with the history/ies of the twentieth century. As becomes clear in *Histoire(s) du cinéma* and his discourse spun around the series in interviews, at the source of his turn to history

is a practical and conceptual investment in *montage*, which he claims, with conviction, is what cinema alone discovered, making astonishing powers of sight and thinking possible.

Of course, montage had been significant for Godard since his earliest stages as a critic and filmmaker. In his *Cahiers* writings, it had been a key point of contention with the arguments handed down from André Bazin – the interdict against editorial intrusions ("montage forbidden"), the stylistic "evolution" of cinema that stressed composition-in-depth and the use of long takes. Where Bazin's realist position had rejected montage on two counts of manipulation – of the integrity of the shot and of the mind of the viewer – Godard valued montage (the "heart-beat" inextricably bound up with the "look" of *mise en scène*) as a means to channel and accent the *emotional* realities that a more Bazinian aesthetic would play down (*GG*, 39-41). Godard's feature films of the 1960s persisted to explore his critical views by mixing long-take and montage traditions, while, at times in the same gesture, engaging and recasting the continuity techniques of Hollywood cinema.

In Godard's middle, militant stage, montage remained a critical concern at the level of shot linkage and the precise, jarring tensions between sounds and images now intended expressly to break the ideological spells and expose the mystifications of the popular cinema's forms and genres. And now the work of montage was conceived in a broader sense to encompass not only shooting and editing stages but all features of the production process, as indicated by the Dziga Vertov Group's motto: "Montage before shooting, montage during shooting and montage after the shooting."[80] As it was for their Soviet namesake whose work Godard and Gorin elevated above Eisenstein's,[81] montage was, in the main, a way of regarding and making sensible (*more* sensible) contemporary

social realities (untainted by psychological fiction and narrative, what Vertov disparaged as "cine-vodka") and was thus essential to the organization of a revolutionary film praxis.

The conjunctive tenor of the "AND" woven throughout *Ici et ailleurs* announces that montage is, still, at the center of Godard's practice, although now it doesn't inscribe a certain angle on reality in accordance with a militant ideological program so much as it indicates an often challenging gap between contraries – a field of intersections, collisions, and contradictions calling for further thought, further research, and the invention of new forms. The work of making sensible the "between-ness" within which relations circulate and remain unsettled is, as scholars drawing on Deleuze's concept of the interstice have repeatedly argued, a critical feature of Godard's montage in the wake of *Ici et ailleurs*.[82] But the "AND" and the "between" are not the whole picture. His use of what he refers to as "historical montage" also entails the idea of convergence, which has its most concrete and robust expression in the video superimpositions that are such a key part of *Histoire(s) du cinema*. The bringing together of heterogeneous materials to make a *composite* image is a formal process that Godard adapts from a text he has cited frequently since the 1980s, Pierre Reverdy's 1918 poem, "L'Image":

> The image is a pure creation of the mind.
> It cannot be born of a comparison but of the *rapprochement* of two more or less separate realities.
> The more distant and just the relation between these realities that are brought together, the stronger the image will be – the more emotional power and poetic reality it will have.[83]

Godard carries this poetic principle over into history in his late video work, using it as a way to discover "just" relations between "distant," ostensibly unlinked fragments. The significance of this development for his ongoing use of citation turns on three points. First, as his own terminology implies, "montage" defines this act of *rapprochement* more

adequately than "collage." Although heterogeneity is still important, the emphasis shifts in this formulation from a paratactic composition of elements that, in the end, retain their radical disjunctiveness and bear up against the structuring processes of the new work into which they are grafted, to a sense of synthetic combination whereby distant elements are made (or rather found) to *embrace*, forming, perhaps for a brief moment only, the kind of "image" Reverdy sketches. In short, Godard's turn to (cinema) history and his investment in montage demand not just a "between" but an "among,"[84] not just collision but striking "co-presence."[85] This is less a change in method from collage to montage than a working tension between them, a tension that Godard's late videographic style manifestly engages and explores at each step.[86] If in his middle stage Godard had notoriously aphorized "not a just image, just an image," he now pursued, though on different terms, precisely a "just image," and this desire, combined with the synthetic force of the montage, is what drives *Histoire(s) du cinéma* and conditions Godard's belief that what he reveals through poetic *rapprochement* provides the substance of his historiography.[87]

Second, Godard's late historical montage makes a distinction between an *image*, in the strong sense of Reverdy's conception, and a mere sight, or standalone shot. Where a sight is stranded, isolated, the image is a necessarily composite structure, an "ensemble-being," as Nicole Brenez well describes it.[88] But on this score, it's important to note that Reverdian *rapprochement* accounts for only so much of what we're given to see and hear in Godard's *Histoire(s)*. Though of special importance, the composites achieved through video cross-dissolves and superimpositions are surrounded by (many more) moments of composition that progress in fits and starts, according to permutations of both image and sound that point up a tremendous *struggle* involved in forming a poetic image, as though

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to give audio-visual form to Beckett's short prose piece, "L'Image," which Godard cites (as an irised page of text) throughout the series – a restless struggle through a convulsive language that, finally, closes with "…now it's done I've done the image."[89] In *Histoire(s)* Godard's remarkable, lyrical facility with weaving together sight- and sound-bits comes up against the difficulty of doing a *rapprochement* properly, of finding and presenting an image that is not only "distant" (that part comes easy) but "just." In this way, the image is an operation of montage insofar as it rises up from and returns to a formal texture that is more in keeping with collage. But because these robust composites are still intermingled in form and content with what surrounds them, there is a sense in which the image is both transient and *incomplete*: it is always, no matter how pristine or emphatic, unfinished and open to still further division and synthesis (still further thought).

Third, an image for Godard, as a "pure creation of the mind," is always at some level a *psychic construction*. This goes not only for Godard but for us, as spectators, as well. The images at stake in our encounter with *Histoire(s)* are not limited to those that assume material shape on the screen, those that Godard renders visible with short-lived superimpositions. Our task is essentially two-fold: on the one hand, we must weigh the combinations that Godard offers and determine whether he has indeed seen something, whether his gestures disclose an historical relation; on the other hand, we must respond imaginatively, constructively, and critically to the gaps in the material ensembles we're given. *Histoire*(*s*) seeks our involvement in both of these capacities. Implicit in Godard's historical montage is the notion that *the spectator must become a skilled montagist also*.[90]

This montage-based conception of cinema as a shared art of showing and seeing stems historically from what Godard reaffirms in *Histoire(s)* to be the pivotal experience

that shaped his vocation as a director and the particular manner of seeing he continues to espouse – the education he received in the Cinémathèque, the resourceful programming of Henri Langlois, which consisted of unexpected juxtapositions of screenings meant to provoke reflection on the links between outwardly dissimilar films and traditions chosen from a wide range of historical and national contexts.[91] In fact, the genesis of *Histoire(s)*, and more generally Godard's transformation into a cinema historian in his late stage, can be traced directly to Langlois, in that Godard took over Langlois' lecturing duties (after Langlois' death) when he gave his Montreal lectures in 1978 and began to draft the basic thoughts, principles, and arguments that would lay the groundwork for his video series to come. In *Histoire(s)*, Godard treats Langlois in quasi-religious terms (photos of Langlois are superimposed with a reproduction of Botticelli's late fifteenth-century painting of the Annunciation) not simply as a programmer or archivist but as a film-*maker*, an inventive practitioner of an *art de montrer* in dialogue with cinematic pasts and presents and shown to an audience (of cinephiles and future New Wave directors) prompted (but not coerced) to share in a certain form of seeing.[92] In *Histoire(s)*, Godard reclaims this moment as the source of an almost Kierkegaardian "unconditional commitment" – as an experience that deeply seizes and *defines* who he is, what he does, and what his most significant pursuits will be. If his montage in the series pays tribute to Langlois and, in a more kaleidoscopic register, "recreates" Langlois' Cinématheque, then it does so in an effort to adapt to new conditions the forms of showing, seeing, and sharing at the source of Langlois' strategies.

With *Histoire(s)* and its montage of citations, Godard retrospectively confirms a second vocation: a persistence of criticism that is closely tied to his self-definition as an essayist. In Godard's interviews around the series there are scattered remarks that, if put

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side by side, would amount to an uncanny reiteration of the way he described himself in 1962. Speaking to Serge Daney, he insists that he is still a critic and refers to *Histoire(s)* as a "visual critical study,"[93] a statement consistent with his view, spoken to Rosenbaum, that video is foremost an instrument for criticism: "It's the only thing video can be – and should be."[94] He also tells Rosenbaum, in order to account for why his work was "not so commercial," that he could never settle on whether he was "writing a novel or writing an essay … but now, in *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, I'm sure it's an essay. It's easier for me and it's better that way."[95] Elsewhere, in an interview where he again voices his affinity for the essay form (and complains about what now passes for film criticism: "I don't know what film criticism criticizes"[96]), he rephrases his earlier "were the cinema to disappear" statement when asked if he ever feels detached from cinema when he works with video: "Never. Whether you're working with color pencils, watercolor or oil paints, it's still the same."[97] In Godard's late period, the critical and the essayistic remain closely entwined (indeed they are pushed into closer contact through video), and even as he insists on the specificity of cinema ("only the cinema") over and against television, his understanding of the medium is not based on its technical supports. Contrary to popular belief, Godard isn't a staunch, nostalgic defender of cinema-as-celluloid in the face of new (i.e. digital) media technologies – his particular cinephilia doesn't cling to photographic capture and indexical bonds between film images and the physical realities they transcribe (a feature that is often wrongly excluded from digital imaging[98]). The essay designation points – as it did when he applied it to his work in the 1960s – to a means of research and reflection that survives media change. If pencils, watercolor, or oil paint would still suffice, this is because what *most* counts in Godard's concept of cinema, over and above recording, are

the gestures of arranging, showing, and seeing whether there is something to see through

engaging other viewers in a dialogue (which is why the photographic base of the medium

is contingent rather than fundamental to Godard's concerns).[99]

Conceived as a work of criticism, composed of sounds and images mostly lifted

and altered from other films, *Histoire(s)* also doubles back onto Godard's prior demand

for film criticism to "write" its observations and claims in audio-visual terms. Given the

degree of material intimacy Godard attains, through video, in the series, it is possible to

argue that with *Histoire(s)*, he at last realizes the form of criticism he was calling for in

the mid-1960s.[100] And yet, the series is hardly a straightforward application of the ideas

he offers in "Let's Talk about *Pierrot*." Using film clips as evidence ("giving examples")

is a basic procedure in the series, but it is everywhere in tension with another, seemingly

contradictory gesture: drastically altering the fragments as though to thrust out (to *make*

evident) what they fail to disclose on their own. It thus remains for us to inspect closely

how Godard's critical poetics of citation in *Histoire(s)* works in action, how it cooperates

with the image-forming process he borrows from the Reverdian notion of *rapprochement*.

Let's Talk about *Histoire(s)*

Histoire(s) is an impassioned attempt to demonstrate – to "recount" as Godard

puts it – what the cinema of the twentieth century was and what it failed to be, what it

made possible and what it could have made possible had its resources of montage been

better understood and applied. The eight-volume series consists of a daunting, carefully

chosen range of film clips spanning silent and sound eras (Hollywood and European art

cinema, documentary newsreels, cartoon animations, pornography). These snippets are

interwoven with other citations from photographic reproductions of paintings, frescoes, and sculptures – most of which are cropped into luminous details (faces and extremities of figures, sections of tableaux, daubs of paint) that find new affinities on recomposition, and most of which are masterpieces in a decidedly European tradition (Delacroix, Goya, Rembrandt, Velázquez, Manet, and Picasso among others).[101]

These cited fragments are not mere referential chunks. Once they become part of *Histoire(s)*, they take on a videographic texture (the grain of which Godard exploits in a painterly manner) and become subject to various procedures that have only loose filmic equivalents (jagged speed changes, flashing iris-effects and alternations, extraordinarily sharp alignments via superimposition). At once dusting off early cinema techniques and inventing new prismatic forms, Godard enlists a vast repertoire of modifications to what he samples, alighting on and accentuating *this* look, now *this* gesture in connection with other fragments against a black field,[102] from which sounds and images spring forth as if memories or capricious, half-willed thoughts.[103] As I have noted, there is a temptation to sort out the citations (understood primarily as "references") in Godard's films and videos at a remove from the work itself. This can be an especially grievous oversight in the case of *Histoire(s)*, where the work of citation involves elaborate tinkering and compositional extension. *We don't want to examine the ingredients instead of the dynamic mix*. Godard himself shifts emphasis from matters of reference to the immediate surface and impact of *Histoire(s)* when he states in an interview: "I think the best way to look at these programs is to enter into the image without a single name or reference in your head."[104]

I take it this is a hyperbolic statement, meant to defuse our reliance on references alone and to bring attention to the fact that Godard is doing something qualitatively new

with the elements he brings in. But it raises the problem of multiple levels of spectatorial

engagement: the allusive "depth" of the citations channeled largely through their content

(the situations of whole films and histories evoked in memory), versus the sheer musical

and pictorial "surface" of the forms they assume in the videographic montage (line, color,

shape, rhythm). Instructive here is Godard's remark that video is "closer to painting or to

music. You work with your hands, like a musician with an instrument, and you play it. In

moviemaking, you can't say that a camera is an instrument you play through."[105] With its

stress on "playing," this comment, whatever it implies about the ontological properties of

video, orients us to the performative aspect of Godard's montage. His statement concerns

how *Histoire(s)* was made but there is still a palpable sense in which the "finished" work

remains in the register of process: stammering, probing gestures cut off from an anterior

program (or "script") as well as from an absolute point of closure. Montage, for Godard,

is a gesture that draws its significance from the doing. It is a *drastic* procedure (from the

Greek *dran*, meaning "to do, to act, to perform") that needs to be addressed in terms of its

spontaneous unfolding and not simply as a hermeneutic textual value.[106]

Having said this, it would be inaccurate to describe Godard's use of citations in

Histoire(s) as *mere* surface play, with all fragments purified of content and completely

removed from their dramatic situations. For a well-viewed spectator, and for those with

even a cursory familiarity with film history, measuring the new forms and associations

into which the estranged elements extend against their original contexts is undeniably a

powerful part of the experience of watching the series and of trying to get a sense of the

thoughts that govern the ensembles taking shape and disintegrating on Godard's volatile

canvas (the key is not to rely on a "script" of citations alone). This interplay between the

original and the remade often figures into Godard's montage, as the fragments conjure up in memory the wholes from which they are taken. Sometimes, the content of the original triggers a play of titles, a visual riff on a concept, or finds a displaced manifestation in the form of Godard's tinkering. For instance, in chapter 4A, in a section devoted to the films of Hitchcock, when the fireworks kiss from *To Catch a Thief* (1955) appears, Godard not only alters the speed of motion and re-orders the shots but encloses Cary Grant and Grace Kelly in a diamond-shaped frame, a maneuver that both recalls the masking techniques of early cinema and channels the dramatic premise of the original scene, which concerns the luring of a jewel thief into action with brazenly displayed diamonds.

More often, and more significantly, the citations punctuate or redirect Godard's treatment of basic concerns in the series, the abiding thoughts and concepts he explores, the claims he sets forth. There are no moments we could single out as distillations of his overall method (this being another lapse in critical judgment, a tendency to make single passages stand in for Godard's entire project) but there are, however, segments in which the stakes of *Histoire(s)* are especially pronounced, moments where we feel the pressure of something important, something weighty being addressed and possibly decided. In one such moment, occurring early in episode 1A: *Toutes les histoires*, we see Godard sitting in his Rolle study, wearing what appears to be a white lab coat, reflecting on a phrase he says aloud and punches into his electronic typewriter, "The Rules of the Game," which, even as it refers both to Renoir's film (1939) and to Michel Leiris's literary self-portrait of the same title (1948-1976), marks a crucial gesture on Godard's part – a sketching out of the "rules" at work in the series. But Godard doesn't straight away launch into such an endeavor. First he types a few other phrases, alters the speed and reverses the motion of a

couple of clips, "slows" the sound to an eerie, low-pitched drone that he pairs with a film

strip passing slowly through the bobbins of an editing console – all of this as if to test and

tune up his instruments, like a musician before a concert.

After a costume change (to a dress shirt and blazer), Godard now looks ready; the

show is about to start, as is suggested further by a studio microphone that swings across

the frame into position at his desk. He loads a blank sheet into his typewriter, takes a puff

on his cigar, and types more phrases (as before, he uses a repeat function on the machine

so the line clacks out several times automatically). His voiceover, perhaps echoing these

phrases that we aren't shown, states: "*Histoire(s) du cinéma* / with an s / all the histories

that might have been / that were or might have been / that there have been." He raises a

hand to adjust his glasses, then, just as a string quartet begins to play, he looks upward as

though casting his gaze onto a screen out of frame. Cut to a quick succession of axial cuts

between close-ups of a young woman's eyes, glowing with blue light.
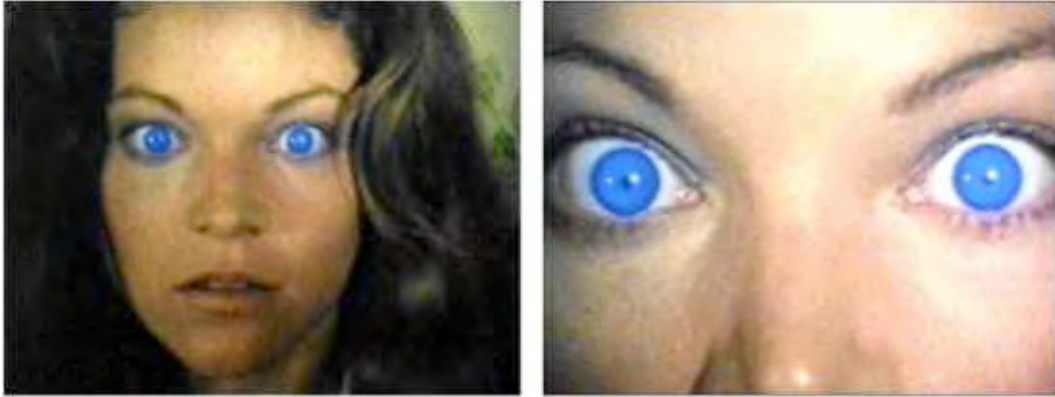
Figures 48-51. *Histoire(s) du cinéma* **(Godard, 1988-98)**

These gestures initiate a stirring but opaque montage sequence. To the sounds of Beethoven's tenth string quartet (the *adagio* movement) and dialogue from Resnais' *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961, a scene in which X attempts to convince A of an exchange of looks and gestures they had a year earlier in the garden of Frederiksbad), we encounter a stream of citations spanned by the titles "the cinema substitutes / for our gaze / a world / more in accordance / with our desires." We see Mephistopheles materialize in flames in Murnau's *Faust* (1926), Fred Astaire and Cyd Charisse dancing a number in Minnelli's *The Band Wagon* (1953), the beaters scene in Renoir's *Rules of the Game*, the distressed merchant's wife in Mizoguchi's *The Crucified Lovers* (1954), a woman learning to swim in Siodmak's, Ulmer's and Zinnemann's *People on Sunday* (1930), an upscale gathering in Wellman's *The Public Enemy* (1931), Lillian Gish stumbling sadly through a desolate street in Griffith's *Broken Blossoms* (1919), group revelry in a saloon in Lang's *Rancho Notorious* (1952), the grand ball in Visconti's *The Leopard* (1963), and then the Teutonic Knights in Eisenstein's *Alexander Nevsky* (1938) robotically striking their opponents, an effect Godard amplifies with stop-starts and repetition. The section has a distinct rhythm and beauty all its own, but where do relationships emerge? What prevents it from being a mere highlight reel, or a cinephilic reverie specific to Godard?

It is possible to read the sequence as holding together on the basis of the content freighted by the citations, despite the significant differences between the films involved, their national traditions and historical contexts.[107] For instance, *Faust* "belongs" with *The Band Wagon* insofar as Minnelli's film turns on a pretentious stage rendition of the Faust myth that flops with the public. The clip from *The Public Enemy*, a gangster film, accords with *The Band Wagon* in that the scene we see from Minnelli's film is a musical pastiche of the noirish gangster genre. In these two examples, it's as though what we do see in one fragment draws forth, by association, what we don't see in another. Otherwise these clips together riff on shared motifs and conflicts (public and private, ritualistic community and grim isolation). In another obscure and intricate exchange, this time between consecutive citations, the massacre by the Teutonic soldiers – meant to rouse indignation against Nazi Germany, which at the time of the film's making was poised to invade Russia – becomes in *Histoire(s)* an image that reflects the brutal and treacherous subjugation at the crux of Visconti's *The Leopard*, a film concerned to unmask the politics of the Risorgimento and national "unification." In still a further link, the waning aristocracy in *The Leopard* picks up the trope of eclipsed social order that we can associate with *Rules of the Game*.

Composed as it is of contextually loaded clips, the segment seems to encourage this kind of analysis. In a way, the montage is atypical of *Histoire(s)*, as Godard hasn't gone to much trouble to entwine the citations with videographic procedures: aside from some minimal cross-dissolve work at the start between *Faust* and *The Band Wagon*, the editing is limited to intercutting and to the insertion of rhythmic black screens, and only Eisenstein's film is adjusted in terms of speed. It's as if Godard has followed Montaigne in "piling up" citations without developing them, leaving it to the audience to pursue their

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fuller meanings, to "pluck them apart with a bit of intelligence" (I.40: 281-282).

A key to understanding the purpose and stakes of the segment lies in the citation that sets things in motion, the fleeting shots of the young woman with fiercely glowing eyes. The fragment is taken from Brian De Palma's *The Fury* (1978), a strange amalgam of horror, science-fiction, and espionage genres that might seem out of place in Godard's ensemble of mostly canonical films, but its form and content are richly suggestive of his ideas in the series. *The Fury* revolves around two teenagers, a boy and a girl, who have profound telekinetic and telepathic abilities. In a terrorist attack staged by a covert U.S. intelligence agency in a non-specific Arabian setting – "Mid East 1977," a title tells us – the boy is stolen away from his father by an unfeeling American agent (played by John Cassavettes) for the purpose of research. Meanwhile the young girl, just coming to know her powers, checks into an institution in the hope of harnessing her sensitivity to what its director calls the "bioplasmic universe," a virtual record of "every human impulse, word, and deed, of lives past and lives to come." Her gift is the means to access this record, to seize hold of a temporality in which past, present, and future events interpenetrate. In the course of her visions, which reveal the ghastly stages of the boy's testing, she acquires a strong urge to collapse the physical distance between them. De Palma directly opposes their psychic connection to less capable technologies of transmission such as television and telephony (and their powers are analogized to montage as a device monitoring and organizing relations between widely spaced locations). One of the final tragedies of De Palma's film is that the boy and girl physically converge only at the instant of the boy's death, when he transfers his rage, from his eyes to hers, in a tightly composed shot and countershot. The shots that Godard cites, the close-ups of her eyes blue with fury, occur

at the end of the film, when she channels her power so acutely that she causes the source

of her anguish, the physically and emotionally numb American agent, to burst into pieces.

In this instance of citation, the force of the original, cathected by the fragment,

resonates with the principles of *Histoire(s)* in two interrelated respects. The direct link

between Godard's upturned gaze and the girl's active stare tropes on the idea of cinema

as a kind of "second sight," an ability to see the interconnectedness of different elements

across vast distances and to hold in mind – outside of chronological time – two or more

elements at once: this, after all, is a requisite condition of an *image*. The talk in *The Fury*

of the "bioplasmic" field (a sci-fi version of Bergsonian duration) has as its complement

not only Godard's voiceover concerning "all the histories" that were *and might have been*

but also the conversation from *Last Year at Marienbad* concerning an event that might or

might not have occurred and the desire of one character to make another character believe

it did. Transferred onto the fragments that Godard arranges asyndetically (that is, without

supplying connectives), these tropes suggest the raw potential of seeing in such a manner,

with the sequence whetting our appetite for it. It's as though Godard isn't quite exhibiting

this form of seeing either so much as he is signaling the "rules" by which it operates.

At the same time, Godard implies that this power of seeing is difficult to rein in,

and dangerous even to the person who exercises it. Hence the importance of the Murnau

film in this sequence. The link from Godard to the girl with second sight carries over to

the fragment from *Faust*, the suggestion being that to call on the resources of cinema is,

in essence, to summon up a force – here embodied by Mephistopheles – that can alter the

world and the course of human events, but that, in answering to our desires, can be used

just as readily for destructive projects. And herein lies the sense in which Godard tweaks

the phrase that reaches across the segment, "The cinema substitutes for our gaze a world more in accordance with our desires" (itself a citation of a misquotation at the start of *Le Mépris* where the line is speciously ascribed to Bazin).[108] Desire coupled with the power to transform makes cinema and the perceptiveness it enables a matter of responsibility: it calls for an ethics of seeing and making alike, a point to which Godard returns at several points in *Histoire(s)*. He also reprises the link between *The Fury* and *Faust* in chapter 2B: *Fatale beauté* where a shot of the girl wielding with her hands a psychic force that makes the Cassavetes character tremble violently is combined, in succession, with the same shot from *Faust* as before, Mephistopheles appearing in a mist of fire, only this time the link is reinforced with a title inscribed on both clips: "Histoire(s) du cinéma."

Figures 52-53. *Histoire(s) du cinéma* **(Godard, 1988-98)**

If this sequence lays out and considers the "rules" by which Godard's montage will operate in the series, then let's look at a later passage where Godard has a stronger hand in shaping relations. After all, we've seen how his use of citations enacts a nimble and complex interplay between original films and reworked fragments, but we have yet to examine how composite images take material form in his videographic montage.

Tied to the issue of citation is the pressing problem of how to make and exhibit resonant connections for an audience when the very matter at Godard's disposal is, by

definition, unstable and in endless development. A challenge lies in squaring Godard's

professed notion of the image with the actual structures he gives us. And we have to be

careful here. Speaking in Reverdian terms of *rapprochement* can give a thin impression

of *Histoire(s)*, since relations generally form in torrential buildups that give us little time

to reflect – it's not as if each linkage halts this intensity and joins only two things at once.

The task then is to observe how images coalesce, scatter, and recur in new guises *within* a

developing sequence, as Godard varyingly figures ongoing thoughts and motifs.

To take one example, early in episode 1B: *Une histoire seule*, we see a three-part

composite of a black-and-white photo of Vivien Leigh, a reeling strip of celluloid (irised

and placed over her right cheek, appearing and disappearing twice, speeding to a colored

blur and then slowing just enough for us to make out the discrete frames: two men with

drawn pistols in *Rio Bravo* [Hawks, 1958]), and a speed-adjusted shot of Jean Marais in

Cocteau's *Orphée* (1950), searching with his hands around Leigh's mouth as if trying to

grasp the evasive strip. This striking image springs from a growing chain of associations

that Godard triggers a few moments earlier when he shows us Glauber Rocha standing at

the crossroads of political cinema and aesthetic "adventure" in Godard and Gorin's *Vent

d'est* (1970), to his right a fluctuant film strip (of Ricky Nelson and Angie Dickinson in

Rio Bravo) that vanishes to reveal a woman approaching. Godard intones in voiceover:

"Sometimes at night someone whispers in my bedroom. I shut off the television but the

whispering goes on. Is it the wind or my ancestors?" This line gives rise to a "history of

wind," as titles tell us citing Joris Ivens's *Une histoire de vent* (1988), a frame of which

appears onscreen. We hear a strong current blowing. We see Lillian Gish assailed by a

dust storm in *The Wind* (Sjöström, 1928), then Dorothy Malone tossing a stone into the

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river in *Written on the Wind* (Sirk, 1956). The titles change from "written on the wind" to "gone with the wind," which leads into the still of Leigh. When the photograms appear, they figure as a tenuous stream that Orphée can't quite embrace as he inspects the surface of the screen (the superimposed film strip replacing Cocteau's mirror-portal to the Zone).

Figures 54-55. *Histoire(s) du cinéma* **(Godard, 1988-98)**

So much is condensed in this short passage. We have Godard's personal *histoire* bound up with the *histoire de vent* – his cinephilic attachments to his "ancestors" (Hawks, Sirk, Cocteau), his own films at radically different moments in his development. After he mentions the whisper in his bedroom at night, he says that he had the "lover's chauffeur" in Cocteau's film (François Périer as Heurtebise) speak the same phrase in a film called "A Place on Earth," the subtitle of Godard's *Soigne ta droite* (1987). But this *histoire de vent* is potentially our *histoire* as well. Godard acknowledges this by interspersing a still taken from Ingmar Bergman's *Fängelse* (1949) of a man and young woman (Thomas the alcoholic writer, Birgitta the prostitute) side-by-side behind a film projector and focused on the spectacle before them. Godard uses this still – splitting it into singles, adorning it with text ("Histoire(s) du cinema"), layering it with a film strip in procession – to situate the couple as spectators of the fleeting images in *Histoire(s)*, an association that extends to the "couple" of Leigh and Marais (which soon fractures into single units, shown to us

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within an iris in the center of the *Fängelse* still). Far from assuming all this holds together

by an imposed logic, Godard confronts the difficulty of conducting his investigation with

an elusive substance – images that come and go in perpetual variation – and the difficulty

of finding and presenting a formal connection that will in turn bring together, perhaps for

a moment only, the spectators taking in this process. In Godard's videographic adventure

by strange paths, superimposition entails more than a plastic technique – it's an operation

of thought that attempts to grasp an ongoing multiplicity ("cogito ergo video," declare the

titles at the start of 1B, after a page of Beckett's "L'Image"). And we have to practice this

form of seeing, too, Godard suggests. The justness of his montage depends on it.
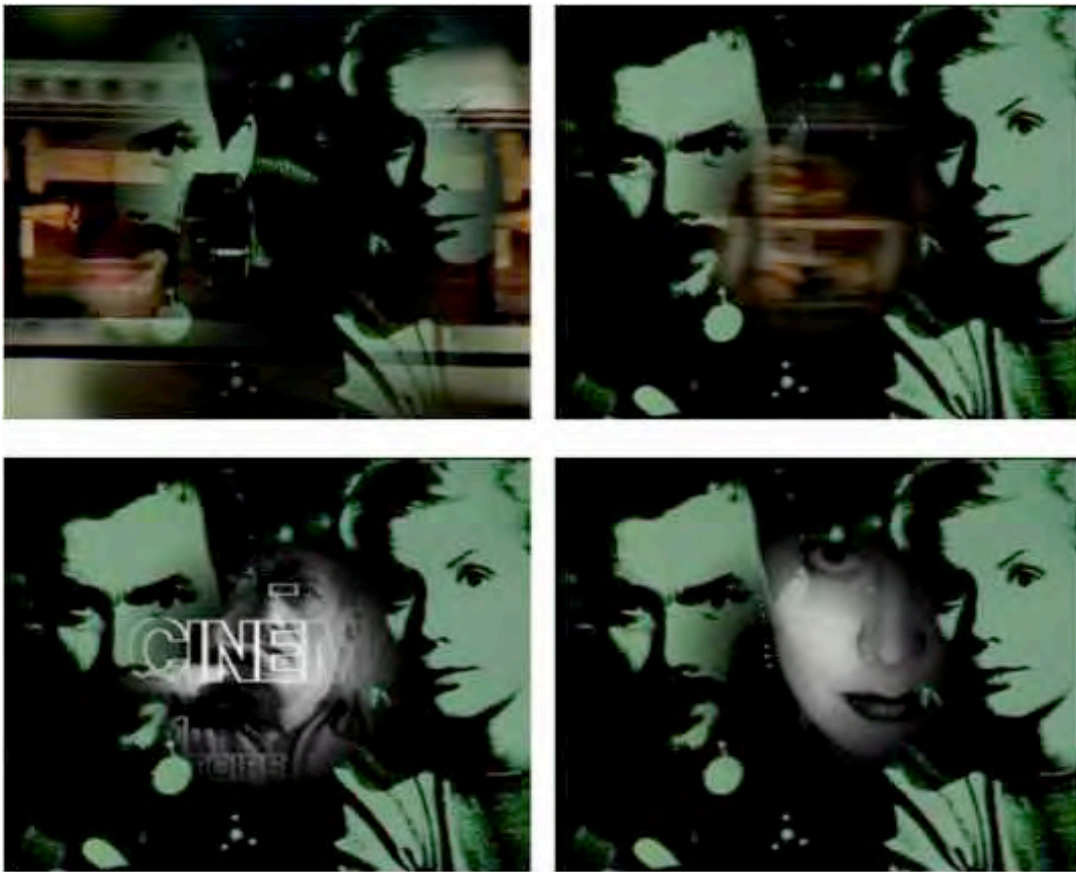
Figures 56-61. *Histoire(s) du cinéma* **(Godard, 1988-98)**

While "conversing" through citations with spirits of cinema past, Godard's work

in this series of couplings and uncouplings is, in part, to acknowledge and reflect on the

course of his own career. The shot he reworks from *Vent d'est* is quite literally (and not

coincidentally) a crossroads moment: in the original film, a young woman who is visibly

pregnant and carrying a film camera approaches the Brazilian filmmaker Glauber Rocha

at an intersection of dirt roads in the countryside and states, "Excuse me for interrupting

your class struggle, it's important, but could you please tell me the way towards political

cinema?" With his arms out to his sides, like a scarecrow or a road sign, Rocha tells her

that one path leads to an "unknown cinema, the cinema of aesthetic adventure," whereas

another path is the way towards a more politically inclined cinema, in which the primary

considerations are practical matters of production, distribution, and training with the aim

of overturning imperialist oppression.[109] The woman starts off down the second path that

Rocha identifies and describes in much greater detail and seems to endorse, but then she

turns back and wanders along the path of "aesthetic adventure," only to deviate from this

course as well by heading into a dense thicket of trees. In her search for political cinema

she does not appear satisfied with the choices that Rocha gives her, and neither does the

Godard of 1970. For the Godard of the late 1980s, when episode 1B was composed, this

is not simply an either/or question. By including in the same *histoire de vent* citations of

his militant period and his later, more reflective work as represented by *Soigne ta droite*,

Godard suggests that although he appears to have chosen the path of aesthetic adventure

and philosophical inquiry, his late work is not a retreat from the realm of politics but, on

the contrary, a political cinema by different means, a politics no longer convinced of the

efficacy of direct action and its methods of engagement. The ground, in late Godard, has

shifted to an ethics of perception that animates a series of searching experiments looking

both to understand cinema historically and to use its principles to establish, and maintain,

dialogical forms of seeing and living together (on this score it's worth noting the titles of

his films produced in the wake of completing *Histoire(s)*: *Éloge de l'amour* ["In Praise of

Love," 2001], *Notre musique* ["Our Music," 2004], and *Film Socialisme* [2010]).[110]

As the *histoire de vent* segment demonstrates in both its form and content, this

seeing together is not easy to achieve, and nothing guarantees the method Godard uses.

The notion of *rapprochement* he adapts from the Reverdian model is something that he

tests out through provisional formations, risking noise and incoherence at each juncture,

and the stakes of his process are not private but communal. He alone cannot confirm the

value of the images he shows us; he can only exhibit and promote the kind of perceptual

labor the task demands. In a sense, the "two-ness" required of an image is at once formal

and spectatorial: the appearance of an image, a "just" image, depends on the convergence

of *at least two* spectators who mutually regard it as such (otherwise, Godard's discoveries

notwithstanding, his work remains a virtuosic collage).[111]

Whether or not the combinations in *Histoire(s)* work for others will quite likely

depend, at some level, on issues of intertextuality and degrees of estrangement between

original and altered fragment, but as I have tried to emphasize in this chapter, a citation

for Godard is not merely a thing or example or reference but an activity – both a *gesture*

that enacts the opening of found material towards new formations and a *regard* sensitive

to possibilities lurking in what is given. When Godard goes as far as to call "everything"

a citation, as he has done often in interviews,[112] his point goes far beyond what we might

call the inherently citational character of a photographic medium, the capacity to record

whatever catches light in front of the camera; and it goes beyond the rhetorical move of

confusing original and appropriated material under the sign of creation. I take it that his

point is mainly to frame an understanding – his and ours – of whatever sounds, sights, or

texts he adapts into his compositions as things interminably in the process of being made.

Notes

[1] Nicole Brenez, "For it is the critical faculty that invents fresh forms," trans. Michael

Temple, in *The French Cinema Book*, ed. Michael Temple and Michael Witt (British

Film Institute, 2004), 235.

[2] Rivette, spoken in a 1969 roundtable discussion in *Cahiers du cinéma* on montage, with

Jean Narboni, Sylvie Pierre and Rivette, in *Rivette: Texts and Interviews*, ed. Jonathan

Rosenbaum, trans. Amy Gateff and Tom Milne (London: British Film Institute, 1977),

74-75.

[3] Godard, quoted in David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: University

of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 312.

[4] Speaking of his last spoken lines in his film *JLG/JLG: Autoportrait de décembre* (1995), Godard claims: "I think it's a quote, but now to me quotes and myself are almost the same. I don't know who they are from; sometimes I'm using it without knowing." Godard, interview with Gavin Smith, "Jean-Luc Godard," in *Jean-Luc Godard: Interviews*, ed. David Sterritt (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), 184. He has described *Nouvelle vague* (1990) in similar terms and taken pride in the fact that all of its spoken dialogue is taken from other sources.

[5] Jean-Pierre Gorin, quoted in Colin MacCabe, *Godard: A Portrait of the Artist at Seventy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 123.

[6] Godard, quoted in *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard, tome 2: 1984-1998*, ed. Alain Bergala (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1998), 32-33.

[7] See Paul Willemen and Noel King, "Through the Glass Darkly: Cinephilia Reconsidered," in *Looks and Frictions: Essays in Cultural Studies and Film Theory* (London: British Film Institute, 1994), 223-257, 227. See also Christian Keathley, *Cinephilia and History, or The Wind in the Trees* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

[8] Fredric Jameson, "High-Tech Collectives in Late Godard," *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 162-163. Christopher Pavsek argues for a periodization of early Godard as postmodernist and late Godard as modernist in his article, "What Has Come to Pass for Cinema in Late Godard," *Discourse* 28, no. 1 (Winter 2006): 166-195. For an account of Godard and his poetics of citation that offsets and valorizes the late against the early work in these terms,

see Alessia Ricciardi, "Godard's *Histoire(s)*," *The Ends of Mourning: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Film* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 167-205.

[9] Ricciardi, "Godard's *Histoire(s)*," 181.

[10] In a sense I am preceded in this approach by Jonathan Rosenbaum's framing of two types of criticism in Godard's work that are evident from the beginning, film criticism and social criticism. Rosenbaum, "*Le vrai coupable*: Two Kinds of Criticism in Godard's Work," *Screen* 40, no. 3 (Autumn 1999): 316-322.

[11] Jonathan Rosenbaum, "Theory and Practice: The Criticism of Jean-Luc Godard," in *Placing Movies: The Practice of Film Criticism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 21.

[12] Jonathan Rosenbaum, "Trailer for Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma*," included in the books for the audio recording of *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (Munich: ECM Records, 1998), 170-171 (chapter 4). I can't say I agree with the grouping of all of these citation-prone filmmakers under the heading of "postmodern appropriation." The line between critique and mere salute is less distinct than Rosenbaum suggests, and his examples seem to be largely a matter of taste. Doesn't Schrader critically rework the ending of Bresson's *Pickpocket*? Doesn't De Palma engage critically with the films and formal innovations of Hitchcock, Lang, and, to a lesser extent, Argento and Bava?

[13] Rosenbaum, "Theory and Practice," 22.

[14] Consider Diderot, one of Godard's art-critical ancestors, in his *Salons* essays, conjuring up paintings that his readers will likely never see, wavering between acute observation of detail and impressionistic flurries that, in their verve and imagination, rival the artwork. For Godard's remarks on this kind of criticism that "exaggerates" while displaying a

"creative sentiment" (his examples are Baudelaire, Faure, and Malraux), see Godard, "Propos Rompus," in *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard, tome 1: 1950-1984*, ed. Alain Bergala (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1998), 465.

[15] For a "cartographic" examination of various types of material citation within which Godard's practices could be contextualized, see Nicole Brenez, "Montage intertextuel et formes contemporaines du remploi dans le cinéma expérimental," *CiNéMaS* 13, no. 1-2 (Autumn 2002): 49-67.

[16] Godard and Pauline Kael, "The Economics of Film Criticism: A Debate," in *Jean-Luc Godard: Interviews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), 119-121.

[17] See his complaints about film criticism in "The Future(s) of Film," his interview with Emmanuel Burdeau and Charles Tesson, in *The Future(s) of Film: Three Interviews 2000/01*, trans. John O'Toole (Bern: Verlag Gachnang & Springer AG, 2002), 16-21.

[18] Godard, in *Godard on Godard*, trans. and ed. Tom Milne (New York: Da Capo, 1972), 213-215, hereafter cited parenthetically in text as *GG*. The Epstein passage that Godard obliquely cites is "There are no stories. There have never been stories. There are only situations without order, without beginning, middle or end; with no right and no wrong side . . . " Epstein, *Bonjour cinéma* (Paris: Éditions de la Sirène, 1921), 31-32.

[19] Jacques Aumont, "This is not a textual analysis (Godard's *La chinoise*)," *Camera Obscura* 8-9-10 (1982): 132.

[20] What Butor shares with Godard is not merely an emphasis on the absolute rapport between critical and creative work (and the will to demonstrate it), but the feeling that critical and creative faculties intertwine with particular force in *poetic* spatial orders. A novelist, travel writer, and critical essayist linked with the French *nouveau roman*, Butor

had been trying since the mid 1950s to reshape the novel into a "stereophonic"

arrangement. He drew on formats not traditionally reserved for fiction – catalogs,

almanacs, itineraries, encyclopedias, all sorts of tabulations and *mises en page* – working

to establish a "volume" in which all elements are simultaneous to one another at any

given structural point. "Every site," he explains in a 1964 essay, "is the focal point of a

horizon of other sites, the point of origin of a series of possible routes passing through

other more or less determined regions." Michel Butor, "The Shape of the Novel," in

Inventory, ed. Richard Howard, trans. Gerald Fabian (New York: Simon and Schuster,

1968): 37. His experiments were heavily indebted to serial composition in music, the

work of Pierre Boulez in particular, but he is adamant in stating that this new

spatialization of elements "manifests itself as poetry" and aspires to "a new idiom, a new

grammar, a new way of linking together the bits of information selected as examples."

Butor, "Research on the Technique of the Novel," in *Inventory*, ed. and trans. Howard,

17.

[21] Raymond Bellour, "The Unattainable Text," in *The Analysis of Film*, ed. Constance

Penley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 21-27, 22. Bellour's points are

partly informed by the work of Roland Barthes, whose essay "De l'oeuvre au texte" he

cites in the article. Barthes elsewhere speaks more specifically about the citability of

cinema (while, like Bellour, citing films in his own critical essays with images that are

not production stills but frame enlargements taken from the film strip). See his "Third

Meaning: Research Notes on Some Eisenstein Stills" (1970), in *Image – Music –Text*,

trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 52-68. There, citation, in the

particular guise of "the still," is a crucial feature of Barthes' half-articulation of the pure

"filmic," which he discovers in his analysis of seized, frozen pictures from Eisenstein's work and not the film in its phenomenal unfolding. Barthes insists that this citation isn't "a specimen chemically extracted from the substance of the film, but rather the trace of a superior *distribution* of traits which the film as experienced in its animated flow would give no more than one text among others" (67). Barthes later repeats with subtle variation these thoughts in his discussion of the photographic "punctum" in his *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981). There, it is clear that the value of such "stills" (if we can still use the term) and their caught details resides not so much in what they yield to an analytic engagement (what Barthes calls the "studium") but in their *affective* properties. For useful discussions of citation in film that take the foundational arguments of Bellour and Barthes into account, see Larry Crawford, "Monstrous Criticism: Finding, Citing – Analyzing Film," *Diacritics* 15, no. 1 (1985): 60-70; and Mikhail Iampolski, *The Memory of Tiresias: Intertextuality and Film*, trans. Harsha Ram (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 26-35.

[22] Raymond Bellour, "A Bit of History," in *The Analysis of Film*, ed. Constance Penley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 1-20, 5.

[23] The series was called *Cinéastes de notre temps* for the first ten years of its running.

[24] Ibid.,18. On occasion, the episodes of *Cinéastes de notre temps* appropriated the stylistic traits of their subjects, as when Labarthe's 1967 portrait of Samuel Fuller made use of unsettling close-ups and aggressive edits. The program also gave young directors a chance to pay homage to their influences, as in Eric Rohmer's portrait of Carl Dreyer (1965), Jacques Rivette's on Jean Renoir (1967), and Jean-Luc Godard's meeting with Fritz Lang (1967). The series ended in 1974, then resumed in 1980 under the name

Cinéma, de notre temps. Among the more notable and innovative recent broadcasts are Olivier Assayas' *HHH: A Portrait of Hou Hsiao-hsien* (1996), *Chantal Akerman by Chantal Akerman* (1996), Chris Marker's portrait of Andrei Tarkovsky, *One Day in the Life of Andrei Arsenevich* (1999), and Pedro Costa's editing-suite portrait of Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet, *Where Does Your Hidden Smile Lie?* (2001). It's worth noting that Noël Burch mentions the program as a significant development in the pursuit of an essayistic cinema. Burch, *Theory of Film Practice*, trans. Helen R. Lane (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 164; Henderson, *A Critique of Film Theory* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1980).

[25] Of this development, Adrian Martin writes: "To put it briefly, many of us are starting to see how words can work differently with images, frame captures or freeze-frames from DVD, clips, graphic design, etc. Film criticism is becoming more multi-channel, at least potentially – and it is moving a little closer to its object, cinema, and sharing its language (of image and sound) a little more. People such as Godard were foreseeing and hoping for this revolution back in 1965! But only now do we have, not just the technology but, more profoundly (and philosophically), the *technique* – a new way of thinking about how to write about film, beyond the old-fashioned rationality of the written, descriptive word." Martin, interview by José David Cáceres and Alejandro Diaz for *Miradas de cine*, "Guys, did you get past page 80 of Volume 1 of *The Movement-Image*?" reprinted in *Cinemascope: Independent Film Journal* 7 (January-April 2007): http://www.cinemascope.it/Issue%207/Articoli_n7/Articoli_n7_05/Adrian_Martin.pdf.

[26] For an overview, see Jim Hillier, "Introduction: Rethinking the Function of Cinema and Criticism," in *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1960s: New Wave, New Cinema,*

Reevaluating Hollywood, ed. Hillier (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 223-235.

[27] In the context of *Cahiers* criticism in the 1950s, *mise en scène* criticism, while notoriously hard to define, refers to a critical attitude favoring *continuous*, flowing scenographies as orchestrated by an authorial agent. It goes hand in hand with auteurism and stems in part from Bazin's notions of "ambiguity" and fondness for events that unfold in longer takes. Rivette, Rohmer, and Michel Mourlet are better exemplars of this criticism than Godard.

[28] See Godard's interview with Serge Daney, "Godard Makes (Hi)stories," trans. Georgia Gurrieri, in in *Jean-Luc Godard: Son + Image, 1974-1991*, ed. Bellour with Mary Lea Bandy (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1992), 167.

[29] Even before his forays into feature filmmaking, Godard made intricate use of existing images. While not citational in a film-critical sense, his short film *Une histoire d'eau* (1958) is technically a reworking of footage shot by Truffaut of a couple driving through flooded landscapes in and around Paris. The voiceover soundtrack, spoken by a female, includes mostly literary references to Baudelaire, Balzac, Aragon, Raymond Chandler, and others.

[30] For a close analysis of the often misdescribed scene, see Adrian Martin, "Recital: Three Lyrical Interludes in Godard," in *For Ever Godard*, ed. Michael Temple, James S. Williams, and Michael Witt (London: Black Dog, 2004), 255-262.

[31] The manner in which Godard does this is so delicately complex as to warrant further description. There are three shots of Nana/Karina altogether: first, a medium-long profile shot of her sitting in a mostly empty theater, one man seated a couple of rows behind her,

another to her left who drapes an arm around her shoulder; then, two close-ups of her upturned face that occur several seconds apart, each from a different angle and scale chosen for their affinities with Dreyer's alternating close-ups. In both cases, these latter shots of Nana/Karina "rhyme" subtly with the close-ups of Jeanne/Falconetti that adjoin them in Godard's shot order. Because Godard is working with a print that uses subtitles instead of intertitles, he is able to weave his heroine-spectator into the dramatic flow of Dreyer's scene with ease and a rhythmic simplicity, the force of which is intensified by the silence on the audio-track that accompanies this instance of citation, and also by the stark contrast of light and dark – the white, almost nondescript space surrounding Jeanne and the field of blackness that envelops Nana's face.

[32] See Sam Rohdie, "Deux ou trois choises…," *Critical Quarterly* 51, no. 3 (2009): 85-99.

[33] In addition to the Situationists and the critics writing for *Positif*, Raymond Durgnat is critical of Godard in this sense, often using the prefix "schizo-" to characterize Godard's compositional strategies. See Durgnat, "Asides on Godard," in *The Films of Jean-Luc Godard*, ed. Ian Cameron (New York: Praeger, 1969), 147-153.

[34] From the French term *découper*, "to cut into pieces," *découpage* (often mistranslated as "script," as in the English edition of *Godard on Godard*) is a term which, in short, adds editing to *mise en scène* and thus accounts for a diagrammatic patterning of an entire scene. Godard famously uses the term in the first of his two important defenses of cutting in *Cahiers* ("Defense and Illustration of Classical *Découpage*"), and it has since been used effectively by such critics and Noël Burch and Brian Henderson. See Burch, "Spatial and Temporal Articulations," in *Theory of Film Practice*, 3-16.

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[35] This is Rivette's point in his 1969 description of the film, spoken in a roundtable discussion in *Cahiers* on montage, cited above (note 2). *Made in USA* is the film that compels the participants to consider practices citation and collage.

[35] Godard, quoted in David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 312.

[36] There is much to be said concerning the effects of Godard's collage methods on his performers, who become agents of citation through gesture, speech, and costume. There is no more striking assertion of the nature of the shot as a "cut-out" than Karina's scissors passing across the picture plane as she eyes the camera directly in *Pierrot le fou*.

[37] Harold Rosenberg, "Collage: Philosophy of Put-Togethers," in *Art on the Edge: Creators and Situations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 174.

[38] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 182.

[39] Laura Mulvey and Colin MacCabe, "Images of Woman, Images of Sexuality," *Godard: Images, Sounds, Politics* (London: Macmillan/BFI, 1980), 90-92.

[40] These are aspects bodily presence and "personification" in cinema that Stephen Heath claims *Une femme mariée* prevents from fusing. See Heath, "Body, Voice," in *Questions of Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 183.

[41] Specifically, Deleuze claims that Godard's film ruptures the organizing concept of "internal monologue" as theorized and practiced by Eisenstein. Whereas the internal monologue presupposes, across each of its levels, an organic whole that encompasses the author, the characters, and the world, Godard's film shows "[t]here are no longer any 'perfect' and resolved harmonies but only dissonant tunings or irrational cuts, because

there are no more harmonics of the image, but only 'unlinked' tones forming the series."

For Deleuze this gives rise, within Godard's work, to a new form of serial composition,

the conception of which Deleuze implicitly adapts from serial music and distinguishes

from the term "collage." Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 182-188.

[42] Aragon, "What is Art, Jean-Luc Godard?" in *Focus on Godard*, ed. and trans. Royal S.

Brown (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972), 142-143.

[43] Ibid., 143-144.

[44] Ibid., 141.

[45] Ibid., 137, 140.

[46] Guy Debord and Gil J. Wolman, "A User's Guide to Détournement," in *Situationist*

International: Anthology, rev. and expanded ed., trans. Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of

Public Secrets, 1995), 15.

[47] Ibid., 15-16.

[48] This line is possibly a citation of an early statement by Pierre Boulez: "It is not enough

to deface the Mona Lisa because that does not kill the Mona Lisa. All the art of the past

must be destroyed."

[49] Debord and Wolman, "A User's Guide," 15.

[50] Ibid., 16.

[51] Ibid., 19. It must be said this hypothetical example is rather uninspired, and closer in

spirit to Frank Capra's use of Nazi footage in the *Why We Fight* (1942-1945) series of

World War II "information" films, produced by the War Department.

[52] René Viénet, "The Situationists and the New Forms of Action against Politics and Art," in *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*, ed. Tom McDonough (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), 184-185.

[53] Guy Debord, "For a Revolutionary Judgment of Art," in *Situationist International: Anthology*, ed. Knabb, 393-397.

[54] "The Role of Godard," in *Situationist International: Anthology*, ed. Knabb, 228-230.

[55] Debord and Wolman, "A User's Guide," 17.

[56] We should note that Debord's films, which are always the implicit, *correct* alternative to Godard's in the Situationist argument, are just as obscurantist in their treatment of cited material. There are two later, "autobiographical" moments in Debord's body of thought that return to this question, and in both cases he condescends to his readers and viewers. First, in his film *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni* (1978), Debord says in voiceover: "To those who are annoyed that they can't understand all the allusions, or who even admit that they have no idea of what I'm really getting at, I will merely reply that they should blame their own sterility and lack of education rather than my methods; they have wasted their time at college, bargain shopping for worn-out fragments of second-hand knowledge." Later, in his 1989 text *Panegyric*, Debord apparently regretting the fact he has to shift from *détournment* to more conventional quotation, writes: "Allusions, without quotation marks, to other texts that one knows to be very famous . . . should be reserved for times richer in minds capable of recognizing the original phrase and the distance its new application has introduced." Debord, *Panegyric*, trans. James Brook (London: Verso, 2004), 8.

[57] For instance, interrupting their third meeting is a series of "recomposed" fragments on which Godard has fragmented a famous line by Che Guavara: "Let me tell you/ at the risk/ of seeming/ ridiculous/ that the revolutionary/ true/ is/ guided by great/ feelings of love." Writing and rewriting plays a critical role in the project, which aspires to "return to zero." Godard *reduces* sentences to recomposable words, words to constituent letters and phonemes, opening up a boundless game of puns and reversals of meaning, of forging "new beginnings" with what is given. Kaja Silverman, in her discussion with Harun Farocki of the film, argues that Godard's writing on images serves a "homeopathic" function: it works as an "inoculation against naming – against "this is." Silverman and Farocki, *Speaking about Godard* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 116.

[58] "Cinema and Revolution," in *Situationist International: Anthology*, ed. Knabb, 378-379.

[59] Thomas Y. Levin, "Dismantling the Spectacle: The Cinema of Guy Debord," in *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents*, ed. Tom McDonough (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), 425-426.

[60] See Brian Price, "Plagiarizing the Plagiarist: Godard meets the Situationists," *Film Comment* 33, no. 6 (1997): 66-69.

[61] Let me point out that among film-essayists, Harun Farocki has most extensively reflected on didacticism and its multifarious forms. The tropes of training, instruction, guidance, and therapy abound in his body of work. *Indoctrination* (1987) examines a business seminar which teaches executives how to "sell" themselves more positively. The participants are thoroughly critiqued by their instructor and by each other, often through the use of video playback as the smallest utterances, expressions, and gestures are mined

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for possible meaning. In *How to Live in the FRG* (1990), Farocki's montage makes

associative leaps across a wide range of training exercises: police officers learning to

handle a domestic dispute, children learning to cross the street, an exotic dancer learning

to unzip her skirt, nurses learning to deliver a baby, and so forth. In *The Interview* (1997),

we see job applicants from various income levels learning to market themselves in

interviews, and here again their actions in mock scenarios are scrutinized with the

assistance of video replay. Whether revealing the manipulative tactics of big business or

implying, through montage, a link between trained citizens and mechanized automata,

what Farocki détourns in these works is the concept of didacticism itself. Each scene of

instruction serves as a foil to Farocki's own motives and methods of teaching, which in

the process become transparent and open to critique. Even in more aggressive moments

when he addresses the viewer in voiceover, Farocki – unlike Debord – doesn't position

himself as an intellectual authority who drives home messages and passes along nuggets

to an audience unfit to receive them. Taking cues from Brecht instead of a naïve

Brechtianism, Farocki teaches by estranging the act of teaching and its routinized

methods. As Fredric Jameson affirms, for Brecht "teaching is the showing of showing,

the showing of how you show and demonstrate." In this way, Farocki not only

appropriates and reconditions images for the purpose of instruction; he also teaches by

demonstrating how to demonstrate. And this is less an outdated gesture of self-reflexivity

than a "form of intelligence," as Farocki likes to describe his work, in which the viewer is

invited – not coerced – to participate. See Fredric Jameson, *Brecht and Method* (London:

Verso, 1998), 91.

[62] Serge Daney, "The T(h)errorized (Godardian Pedagogy)," trans. Bill Krohn and Charles Cameron Ball, available on the website maintained by Steve Erickson: http://home.earthlink.net/~steevee/Daney_Godard.html. For an alternate translation that is less faithful to Daney's writing style, but that includes important endnotes by Daney, see "Theorize/Terrorize (Godardian Pedagogy)," trans. Annwyl Williams, in *Cahiers du Cinéma, 1973-1978: History, Ideology, Cultural Struggle*, ed. David Wilson (London: Routledge, 2000), 116-123.

[63] In a recent overview of Godard's career, Peter Wollen suggests that Godard's politicization in the mid-to-late 1960s is less a sign of some wishy-washy tendency to change with fashion than a consequence of his "unflinching determination to be topical, to keep abreast of the headlines (and particularly the city streets life-style of vanguard urban youth)." Wollen, "JLG," in *Paris Hollywood: Writings on Film* (London: Verso, 2002), 78. Daney likewise acknowledges this aspect of Godard's work by pointing to the director's recurrent use of "discours du manche," the progressive and indignant discourse of "the right side." See the translator notes by Krohn and Ball.

[64] Daney, "The T(h)errorized," trans. Krohn and Ball.

[65] For a compelling discussion of how *La Chinoise* "is an exercise on Marxism with Marxism as much as it is an exercise on film with film," see Jacques Rancière, "The Red of *La Chinoise*: Godard's Politics," in *Film Fables*, trans. Emiliano Battista (London: Berg, 2006), 143-153.

[66] Daney, "The T(h)errorized," trans. Krohn and Ball.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Manny Farber, "Jean-Luc Godard," in *Negative Space: Manny Farber on the Movies*, exp. ed. (New York: Da Capo, 1998), 268.

[69] Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, trans. and ed. M.A. Screech (New York: Penguin, 2003), 909. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text, by book, chapter, and page number.

[70] I do not mean to argue that the polemical essay-film, mastered by Debord, is somehow less effective because of its dogmatism. In the arena of radical protest, it certainly plays a role that the more tentative, Montaignian essay form could not provide. Godard's practice has always posed problems for critical classification along these lines: his Vertov Group films were too strange, and at times to "beautiful" to fit neatly into the category of avant-garde, and at the same time too political to be considered as "art cinema."

[71] It is possible to view Godard's increased visibility and self-portraiture in his late work as, in part, a rectification of his insufficient bodily presence in his militant films, which, in this respect, had regressed from Godard's interrogation of himself in his contribution to *Loin du Vietnam* (1967), *Caméra-oeil*.

[72] On the critical significance of video in Godard's work, see Philippe Dubois, "Video Thinks what Cinema Creates," trans. Lynn Kirby, in *Jean-Luc Godard: Son + Image, 1974-1991*, ed. Bellour, 169-185; and Michael Witt, "Shapeshifter: Godard as Multimedia Installation Artist," *New Left Review* 29 (2004): 73-89.

[73] Looking back on *Ici et ailleurs* in his 1980 lectures on cinema history, Godard reaffirmed the centrality of the "AND" to the project: "[W]e chose the title *Ici et ailleurs* to emphasize the word AND. The film's true title is AND, neither *Here* nor *Elsewhere*; it

is AND, it is *Ici et ailleurs*, that is, a certain movement." Jean-Luc Godard, *Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma* (Paris: Albatros, 1980), 303.

[74] Gilles Deleuze, "Three Questions About *Six fois deux*," trans. Rachel Bowlby, in *Jean-Luc Godard: Son + Image, 1974-1991*, ed. Raymond Bellour with Mary Lea Bandy (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1992), 35-42. For Deleuze's remarks on Godard's "method of AND," which mobilizes the "irrational interval" (a foundational concept of Deleuze's sense of modern cinema), see *Cinema 2*, 179-188.

[75] Richard Brody, *Everything is Cinema: The Working Life of Jean-Luc Godard* (New York: Metropolitan, 2008), 376-377.

[76] In this sense, the passage speaks to the contradiction inherent in the very designation of the "people" that Giorgio Agamben discusses in "What is a People?" *Means Without End: Notes on Politics*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 29-35.

[77] The other major element in play in the segment is the functioning of capital, which Godard "explains" with a short blackboard illustration, claiming that capital adds zeros and multiplies by zeros under the pretense of responding to desires and "eliminating" the poor. Notice how the zeroes graphically rhyme with the heads of the anonymous crowd. Godard's remarks also situate the problem of how to form a series of people, how to know one's image within an *enchaînement* of images, in relation to the exchanges and flows of capital, the problem being that the dreams of the people are added to the grand total as mere zeroes, multiplied and nullified in the same "inclusive" gesture.

[78] The essay-filmmaker closest in spirit to Godard and Miéville's search for an alternative television is Alexander Kluge, especially given his inventive uses of the interview format.

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[79] Dubois, "Video Thinks What Cinema Creates," 177.

[80] MacCabe, *Godard: Images, Sounds, Politics*, 42-43.

[81] In an argument that Godard has repeated in his discussions about montage concerning *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, Godard and Gorin claim that Eisenstein did not really practice montage but the discovery of "angles" allowing social reality to be perceived differently. This, Godard admit, was an advance on the innovations of Griffith, which were merely a matter of changing the camera position, but Eisenstein's use of angles was surpassed in complexity by Vertov's use of montage proper and its "perpendicular" crossings of social realities brought into contact. But then Godard goes on to say that whereas Eisenstein and Vertov opposed one another publicly, in reality they were "two hands of the same body." Godard and Gorin, "Angle and Reality: Godard and Gorin in America," interview by Robert Phillip Kolker, in *Jean-Luc Godard: Interviews*, ed. David Sterritt (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), 66-67.

[82] Michael Witt, "On Gilles Deleuze on Jean-Luc Godard: an Interrogation of 'La méthode du ENTRE." *Australian Journal of French Studies* 32, no. 1 (1999): 110-124; Pavle Levi, "The Crevice and the Stitch," *Critical Quarterly* 51, no. 3 (2009): 41-62.

[83] Pierre Reverdy, "L'Image," *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Flammarion, 1975), 73-75. It is worth noting that Reverdy's formulation of the poetic image arises in the context of his debates with André Breton regarding "lyrical meaning." Breton cites Reverdy's poem in the "Surrealist Manifesto" of 1924, but he conveys the "image" in terms of psychic automatism (implicitly in opposition to symbolist conceptions of poetic labor expressed by such figures as Poe, Baudelaire, and Valéry).

[84] Brian Henderson offers a useful distinction between collage and montage while discussing Godard's work: "The difference between montage and collage is a complex question. Film critics generally use the term collage without elucidating its meaning or even its difference from montage. There is sometimes the suggestion that the pieces of a collage are shorter or more fragmented than those of a montage, but this does not hold up. Modern filmmakers rarely use any shot shorter than Eisenstein's average shot in *Potemkin*. Moreover, collage as practiced by moderns allows long takes and tracking shots; montage as practiced by Eisenstein did not. It seems clear that the difference between montage and collage is to be found in the divergent ways in which they associate and order images, not in the length or nature of the images themselves. Montage fragments reality in order to reconstitute it in highly organized, synthetic emotional and intellectual patterns. Collage does not do this; it collects or sticks its fragments together in a way that does not entirely overcome their fragmentation. It seeks to recover its fragments *as fragments*. In regard to overall form, it seeks to bring out the internal relations of its pieces, whereas montage imposes a set of relations upon them and indeed collects or creates its pieces to fill out a preexistent plan." Henderson, "Toward a Non-Bourgeois Camera Style (Part-Whole Relations in Godard's Late films)" (1970-1971), in *A Critique of Film Theory*, 67. This distinction is echoed in discussions of literary collage versus montage, where the latter is accorded more of a unifying principle. See Charles Bernstein, "Pound and the Poetry of Today," in *My Way: Speeches and Poems* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 160-165. For Bernstein, Pound's *Cantos* fail as montage (the desire for which locates the supremacist arrogance of Pound's ambitions)

but the result is a much more interesting collage, the politics of which undermine Pound's

own stated aims.

[85] "Co-presence" names the ground on which Jacques Rancière has taken Godard's work

in *Histoire(s)* to task in a number of recent essays. Rancière maps a progression between

early and late Godard from dialectical clashes of heterogeneous elements to symbolist,

"fraternal" linkage in a form stripped of possibilities for dissensus. I will take up this

argument in the conclusion of my study and argue that Rancière misses the mark insofar

as he neglects to consider the essayistic components of Godard's montage and address to

the spectator.

[86] For this reason it is perfectly sensible (and not always just a sign of laziness and

insensitivity on the part of the critic) that slippages between "collage" and "montage" are

common in analyses of Godard's practice. It could be argued that in *Histoire(s) du*

cinéma, the moments of montage (according to Reverdy's poetic image) momentarily

spring forth from collage and return back again. Sam Rohdie's work on the series, which

he terms a "collage-montage," draws out, I believe more accurately, the complexity of

Godard's collage and its art-historical inheritance, while giving somewhat less sufficient

attention to montage and in particular superimposition. See, for example, Rohdie's "Deux

ou trois choises…," 85-99. In his more general study of montage, Rohdie is frequently (if

implicitly) gesturing towards a limit point between collage and montage, a tension

intrinsic to the latter. Rohdie, *Montage* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

[87] The "just an image" line, uttered in *Vent d'est*, is usually taken, by defenders and

detractors of Godard's work alike, to be a claim against the immediate, reified "reality"

offered up by an image and its represented content. This reading is accurate, but more

specifically, the phrase is adapted from Maoist thought concerning "correct ideas" (it is a statement that in this respect dovetails with the Dziga Vertov Group's constant stress on "correct sound"). In Mao's "Where Do Correct Ideas Come From?" (1963), Mao argues for a process of social knowledge that develops through a dialectics of theory and practice (practice at the beginning, then a return to practice to test and ground theory, which if left to its own devices would result in sheer, facile contradiction). Bound up with this concept is a theory of cognition that moves from perceptual to conceptual knowledge by virtue of a "leap," both from practice to theory and then from theory back to practice, where the legitimacy of the initial leap is tested. Godard and Gorin's French use of the term *juste* (meaning both "correct" and "only") stresses the *mere* image-ness of a film image not yet subjected to these self-critical measures. Mao, "Where Do Correct Ideas Come From?" in *Mao Tse-tung: Four Essays on Philosophy* (Peking: FLP, 1966), 134-136.

[88] Nicole Brenez, "The Ultimate Journey: Remarks on Contemporary Theory," trans. William D. Routt, *Screening the Past* 2 (1997): http://www.latrobe.edu.au/screeningthepast/reruns/brenez.html.

[89] Samuel Beckett, "The Image," trans. Edith Fournier, in *Samuel Becket: The Complete Short Prose, 1929-1989*, ed. S.E. Gontarski (New York: Grove, 1995), 165-168.

[90] As I discuss in Chapter Four, Godard speaks to the work of the viewer by assuming, himself, the role of a viewer in *Histoire(s)* and other videos in which he appears in his late period. A key concept to grasp here is that Godard does not reduce his notion of the ensemble-image to the material structures of his work. Superimposition enacts a way of seeing that he wishes to remain operative, in our engagement with the work, even where

superimpositions are not materialized on screen. As Godard comments in an interview he gave when the final chapters of *Histoire(s)* were being completed, "But an image doesn't exist. This [he is presumably pointing to a single photograph or painting] is not an image, it's a picture. The image is the relation with me looking at it dreaming up a relation at someone else. An image is an association." Godard, interview with Gavin Smith, "Jean-Luc Godard," in *Jean-Luc Godard: Interviews*, 190.

[91] See Richard Roud, *A Passion for Films: Henri Langlois and the Cinémathèque Française* (New York: Viking Press, 1983).

[92] For details regarding the significance of Langlois for Godard's *Histoire(s)*, see Sam Rohdie, "Intersections," *Screening the Past* 23, http://www.latrobe.edu.au/screeningthepast/23/intersections.html#fnB1.

[93] Godard, "Godard Makes (Hi)stories," 167.

[94] Godard, quoted in Rosenbaum, "Trailer for Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma*," expanded version available at http://www.jonathanrosenbaum.com/?p=15760.

[95] Ibid.

[96] Godard, "The Future(s) of Film," 19.

[97] Ibid., 14.

[98] For a useful corrective, see Tom Gunning, "What's the Point of an Index? or, Faking Photographs." *Nordicom Review* 25, no. 1-2 (2004): 39-50.

[99] Though Godard laments the passing of the kind of cinema whose faculties he feels are now scarcely operative in the media landscape, he contends that "optics doesn't change," which makes clear that his arguments concerning cinema are not *primarily* ontological: "An image is an image, whether it's pictorial or not, etc. There will always be a support,

even if tapes disappear, even if they are replaced by cards, for example. Optics doesn't change." Godard, "The Future(s) of Film," 16-21.

[100] In academic discussions concerning the possibility of scholarly work composed in the form of video essays, Godard's *Histoire(s)* has been frequently invoked as a pioneering example of what is possible. See the articles and examples of such work that Catherine Grant has gathered at her website *Film Studies for Free*: http://filmstudiesforfree.blogspot.com/2009/12/video-essays-from-mediascape-and-new.html. While it stands to reason that Godard would be mentioned in this context, the kind of "essays" that have emerged so far in this arena are rarely "essayistic" in the sense I am exploring in this study.

[101] Godard's move into his late work is notable for the sense in which it engages artistic tradition. His montage in *Histoire(s)* could be seen as drawing on Langlois and Malraux in the same gesture – the juxtapositions of Langlois' programming, and the notion of potentially infinite, *metamorphic* extension that underlies Malraux's imaginary museum. Such a procedure might seem, on the surface, rather ahistorical and far removed from the temporality of human events, but the concept of history that Godard's montage animates is predicated not on linear or chronological development (history as continuous narrative) but instead on discontinuity, rupture, and unforeseen returns and reprises across disparate contexts and timelines. This disposition does not elevate formal affinities above historical realities on a human scale. Godard's point in entwining, via citation, film history and the heritage of European painting is to show that cinema inherits from the older plastic art its mission, its *obligation* to confront and create images of human experience from the most quotidian events and gestures (the history painting of Rembrandt, the leisurely scenes of

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Impressionism) to the atrocities of warfare and violent abuses of state authority (Goya's

El tres de mayo de 1808 en Madrid [1814] and *Los desastres de la guerra* series [1810-1815], Picasso's *Guernica* [1937]). For Godard, cinema, like painting, is – or at least it should have been – an art in constant dialogue with historical realities, which it responds to and reflects, and at times anticipates. For Godard – and this is another major point of difference from Guy Debord – art is still a viable domain of resistance and invention. In his late work, specifically in *JLG/JLG* and the video short *Je vous salue, Sarajevo* (1993), he makes a sharp distinction between art and culture, contending that culture is "the rule" whereas art is "the exception," and that "the nature of the rule is to want the death of the exception. It is thus the rule of Europe, of culture, to organize the death of the living." If Godard insists on upholding the exceptional status of art, his use of citation tries both to give historical evidence of artworks living up to their duty to confront and reflect, and to show, through drastic manipulation and recomposition, how those same fragments are not documents lodged in a certain context but filled with possibilities and implications for the present, for *the time of our viewing*.

[102] The persistent blackness, always there beneath and behind fleeting combinations, is almost like a videographic version of the dark studio in *Le Gai savoir*.

[103] This kind of attention to detail is, as Paul Willemen has noted, already visible in the criticism Godard wrote for *Cahiers* at the start of his career. Willemen, with reference to Godard's use of photographs in the book *Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma*, writes that Godard seizes on certain details and gestures that "anchor his memory" of a particular film. "Godard hardly ever uses a still which reproduces the whole of a frame. He will reframe the look or the turn of a face, or the bend of an arm or a shoulder or a

neck or whatever. It's the fragment of the image that he focuses on."[103] Indeed, in his early writings Godard tends to fix his attention on details and performance gestures, as in his discussion of a "vertical" dimension repeatedly marked by gestures in Astruc's *Une Vie* (1958), or the sudden passage from "stylized gesture to feeling" that he attributes to the moment in John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956) when John Wayne lifts Natalie Wood into the air after tracking her down (*GG*, 97-98; 117). This sort of fragmentation is again operative in *Histoire(s)*, where the accentuated elements branch into new linkages across separate works, and where Godard's attention to gesture sometimes underscores what is already a peak moment in the source (the same shot from *The Searchers*) and sometimes makes banal motions emphatic (a shot of Elizabeth Taylor in *A Place in the Sun* [George Stevens, 1951] rising from a lakeshore superimposed with a detail of Giotto's fresco *Noli me tangere* [1304-1306], her outstretched arm parallel to that of Mary Magdalene and the hand of a resurrected Christ jutting into the bottom right corner of the frame).

[104] Godard, quoted in Adrian Martin, "Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, Parts 1A and 1B: Tales from the Crypt," *Senses of Cinema* 10 (2000): http://archive.sensesofcinema.com/contents/cteq/00/10/histoires.html (no longer available online). The original source is an interview conducted by Michel Ciment and Stéphane Goudet, *Positif* 456 (February 1999): 57.

[105] Godard, quoted in Rosenbaum, "Trailer for Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma*," 168.

[106] Here I am drawing on Vladimir Jankélévitch's writings on music and his concept of the drastic. Godard cites Jankélévitch in both the final episode of *Histoire(s)* and in *Éloge d'lamour*. More to the present point, Jankélévitch distinguishes the drastic component of music, found in the instances of its playing, from a "gnostic," hermeneutic order of

analysis that looks at textual structures (which could perhaps be apparent in musical notation as opposed to its performance). And the drastic names not only the work of the musician but also that of the listener in the midst of the experience of music being played (which leads him to call the listener a "tertiary re-creator"). See his *Music and the Ineffable*, trans. Carolyn Abbate (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 77-81.

[107] For an incisive reading of this sequence (in terms of Godard's emphasis on projection) that has informed my own analysis, see Daniel Morgan, "'A Feeling of Light': Cinema, Aesthetics, and the Films of Jean-Luc Godard at the End of the Twentieth Century" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2007), 109-120.

[108] As Jonathan Rosenbaum points out, it is quite possible that Godard misattributes this quote to Bazin, and that the actual passage comes from a Michel Mourlet article in *Cahiers du cinéma* in 1958: "Since cinema is a gaze which is substituted for our own in order to give us a world that corresponds to our desires, it settles on faces, on radiant or bruised but always beautiful bodies, on this glory or devastation which testifies to the same primordial nobility, on this chosen race that we recognize as our own, the ultimate projection of life towards God." Rosenbaum, *Essential Cinema: On the Necessity of Film Canons* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 184.

[109] James Roy MacBean provides a valuable discussion of this scene in his book *Film and Revolution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975), 116-138.

[110] For Godard – and this holds true for all phases of his politicization – there can be no valid politics that does not involve knowing how to work as a percipient spectator. It seems to me the following statement, which he made in the late 1960s, is just as true of his political disposition today: "[W]e have not yet learned to watch and listen to a film.

And therein lies our most important task today. For example, those who are politically aware are rarely cinematographically aware as well, and vice versa. Generally it's one or the other. As for myself, I owe my political formation to the cinema, and I think this is comparatively rare at present." Godard, interview by Jean Collet (dated 12 May 1967), in Collet, *Jean-Luc Godard*, trans. Ciba Vaughan (New York: Crown Publishers, 1970), 104. I am indebted to Pavle Levi for this reference.

[111] In the *histoire de vent* segment, this problem surfaces in the way couples are formed and deformed, and Godard's handling of citations negotiates the distance between two conditions of being: despairing solitude, as suggested by the Gish and Malone characters, at odds with their communities; and the sudden, "miraculous" convergence that Godard believes cinema can provide, a possibility acknowledged through the couple temporarily formed in Bergman's *Fängelse* before a film projected on an attic wall, in a lone instance of relief from their miserable situations.

[112] Speaking of the dense citationality of his film *Nouvelle Vague* (1990), Godard says: "I tried to establish a balance between literary quotations, verbal quotations, and also quotations from nature. In this film there is the quotation of water, the quotation of trees." Godard, qtd. in Silverman and Farocki, *Speaking about Godard*, 242n1.

CHAPTER THREE

Of Love and Dialogue:

Refiguring the Couple in Modern Cinema

> I believe that the only thing that exists in the world is communication. I don't believe that I exist, I don't believe that you exist; I believe that we're a movement materialized of movements, of forms that pass between us.
>
> –Godard, 1982[1]

> There is no film without love, love of some kind. There can be novels without love, other works of art without love, but there can be no cinema without love.
>
> -Godard, 1983[2]

> I'd like to make a film with a real reverse-shot. There has never been one. There has only been what the Americans did, but that has become any- and everything. All the great films known until now don't have shot/reverse-shot – for one reason: we don't know what a real reverse-shot is. … I have a project for a short film on lovers meeting in the various *arrondissements*. I proposed something. I have no idea whether it will ever be made. I'd call it *Champ contre champ* (Shot/Reverse-Shot). It features a girl called Adrienne Champ and a boy called Ludovic Champ.
>
> –Godard, 2001[3]

In a 2000 interview, Godard claims he has never understood why his earlier film *Le Mépris* (1963) is so well regarded. "Commercially, it's a film that has made a lot for those who own the rights," he says. "It's always high on people's lists. I think it's simply because it comes from an American-style novel, with a basic story that is not my own. It has a number of weaknesses."[4] This statement is one of many he has made over the years dismissing or downplaying his 1963 feature, but his apparent dissatisfaction with the film has not kept him from revisiting it through citation at key moments in his later work. For instance, *Soft and Hard* (1985), a video he co-directed with Ann-Marie Miéville, reaches a dramatic finish as he and Miéville take part in a formalized play of gestures involving a clip from *Le Mépris* (the opening shot at Cinecittà), which first appears on their television

and then is projected onto a wall of their apartment as their extended arms superimpose with the image. Clips from *Le Mépris* abound in *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988-98), the early episodes in particular, and Miéville, although working alone, even cites Godard's film in her 1985 feature *Le Livre de Marie* (a clip of the main couple quarreling in their Rome apartment). Why, then, does *Le Mépris* resurface with such frequency in Godard's later stages? What enduring significance does it hold, despite his voiced misgivings about the project and its "number of weaknesses"?

Of Godard's early features, none anticipates the general mood of his late period more palpably than *Le Mépris*. A transitional project for the filmmaker, it sounds within his body of work the first sustained notes of mourning for a fallen, irrecoverable cinema. Godard had already spoken of the end of a certain kind of cinema in interviews around *À bout de souffle* (1960), where he welcomed the notion and framed his radical debut as the "finishing touch" to a series of indelible changes initiated by Bresson and Resnais.[5] But in *Le Mépris*, "the end of cinema," as the boorish American producer Jeremiah Prokosch (Jack Palance) is famously mistranslated as saying, becomes the cause for serious lament. The film concerns a disastrous international co-production in which the aging Fritz Lang, playing a peculiar version of himself (espousing the ideals of classicism while the rushes of his film-in-the-making fail to bear them out) struggles to adapt Homer's *The Odyssey*. Through the figure of Lang, *Le Mépris* shows the classicist paradigms of Old Hollywood and ancient Greece to be equally out of reach. The bleakness of this loss can be felt in the film's closing seconds where Lang's anemic Ulysses supposedly spots and salutes Ithaca but the camera finds only sea and sky. The "silence!" that we hear Godard shout (playing Lang's assistant director), the empty horizon, the declarative chords of the musical score,

the "FIN" title: these elements impart a feeling that is unequivocally somber.

Godard, reporting on the cinematic state of things in 1963, is troubled by the loss of the Hollywood studio system as an aesthetic *sensus communis*. As Colin MacCabe has argued, the American cinema that Godard and his *Cahiers du cinéma* associates admired so fervently had offered them not just a group of auteurs but a promise of "an audience secure in its knowledge of genres and stars, who allowed the artist to demonstrate his art within a popular and established medium."[6] The industrial and economic conditions that enabled this relationship between filmmakers and a conceivably universal audience had, by the late 1950s, just at the time of the Nouvelle Vague's emergence, fallen into decline as Hollywood, awkwardly trying out new production formulas in the wake of the studios' divestiture of theater chains, found much of its mass audience siphoned off by television. Offering as it does a reflexive and "embittered discourse on the film industry," Godard's film excoriates the Euro-American "big-budget epic" while itself being an example of it,[7] and it shows, through its treatment of the sadistic, domineering Prokosch, Hollywood to have mutated into a shameful commercial force that now occupies European film culture.

This lament for Hollywood classicism extends to the style of *Le Mépris*, which inhabits a precarious position between the classical and the modern. Commentators have pointed out that the film is the most classically inclined in Godard's oeuvre since it flirts with a three-act structure and employs non-diegetic music, vibrant color, and anamorphic widescreen for melodramatic effect.[8] At the time of the film's release, Godard referred to it as "an Antonioni film shot by Hawks or Hitchcock,"[9] thus marking an intimate relation between the modern and the classical cinema at the level of film style. In his earlier work, the French-Swiss director had proved himself, in Susan Sontag's words, a "destroyer" of

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the popular, Hollywoodian cinema, his disturbance of its conventions akin to the Cubists' detonation of pictorial unity in painting and to Schoenberg's rejection of established tonal principles regulating progression and simultaneity in music.[10] But with *Le Mépris* Godard seems intent on retaining a few classical elements as essential to his project.

This curious entwinement of styles is nowhere more evident and fascinating than in the drawn-out apartment scene that runs through the middle third of the film, a scene where a young couple – Paul (Michel Piccoli), a screenwriter hired by Prokosch to revise Lang's script, and his wife Camille (Brigitte Bardot) – argue and circulate throughout the unfinished rooms, trying out different poses and postures as if searching for some form of mutual abidance in the maze-like interior, as well as in Godard's roaming frame. Godard channels, without discord, the cinema of Antonioni (the relentless play of frames-within-frames, the "autonomous mediating gaze" of the camera, the "inquiring detachment" that regards incidental details as elements of suspense[11]), as well as the melodramatic *mise en scène* of Minnelli (a delicate, anxious choreography of motion in domestic space, the cuts relatively sparse and unimposing, the camera mid-range and itinerant, the color pitched to emotional shifts in the CinemaScope frame).

What is quite out of keeping with classical convention is that the scene meanders on for over thirty minutes without much occurring to advance the narrative. Nevertheless, there is little sense of its extended duration being unearned, and it does reach a climax of sorts in its closing minutes, albeit by enigmatic means. This final "movement" begins as Paul and Camille sit down on either side of a table with a white lamp at its center. We see them together, in a profile two-shot, framed almost symmetrically against a window, and just as Paul switches on the light, an axial cut takes us to the middle of the lampshade that

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now dominates the widescreen frame.

The lampshade, cropped and "flattened out" against a shallow background in softer focus, is suddenly less a lampshade than a blank field that lights up at random while the camera shuttles back and forth between Paul and Camille, and while Paul tries, and fails, to mark the precise moment his wife stopped loving him. "Since we were at Prokosch's?" he asks. "When you saw me pat Francesca Vanini's behind?" Camille shakes her head and replies, "Let's say it was that. Now it's over. Let's not talk about it."

With this unorthodox maneuver, Godard puts motivations of camera and *mise en scène* intensely into question. Initially, there is some suggestion that the camera is allied with Paul's desire to learn the source of his wife's scorn, but as the conversation goes on it becomes apparent that the camera's mobility and concentration have, by the standards of classicism, only an arbitrary relation to Paul's questioning. In the conspicuous absence of shot-countershot cutting, the camera's course and tempo are not determined by speech. Instead of staging a tennis match of questions and responses, Godard here stresses, in one unbroken take, the intervening space that dialogue scenes often reduce or omit. As for the lampshade, we might be tempted to interpret it as an obstacle that separates the characters and accents their inability to "connect" in the scene. It seems to me, rather, that Godard is warmly mocking such use of objects in Hollywood melodramas of the 1940s and 1950s.[12]

Rendered abstract, the "lampshade" resides where shots and countershots would typically pivot in the exchange (or in the space the cuts would skip across, depending on camera position). It is not so much an object as a zone in the image that the camera studies with each alternating pass. I take it the purpose of the framing and camera movement isn't to signal, in unambiguous terms, "connection" or "disconnection" but to trace and inspect a bodily *interval* that both unites and separates this volatile couple.[13]

In the brief moments that follow, Godard continues this investigation – oddly enough by resorting to the very device he has just avoided. After a short, semi-violent scuffle in which the interval between Paul and Camille collapses, the mournful score starts up again and Camille makes for the door. We cut to a medium shot of Paul now calmly pursuing her as the camera retreats at the same rate; then we cut to a legitimate countershot from Paul's implied perspective, this shot pushing through the doorway as Camille, walking down the stairs, turns and says she despises him: "Je méprise!" Here, too, the mobile camera is crucial: the shot and countershot fuse with a striking ebb and flow, a pull-and-push effect expressed frontally.

This scene-ending alternation is puzzling not only because Godard uses shot-countershot – *the* classical technique of interlinking two shots and characters within a continuous scenography – just seconds after pointedly avoiding it, but also because he tends in general to refrain from using the staple procedure at all cost, whether he stages conversation in stretched-out takes, switches between head-on views instead of over-the-shoulder setups, or tinkers with all manner of pans and tracks (see in particular *Vivre sa vie* [1962] and *Masculin féminin* [1966]). *Le Mépris* conforms to this tendency, with this single exception. Why, then, does Godard, at this critical moment in the film, opt for this basic principle of film syntax?

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Figure 63-64. *Le Mépris* (**Godard, 1963**)

It helps to recognize that the mobile alternation between Paul and Camille is also

a citation. In Godard's parlance, it is "shot by Hitchcock," and thus it engages the work

of a director who, as Gilles Deleuze and many others have noted, prefigures the modern

cinema from the side of the classical.[14] Godard had earlier ascribed this visually striking

device of shot (backward track) and countershot (forward track) to Hitchcock in his 1957

review of *The Wrong Man*. There Godard observes the moment the "wrong man" crosses

the threshold into the city jail, and he points to a another use of the alternation at the end

of *I Confess* (Hitchcock, 1953) where the priest, wrongly accused of murder, approaches

the "right man," whose guilt he learned in confidence. Hitchcock, as Godard most likely

noticed,[15] employed this same technique again in *Vertigo* (1958) – first as Scottie (James

Stewart) follows Madeleine/Judy (Kim Novak) around San Francisco, then once more as

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he walks into an open grave in his nightmare.

If *Le Mépris* brings some of this baggage into play – after all, Godard wanted to cast Kim Novak in the role of Camille – it's no simple case of allusion or *hommage* when the mobile shot-countershot appears. Godard revises the maneuver for his own purposes. For Hitchcock, it is foremost about point of view, the subjective look as it travels though a space and attaches to an object, or meets with a returned glance; in *Vertigo* the binding force is one of desirous pursuit (shot) and magnetic allure (countershot). For Godard, the subjective look is of significantly less concern than the rhythmic interaction of bodies – indeed, the forward track of the countershot gradually detaches from Paul's sightline. In Godard's hands, the technique becomes another means of examining the space between Paul and Camille. It becomes, like the lampshade moment it follows and whose principle it continues rather than contradicts, yet another measure of *intervallic tension*.

Godard's point in using shot-countershot isn't simply to elegize classical cinema and its popular "language" but to reframe the classical in terms of the modern, to rescue the device by showing it to be more capable than what its staple uses indicate. Godard, I believe, understands and respects the simple power of shot-countershot. What he avoids are its monotonous, routine uses, the notion that inter-shot matches are the definite result of a technique whose success is guaranteed by the narrative action it propels and clarifies. He doesn't refuse the device out of some counter-cinematic credo so much as he saves it for moments when its greater potential might shine through, and in *Le Mépris*, he recasts it as a primarily investigative procedure. That is, he criticizes the device by using it more inquiringly, more inventively.[16] As such, it provides an apt coda to a scene in which Paul and Camille restlessly seek (and fail to find) some way of sharing the same environment,

all while the camera and cutting inspect their opaque, erratic behavior and seek somehow to detect the intensities of mood and thought and feeling that circulate between them – in the interval across which Camille's "Je méprise!" passes while its cause goes unspecified.

The enduring relevance of *Le Mépris* within Godard's corpus has to do with more than a melancholic temperament that it shares with his more recent output. In particularly stark ways, the film carries with it motifs and concepts that Godard revisits and continues to work through well into his late period – motifs and concepts that constellate around the problem of the couple. How to conduct and observe a veritable dialogue, how to manifest and apprehend what brings two people together, and what causes them to separate, in the absence of elucidating words, a normative technique, and narrative resolution – these are matters Godard takes up time and again. His ongoing investment in the couple as a basic social unit throughout his body of work is apparent in the way that male-female pairings figure in several of his transitional projects: in addition to Paul and Camille in *Le Mépris*, there are the Marxist-Leninist detectives in *Le Gai savoir* (1968), Godard and Miéville in *Ici et ailleurs* (1976), and Paul Godard (Jacques Dutronc) and Denise Rimbaud (Nathalie Baye) in his return to feature-length fiction cinema, *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* (1980). It's as if each time Godard marks a "return to zero," a place from which to begin anew, he poses the couple as fundamental to the possibility of further creation.

In what follows, I want to show how this profound and lasting concern with the couple is central to Godard's essayistic enterprise, and also how it significantly informs his collaborative undertakings with his partner, Miéville. As we'll see, between his early and late stages, Godard treats issues of coupling in a searching, inquisitive mode, both in

his feature films and his video projects that dispense entirely with a narrative pretext. The couple is a privileged social and dramatic unit that allows Godard to engage and explore cinematic conventions, to invoke and estrange the constructive logic of classical cinema from the side of the modern, and, in doing so, to carry out investigations into interactions between figures that are, in gesture and posture and general manner within the frame, not strictly bound to a "continuity system" or to psychologistic characterization. This abiding concern with the couple and dialogue eventually, by his late period, shades into Godard's personal and creative partnership with Miéville. But while his life and his work intersect almost as freely as the categories of fiction and nonfiction in his filmmaking, his focus on the couple is, at least by the 1980s, less an autobiographical theme than a manifest belief in the idea that love and labor should co-exist at the source of creative acts (an idea that finds its most pronounced articulation in *Passion* [1982] but that emerges across his late films and videos). In Godard's work with Miéville, the dialogue form assumes an overtly philosophical register and becomes a highly capable way of reflecting on the powers and limits of cinema and acknowledging how the stakes of Godard's practice are necessarily interpersonal. Examining this development will both shed light on Miéville's importance within Godard's late work and allow us to gain a fuller understanding of how he searches for a diligent spectator through essayistic means.

Dialogues, Love Scenes, Gestures

Godard's figuring of the couple in his Nouvelle Vague films – through framing, lighting, cutting, noise, music, gesture, and speech – is a recurring means by which he addresses and critiques cinematic traditions, in particular the codes and conventions of

the Hollywood cinema he found so invigorating as a critic. Two years after the release of

À bout de souffle, he said that his ambition in making the film was to "take a conventional

story and remake, but differently, everything the cinema had done. I also wanted to give

the feeling that the techniques of filmmaking had just been discovered or experienced for

the first time" (*GG*, 173). This line encourages us to rethink the popular image of Godard

as an outright dismantler of tradition in his early features – "to remake, but differently" is

not quite to reject wholesale or destroy beyond recognition. Godard's comments imply an

investment in *estranging* and *re-purposing* the cinema before him, letting the conventions

remain as aesthetic possibilities for fresh applications.

Part of the charm of Godard's early films comes from their mixture of a loving

admiration for Hollywood cinema, evinced through a surfeit of citations, and a stubborn

refusal to abide by its stylistic and dramatic protocols. His treatment of couples is a case

in point. From *À bout de souffle* to *Made in USA* (1966), Godard's films call to mind the

conceits and fatalistic arcs of B-movie thrillers: deception leads not merely to separation

but death, isolation, even suicide as in *Pierrot le fou* (1965). Only Lemmy Caution (Eddie

Constantine) and Natacha von Braun (Anna Karina) escape this pattern and experience a

happy conclusion as she comes to say "I love you" while, together, they race away from

Alphaville.[17] Playfully, critically, Godard infuses these cited and mish-mashed scenarios

with idiosyncratic forms of coupling. If he violates rules of continuity, if he places image

and sound in conflict, if he avoids explicitly separating the essential from the inessential

in a given scene, he also drastically reworks the dramatic operations of speech, language,

and gesture, conducting research into the vagaries of human interaction.

In "Defense and Illustration of Classical Construction" (1952), one of his most ambitious articles for *Cahiers*, Godard passionately describes classical *découpage* as a versatile aesthetic system far from being outmoded. Gleaning examples from Hitchcock, Preminger, Welles, Hawks, and Joseph Mankiewicz, he embraces this classical style as an intensely affective choreography of bodies, aptly suited to expressing "aberrations of heart and mind," emotional realities and their physical manifestations that would forfeit their impact if filmed according to the long-take, composition-in-depth style privileged in Bazin's evolutionary account of film language (*GG*, 26-30). But between this article and his own forays into filmmaking, Godard, through his critical engagements with the films of Rouch and Rossellini among others, becomes more and more interested in spontaneity and chance, and, along with these aspects, the intimate and experimental combination of fiction and documentary, their methods of shooting, their idioms of presentation. *À bout de souffle* and the less rambunctious *Le petit soldat* (1963) could be said to exhibit – in a radically different guise – the expressive force Godard earlier accorded to the *découpage* whose schemes he would soon trouble. And yet, in Godard's films, although tradition is not quite obliterated, overthrown, or ruled out, the human figure enters into qualitatively different formal relations and manners of performance that indeed indicate the onset of a full-blown modern cinema.

The couples in Godard's cinema, the interactions they generate and participate in, are radically fresh because they consist, first of all, of bodies released from the regulatory mechanisms of classical cinema. His performers confound the logic of what Deleuze calls the "sensory-motor schema" according to which looks and gestures, actions and reactions are organized to assure rational coordinates of time and space, to further and interconnect

the sequential bits of narrative that, in turn, grant these human actions import, motivation. For Godard, no such regime holds sway – its strategies are present only in their relentless undoing. The modern cinema of the post-World War II period that Deleuze defines, using Godard's work through the 1960s and beyond as examples of its emergence and growth, involves "a new type of actor … not simply the non-professional actors that neo-realism had revived at the beginning, but what might be called professional non-actors, or, better, 'actor-mediums,' capable of seeing and showing rather than acting, and either remaining dumb [as in "mute"] or undertaking some never-ending conversation."[18]

Godard's cinema offers prototypes of such an actor. In Karina's untrained grace, Belmondo's nervous athleticism, and Léaud's impulsive rhythms of gesture and speech, we find bodies with tics and all, unregimented and pushing constantly at the boundaries of a fiction that feebly contains them, filmed by a camera that likewise moves, trembles, and stares according to a curious gestural logic. Performance in Godard's films is often discussed in terms of Brechtian "alienation effects" that provoke critical reflection and disallow emotional involvement through the familiar channels of identification.[19] While Godard's work clearly invites and supports such an account – given his "foregrounding" of filmic implements and use of actors as citational mediums never congealing into their roles and putting the drama into question – it's important to bear in mind the *inspective* character of the camera, the way of looking Godard takes from the ethnographic films of Rouch and, strangely enough, from the scientific-poetic documentaries of Jean Painlevé, whose shoulder-harnessed camera apparatus he employed in filming *À bout de souffle*.[20] Godard's debt to Rouch is well-known, but he has also framed his first feature film as a Painlevé-inspired experiment as much scientific as aesthetic: What would happen if one

pulled Jean Seberg out of Preminger's films and studied her movements and attitudes the way Painlevé looks at such enigmatic creatures as sea-horses?[21]

This is to say that while Godard's camera enacts a variety of modes of expression (from the lyrical to the clinical), it often conveys, and asks us to share, an observational intensity that regards the human figure as something like a specimen (this, I might point out, is what Truffaut found unsettling about seeing Léaud in *Masculin féminin* – the film revealed the actor's anxiety under the pressure of "an entomologist's eye"[22]). Because in Godard's work the camera is so much a part of the scene being filmed, because the actors and spectators alike can sense its presence as an *instigative* factor, when someone breaks the "fourth wall" and looks directly into the lens (as occurs with Karina throughout *Vivre sa vie*, for example), the effect is less an illusion-shattering rupture that swiftly puts us in a distanced, critical position than a quite natural event given the basic stylistic parameters Godard establishes and maintains for the film's duration.[23]

Godard's particular freeing up of actors from the structures of classical cinema, and his extensive combination (not to say synthesis) of research and spectacle, make for highly inventive scenes of coupling and conversation, the implications of which linger in Godard's work and, I believe, eventually shade into his collaborations with Miéville. In his New Wave period there are two kinds of scenes, with shared conceptual investments, that I want to stress so as to make this line of development apparent: enactments of love that take place primarily through a mannered "body language" of gesture; and scenes in which the difficulty of communication is a central subject of an interaction that points up the limits of both verbal expression and visual representation.

Performance gestures in Godard's work (early, middle, and late) serve a number of intricate functions from indication of mood and rhythm to evidence of routine activity, from direct citation (Belmondo aping Bogart) to implied citation (Maruschka Detmers, in *Prénom Carmen* [1983] as the title character, alluringly rearing her head and flailing hair into a close-up, echoing Rita Hayworth's introduction in *Gilda* [Charles Vidor, 1946] and adding to the film's links between the seductresses of film noir and Bizet's opera). There are passages in Godard's early features where tender, intimate gestures between a couple mark a realm of potential understanding, passages more or less abstracted, in terms of the *mise en scène*, from the surrounding segments of the film. The most conspicuous and the most stirring of these scenes happens in *Alphaville* (1965), when Caution and Natacha, at a fleeting, nocturnal remove from the dehumanizing clutches of Alpha 60, together enact a definition of "love" – a forbidden word in the city – after reading aloud sections of Paul Éluard's *Capitale de la douleur* (the scene plays as if this is the source of their recitation, but their lines are collaged from multiple Éluard poems[24]). Caution and Natacha, filmed at close range in gently flashing and modulating light, strike measured, entranced poses, dance in a tight circle, look back at the camera, gesture in arcing patterns, and caress one another's faces. The music that envelops them is a soft ensemble of strings allowed to go on uninterrupted (as opposed to the strident horns that flare up in fragments elsewhere in the film), and as the scene unfolds, we hear Natacha's voiceover reciting (and collaging) more verses by Éluard, the changed tone and cadence of her voice attesting to the impact of the exchange. "Increasingly," she recites, "I see the human form as a lover's dialogue."

Figures 65-72. *Alphaville* **(Godard, 1965)**

Surreally detached from the daytime events around it (police officers arriving at Caution's hotel and then, after this interlude, barging into his room), the scene has as its basic impetus the "lyric illumination" of Natacha, to use Chris Darke's apt phrase.[25] The elements at work in this reduced, highly-controlled experiment conspire to bring about a transformation, or, to put it better, to awaken Natacha, and the viewer, to the potential for such change. However sectioned-off the scene feels, it's important to observe the sense in which this "lover's dialogue" emerges from, and responds to, a process of questioning. Godard prepares for this gestural interlude in the preceding moments. As Caution puts several questions to Natacha concerning her place of birth, her knowledge of words, the two performers go through many permutations of being physically coupled in the scene, of sharing the frame or otherwise being connected by the camera movement and cutting (which deploys shot-countershot merely to estrange it with delayed reversals and jarring shifts in scale and angle), and the general manner of Caution's inquiry stands in implicit counterpoint to the unfeeling interrogation methods of Alpha 60. As with the apartment scene in *Le Mépris*, we're made keenly to sense the importance not just of the bodies but the spatial interval between them – now contracting, now expanding. What sets the "love scene" in motion, beyond Natacha's question as to the definition of love, are two caresses of her face and shoulder, administered by Caution as he encircles and follows her.

The interlude, then, advances their dialogue and its permutational logic in a more condensed expressive fashion, through the stylized gestures and the lighting schemes that accent them. As we can see in the above stills, their caresses reach and reciprocate across the charged space between them (a space declared as charged, in the shot of them facing each other, by the lit-up, futuristic jukebox that spans them). Their movements and poses

are choreographed into tight formal patterns and rhyming variations: she loops one open hand around one side of his neck (just her left eye visible), then her other hand around the other side (just her right eye visible); as they spin around, her face peers over his shoulder (the light dimmed), then his face peers over hers (the light intensified); as they gaze at the camera in a two-shot, the lighting changes its focus between her side and his side, making for a simple, but stunning, alternation without cutting. These measures constitute a search for a poetic "body language" after prosaic speech fails to answer to Natacha's question. Notice how the intoned verses coalesce with and enhance what we see enacted: "Your voice, your eyes, your hands, your lips. Our silences, our words … Light that goes, light that returns … Because I love you, everything moves …"

While the main dramatic purpose of the scene is to bring Caution, a hardboiled Orpheus, closer to saving his Eurydice from her oppressed life in the technocratic state (and Orphic rescue is one of Godard's favorite motifs), it's imperative that we grasp the forces enabling Natacha's not-yet-complete awakening to love as belonging, in a primal sense, to the film medium. The scene's poetic interplay of light and darkness works, like the overall aesthetic design of the film, to acknowledge the material conditions that allow each image to shimmer on the screen, but more than a reflexive gambit intent on "laying bare" what illusionist drama veils over, this serves to embroil and implicate cinema as a *catalyst* in the scene, as that which not only gives material form to the "lover's dialogue" but has a direct hand in the change that emerges. Light, shadow, gesture, music, rhythm, voice: these figure as elemental forces of coupling that speak to the mysterious capability of cinema to transform, through contact, human relations. It isn't just the heroic deeds of

Caution armed with lyric verse but the power of cinema that moves Natacha from a state of deadened, instrumentalized rationality into the orbit of a loving, bodily felt interaction.

"I see the human form as a lover's dialogue": this remark could go some way to define an ongoing ambition in Godard's work and its persistent exploration of relations between corporeal movement and cinematic form (right up to his montage in *Histoire(s) du cinéma*). In his early films, which for the moment most concern us, another pertinent case of gestural expression vis-à-vis the problem of dialogue occurs in *Une femme mariée* (1964), a film that begins, in fact, with the truncated, stylized gestures of a couple shown in a rather abstract manner. After the opening credits, and text indicating the film's whole title, "Fragments of a Film Shot in 1964 … in Black and White," a woman's hand, palm-down, with a wedding band on the ring finger, slides upward, little by little, into a blank white frame and is joined seconds later by a man's hand that angles in from the right and clasps her wrist. A dramatic context arises in spare increments as female and male voices mapped onto these limbs continue a conversation already under way. "I don't know," she says. To which he responds, as if re-phrasing an earlier question, "You don't know if you love me?" She asks in return, "Why do you talk all the time?" Godard's film, announcing itself as an assemblage of fragments, begins by singling out for emphasis the components of bodily gesture, voice, and language that generate, like small-form "cells" building into larger, variant structures,[26] an examination to follow into male-female relationships. And the first spoken exchange introduces a problem of knowing as bound to loving – knowing just what it means to love, what loving looks and feels like.

Eventually, through a series of one-shot tableaux isolating parts of the woman's nude figure (face, back, legs, stomach) as her lover caresses her mostly from off-screen,

we come to know that we're observing an illicit affair between Charlotte (Macha Méril) and Robert (Bernard Noël), whom, we later learn, is an actor by profession. The precise and studious framing by the motionless camera militates against *conventional* eroticism, and the performances give muted signs of sexual desire. That said, the scene does posses a certain sensuality and pronounced tenderness, amplified by the Beethoven string quartet (Op. 59/III, second movement) we hear sampled in spurts. If this abstract presentation of intimate gestures, repeated with subtle variation in the love-making scene with Charlotte and her husband, looks ahead to the interlude in *Alphaville*, here there is no intimation of a transformative energy at work. The steady, mutual caresses run up against the body as a barrier, an opaque surface that can be traced but neither trespassed nor absorbed. Robert speaks directly to this obstructive aspect: "When you come down to it, even in love you can't go very far … You kiss, you caress, but you're still on the outside. It's like a house you can't enter." The body, the scene implies, withstands both the camera's anatomical gaze and the lovers' exchange of mobile, searching touches. Godard playfully returns to this desire to "go further" in a scene where Charlotte visits a doctor's office and studies a book with pop-up illustrations of human anatomy – she opens panels into a figure's torso and goes as far the small intestines but remains frustratingly on the outside, her attempt to reach and posses an interior essence foiled.[27]

Charlotte and Robert (first love scene)

Charlotte and Robert (second love scene)

Charlotte and Pierre, her husband

Figures 73-86. *Une femme mariée* **(Godard, 1964)**

In *Une femme mariée*, the encounter between Godard's lens and the depthless, impassable bodies it observes sets up an elaborate framework within which the film's core elements and concerns interact, shade into one another, without being reconciled. First, there are, as always, citations of other films. Here Godard's love scenes visually call to mind Bresson (in particular *Pickpocket*, 1959), Resnais (the opening embrace in *Hiroshima mon amour,* 1959), and, as Bill Krohn has keenly noted, Marcel L'Herbier's *L'Argent* (1928).[28] The truncated framing also appropriates and critiques the fetishistic brassiere advertisements that have such an immediate bearing on Charlotte's behavior: the mannered aspect of the love-making feels, in part, the result of her attempt to "live" the amorous gestures and postures she has pored over in popular magazines, to immerse herself in clichéd images addressed to voyeuristic desire. Charlotte's adoption of such an image, of such a performance, is one of multiple ways in which corporeal presence in the film is constantly renegotiated through shifts and circulations that refuse, at all points, to yield what fiction films typically prime us to see – a singular, consistently characterized being on which determinations of plot are written. To borrow the terms of Stephen Heath, who notes the radical potential of Godard's films in this respect, the separate dimensions through which the body is personified and made present in cinema – "agent," "character,"

"person," "image," "figure" – do not combine to form a single entity but remain caught in an unsettled process, each construct in irresolvable tension with the others.[29]

What most vigorously prevents a melded, uniform bodily presence in *Une femme mariée* are the explicit intrusions of documentary procedures into the fiction. While such intrusions abound in Godard's cinema from *À bout de souffle* on, here they obtain a force that overrides the fictive context entirely. (The film forms a trilogy of sorts with *Vivre sa vie* and *Masculin féminin*, all three having a strong sociological component that presages the "sociological essay" of *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle*, 1967.) On multiple occasions the characters take part in vérité-style interviews and monologues that conjure up Rouch and Morin's *Chronique d'un été* (1961). For instance, in an after-dinner discussion at the home of Charlotte and her husband Pierre (Philippe Leroy), the married couple and their guest, Roger Leenhardt, the film critic and filmmaker playing himself, take turns holding forth about subjects divided by intertitles: Pierre speaks on the importance of "memory," Charlotte on "the present," Leenhardt on "intelligence." Each monologue is a long-held close-up fleetingly interspersed with countershot reactions, and the speakers all waver at an ill-defined border between actor and character, now saying what seems a scripted line, now talking in a plainly spontaneous fashion, in response to questions we don't hear (it is quite likely that Godard is asking them questions and not including his voice in the final edit, this being one of his ways of interacting with the performers in the midst of a scene while it is filmed). Leenhardt's speech, in particular, troubles the pretense of theatricality: defining intelligence as the temperate embrace of paradox and, by extension, openness to compromise between bold positions "for" and "against" whatever is at issue, his segment seems extracted from an intellectual *exposition d'entretien* on television.

It's this intrusion of documentary that puts the scenes of intimate gesturing into direct contact with the more general problem of dialogue. In the final scene of the film – the second clandestine meeting between Charlotte and Robert, which unfolds in a hotel room near the Orly airport as Robert awaits a flight to Marseilles, where he will act in a stage production of Racine's *Bérénice* (1670) – the main subject is the uncertain relation between performance and sincere affection, "theater and love," as an intertitle announces after a series of more amorous tableaux, this time with Charlotte and Robert both silently mouthing "I love you" under the Beethoven quartet. Their exchange of caresses leads to a segment in which Charlotte interviews Robert as to the differences between acting in life and acting in theater. Here again – and more fittingly given the topic – the line separating actor and character is indistinctly drawn. The tone of Méril's voice from out of frame and the intelligence of her questioning are very much out of keeping with the characterization of Charlotte as unreflective and frivolous (an image that is nonetheless still present in the interview, in the few "reaction shots" we are shown of her not seeming to pay attention to Robert's responses, her eyes glazed over). Her questions – "What is an actor?" "Are you defending a position at the moment?" "How do you know the difference between life and acting?" "In the theater, do you have a feeling that you exist? Or are you just a machine"? – slyly nudge Robert into confusion, as his common-sense logic ceases to be adequate. As Marcia Landy has pointed out, Charlotte, as in a Socratic dialogue, plays the *eiron* to Robert's *alazon*.[30] Her questions, ostensibly brought on by ignorance, expose the weak reasoning behind his initially confident views – and Robert, we should note, also seems to be commenting out of character, as Bernard Noël, an actor in Godard's film urged to speak off-the-cuff about the nature of acting. Both amused and perturbed as he struggles

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to uphold his position that in life he speaks his own words whereas in the theater he acts

out a script, Noël is abruptly wrenched back into the role of Robert when he reacts to her

question, "When you make love to me, for example, is it theater for you?" Protesting too

much, he assures her that love and theater are different activities entirely. Her questions

then compel him to explain his understanding of love, which he fails to do convincingly,

and the film fades to a black screen as he stammers out, "So love is yourself in relation to

somebody else. In relation to … I don't know …"

This verbal stumbling leads, for the moment, back to stylized love-making, with

talk once more yielding to touch (and music) in the pictured attempt to define love. Part

of the work of this combination of fiction and documentary, as the couple onscreen pass

in and out of characterizations themselves inconsistent with other sections of the film, is

to suggest that the "staged," sculpted gestures Godard shows us can still be inspected for

insights into "actual" love and communication (in the sense that Godard indicates in the

first epigraph of this chapter).[31] Dialogue here functions, even more so than in Godard's

earlier films, not as a stock dramatic device that permits characters to converse and carry

on a narrative but as a dynamic mode of contrast keyed to investigation, a mode in which

the gesturing figure is just as vital a factor as the spoken word, and in which the resources

of the medium are used to seek and discover more so than to stage and represent. In *Une

femme mariée*, this conception of dialogue further puts into question the usual means by

which bodies are constituted and characterized in cinema, and it contributes to Godard's

avoidance of representational clichés of love and sensuality. This final scene concerns a

familiar situation in melodrama: the ineluctable separation of two lovers. Charlotte and

Robert demonstrate their sense of a looming, final break-up in a short segment in which

they read aloud from Racine's *Bérénice*, Robert speaking the part of Titus and Charlotte the part of Bérénice.[32] They do this under the pretext of helping Robert to prepare for his performance in Marseilles, but the borrowed lines from Racine's fiction acknowledge the truth of their situation. As their own words again fail them, the film comes to an end as it began, with two outstretched hands converged against a white bed sheet, except this time their limbs pull away and slide out of frame. His detached voice reports, "It's over, I have to go," then hers replies in like tone, "Yes, it's over."

Une femme mariée raises most boldly a premise that cuts across Godard's early films – namely, that dialogical interaction cannot be taken as a given, as in most fiction films, that it must instead be sought, because neither language nor performance (nor the formal devices that organize them) are geared in with a self-sustaining dramatic system that shores up their significance generally by ensuring, with confidence, their value and coherence within a developing narrative. Godard's early films, allowing for variances in mood and topic, together insist that the basic operations of speech and gesture, language and bodily presence, must be newly configured, and the question of love, the necessity of escaping and critiquing clichés of its representation, makes this task all the more arduous. The problem of dialogue, combined with a distrust of linguistic expression, is broached in a rather direct fashion in the eleventh tableau of *Vivre sa vie*, a sixth and final café scene where Karina as Nana takes part in a discussion with a stranger played by the philosopher of language, Brice Parain (as Godard's titles put it, Nana "unwittingly does philosophy"). Nana worries that her thoughts don't extend freely into speech with her words matching her intended meaning, and Parain – speaking to his interlocutor as extemporaneously as Leenhardt does in *Une femme mariée* – offers his belief that although language involves

error and subtle deception unavoidably, we must attempt to express ourselves in the best words possible, since, after all, we must think to live, and thought is impossible without language.[33] This tableau stands out from the others in two ways: it uses shot-countershot whereas the other café scenes go to extraordinary lengths to eschew the technique, and it presents a dialogical exchange that contrasts sharply with, and gives a moment of respite from, the fatalistic course into which Nana's life as a prostitute has settled. Although the scene cuts together two dissonant modes of performance, and although it is doubtful that Parain's passing references to Plato, Kant, Hegel, and Leibniz make much sense to Nana, the alternations indicate a more reciprocal exchange than Nana experiences in her routine "transactions," of a primarily economic order, with her clients.

Dialogue figures across Godard's New Wave films as something to be striven for, something that emerges once fiction and documentary strategies interact, that depends on gesture as much as verbal language, and that involves a camera-eye that views the bodies before it and the exchanges they enter into from a quasi-scientific standpoint. The couple (and by extension the question of love) is a fundamental relation through which Godard's early films work towards and through this conception of dialogue, whether the purpose is to diagnose its impossibility (*Le Mépris*), to signal its unrealized potential (*Alphaville*), or to investigate whether the most intimate and loving of gestures are, in fact, our own and not repetitions of commercial images (*Une femme mariée*). I have highlighted this aspect of his early films because it continues, in critical ways, into his later work, not quite by a direct and organic succession (this rarely being the case in Godard's oeuvre) but through a loosely convergent series of sketches, exercises, and reflections. I now want to show in the second half of this chapter how this reaching for dialogue, with its attendant concerns

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of love and coupling and research into corporeal movement, returns as an essential facet

of Godard's collaborations with Miéville, and how the *dispositif* of the dialogue serves to

carry out, and orient the viewer to, some of the most important aims of the essayistic style

that Godard and Miéville together put to use.[34]

Where Godard, in his earlier projects, already examines human gestures and the

rudiments of interpersonal exchange – freeing up bodies from conventional structures of

narrative and characterization, and mingling fiction and documentary without dissolving

one into the other – in his collaborations with Miéville, this investigative work becomes

more intense and more consequential. As we'll see, it provides a course of research that

takes Godard first towards the videographic inspection of gesturing bodies within images,

and then, ultimately, as becomes apparent in his late videos, towards a general conception

of cinema as a gestural undertaking, performed by the montagist.

Miéville-Godard

In the last two pages of a biographical "roman-photo" arranged by Alain Bergala

as a preface to the French publication of *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard* in 1985,

Godard himself contributes a montage of sorts. On the verso page are production stills of

his first wife, Karina (in *Bande à part*, 1964); his second wife, Anne Wiazemsky (in *Vent

d'est*, 1970); and Myriem Roussel (in *Prénom Carmen*, 1983). A caption describes these

women, identified with three separate phases of Godard's career, as those who "played a

role in films." On the opposite side is a single photo, a hazy close-up of Miéville with her

hair tumbled around her face and shoulders, her lips slightly parted, the grain and contrast

of the photo adjusted to produce a more painterly portrait. A caption singles her out as the

woman who "played a role in life." That Godard accords a privileged position to Miéville in this gallery of past female collaborators is certain, and if "playing a role in life" is to be separated from (yet juxtaposed with) "playing a role in films," it is because with Miéville Godard has taken part in a relationship in which love and work, creation and analysis, life and cinema exist, quite uniquely, on an artisanal continuum.[35]

Over the past four decades, Godard and Miéville have carried on a partnership whose closest parallel is perhaps that of Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet, which lasted from the early 1960s to Huillet's death in 2006. But with the Straubs the division of labor is somewhat easier to sort out: Straub (who, like Godard, is the public voice of the couple) has long said that he directed the shooting, while Huillet handled the sound recording and editing (though, as we can see in Pedro Costa's engrossing portrait of the couple in their editing suite, *Où gît votre sourire enfoui?* [2001], the most minuscule of decisions are made mutually, if often after serious contestation). Godard and Miéville's partnership has entailed a greater variety of projects, from joint ventures to appearances as themselves or in fictionalized roles to thematic connections between films and videos directed solo. As Godard distinguishes his and Miéville's situation: "The Straubs work in tandem, on the same bicycle, him in front, her behind. We have two bicycles."[36]

Working together, Godard and Miéville continue to explore and develop the two avenues of research I have underscored in Godard's early period: an investment in forms of dialogue, and critical attention to gesture. Their projects throughout the 1970s traverse a number of dialogical situations and intensively "decompose" (Godard's preferred term) corporeal movement with video as an instrument in both the musical and scientific sense of the term, altering speeds and rhythms in a manner that recalls, and asserts the enduring

significance of, the experimental dissection of bodily motion in early cinema from Vertov to the French impressionists of the 1920s.[37] Dialogue and the analysis of gestures go hand in hand manifestly in *France/tour/détour/deux/enfants* (1978). Their video series, made for French television, integrates into each of its twenty-six episodes a segment in which Godard, in the role of a reporter (whom we hear but never see), poses challenging, often abstract questions either to a young girl (Camille) or a young boy (Arnaud); the episodes also include segments in which scenes of these children performing routine activities, or of anonymous crowds moving through the cityscape during rush hour, are observed with video stop-starts, the tape speed altered in a way that renders each motion a jagged series of constituent parts (as the sound, recorded live, remains continuous). The interviews and altered-motion exercises are also discussed in brief, interspersed dialogues between Betty and Albert, two television "presenters," as the end titles declare, who figure at some level as fictional stand-ins for Miéville and Godard.

A shared purpose bridges these two features, and gives Godard's abiding concern with the gesturing figure a stronger political inflection. As Michael Witt points out in his analysis of the series, Godard and Miéville, in an enterprise that freely engages trends in post-structuralist thought of the same decade (Foucault, Lyotard, Deleuze, and Guattari), work to reveal the social forces that contain and condition both common knowledge and seemingly natural, quotidian gestures. The episodes, each organized around a heading of juxtaposed terms that half-determine the focus (e.g., "Dark/Chemistry," "Light/Physics," "Disorder/Calculus," "Violence/Grammar"), collectively assert that the daily cycles and routines to which the children are subjected – at home, at school, en route between – are meant to tame them into "docile bodies" (Foucault's term) in the efficient service of the

capitalist economy. "School" comes to denote a carceral environment, less a place of real and beneficial learning than a training ground, the regimentation of which corresponds, in structure and effect, to the regulative schemas of both the urban landscape and television programming. The interviews and altered-motion segments work as interlinked means of interrogation that allow Godard and Miéville to get a critical sense of the extent to which Arnaud and Camille have already submitted to this monotonous process of social control. Godard's questioning draws out their ingrained thoughts regarding properties of time and space, light and dark, day and night, as well as some accepted-as-natural incongruities of capitalism. As Witt remarks of the use of video, Godard and Miéville "set out to conduct a kind of videoscopic ultrasound of the calibrated body, and so to cast into relief the work of the micro-powers in producing human docility-utility."[38]

The series thus introduces into Godard's work, which is now Miéville's work as well, a new visual texture: not "slow motion" in the sense familiar to film but a variable motion, the result of tape-speed alterations that produce staggered and jerky movements that Witt and other critics have accurately termed "saccadic." This videographic process, used as it is to conduct an inquiry, extends Godard's quasi-scientific examination of the gesturing figure, and it inventively summons up a technique of the film medium without quite replicating it. *France/tour/détour*, as part of its sociological critique, and as part of its assault on the practices of television, turns back to cinema of the silent era and draws on one of its technical resources, deemed by such theorists as Vertov, Epstein, Kracauer, and Benjamin to demonstrate the medium's revelatory power. Godard and Miéville's use of saccadic motion reanimates the ambition to sharpen our perception by bringing to light the intricacies of movement that escape our unassisted and habituated glance at the world.

If the technique succeeds in disclosing where gestures fall in line with disciplinary forces and where there remains room for rhythms and interactions off the grid, it also gives form to a corporeal presence that differs markedly from the fluid bodies we see in the films of Vertov or the French impressionists. Decomposed into serial components, performance gestures oscillate unsteadily between laminar and turbulent movement. As Albert asserts in a voiceover passage that accompanies an analysis of Camille "preparing her body for the night" (i.e., undressing before bed), the irregular transitions between speeds lend the impression of "uncovering a secret, then covering it back up." In an interview around the theatrical release of *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* in 1980, Godard, discussing the impact of this process on his subsequent work, contends that its distension of time releases "galaxies" of possibilities embedded in each dissected movement.

> As soon as you halt one image in a movement that consists of twenty-five others (which isn't enormous, it's five times the number of fingers on your hand, so something you can still conceive of), you notice that in a shot you have filmed, depending on how you freeze it, suddenly there are billions of possibilities. All the possible permutations among these twenty-five images represent billions of possibilities. I concluded from this that when you change the rhythms, when you analyze the movements of a woman, even moments as simple as buying a loaf of bread, for instance, you notice that there are loads of different worlds inside the woman's movement, whereas the use of slow motion with the boy was much less interesting. We'd stop the image, and between each image was always the same directing line. But with the little girl, even when she was doing extremely banal things, you'd go suddenly from profound anguish to joy a split second later. They were real monsters … And in my guise as a scientist who knows certain theories, I had the impression that they were particles [*corpuscules*] and different worlds, galaxies that were different each time, and between which you could travel via a series of explosions.[39]

There is much to deduce and extrapolate from this comment. The phrase "twenty-five images" refers not to discrete takes or contiguous shots but to a much shorter stretch of recorded material – a split second, in fact, that plays back in twenty-five video frames. Godard and Miéville discover, in the editing room, "worlds" both latent in and extending

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beyond the movements captured. Describing these frames as "images" suggests a kind of infinitesimal montage within a single take, one spotted on the screen, and one that renders the human figure a complex of shifting "particles" and "explosions," as Godard puts it. In this corporeal presence resides a working tension between what the process discloses and what it creates, *sculpts*. "They were real monsters," Godard states, and his remark carries with it an interesting slippage. Throughout *France/tour/détour* the fully disciplined adults are described as "monsters" going about their daily routines. Yet Godard's statement uses the term rather curiously to indicate how within the decomposed gesture, a diverse range of emotions are crossed and different worlds are opened up to the observer step-frame by step-frame. The speed alterations produce "monsters" that are not the cadential automata under critique in the series, but neither are their contortions consistent with what our eyes regard as "natural" and "human." Altered-motion in the hands of Miéville and Godard is not just a tool to show and inspect the minutiae of actions but a rhythmic, textural device as much poetic as scientific. The stop-start segments, as many critics have noted, visually bring to mind, more readily than the slow motion of the avant-garde cinemas of the1920s, the chronophotographic studies of Marey. But the work on speed and movement carried out by Godard and Miéville does not avow a positivist and mechanist belief in objective quantification (in fact Marey's research can be viewed as inscribed within the history of social control of the body that *France/tour/détour* rails against).[40] The analyzed gestures in *France/tour/détour*, unlike those in Marey's animated images, are presented unevenly and divisibly. The pauses and restarts, the changes in speed, have irregular distributions so that each succeeding step-frame is released from the purpose of distilling the essence of one sweeping, continuous motion and can instead hold out the promise of a different

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trajectory, of a surprising incipience that might appear "monstrously" out of place in the recorded movement. As Albert comments over the first use of the procedure in the series, the image of Camille preparing for bed, "The beginning of a story [*histoire*], or the story [*histoire*] of a beginning . . . Slowing down. Decomposing."

Godard and Miéville's work on speed and movement also gives the impression of an image that is suddenly arrested and tinkered with *now* – as though they are showing us the research process itself and not its mulled-over outcome. If their use of altered-motion estranges the gesturing figure to enhance our seeing, it also makes strikingly evident *their* gestures as composers and decomposers of what we're given to inspect. In his later video projects such as *Grandeur et décadence d'un petit commerce de cinéma* (1986), *On s'est tous défilé* (1987), and *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988-1998), Godard's shaping of gestures becomes increasingly virtuosic: he adds reverse motion to his palette of techniques, while ramping speeds and generating videographic bodies that have a marionette-like plasticity (and broadening his range of citations on this score to include Cocteau and Maya Deren). Already, though, in *France/tour/détour* we can discern a basic working relation between the gesturing figures onscreen and the formal operations (also "gestural") that *manipulate* them and enable them to enter into dexterous and musical combinations.

Eventually I will come back to this concept of the gestural that involves both the actions of figures within the work and the operations of agent(s) outside the work. This idea resurfaces as a major dimension in one of Godard and Miéville's later video essays, *The Old Place* (1999), and, as I will argue, it has implications that take us to the crux of Godard's affinities for the essay form. For the moment, though, I want to discuss how his video experiments with Miéville light a path for his "return to cinema," and how his films

of the 1980s revisit and enlarge on the concerns of love, coupling, and dialogue that were already salient features of his New Wave films. This circling back on Godard's part is not a straightforward continuation; it involves revision, especially with respect to matters of sexual difference. And the ways in which his late films treat these abiding issues are not restricted to his film production but have an intimate bearing on his video projects made either alone or with Miéville in a more *patently* essayistic register. In fact, this reflection on the couple, and the associated problems of love and dialogue, functions as a circuit of work between his film and video practices, which develop along parallel tracks in his late phase, the discoveries of one mode informing the experiments of the other.

Touching on the Miraculous

As Philippe Dubois has intriguingly put it, Godard's rigorous adoption of video amounts less to a period than a perennial "**state**, as in a state of matter … It's a way of breathing through images, of being intimately joined with them … It's video as *always there*, within reach of hand and eye, as a way of reflecting (on) cinema, in all its forms."[41] In relation to Godard's film production video becomes, by the 1980s, a means of seeing the film *before* shooting it, of thinking out and through a "script," an audiovisual sketch from which the film to be made will take its cues. Hence the purpose of the modest video "scenarios," as Godard calls them, that precede *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* and *Je vous salue, Marie* (1985), and the more ostentatious one that comes after and accompanies, yet takes a preparatory relation to, *Passion*. In his earlier projects with Miéville, video had made feasible forms of montage and analysis to contend with television from within, and their experiments with speed and motion had led them to draw on neglected cinematic forms

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associated with the silent era. Now, while retaining its investigative aspect, video is used to engender – and to envision in a resolutely provisional form – a whole dramatic field of interrelations among characters, motifs, and concepts. In *Scénario de 'Sauve qui peut (la vie)'* (1979), Godard presents, and vocally describes, video cross-fades, superimpositions, and altered motion as devices through which, before pressing on to make a film, one can "see if there is something to see," and he proceeds to do this using stills of the actors and footage shot around Rolle, his spoken thoughts (presented as) spontaneous.

That Godard and Miéville's videographic research carries over into *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, whose opening credits list Godard as "composer" and both Miéville and Godard as editors, is most conspicuous in the distinctive "slow motion" segments that punctuate the film. On more than a dozen occasions, shots abruptly change tempo mid-duration and movements take on a staggered shape and rhythm – an effect achieved via step-printing that approximates the look of the altered-motion in *France/tour/détour*. In *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, no *single* theme governs the use of this technique, but one of its functions is to show (or extrude) an ambivalence of attitude in the physical interactions between two of the primary characters, Paul Godard and Denise Rimbaud, a couple who have decided to separate by the film's beginning (though as Denise reveals to her friend Michel, "It's over but no one seems to notice, not even me"). In one such use of slowed motion where this ambivalence comes out, Paul leaps across a kitchen table and throws Denise to the floor. The event is shown in somewhat steadier increments of action than other instances of the device (e.g., Denise caught in syncopated stops and continuations as she rides her bicycle through the countryside), and though Paul's outburst is, without question, an act of violent aggression, there are stages in which their "embrace" implies

love more manifestly than hostility; and once they reach the floor and continue to thrash about (albeit in a way that makes no attempt to represent a "realistic" struggle), what we see looks more indicative of lovemaking. The equally turbulent electronic musical score that coincides with this action is replayed from an earlier scene at a train station where a woman is slapped (also in step-printed slow motion) because, apparently, she refuses to choose between two men. This association, together with Denise's grimaces over Paul's shoulder, keep intimations of affection in check. Yet the event also complements another earlier slowed moment where Denise and Paul, with more ethereal musical scoring, come together in a fond embrace outside Denise's workplace.

Figures 87-88. *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* **(Godard, 1980)**

"We don't seem able to touch each other without bruising," says Paul to Isabelle

(Isabelle Huppert), who has witnessed his assault on Denise in the kitchen. More than a blurring of intention, Godard and Miéville's work on speed and motion tries to bring into visibility an equivocation between affection and aggression on Paul's part, showing these two attitudes to be inextricable, rather than opposing. It's this continued emphasis on the mysteries and ambiguities of performance gesture that, in part, enables the importance of the couple, and with it, an investigation into sexual difference, to return in Godard's late films. In *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* we again find a distrust of verbal language in expressing and apprehending love, or rather "passion," the exact definition of which is left unsettled as different characters profess their dissatisfaction with the too-casual use of the term by others. Paul doesn't offer a definition – though for him, it seems attached to the prospect of integrating love and work into a constant relation, entailing "a shared activity, not just at night" – but he is quick to dismiss Denise's thoughts on the subject (and to criticize her reasons for leaving him as "just talk"). The slowed embraces don't offer an answer either: what they disclose is a lingering potential for passion, unrealized.

Just as Godard claims that Camille in *France/tour/détour* was appreciably more interesting to study with altered-motion than her male counterpart, Denise's step-printed movements in *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* have a lyrical quality that Paul's, in their burlesque clumsiness, do not. The shots of Denise bicycling, in pauses and restarts against verdant, impressionistic streaks of trees, call to mind the phrases she jots down and reads aloud: "Something in the mind and body arches its back against routine and the void …" There is a sense that her trouble with Paul has not only to do with the definition of passion but with a basic disparity and lack of accordance in their gesturing. Variations on this basic scenario are explored in a number of Godard's films through the 1980s, most forcefully

in *Prénom Carmen*, with Joseph and Carmen colliding into one another and against the walls and surfaces of the space they inhabit (a dynamic Deleuze finds paradigmatic of a modern "cinema of the body"[42]). Here briefly I want to look at another example, one that occurs in *Je vous salue, Marie*, Godard's version of the Annunciation and the Immaculate Conception, which he sets in modern Geneva. The film hinges on the character of Joseph learning how to demonstrate through gesture a certain conception of love. Looking at the film in this light will give us a telling perspective on how Godard's late films rethink his earlier figurations of amorous and sexual matters; and since the film technically forms the second part of a diptych with Miéville's *Le Livre de Marie* (1985), it will also bring to the surface another dimension of creative overlap in his partnership with Miéville.

Though Godard and Miéville claim to have made these two films without an eye to their conjunction, *Le Livre de Marie* and *Je vous salue, Marie* have numerous formal and thematic parallels and Godard insisted that they be exhibited together. When shown jointly the transition between features is quite seamless: a black screen (a device already present in *Le Livre de Marie*) becomes an intertitle that both initiates Godard's film and recurs throughout it, "en ce temps / la" ("at that time"). Dan Morgan has pointed out that this phrase is, in part, a continual reference back to *Le Livre de Marie* that testifies to an intimate bond between the films.[43] Indeed, "at that time," for all its biblical and fable-like tone, is a kind of variation on "ici et ailleurs" ("here and elsewhere") – it suggests the two parts of the diptych share temporal if not diegetic boundaries.

The "Marie" in Miéville's film is not the virgin mother but a clever eleven-year-old girl (Rebecca Hampton) witnessing the breakup of her parents (Aurore Clément and Bruno Cremer), the reasons for which are not spelled out beyond the mother's built-up

resentment over the routinized domestic role in which she has been cast as her husband comes and goes in accordance with his job. In a poignant scene that involves a material reference to one of Godard's early films, Marie sits on the living room floor watching *Le Mépris* on television as her mother, reframed internally by a doorway in the background, repairs the cord to a lamp, and as the father walks back and forth collecting some of his belongings. We can see the monitor at the bottom-left corner of the frame, and Marie is attentively watching the long apartment scene from Godard's 1963 film, in particular a moment where Paul slaps Camille after she insults him. To be exact, we hear the citation before we see it: Paul's voice accompanies a medium shot of Marie's mother, as though his question, "Why don't you want us to go to Capri?" is addressed to her. Stronger than an allusion, the scene from *Le Mépris*, with its ready-made associations with respect to a disintegrating couple unable to establish or maintain a dialogue, is woven tightly into the story world and made to reflect its elemental conflicts. As Marie shifts her gaze between the TV monitor to the domestic scene around her, the citation reinforces her position as a spectator trying to make sense of an opaque dispute between a married couple. The scene also "borrows" a bleak mood, keyed to separation, through the plaintive musical score for *Le Mépris*, which swells on the audio track and, for the moment, merges with the diegesis as grippingly as do the Chopin and Mahler compositions elsewhere in the film.

"At that time," *Je vous salue, Marie* responds to Mieville's drama of embittered separation with one of *miraculous* reconciliation. Godard's film, by a poetic accretion of motifs, threads two strands of action that alternate and intersect: the relationship between Marie and Joseph as they struggle to endure the exceptional situation into which they are thrust; and the relationship between a Czech science professor, exiled for his ideas about

intelligent design, and a female student called Eva with whom he strikes up an adulterous affair. Linking and contrasting these strands (within which the couples form and dissolve and reunite amid triangulations of desire) are concepts of origins, of creation, of the body and the soul, of exterior and interior, all of which motivate the film's sumptuous textures.

"At that time," the miracle of the virgin conception – far from being a contained and distinct happening – is broadly dispersed into sounds and sights of the natural world, gestures of daily living and work (Joseph is a taxi driver, Marie a gas pump attendant); it is manifested, if at all, as a mysterious commingling of forces: sunlight on rippling water, gusts of wind in the grass, spates of birdsong, mutters of thunder, flare-ups and fade-outs of both secular and sacred music, seasonal shifts into winter and spring, a jet soaring over bare tree limbs and powerlines, a relay of spheres linking Marie's stomach and biological rhythms to the sun and the moon. However much the film evokes a supernatural force, to which Marie directly refers – "The hand of God is upon me, and you can't interfere," she tells Joseph – it inscribes the sacred within the profane, the spiritual within the quotidian. And Godard's focus falls not on the miracle of Christ's birth and subsequent acts but on the gradual, awkward, trial-and-error steps towards restoring love (an achievement made to seem equally "miraculous") enacted by and between Joseph and Marie. In the pivotal scene showing this process, Joseph must overcome his doubt and distrust, as well as his sexual frustration, in learning how to say and to demonstrate through a gesture of proper force and direction, "I love you." Sitting on a bed in front of Marie, who is stripped from the waist down, Joseph at first touches her stomach too assertively, too possessively, and this provokes the sudden appearance of Gabriel, who wrestles Joseph to the floor. Trying again, with Marie's vocal guidance ("No … No … Oui"), Joseph starts to gesture rightly,

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which is to say *receptively*, withdrawing his hand from her stomach rather than applying

it. He learns, in spite of his earlier claim that "miracles don't exist," to acknowledge and

accept the mystery of Marie's condition, to live with it, and to approach her body without

sexual intent foremost in mind. "J'taime," he states, now redoing the gesture successfully.

"Oui," Marie affirms as a sudden montage of a Dvořák cello concerto and a Bach toccata

gives emphasis to the couple's reunion. We also see shots of a sky with deep blue clouds

and of wind-rustled fields of flowers, reminding us that this miracle is a cosmic event that

includes but goes beyond the subjectivities of these two characters.
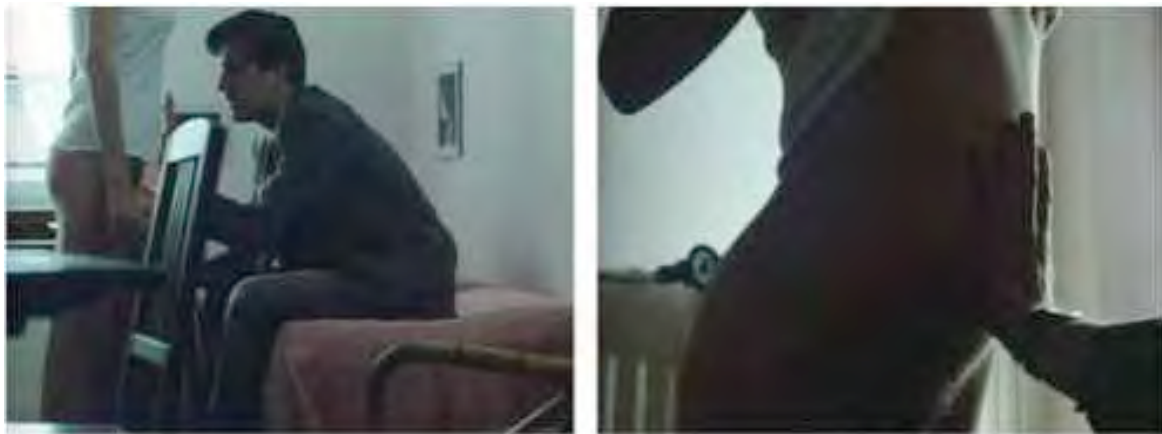
Figures 89-90. *Je vous salue, Marie* **(Godard, 1985)**

Godard arranges and shoots the scene in such a manner as to grant the spectator

sudden visual access to the space where the gesture is discovered. At first, the camera,

placed low, takes what looks to be an inopportune angle: a straight-backed chair in the

foreground interferes with the camera's, and our, vantage of Joseph's motions, and the

chair also impedes the pictorial space between the performers, their bodily interval. But

then, precipitated by Joseph's upward glance at Marie's face, the film cuts to a close-up

(though significantly not a point-of-view shot) of Marie's curved, side-lit stomach, with

Joseph's hand gently entering and leaving the frame. This simple but graded change of

angle, proximity, and scale gives us an intimate, unhindered look at the gesture making

contact: Joseph's physical-and-verbal revelation has as its correlate this close and "clear"

viewpoint shared by the camera and the spectator. It's as if Godard wants the exhilaration

of this brief moment of interconnection to be ours, too.

This miraculous turning point, this ecstatic restitution of human love that Godard

places at the conceptual center of *Je vous salue, Marie* is, beyond its contribution to the

diptych, a reflection on the very possibility of such a decisive moment being brought off

convincingly in modern cinema. This implicit reflection is made explicit when, near the

end of the film, we hear Joseph's off-screen voice invoking the final words of Bresson's

Pickpocket: "Oh Marie, what a strange road I had to take to reach you." Godard's calling

forth of Bresson's film and its notoriously ambiguous ending is richly significant. Despite

the sudden, amorous embrace between Michel and Jeanne on either side of prison bars in

the film's uplifting finale, and despite the intimations of theological ideas of redemption

and providence that Bresson's admirers have often been quick to fall back on, the causes

and effects that bear on the protagonist's "strange path" – vis-à-vis the manual activity of

pickpocketing – remain far from apparent by the film's end. We can't pin down what has

brought Michel to this point of union with Jeanne, nor does the film give us an indication

of the couple's future. As Susan Sontag remarks, "we do not see love lived. The moment

in which it is declared terminates the film."[44] In Godard's film the Bressonian line, while

freighted with associations of grace and conversion, is immediately followed by Marie's

off-screen voice inquiring: "Now what's wrong?" Her question does the work of swiftly

confronting the *aftermath* of transformation. Christ has entered the world by virgin birth;

Marie and Joseph have reconciled by a strange path; where to go from here? The closing

scenes of the film explore the couple's return to convention in all its ordinariness as their child "Junior," who is now twelve years old, leaves home to tend to his heavenly father's business. The ending without a denouement makes a point of reflecting on the difficulties of what Sontag says *Pickpocket* leaves unstaged: "love lived."

Je vous salue, Marie thus stands as a major episode in Godard's thinking about couplehood. The film responds to Miéville's *Le Livre de Marie* and its focus on climactic separation both by interjecting the possibility of miraculous re-coupling and by regarding as inescapable the question of love's sustainability over time, the question of what comes after the altering instant, once its immediate effects have worn off. There is still one more level to Godard's work here that warrants attention before we move on – namely, how it rethinks his earlier treatments of masculine-feminine pairings and, as such, speaks to how his attitude towards the heterosexual couple changes in the Miéville years.

The scene in which Joseph learns a "correct" gesture of love in relation to Marie inscribes two frequent motifs in Godard's late films: the notion that men must discover a manner of loving contact and interaction that is not founded (primarily) on sexual desire; and the privileging of the female figure as a locus for reflection on cinematic possibilities in general. As Laura Mulvey has observed, this latter motif is not a novel development in the late period; Godard, throughout his body of work, has obsessively explored a "gallery of feminine iconographies," in the process framing as analogous the "problem of woman" with that of the cinematic medium: the common term, as Mulvey notes, is the paradoxical interplay of artifice and reality, (outer) appearance and (inner) essence.[45] Godard embarks on this exploration with a theme of deceptive beauty taken – cited – from film noir. With his turn to Marxist politics, the female figure embodies the logic of commodity fetishism,

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projecting a desirable (false) surface caught up in a generalized exchange and circulation

in which (true) origins are continuously masked; and Godard's opposition to this logic is

in parallel to his impulse to "defetishize" the film image, making its production processes

and materials visible.[46] By the 1980s the female body, Mulvey argues, is no longer bound

to Marxist critique. "The tension between surface and secret, the visible and the invisible,

shift from materialist curiosity to a sense of the inevitability of mystery."[47] With *Prénom*

Carmen and *Je vous salue, Marie* – which for Mulvey "polarize femininity into a binary

opposition, the carnal and the spiritual" – there emerges a "complex conflation between

the enigmatic properties of femininity and the mystery of origins, particularly the origins

of creativity, whether the creation of life or the creative processes of art."[48]

Mulvey's use of the term "iconography" suggests that these images of women,

however problematic they at times are (and Godard's films, we should note, have been

disparaged many times for their misogynistic tendencies in both early and late stages[49]),

they are drawn and redrawn – not uncritically – from the cultural imaginary. It's not my

purpose here to defend or explain at length Godard's constructions of sexual identity, as

that would oblige us, at the very least, to examine his reworking of the female nude from

the heritage of European painting, and to consider his and Miéville's critical approach to

pornography. Here I merely want to show how Godard again links the female body with

cinema in general in *Je vous salue, Marie* not to perpetuate a virgin-whore dialectic but to

work towards certain conditions of exchange that fail to arise in the earlier films that look

to discover, rather than take for granted, dialogical interaction.

The concept of struggling to define or constitute love through gesture, through

touch, brings to mind the previous examples we have collected in this chapter: the love

scenes in *Une femme mariée* and *Alphaville*. Where the former film enlists vérité-style questioning to blur the boundary between actor and character and to instigate a reflexive discourse on playacting with regard to love, the latter uses music, lighting, and lyric verse to picture an amorous trance fleetingly off the radar of Alpha 60. In *Je vous salue, Marie*, gesture again rivals speech for significance and has a transformative function, but touch is oriented to a variant pursuit. In a kind of reversal of Caution teaching Natacha, Marie – not simply "representing" chasteness or an enigmatic femininity, but embodying herself the concept of acceptance in the face of mystery – guides Joseph's gestures until together they establish a condition of co-presence in which this acceptance is shared. Though her hands do not also reach across the spatial interval between them there is still a reciprocity of contact and tactile apprehension (her body not being a passive object). The touch that Joseph learns is neither possessive nor penetrating; it is not a caress motivated by lust but a letting go motivated by a shared project of love.

This aesthetics of the miraculous, articulated around the couple, is developed further in Godard's later projects: in *Nouvelle vague* (1990), compulsive iterations of outstretched hands enclasping or calling for help raise the potential of giving what we don't possess, a "miracle of our empty hands"; and in *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, Godard speaks of being able to look, through images, at what we cannot see, a "miracle of our blind eyes." I will take up these concepts at length in the final chapter. For now, I just want to note that they spring from Godard's thinking about the couple, in a stage where his own partnership with Miéville is not simply a circumstance to allude to through the use of surrogates in the fiction but a matter of direct collaboration that informs the films' discourse on love and work and the necessity of combining them, of *striving* to combine

them. These figurations are more than self-reflexive allegories, but they do coincide with Godard making room, in his sound and image practice, for a creative and critical dialogue with a prominent feminine voice.

A Song of Two Humans

As one testament to the symbiosis between Godard's late films and videos, love and dialogue remain at issue in his videographic essays made with Miéville.[50] Their dual effort to arrange and conduct a balanced exchange of ideas is nowhere more evident than in their co-directed 1985 project *Soft and Hard* (or, as the opening titles declare, "A Soft Talk on a Hard Subject between Two Friends," the last term here downplaying any erotic component to their creative and personal relationship). Godard and Miéville, appearing as themselves, take part in a lengthy conversation in their Rolle apartment. How they situate and film themselves might seem, on the surface, unremarkably simple, but there is much to notice in the context of our present concerns. Their dialogue is shot from a single setup for all but the last seconds of the scene. They sit on separate couches whose edges almost touch to form a right angle, Miéville shown on the left, Godard on the right. The camera is static and positioned behind Godard's head and shoulders so that we can't see his face but have a relatively straight-on perspective of Miéville. A white lamp, its shade glowing with a pale orange light, dominates the leftmost portion of the shot and graphically takes up as much room as the two discussants' figures. The lamp isn't needed to light the scene (the natural light streaming in through the windows is ample) but it boldly marks a space of interaction: here too, the interval is as important as the words and gestures passed back and forth. And while the lamp is physically between the couple, the framing discourages

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us from regarding the object as somehow impeding their communication (a cliché of *mise en scène* that, as we saw, Godard stylistically frustrates in *Le Mépris*).

We can discern here, in their self-placement within the frame, a critical shift in relation to Godard and Miéville's previous dialogical setups, in particular those in which Godard himself appears. In their made-for-television series *Six fois deux (Sur et sous la communication)* (1976), Godard faces the camera in interview sequences, a single light source illumines his figure in an ink-black atmosphere, and his interlocutor remains out of frame.[51] In *France/tour/détour*, we hear him asking questions but he does not appear visually. Here, with his back to the camera – a position he repeats with subtle variations in his later video dialogues with Woody Allen (*Meetin' WA*, 1986), Michel Piccoli (*2 x 50 ans de cinéma français*, 1995), and Serge Daney (episodes 2A and 3B in *Histoire(s) du cinéma*)[52] – he physically shares the frame, and his address to Miéville is considerably more open and receptive. No longer a single authorial subject fielding questions from an unseen questioner, he assumes a position conducive to reciprocal exchange – and neither he nor Miéville are emphasized so much as the space between them.

Made for Britain's Channel Four, *Soft and Hard* extends Godard and Miéville's earlier critique of television, though in a gentler vein, and their dialogical self-portrait is expressly meant to oppose and resist the address of television news and its obstruction of genuine, informed communication. In fact, their arrangement with respect to one another and to the camera is designed, in diagrammatic terms, to counterpose the quick inserts of a television newscaster (a monological format) that periodically break up their discussion.

Figures 91-92. *Soft and Hard* (**Godard, Miéville, 1985**)

As we can make out through comparison of these stills, the clearing between Godard and

Miéville, their bodily interval, assumes the same pictorial position within the frame as the

newscaster's frontal figure. Whereas the newscaster, edged to the left to accommodate a

keyed-in picture window, has his back to the image, Godard is edged to the right with his

back to the camera, making room for a balanced exchange. Moreover, in a maneuver that

Godard will use again in *Histoire(s)*, the spatial opening, bordered by the lampshade and

the two conversing figures, becomes a zone where images suddenly materialize via cross-

fades and superimpositions, their graphic contours merging uncannily with those of the

established scene. For instance, as Miéville relates how, as a child, she projected images

onto her bedroom wall by putting a light bulb inside a shoebox and sliding the negatives

of family photographs through an aperture, an image of Marie in a bathtub in *Le Livre de*

Marie slowly comes into view, and Miéville's hand gestures seem to embrace the young

girl's head, which is already touched by the hand of Marie's mother, jutting into the shot.

Figures 93-94. *Soft and Hard* (Godard, Miéville, 1985)

Soft and Hard thus gives us "lampshade moments" of coupling and dialogue that recall the enigmatic lampshade in *Le Mépris*, but here the interval between bodies, rather than being examined with a lateral tracking shot that inscribes an alternation logic despite the absence of shot-countershot, is a place for simultaneous combination.

In this "soft talk" between two filmmakers, which has the mood of a chamber piece – intimate, informal, serene: a mood underscored by the fitful sampling of, once again, a Beethoven string quartet (the *molto adagio* movement of his fifteenth) – voice and gesture are primary dialogical elements. The video commences with Godard's and Miéville's voices overlapping with each other and with the music, as if two instruments contending and conversing. The opening minutes meander between transient glimpses of their daily activities in Rolle – talking on the phone, doing chores, working at a writing desk and at an editing console – while the commentary touches on topics without a clear continuity of reflection.[53] In one particularly significant and humorous passage, Miéville stands ironing a dress in their apartment as Godard enters from the background holding a tennis racket and begins to practice his backhand stroke, jumping into the air. This is the first scene in which both performers appear in the same shot and their respective gestures

are caught and examined with brief pauses in the image while Godard states in voiceover:

> In dreams different directors have a hand. One mixes action and vision, the other contrasts them. To the first, the self and things are identical. To the other, they're just objects. One sprays the eye onto the phenomenon. The other captures the phenomenon. One looks with his eyes shut, the other with his eyes open. On the one hand, a monologue on the inner stage. On the other hand, a dialogue.

We have observed already how the concepts of seeing and vision are constantly stressed in Godard's work, in particular in his later stages. Here, in making a distinction between two kinds of filmmakers who "have their hand in dreams," he singles out, and aligns his and Miéville's project with, a way of looking that catches and studies objects instead of regarding things and people as "identical" (as undifferentiated) within the flow of action. And he connects this way of seeing with one's open eyes to the dialogue form, of which *Soft and Hard* is an example. Fittingly, then, Miéville now speaks as the image dissolves to a still from *Gone with the Wind* (Fleming, 1939), Scarlett and Rhett entwined in a kiss.

> The northern dreams are paler and all the more violent because they make the images explode. When it comes to the image, half a turn in the south is more significant than a movement in the north.

This peculiar exchange of voices and gestures does something common to Godard's late video essays – it impresses a lyrical sense of development even as the spoken content is obscure and the ideas pile up and drift past before we can quite grasp them. How, we are left to ask, does Miéville's statement follow from Godard's? What's this business about northern and southern dreams? What are these tropes of coupling and dialogue working to achieve? (This is precisely the sort of confusing but resonant moment that is too often glossed over when critics "tidy up" Godard's work by summarizing it at a distance.) The pauses are, implicitly, in concert with the kind of vision that Godard's remarks delineate, and yet they seem to be *seeking* a relation between these two figures rather than showing

one already found: we're made to sense the potential of interconnection without seeing it realized. As for Miéville, her response here takes up and modulates Godard's comments on two kinds of directing dreams by making a distinction between northern and southern dreams. A gentle half-turn in the south carries much more significance than the explosive movements in the north – we can thus understand the south, in this curiously nonspecific, territorial formulation, as a counterpart to the inquisitive and sensitive regard that Godard separates (and the north, perhaps, as the action-based Hollywood "dream" as displayed in the *Gone with the Wind* production still, its classically perfect kiss).

As this alternation attests, their dialogue is not structured to argue a neat, cogent thesis. Nor does the balanced focus given to each author translate to a consensus. In the central discussion scene, Godard and Miéville rarely reach an agreement. She assumes a critical stance towards his practice, in particular his treatment of couples. He recalls her criticism that despite his complaints about the lead actors while making *Prénom Carmen, Je vous salue, Marie*, and *Détective* (1985), he hadn't given them "much of a dialogue to work with." Speaking mainly of *Détective*, she suggests that while his craft is unmatched when it comes to orchestrating commotion in public settings, something is missing in his scenes of intimacy between men and women.[54] She says he ought to "go further" in those moments instead of relying on what comes natural to him, instead of deploying the same sort of formal games from one film to the next. Godard responds by saying that he has to see things first (which, he emphasizes, requires discussion among collaborators) and that scripting a dialogue is not his strong suit, whereas he believes it comes to her more easily.

Soft and Hard is a portrait of two contrasting, though not antagonistic, attitudes towards cinema in an era of televisual dominance. Where Godard exudes confidence in

claiming he could make a film with only a pencil and a box of matches, Miéville is less convinced of her creative powers, and she registers concern for a soft, fragile voice that she finds difficult to preserve in audiovisual production. Just as their discussion starts *in media res*, it trails off without reaching a conclusion, fading to black as Godard declares the centrality of projection to cinema, its capacity to enlarge and project the "'I' towards others, towards the world," whereas television, he claims, doesn't project; it reduces and subjugates, *taking in* its spectator as a subject "like the subject of a king." The video then ends with a variation on a shift we have witnessed before in Godard's work – a shift from a scene of conversation to a stylized gestural enactment that continues and culminates the dialogue. In one extended take (with a change of music, now Beethoven's sixteenth string quartet, to mark a slight change in expressive mode) the video camera zooms in bit by bit on a television set on the floor of their apartment, its screen changing as though someone is flipping channels through commercials and various types of programs. After its screen (now almost flush with the video frame) goes black for a moment, it displays the opening of *Le Mépris* – the famous shot of Raoul Coutard and his camera crew tracking alongside a young woman as she reads a script on the abandoned studio grounds of Cinecittà. Then the video camera strays up and away from the television and pans past a window towards a blank white wall, which is swiftly lit up by a projector beam. There, the same fragment from *Le Mépris* is projected (flush with the video frame), and Miéville and Godard both stretch an arm into the shot from the left edge, creating shadows that superimpose onto Godard's earlier film. Godard asks, "Where has it gone, these projects … these projects to grow, to be enlarged into subjects? Where has it gone?" Miéville replies, "It is hard to say," and then he replies in turn, as if processing her words: "Hard to say."

Figures 95-96. *Soft and Hard* (Godard, Miéville, 1985)

The implications of this ending – which, as an elaborate confrontation of media, stages a critical shift from television to film through videotape in a piece to be shown on public television, and which also superimposes two works, from Godard's early and late stages, concerned with mourning the loss of something peculiar to cinema – are too great for us to tackle in detail here. What is most germane to our purposes is that gesture, once again, operates as a key element of dialogue. Together, Godard and Miéville demonstrate a concept that is better shown than verbally discussed: the decline of projection is, in their parlance, "hard to say." Once the fragment from *Le Mépris* disappears (just as Coutard's camera pans towards the audience), their dual performance – given its stark reduction to gesture, music, and voice – echoes (intentionally or not) the compositions that begin and conclude *Une femme mariée*, but here we have a different logic of coupling. The gestures mediate between the light source and its destination: in a shadow effect that owes to their position in relation to the projected light, which hits the wall at an angle rather than from head on, their gestures are not just doubled and enlarged but *extended* towards the center of the *Le Mépris* image. Of equal significance: their silhouettes converge on the "screen" and constitute a new formation, an ensemble of shadows that emanate from solid bodies.

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This is how Godard and Miéville manage to end their tortuous and somewhat contentious dialogue on a climactic, harmonious note, with a couple's embrace.

A Gestural Logic of Images

We have seen in this chapter that performance gesture consistently emerges as a decisive component of dialogue both in Godard's solo projects and in his collaborations with Miéville. Time and again, the gesturing figure operates as not simply one dialogical aspect among others but as a kind of limit concept and activity that, in critical moments, traverses and negotiates other aspects, mediating between tensions such as self and other, interior and exterior, visible and invisible, appearance and essence, action and intention – in short, the major concepts that factor into examinations of dialogical exchange between male-female couples throughout Godard's corpus.

In the course of development we have explored, there is still one more step, one more aspect of gesturality that calls for more focused attention: the sense of gesture that pertains to the work of the montagist. In what remains of this chapter, I want to look at how this level is brought to bear in *The Old Place*, a 1999 video co-directed by Godard and Miéville. We noted in our discussion of their earlier project *France/tour/détour* that their analysis of quotidian gestures within images had the effect of making *their* creative and critical gestures strikingly apparent. *The Old Place* elaborates further this interplay between gesturing figures shown within images and the gestural procedures of montage that thrust them into new ensembles, but in order to grasp this concept of gesturing, and the stakes it carries within Godard and Miéville's use of the essay form, we will have to work our way through a number of obscure citations and through their somewhat cryptic

exchanges in the spoken commentary.

The Old Place – commissioned by the Museum of Modern Art in New York – is subtitled "Small Notes Regarding the Arts / At Fall of the 20th Century." The video is a demandingly dense weave of citations taken from cinema, painting, sculpture, literature, music, and philosophy; its style complements that of *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, but like *Soft and Hard* it has a gentler tone and rhythm and its montage is much less tumultuous. Their own works, made together and separate, are among the citations, and they reprise the "at that time" intertitle from their *Marie* diptych. Here their dialogue is a serene, lyrical duet, an alternation of voices that move through an immense span of topics, and they appear in the video just once, in a superimposition, as a couple sitting behind an odd, wheel-based projector (what looks to be a museum installation), their bodies in heavy shadow except for one eye apiece.[55] The opening titles, over a photo of a woman on a swing exchanging

Figure 97-98. *The Old Place* (Godard, Miéville, 1999)

glances with a man below, situate the "film" as a co-composed "essay." Additional titles announce that their video is organized into "twenty-three exercises / in artistic thinking." Throughout these loose-limbed "exercises," they take up problems of art practice while mounting a defense of figurative art over abstraction, framing artistic thought as an ethics

of attention to quotidian detail, and maintaining that art must constantly square itself with historical reality (a commitment they take Pop to task for breaching).

Given their view of corporeal presence as a site of resistance and experiment, it comes as little surprise that Godard and Miéville should find the deletion of the human figure in modern and contemporary art upsetting, be it in the abstract canvases of Pierre Soulages, or in the installation "reserves" of Christian Boltanski.[56] In fact, the poetics of montage they animate in the video depends on the human figure crucially, not only as a unit of linkage between heterogeneous materials but as an element that opens a *gestural* connection between figures shown within images and the artist showing his or her hand through the act of montage. As with numerous other concepts at issue in *The Old Place*, this sense of gesturality surfaces somewhat obliquely, while Godard and Miéville, in the last stretch of exercises, focus their thinking more acutely around the nature of the image, its structural dynamics and its relationship to history.

In their fourteenth exercise, titled "Logic of Images," Godard and Miéville draw on the ideas of Walter Benjamin to define an image as a constellation, "a point at which the past resonates with the present for a split second," as Godard asserts while onscreen we see (decelerated) the fireworks kiss from *To Catch a Thief* (Hitchcock, 1955). A few seconds later, following shots from the planetarium sky show in *Rebel Without a Cause* (Ray, also 1955), Godard goes on: "Just as stars simultaneously approach and move away from each other driven by the laws of physics, for example, as they form a constellation, so, too, do certain things and thoughts approach each other to form one or more images." Miéville then replies: "So in order to understand what goes on between stars and between images, one must begin by looking at the simple links."

Godard and Miéville are framing a "logic of images" that the ensuing fragments attempt to bear out, working from simple to more and more elaborate connections. This setup is itself rather circuitous, so we need to take close note of its features. The citation of Benjamin's notion of a constellation as the basis of an image both continues a thread of astronomical discourse in the video and lends the "logic" a certain historical character. Constellations are constituted as such *through perception* (the specific patterns we make of them do not exist independently of our observation). Flashes of light, their source long since extinguished, travel across thousands of light-years to reach our immediate present. Benjamin deploys the concept of an astral image – and the perceptual *grasp* it entails – as a means to describe an event in which the past and present fleetingly interpenetrate, *as an image*. And the emergent relationship between "the what-has-been" and "the now" is, for Benjamin, "not temporal in nature but figural (*bildlich*)."[57]

Godard and Miéville take on this principle in idiosyncratic ways. Speaking over languid cross-dissolves between faces in sculptures and paintings made to couple with each other, Godard first mentions constellations in a stream of thoughts concerning self-other relations: "This image that you are, that I am, that Walter Benjamin speaks of . . ." The citations of the Hitchcock and Ray films (both shown with shot orders that deviate from the original) trope on their featuring of "stars": Grace Kelly and Cary Grant in their famous kissing scene; James Dean and Natalie Wood – in separate shots – underneath the catastrophic "burst of gas and fire" projected on the planetarium's dome. These citations, while not "adjacent" in the sequence, comprise an associative montage that bodies forth Godard and Miéville's notion of a constellation. The short-lived shot of Kelly and Grant leaning towards one another, followed by fireworks, functions here as an embodiment of

montage – of separate elements converging to produce a flash. And in the *Rebel Without a Cause* fragment, where the stress falls on spectatorship (but where the explosion is still bound up with a "couple" of stars), the constellation is underscored as a perceptual event. The exercise thus points up the constitutive role of the spectators who do not take in the constellation from the outside but are instead inscribed in the explosive flash they at once witness and, for the time being, "complete." We should also observe that the flash in this formulation has a concrete historical resonance, as the "explosion" in Ray's film is meant to evoke the atomic bomb: the past summoned up in this stretch of Godard and Mieville's exercise is, to put it more precisely, the traumatic past.[58]

Figure 99-100. *The Old Place* **(Godard, Miéville, 1999)**

Already, then, the gesturing figure has an integral role in this logic of images. As Miéville speaks of starting with simple links, the exercise moves from coupling faces to, more explicitly, the cinematic principle of shot-countershot, with an alternation between stills of a white woman playing tennis in the early twentieth century and Venus Williams seemingly approaching the net from the "other" side. This play on "tennis-match" syntax (which undermines its rule of similarity in conventional practice[59]) ramifies into a series of links made on the basis of outstretched hands within and across photos from different

historical contexts, the emphasis progressively shifting from "couples" to groups and also from two- to three-part montage structures (from simple to more complex).

This series takes us to a title and image that, with a brief silencing of the spoken comments and a change of music (to Tomasz Stanko's melancholic "Litania"), interject into the sequence a new sense of gesturing, or acknowledge one that has been operative all along: the "baptism of montage." This title is lettered over a still of a double baptism performed, simultaneously, in a river. With a slow cross-dissolve, we then move to a still of a baptism scene from Pasolini's *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo* (1964).

Figure 101-102. *The Old Place* (**Godard, Miéville, 1999**)

Godard and Miéville are doing something more interesting here than conjoining two stills to make a metaphoric comparison on the principle of baptism. The first still is already an internal enactment of montage, with the two immersed bodies standing in for separate shots and the central body administering the ritual standing in for the montagist. In other words, it provides an *intra*-image complement to what Miéville and Godard are themselves in the midst of doing. The shift in the exercise from astrological to theological motifs is rather abrupt, but it enlarges on the relation already in play between montage and the gesturing pictorial body. In linking montage with baptism, the figural and the gestural intersect as carnal acts. And one effect of the sequence is to confer a gestural

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status – shared with imagistic figuration – onto the constructive labor of montage. The gesturing body, in this way, is posited as a montage unit in two entwined respects, at the interior and exterior of the image-forming process.

The question arises as to what to make of the spiritual association that montage acquires in this passage. What does baptism have to do with the preceding reflections on historical constellations? And why do Godard and Miéville, as "non-believers," affiliate their work, apparently unreservedly, with so specific a religious practice? In Christianity, baptism (from the Greek *bapto* and *baptizo*, meaning "to dip" and "to dye") is a symbolic ordinance of the New Testament that indicates a cleansing, a liberation from sin and thus from the fate of an unredeemed humanity. It is a public affirmation of faith that *initiates* one into a body of believers, a body constituted by the mutual reception of the gift of the Holy Spirit. Godard and Miéville, in their secular use of the concept, invest montage not just with these intimations of cleansing, rebirth, and liberation but also with a capacity to induct those who come into contact with its powers into a heightened form of perceiving the world and its (historical) relations, a way of seeing that the viewer and the montagist may potentially share. Their inclusion of Pasolini's *Il Vangelo* is triply significant on this score. In drawing on Pasolini they declare their own intentions to appropriate a Christian belief for secular, immanent means (the Italian director offering a prime case of such an impulse).[60] Secondly, Pasolini's film, yearning as it does to find within the contemporary world traces of the archaic past, traces figured in its actors and locations (despite the shift from the original *terra sancta* of the Gospel to Calabrian landscapes of equal humility[61]), is intriguingly integrated into the sense of history that marks *The Old Place*, the stress on figural relationships between disparate things and events ("close and distant at the same

time") that are constellated by the act of montage. And thirdly, though the dual baptism seems to take place in the absence of witnesses, the fragment from *Il Vangelo*, with its gathering of onlookers, brings the problem of the audience into the imagistic texture of the sequence. Following this baptismal formulation, there are two main offshoots in the video: first, a series of combinations (achieved with cross-fades, superimpositions, and straight cuts) that link a Western filmmaker examining film strips with an Eastern man sewing Communist flags; a religious icon painting of Mary and Joseph's flight to Egypt with a black-and-white photo of refugees labeled "Kosovo"; a detail of a cave painting (dated "-1700") with a rhyming detail of a modern canvas ("+1910"); second, a series of clips that trope on the act of spectating as Godard's voice bemoans that whereas only 19 people saw the Crucifixion (we see another clip from *Il Vangelo*), 1400 were present at the first performance of *Hamlet* (we see a clip from Olivier's *Hamlet* [1948], the prince seating his mother before "The Mousetrap" begins), and 2.5 billion witnessed, thanks to television, the finals of the World Cup (we see teams taking the pitch and hordes of fans cheering). Here, while exhibiting in a rudimentary and slightly more instructive form the historical montage they jointly embrace in the video, Godard and Miéville regret that this form of seeing is so severely underused. Still endowing montage with spiritual and, more precisely, with messianic properties, they begin the stream of clips regarding contexts of spectatorship with three successive details from Masaccio's 1423 fresco depicting Adam and Eve's expulsion from Eden – first, a tight "two-shot" of them together, coupled, then a single of Adam covering his eyes in shame, then a single of Eve, her head reared back, her eyes closed, her mouth open.[62] Godard uses this painted scene from Genesis often in *Histoire(s) du cinéma* where it figures "the fall" as a tragic turning away from the form of

seeing that cinema alone, through its resources of montage, made possible.

This relation between the gestural and the figural, vis-à-vis the act of montage, is a culminating stage in the series of experiments we have traced in this chapter. Already in his Nouvelle Vague films (if not earlier, in his written criticism), Godard concentrates on the gestures of performers and regards them as pivotal elements of dialogical interaction. In their videos of the late 1970s, he and Miéville inspect and decompose bodily gestures through altered motion, trying to detect social forces of conditioning. In the videographic style that Godard shares with Miéville in *The Old Place* and exhibits individually in other late video projects such as *Histoire(s) du cinéma* and *De l'origine du XXIe siècle* (2000), montage emerges not only as a device for bringing to light historical connections between disparate materials but also as a gestural undertaking. This conception of montage derives its importance from three intersecting features that I wish to highlight: an essayistic sense of doing; an ethical demand according to which the doer is inscribed in the deed; and, not least, a sense of love as a binding force that figures critically in the bringing together both of montage fragments *and* their diligent beholders.

First, the Godardian gesture of montage is drastic – "drastic" not merely because its effects are far-reaching but because it is of the order of *doing*, of performance (from the Greek *dran*). This particular gesture of montage is less a code requiring hermeneutic decipherment than a shaping or structuring that searches for connections and maintains an inceptive and often a provisional character.[63] Mutely expressive, this gesture of montage evinces an attitude towards what it exhibits, an attitude of seeking, checking, *looking in to* what research has turned up. Godard and Miéville's sentiment of presentation in *The*

Old Place is not "here are two things juxtaposed to produce a revealingly robust image," but instead "what if we put these fragments together, and what if we do so like *this*, now like *this*?" Of course, the affiliation of gesture and figure through montage is not without precedent in the history of cinema. In Sergei Eisenstein's theories and films, to take one noteworthy example, we find a strong link between "gesture" and "shot": both are units of montage with rhythmic, "explosive" capacities (the gesture within compositions, the shot between them).[64] But whereas for Eisenstein the basis for this affiliation is a mutual expression and reinforcement of a global, synthetic unity, an overall theme that saturates each partial element, for Godard and Miéville there is no guiding logic of *pars pro toto* to assure that the gestures in and of montage will, in fact, meaningfully cohere and evoke an organizing whole in the mind of the spectator.[65] In his *Scénario du film Passion* (1982), a portrait of himself at work, Godard – while sitting in front of a screen and experimenting with video cross-fades and superimpositions – describes montage as "looking for gestures and movements that look for themselves." While Godard suggests that *some* elements of montage come together as if of their own accord (as if the montagist has drawn out their latent impulse to converge), it's clear from his demonstration that the process of forming such resonances is inquisitive and exploratory. This essaying of gestures is a perceptual adventure in which there are bound to be gaps and breakdowns in synthetic "movements" of material and thought: the process is *errant* and does not rule out the prospect of erring.

Second, there are ethical concerns involved in this Godardian gesture of montage. No matter how provisional its nature or rough its articulation, this gesture implicates a doer in the deed, in what is made *manifest*. This issue comes into play in *The Old Place* when, just moments after the baptism passage, the intertitle "to think with one's hands"

introduces a gradual cross-fade between stills of Conrad Veidt in *Orlacs Hände* (Robert

Wiene, 1924) and Glenn Gould playing Bach's *Goldberg Variations*. The image consists
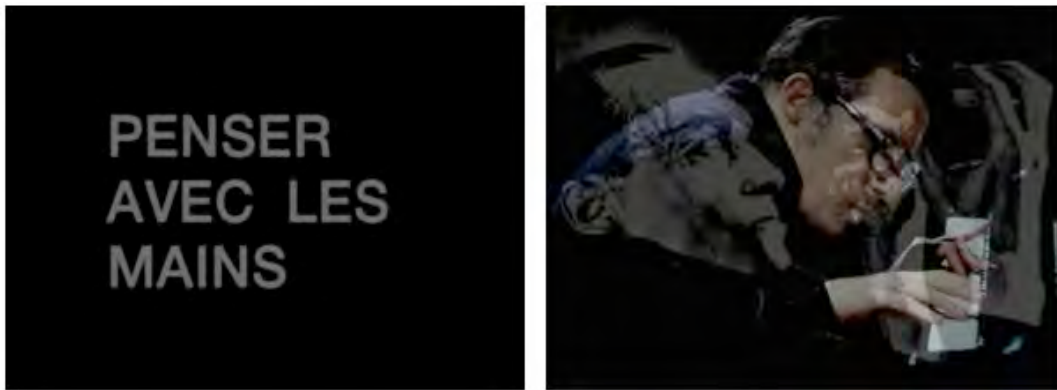
Figure 103-104. *The Old Place* **(Godard, Miéville, 1999)**

of citations and motifs that Godard uses elsewhere in his late work. "To think with one's

hands" is the title of a 1936 essay by Denis de Rougemont, cited at length in the next-to-

last episode of *Histoire(s)*, that responds to the rise of fascism by calling for friendship

and a populist politics founded on creative thought extended into action. Thinking with

the hands becomes, in Godard's thought, a shorthand for montage and its implicit (and

urgent) charge of public responsibility. Within this same gestural conception, however,

montage is inhabited by the potential horror of the hands and mind working at variance.

In *Orlacs Hände* a concert pianist worries, after receiving an emergency hand transplant,

that his hands are possessed of cruel, possibly murderous intent. In its convergence with

Gould (like Orlac eyeing his hands) at the piano, this citation suggests that montage is a

violent and potentially injurious enterprise: the delicate handiwork that selects, samples,

composes, plays, modifies, and "baptizes" is also capable of doing serious harm, perhaps

without the montagist knowing it or intending such an outcome.[66]

Finally, while this gestural view of montage necessarily embroils the doer in the

doing, it also gears in with the inventive forms of coupling and dialogue we have traced

in Godard's body of work. In his late videos, there continues to be an important stylistic

connection between what the bodies of couples do within and between images and what

Godard does with images as bodies (despite the fact he is handling materials that are, for

the most part, not of his making) – the scenes of coupling adapted from *To Catch a Thief*

and *Rebel Without a Cause* to bear out a "logic of images" in *The Old Place* are just two

instances among several. In *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, the lover's embrace works at pivotal

points as an intra-image complement to the poetics of montage that animates the series.

There is no more instructive example than the citation of *A Duel in the Sun* (King Vidor,

1946) used in 1B. Godard cites the final scene in which lovers, played by Jennifer Jones

and Gregory Peck, embrace in the last seconds before their death (after having shot and

mortally wounded one another). While Jones writhes across the rocky terrain, struggling

towards Peck, intertitles state that "the image / will come / oh! time / of the resurrection."

Figure 105-106. *Histoire(s) du cinéma* **(Godard, 1988-98)**

In the context of the episode, the citation testifies, in melodramatic fashion, to Godard's

voiceover remarks concerning the "grand stories" of sex and death that hold sway in the

popular cinema. At another, equally significant level, it presents a difficult-to-accomplish

and momentary convergence of bodies, with the titles marking the desperation enacted by

Jones as a yearning ("oh! time") for an image to arise. Once the lovers converge, Godard

offers an intertitle, "amore" (its "e" lowered to line by itself so that "amor" rhymes with "la mort," uttered in his voiceover), then he returns to a two-shot of Jones caressing and kissing Peck's face. He severely adjusts the speed, slowing down and decomposing the affectionate gesture into increments, imbuing it with a new feeling and rhythm that suits its new musical accompaniment (the opening violin score of Hitchcock's *Psycho* [1960]).

A recent short video of Godard's is composed mainly around a lover's embrace, which he again shapes and intensifies with stop-starts. *Une catastrophe*, which he made especially for the 2008 Viennale, begins with sounds of tennis players exchanging shots that accompany a fragment of the Odessa steps massacre from *Bronyenosyets Potyemkin* (Eisenstein, 1925). Then, after heavily treated archival footage of combat (scenes reused from the "Hell" section of *Notre musique* [2004]), we see a fragment from *Menschen am Sonntag* (Curt and Robert Siodmak, Ulmer, Zinnemann, 1930): a young couple caressing each other in shot-countershot alternations (prefigured by the tennis match) while on the soundtrack a piano piece from Schumann's *Kinderszenen* (1838) plays and an aged male voice (André S. Labarthe) recites verses in Low German concerning children who sneak out at night. All the while staggered intertitles report: "a catastrophe / is the first / strophe of a poem / love." Here again Godard reworks a couple embracing to figure montage as a

Figures 107-108. *Une catastrophe* **(Godard, 2008)**

coupling of bodies in which love, in the midst of death and calamity, is the binding force.

Even as it relies on a formalized play of gesturing bodies, this relation between montage and love isn't purely formal. The *Duel in the Sun* clip in *Histoire(s)* is directly preceded by a still of the couple observing a projected spectacle in *Fängelse* (Bergman, 1949). While this still, at one level, refers to Godard and Miéville, it also more generally evokes the constitutive role of the spectators who – like those in the Bergman film – are momentarily brought together by an act of seeing (a condition we saw obliquely figured in *The Old Place*). Indeed it is through the conceptual link between gestures of montage and gestures of love that Godard most boldly puts forward a feature of his compositional practice: that an *image*, in the robust sense, is neither simply a matter of formal affinities nor a private, individual sighting; it requires that *at least two* viewers share the perception and the belief that something is resonantly brought to light.

Counting the audience in this formulation presents a question: what *kind* of love binds the image? Since Godard surely doesn't require the spectators "coupled" in their perceptual task to be romantically involved, what happens to the erotic component that marks these sampled love scenes in their original contexts? In fact, this is a question we could ask of Godard's late work in general. What becomes of the eroticism glimpsed in different modes in his earlier work – the "mad love" and moonlit sex scene of *Pierrot le fou*, or the measured but sensual caresses of *Une femme mariée*? Even the lyrical trance of *Alphaville* is tinged with a sensuality that seems absent from the late films and videos, where the erotic – if not ignored altogether or critiqued as (badly made) pornography or sublimated into luxuriant sound-and-image textures – typically serves as an obstacle for the characters to overcome in their relationships. With *Éloge de l'amour* (2001), Godard

ostensibly devotes an entire project to the topic of love, but given that depictions of love are all but missing from the film, it is hard to know exactly what is meant to be "praised."

What we find in Godard's late work – and his notions of gesture and montage are no exception – is an emphasis on love not as *eros* but rather as *philia*, for which the most appropriate translation is "friendship." His soft talk with Miéville is declared in recurring intertitles as a dialogue between two "friends."[67] At the end of chapter 3B in *Histoire(s)*, when a young woman recalls the names of some Nouvelle Vague filmmakers (it is not a typical roster: "Becker, Rossellini, Melville, Franju, Demy, Truffaut"),[68] Godard replies soulfully, "Yes, they were my friends." In a similar mood, Godard ends his recent tribute to Eric Rohmer, made in the wake of Rohmer's death, with a citation of the final lines of Flaubert's novel *L'Éducation sentimentale*, an exchange between close friends who agree upon recounting a shared past, "That was the happiest time we ever had."

With the emphasis placed on *philia* over and above *eros*, Godard highlights as crucial for his work and its substantial repertoire of encounters, exchanges, ensembles, and interpersonal gestures something that is much less common to erotic love – namely the condition of reciprocity. While erotic love exists (and even thrives) where all manner of asymmetries come between those involved, friendship is nothing if not reciprocal: the special "concord" and "con-sentiment" between *philoi* emerge only where attitudes, gifts, and services are returned in equal measure.[69] By regarding *philia* as the binding force of the multi-part images in his late work, Godard in turn suggests that the relations between montage fragments, *as well as* between their diligent viewers, partake of a reciprocity in those special, transient moments in which a revelatory image does come into being and is received as such – hence the double significance of the recurring *Fängelse* citation, which

Fig. 109. *Histoire(s) du cinéma* **(Godard, 1988-98)**   **Fig. 110.** *The Old Place* **(Godard, Miéville, 1999)**

both couples with surrounding fragments and inscribes a coupling of film viewers. While

this sense of connectedness runs the risk of a treacherous formalism rooted in consensus,

it's important to remember that such "affiliations" are not assured by the methods and the

techniques Godard deploys. The reciprocal convergences in question are (like friendships

between genuine *philoi*) quite rare and difficult to establish – so rare, in fact, that Godard

describes them in terms of the miraculous. The gestures in and of his late videographic

montage essay this difficulty, taking little for granted and addressing spectators who, far

from being absorbed into a rhythmic formal pattern, must perform the strenuous task of

both detecting *whether* Godard has seen something and working *constructively* within the

gaps and the shortfalls in the material structures he offers; sharing in the work of montage

puts this responsibility firmly in our hands.

Notes

[1] Godard, *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard, tome 1: 1950-1984*, ed. Alain Bergala (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1998), 508. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

[2] Godard, "The Carrots are Cooked," interview by Gideon Bachman, in *Jean-Luc Godard: Interviews*, ed. David Sterritt (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), 132.

[3] Godard, "A Long Story," interview by Jacques Rancière and Charles Tesson, in *Jean-Luc Godard: The Future(s) of Film: Three Interviews 2000/01* (Bern: Verlag Gachnang & Springer AG, 2002), 64.

[4] Godard, interview with Emmanuel Burdeau and Charles Tesson, "The Future(s) of Film," in *The Future(s) of Film*, 22.

[5] Godard, *Godard on Godard*, trans. and ed. Tom Milne (New York: Da Capo, 1972), 173, hereafter cited parenthetically in text as *GG*.

[6] Colin MacCabe, *Godard: A Portrait of the Artist at Seventy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 146. See also Colin MacCabe, "On the Eloquence of the Vulgar," in *The Eloquence of the Vulgar: Language, Cinema and the Politics of Culture* (London: BFI Publishing, 1999), 151-53.

[7] Jacques Aumont, "The Fall of the Gods: Jean-Luc Godard's *Le Mépris* (1963)," in *French Film: Texts and Contexts*, ed. Susan Hayward and Ginette Vincendeau (London: Routledge, 1990), 174-175.

[8] On *Le Mépris* and its relation to classicism, see Marc Cerisuelo, *Le Mépris* (Chatou: Transparence, 2006); Joe McElhaney, *The Death of Classical Cinema: Hitchcock, Lang, Minnelli* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 1-3.

[9] Godard, quoted in David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 315.

[10] Susan Sontag, "Godard," in *Styles of Radical Will* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969), 150.

[11] Gilberto Perez, *The Material Ghost: Films and Their Medium* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 87-91, 367-416.

[12] Consider for instance the partition that "separates" characters inside the house of Cary (Jane Wyman) in Sirk's *All that Heaven Allows* (1955).

[13] For an astute analysis of bodily "intervals" in cinema, see Alain Bergala, "L'intervalle," in *La Mise en scène*, ed. Jacques Aumont (Brussels: De Boeck, 2000), 25-35.

[14] See Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 200-205. For a helpful discussion of the place of Hitchcock's in Deleuze's two-volume study of cinema, see Sam Ishii-Gonzáles, "Hitchcock with Deleuze," in *Hitchcock: Past and Future*, ed. Richard Allen and Sam Ishii-Gonzáles (London: Routledge, 2004), 128-145.

[15] Though Godard stopped writing about Hitchcock in *Cahiers* as he drew closer to making his first feature films, it is apparent from his top-ten lists and occasional remarks in interviews that Hitchcock's work remained throughout the 1960s a key point of reference for his own developing conception of modern cinema. In 1963 he ranked *Vertigo* as the third best American sound film, and in the 1965 interview "Let's Talk About *Pierrot*," Godard, playing up the non-narrative aspects of modern cinema that he believes qualify it as such, contends, "Any great modern film which is successful is so

because of a misunderstanding. Audiences like *Psycho* because they think Hitchcock is telling them a story. *Vertigo* baffles them for the same reason." *GG*, 223.

[16] Applicable to Godard's thinking is Harun Farocki's description of Bresson's work: "Shot/countershot is an element in film language that is often criticized – Bresson criticizes it by using it more intensely." Farocki, "Bresson: a Stylist," in *Imprint: Writings*, ed. Susanne Gaensheimer and Nicolaus Schafhausen (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2001),180.

[17] Through his use of Caution in *Allemagne 90 neuf zéro* (1991), Godard later changes his attitude towards the individual heroism implied in this lover's getaway, marking it as a failed mission, since the equivalents of Alpha 60 lived on. See Daniel Morgan, "The Place of Nature in Godard's Late Films," *Critical Quarterly* 51, no. 3 (2009): 11-15.

[18] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 20.

[19] For a standard account of Godard's work along these lines, see Robert Stam, *Reflexivity in Film and Literature from Don Quixote to Jean-Luc Godard* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

[20] Brigitte Berg, "Contradictory Forces: Jean Painlevé, 1902-1989)," in *Science is Fiction: The Films of Jean Painlevé*, ed. Andy Masaki Bellow and Marina McDougall with Brigitte Berg (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000), 41.

[21] Godard, *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard, tome 1: 1950-1984*, 545. Godard has also referred to fiction films as "Painlevé plus actors." Godard, quoted in Michael Witt, "Montage, My Beautiful Care, or Histories of the Cinematograph," in *The Cinema Alone:*

Essays on the Work of Jean-Luc Godard, 1985-2000, ed. Michael Temple and James S. Williams (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2000), 44.

[22] Francois Truffaut, *Letters, François Truffaut*, ed. Gilles Jacob and Claude de Givray, trans. Gilbert Adair, (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 385.

[23] For a fresh perspective on the relation between performance in Godard's early films and Brecht's principles of drama, see Perez, *The Material Ghost*, 336-360.

[24] Adrian Martin, "Recital: Three Lyrical Interludes in Godard," *For Ever Godard*, ed. Michael Temple, James S. Williams, and Michael Witt (London: Black Dog, 2004), 262-267. Martin has been the sharpest commentator on the place of lyricism in Godard's films in his early and late stages. See Martin, "Llegar tan lejos por la belleza: El lirismo de Jean-Luc Godard," in *¿Qué es el cine moderno?* (Santiago: Uqbar, 2008), 83-94.

[25] Chris Darke, *Alphaville* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 51.

[26] Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 182-183.

[27] Godard's concern with the "inside" and "outside" with respect to the body carries over from *Vivre sa vie* and surfaces here in part through a prop that Charlotte is holding in her first interlude with Robert, a copy of Elsa Triolet's 1962 novel *L'Âme*, "The Soul."

[28] Bill Krohn, "*Une femme mariée* from Deleuze to L'Herbier," in the booklet included with the Masters of Cinema DVD release of *Une femme mariée*. There are shades of Hitchcock's films here as well. *Psycho* in particular comes to mind – its affair in the opening scene and, to an extent, the fragmentation of the nude female body in the shower scene, in particular the extreme close-up of Charlotte's stomach. At the entrance to the movie theater at Orly airport, where Charlotte meets up with Robert and watch a few minutes from Resnais' *Nuit et brouillard*, Godard cuts to a poster image of Hitchcock.

[29] Stephen Heath, "Body, Voice," in *Questions of Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 183. Heath, I should note, doesn't think Godard's "strategy of personification" in *Une femme mariée* goes far enough in seeking new modes of bodily presence, but he implies that Godard gestures towards such alternatives.

[30] Marcia Landy, "Just an Image: Godard, Cinema, and Philosophy," *Critical Quarterly* 43, no. 3 (October 2001): 15-16.

[31] In one of his Montreal lectures that made up the 1980 book *Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma*, Godard draws an extended parallel between *Une femme mariée* and Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922), as he showed these two films together to his students. Godard bases the comparison in part on the principle of "waiting and expectation." He says, "We know very well that in amorous relations, as in work relations, there is the moment where one makes a gesture toward the other, and I wasn't able to express that, because I did it too fast … But I didn't even notice that what I was looking for was exactly that [Flaherty's] way of looking at that gesture, and the same gesture, the fact of waiting, and then you catch something – instead of a fish you capture a hand and that hand – depending on what it does to you – will also satisfy your hunger." Godard, quoted in the booklet that accompanies the Masters of Cinema DVD of *Une femme mariée*, translated by Craig Keller.

[32] To be specific, Robert also speaks a couple of lines from the part of Antiochus, and both of their lines are rearranged from different sections of the play.

[33] Unlike many critics who take the scene to uncritically endorse Parain's ideas in this tableau, I believe Godard is more closely allied with Nana's anxieties about the limits of verbal expression, given that he is working with a "language" of image and sound that

does not inherently privilege the spoken word. I take it that when Nana/Karina glances at the camera at one point while Parain is speaking, her gesture serves not simply to shatter the illusion of transparency and remind us that we're watching a film (as if Godard ever allowed us to forget) but to acknowledge that the expressive instruments of cinema might not fit easily into the model of thinking and being that Parain is espousing.

[34] In an essay that has shaped my own understanding of the importance of dialogue in Godard's cinema, Nicole Brenez examines how Godard traverses various scenarios of questioning – interviews, questionnaires, police interrogations, torture scenes – en route to transforming images into *autonomous questioning agents* no longer reliant on scenes of investigation for their critical power. Brenez, "The Forms of the Question," in *For Ever Godard*, ed. Michael Temple, James S. Williams, and Michael Witt (London: Black Dog, 2004), 160-177. I would add that Godard's various collaborations with Miéville are a crucial part of this evolution.

[35] One, albeit overly simplistic way of periodizing Godard's career is to separate three basic stages that correlate roughly with three relationships: the New Wave years with Karina, the political activist years with Wiazemsky, and everything after with Miéville. Godard himself has suggested this, in one of his more obnoxious moments, in a reunion with Karina filmed for French TV in the 1980s. There Godard tells an interviewer that when he began making films, he felt he needed a muse to follow in the footsteps of some of his favorite directors. He specifically mentions Welles and Rita Hayworth, Sternberg and Marlene Dietrich, Renoir and Catherine Hessling. But he says he reached a stage at which he realized that to pursue a different path, to make a different kind of film, he

needed to be involved with an altogether different kind of woman. On hearing this Karina begins to cry, stands up, and leaves Godard sitting at the table.

[36] Godard, quoted in Catherine Grant, "Home-Movies: The Curious Cinematic Collaboration of Anne-Marie Miéville and Jean-Luc Godard," in *For Ever Godard*, ed. Michael Temple, James S. Williams, and Michael Witt (London: Black Dog, 2004), 100. A comprehensive study of the collaborative work of Godard and Miéville falls outside my ambit here, as does a thorough look into technical matters of which activities each figure undertook in certain projects. The two filmmakers seem to have deliberately made it tough if not impossible to work out such questions of authorship, with Miéville keeping silent as to the full extent of her role in Godard's work, and with Godard insisting on her invaluable contributions but refusing to be specific.

[37] Godard expresses in his Montreal lectures an interest in revisiting the silent era with an eye to rescuing its neglected innovations. Godard, *Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma* (Paris: Albatros,1980), 309.

[38] Michael Witt, "Going Through the Motions: Unconscious Optics and Corporal Resistance in Miéville and Godard's *France/tour/détour/deux/enfants*," in *Gender and French Cinema*, ed. Alex Hughes and James S. Williams (New York: Berg, 2001), 183.

[39] Godard, *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard, tome 1*, ed. Alain Bergala, 508. This is a slightly altered translation from the one provided by Witt.

[40] See Marta Braun, "Marey and Demeny: The Problems of Cinematic Collaboration and the Construction of the Male Body at the End of the 19th century," in *Marey/Muybridge pionniers du cinéma* (Beaune: Conseil Regional de Bourgogne, 1996), 72-89. For more on the relevance of Marey's work in this context, see Marta Braun, *Picturing Time: The*

Work of Etienne-Jules Marey (1830-1904) (Chicago: University of Chicago Pres, 1992); and Anson Rabinbach, *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Social Modernity* (New York: Basic Books, 1990).

[41] Philippe Dubois, "Video Thinks what Cinema Creates," trans. Lynn Kirby, in *Jean-Luc Godard: Son + Image, 1974-1991*, ed. Raymond Bellour with Mary Lea Bandy (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1992), 169.

[42] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, 195.

[43] Daniel Morgan, lecture given in his graduate seminar "The Late Works of Jean-Luc Godard," University of Pittsburgh, fall 2008.

[44] Susan Sontag, "Spiritual Style in the Films of Robert Bresson," in *Robert Bresson*, ed. James Quandt (Toronto: Toronto International Film Festival Group, 1998), 66.

[45] Laura Mulvey, "Marie/Eve: Continuity and Discontinuity in J-L Godard's Iconography of Women," in *Jean-Luc Godard's* Hail Mary: *Women and the Sacred in Film*, ed. Maryel Locke and Charles Warren (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993), 40-42.

[46] Laura Mulvey, "The Hole and the Zero: The Janus Face of the Feminine in Godard," in *Jean-Luc Godard: Son + Image, 1974-1991*, ed. Bellour, 76-77.

[47] Ibid., 76.

[48] Ibid., 81.

[49] For a recent example that singles out for critique a few of his early features, see Geneviève Sellier, *Masculine Singular: French New Wave Cinema*, trans. Kristin Ross (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008). Sellier finds Godard's films, particularly those featuring his "creation," Karina, prone to "infantilizing" female characters whose beauty

disguises their deceptiveness and whom the (masculine look of the) camera regards as an object more than a subject with whom to engage in the exchange of ideas.

[50] We might also note that inventive forms of dialogue are a preoccupation of Miéville's as well. Two of her feature films, both of which involve Godard as an actor, *Nous sommes tou encore ici* (1997) and *Après la réconciliation* (2000), put the question of dialogue front and center and grant the form a distinctly philosophical function. *Nous sommes tou encore ici* starts with a clever rendering of a section of Plato's *Gorgias,* with women playing the roles of Socrates (Aurore Clément) and Calliclès (Bernadette Lafont), and its final third casts Clément and Godard as a contemporary couple enduring different moods together in private and public places and discussing such topics as solitude, aging, vision, creation, and the self coming to genuine terms with the other.

[51] My description here refers specifically to Godard's self-positioning in episode 2B of the series, entitled "Jean-Luc." In episode 3B: "Marcel," a different interview format is employed as Godard and (less frequently) Miéville ask questions to Marcel Raymond, a factory worker who, in his free time, makes 8mm nature films. Raymond is shown with his back to the camera, editing film strips at a work station while nature scenes from his films are projected on the wall in front of him. His own shadow superimposes with shots of flowers, snowy hilltops, and sunlight dancing off the surface of a lake. Miéville and Godard remain unseen for the interview's duration, though Godard's gesturing hand can occasionally be glimpsed slipping into the camera's field of view.

[52] The tone and degree of shared vocal emphasis varies somewhat in these dialogical setups. Godard is more respectful of Daney, whereas he belittles Allen's filmmaking

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somewhat, and he more or less ambushes Piccoli with his critique of the celebration of cinema's centenary in France.

[53] As the only two performers in this "home movie," their existence seems remote and withdrawn, but Godard's voiceover at the beginning situates the work, albeit obliquely and poetically, in relation to an outside history: "It was still the time of daily massacres in Beirut. It was already the time of glorious space flights to Mars and Venus. It was the time of private television's triumph and the dollar's incredible rise, the time when trees were buried in the Black Forest and McEnroe was first defeated, the time of the fifth generation computer and the famine in Africa. More than ever it was the time when all the waters of the sea could not wash away the stain of intellectual blood. It was also the time of the penultimate analysis session, and of the last picture show."

[54] Miéville offers the view that perhaps the relation of the couple can only be studied from the outside, like the static, opaque shell of an egg obstructing movements and processes happening within – a comment that recurs back to their earlier exchange concerning "interior" and "exterior" analysis. It's a comment that calls to mind the shot that closes *Le Livre de Marie*, an extreme close-up of a soft-boiled egg that Marie, having just been left at home as her mother ventures out on a date, cracks open with a knife.

[55] Their side-by-site placement behind a projector calls to mind the still of the couple of spectators watching a projected film in Bergman's *Fängelse* (1949) that Godard reworks periodically in *Histoire(s) du cinéma*.

[56] In *The Old Place*, Godard says, "From an art history point of view, if Malevich can put a black square on a white canvas, I don't think World War I is such a disaster. Poisoned by photography, painting committed suicide, and Soulages laid it in its grave after World

War II. From an art history point of view, the twentieth century is the Hundred Years War." In an earlier exercise, Godard and Miéville take serious issue with Boltanski's 1989 installation *Réserve du Musée des enfants*, which they consider "a kind of atrocity, an artistic crime, committed by a public figure." The elimination of the human body from the "reserve" of used clothes is at the center of this accusation (and of their critique of modernist and contemporary art in general), as though to argue the artwork is actually in league with the atrocities of the holocaust it is meant to evoke and bemoan. In essence, the installation relies on absence without also relying, dialectically, on the presence of the traumatic event through visceral, disturbing images – a tactic of showing and not showing used so intelligently and powerfully in Resnais' *Nuit et brouillard* (1955).

[57] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Belknap of Harvard University Press, 1999), 463 [convolute N3, 1]. In turning to Benjamin, Godard and Miéville affiliate their montage with a philosophy of history (albeit a purposely non-systematic one that proceeds by fragments, essays, aphorisms, and eclectic citations) that is both, despite apparent contradiction, materialist *and* messianic (and thus there is some sense in which Benjamin's thinking impacts on the spiritual turn of the exercise that I discuss below). The unorthodox spirit of Benjamin's thinking is such that Marxist notions of revolution and theological notions of redemption intermingle without being consigned to opposite poles. The messianic, in this sense of history, does not point to a transcendent order whose ultimate fulfillment on Earth will occasion the end of days; nor does it partake of a (utopian) longing for such an event that is always (because impossible) in deferral. For Benjamin, the messianic awaits activation in and for the present of which it is already and irrevocably a part ("now-time," he says,

is "shot through with splinters of messianic time"). The task of the historian is to unleash this redemptive power, to make it graspable by animating its "logic" of ruptures and constellations, and by demonstrating the requisite alertness. For a Benjaminian reading of Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, see Alessia Ricciardi, "Cinema Regained: Godard Between Proust and Benjamin," *Modernism/modernity* 8, no. 4 (November 2001): 643-661.

[58] Here too the Shoah factors into Godard and Miéville's thinking. Between the clips from Hitchcock and Ray, directly following Godard's remarks on Benjamin's concept of a constellation, the title "beyond the stars" changes to "the star of David," and over a documentary shot of a group of children collected at a camp (one flipping her arm over to reveal a tattooed number), Miéville says, "Even when people have forgotten it, and it is a question of returning." The voiceover from the planetarium presentation in *Rebel Without a Cause* for a moment overlaps with this documentary image.

[59] See Godard's lecture comments in *Notre Musique* (2004) regarding Howard Hawks's use of shot-countershot cutting in *His Girl Friday* (1940). There, Godard claims that the pictorial symmetry of the alternation (actually two production stills) reveals that Hawks is incapable of telling the difference between a man and a woman.

[60] For a detailed examination of Pasolini's use of the biblical source text, see Bart Testa, "To Film a Gospel ... and Advent of the Theoretical Stranger," in *Pier Paolo Pasolini: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Patrick Rumble and Bart Testa (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 180-209.

[61] Noa Steimatsky, "Pasolini on Terra Sancta: Towards a Theology of Film," in *Rites of Realism: Essays on Corporeal Cinema*, ed. Ivone Margulies (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 245-269.

[62] The figure of the agonized female, with mouth open, appears often in Godard's video samplings and is somewhat favored within a figurative economy that already privileges the traumatized (and tortured) body, male and female. Examples range from religious to revolutionary contexts, and Godard's use of altered motion sometimes *sculpts* the found figure into such a pose (e.g., the woman singing "La Marseillaise" in Gance's *Napoleon*, shown below). Such tinkering, which obscures and changes registers of expression, is on even broader display in Godard's Gallimard art books for the series.

[63] My sense of the drastic component of Godard's montage gesturing is informed by the writings on music of a philosopher whom Godard cites on at least three occasions in his late work, Vladimir Jankélévitch. I am drawn both to his notion of doing and to his view of the work of the audience as "tertiary re-creat[ion]." See his *Music and the Ineffable*, trans. Carolyn Abbate (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 77-81.

[64] Sergei Eisenstein, "Montage 1937," in *S.M. Eisenstein Selected Works*, vol. 2, *Towards a Theory of Montage*, ed. Michael Glenny and Richard Taylor, trans. Michael Glenny (London: British Film Institute, 1991), 21-23.

[65] A productive comparison could be made between Godard's conception of an image and Eisenstein's theories of "imagicity" and "generalized image [*obraz*]." Both notions are indefinable apart from the constructive work of the viewer (perceptual, intellectual), and both figures distinguish an "image" from a mere depiction by virtue of the fact that the former is not a singular, concrete manifestation but a dynamic unfolding movement

grasped as a multiplicity. But what sets Godard's montage apart from Eisenstein's is its pointed lack of emphasis on total integration and organic unity.

[66] In Godard's conception of montage, "thinking with the hands" is intimately tied to the ethical dilemma of "dirty hands," which Godard broaches in chapter 2B of *Histoire(s)*, where he cites *Orlacs Hände*. See Chapter Four for a discussion of this sequence and its implications for Godard's self-portrayal.

[67] Colin MacCabe, while noting strong affinities between Godard and Montaigne, has observed one major difference: whereas Montaigne withdrew to a library that was strictly a masculine workplace from which women were excluded, Godard's workplace in Rolle is "unthinkable" without the presence and participation of Miéville. MacCabe, *Godard: A Portrait of the Artist*, 241. It's important to note, though, that Montaigne's view of friendship – which, in "Of Friendship," he had considered, like the Greeks before him, a relationship of which women were much less capable than men – changed in his later years after meeting a young female admirer and diligent reader, Marie de Gournay. She ultimately edited, helped to annotate, and wrote a preface to the final, 1595 edition of the *Essais* published after Montaigne's death. And in his lifetime Montaigne felt compelled to bring their relationship into the textual weave of the *Essais*. Michel de Montaigne*, The Complete Essays*, trans. and ed. M.A. Screech (New York: Penguin, 2003), 751.

[68] This rather atypical list combines the French New Wave with Italian neorealism in the figure of Rossellini, it suggests Godard's belated patching-up with Truffaut, it includes the older generation of French directors with Melville and Becker, it leaves out the Left Bank figures such as Varda, Resnais, and Marker, and it somewhat surprisingly counts Franju as a major New Wavist, despite Godard's long neglect of Franju following an

initially enthusiastic and insightful response in his *Cahiers du cinéma* criticism. On the significance of Franju with respect to the French New Wave, see Adam Lowenstein, "History without a Face: Surrealism, Modernity, and the Holocaust in the Cinema of Georges Franju," in *Shocking Representation: Historical Trauma, National Cinema, and the Modern Horror Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 17-53.

[69] In formulating *philia* in such terms, I am drawing on ancient Greek conceptions of love and friendship, Aristotle in particular in the eighth and ninth books of his *Nicomachean Ethics*. "Con-division," "con-sentiment," "sharing," and "concord" are all key terms in Aristotle's treatise. By attributing *philia* and its condition of reciprocity to Godard's late montage and its reception, I do not mean to suggest this relation is easily accomplished. Godard's style and discourse operate at the limits of mutual comprehensibility, as I will discuss more extensively in the conclusion of this study. It is also worth noting here that Jacques Derrida, among others, has shown that the language of reciprocity that forms the core of the Greek model of friendship is shot through with internal divisions and ruptures. Derrida effectively situates the Montaignian essay form as a pivotal stage in a "history of friendship" when he claims, in a reading of Montaigne's "Of Friendship," that Montaigne interjects "heterology, asymmetry, and infinity" in a way that severely diverges from the discourse of reciprocity inherited from the Greek conception of *philia*. In our study of the essayistic practice of Godard, it remains for us to examine how he negotiates this tension between the emphasis on "friendly," reciprocal kinships and the use of a form that often seems to communicate the very difficulty of communicating anything at all. See Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (London: Verso, 2005).

CHAPTER FOUR

To Show and Show Oneself Showing:

The Stakes of Self-Portraiture in Late Godard

Elsewhere you can commend or condemn a work [*ouvrage*] independently of the author [*ouvrier*]; but not here: touch one and you touch the other.
-Michel de Montaigne[1]

I can say how I picture Godard. He's a man who works a lot, so he is, necessarily, completely alone. But his is not just any solitude, it's an extraordinarily populous solitude, populated not by dreams, fantasies, or projects, but by actions, things, and even people. A multiple, creative solitude.
-Gilles Deleuze[2]

I don't believe in the solitude of an artist and the auteur with a capital A.
-Godard, 1983[3]

Solitude is not seclusion. One is always two in one.
-Godard, 1997[4]

Not unlike some of the painters whose self-depictions he cites in his later films

and video essays – Rembrandt, Courbet, van Gogh, Schiele – Godard, over the course of

his long career in cinema, has been a serial self-portrayer. From his cameo in *À bout de*

souffle (1960) to his later, more burlesque appearances in *Prénom Carmen* (1983), *King*

Lear (1987), and *Soigne ta droit* (1987) to his ostensibly less fictionalized self-portrayals

in *JLG/JLG: autoportrait de décembre* (1995) and *Notre musique* (2004), we could chart

a rather vast spectrum of personae through which Godard has questioned his own image

and undertaken a cinematic sketching of the self, at the outer limits of narrative but still

firmly within the bounds of performance. Added to this work of self-presentation are his

many public appearances that continue periodically throughout his late stage, despite his

(self-cultivated) image as a recluse fated to shoot lush landscapes and reflect on cinema

history at his hideout/laboratory in Rolle, Switzerland.[5] The cultural visibility of Godard, particularly in France, is such that the very phrase "late Godard" calls to mind as readily as the work itself the physical characteristics of the aging French-Swiss director, his thin-lipped grin under glasses and cigar smoke, his stubbled face and wiry, half-receded hair, and not least his distinctively gentle voice making often ludic and provocative statements.

And yet, as Jacques Aumont has noted, Godard's perennial concern with his own public and cinematic image doesn't entail "pretensions to the autobiographical." In other words, though Godard, as part of his role as a cinema historian, is very much invested in understanding his own cinematic past in relation to his current projects, he is not the sort of filmmaker who relishes discussing his earlier, heroic experiences, nor does he urge us to interpret his work through the lens of his personal life, and nor does he have a familiar auteurist conception of an oeuvre within which separate works cohere like episodes in an evolutionary progression, even when such continuities are flagrant.[6] By what terms, then, are we to comprehend the interrelation that Godard himself forcefully draws between his corps and authorial corpus? And to what ends does he devote the persistent re-fashioning of his own presence in cinema, whether in body or voice?

In this chapter I will consider Godard primarily as a self-portraitist attempting to realize in the medium of cinema a mode of working more common to painting. Looking mainly at three works of his late period made without the credited involvement of Anne-Marie Miéville – *Scénario du film Passion* (1982), *JLG/JLG*, and *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988-98) – I want to demonstrate how Godard's practice of self-portrayal is rooted in an essayistic tradition, with Montaigne as its source, in which the intensive study of oneself, *in the midst of creative labor*, is not a narcissistic exercise of turning inward but a means

of working through the self in relation to others, namely to an audience of spectators who are potentially able to share in the manner of seeing that Godard exhibits with astonishing command in these projects. That is to say, I take self-portraiture to be, for Godard as well as for Montaigne, a dialogical endeavor, no less invested in exchange and friendship than the collaborative undertakings of Godard and Miéville that we addressed in the preceding chapter. Before this sense of self-portraiture can become manifestly evident, we first need to draw a couple of distinctions, both of which pertain to Godard's particular attachments to the essay form. First, the kind of self-depiction on view in these late works by Godard has little to do with autobiography, conventionally construed. In place of a chronological account of lived events through which an individual emerges, Godard presents fragments and fissures of a self that is stubbornly inconstant, dispersive. This difference is intrinsic to the kind of self-observation that Montaigne inaugurates with his *Essais*, and Godard is similarly quick to set apart his self-portraiture from biographical genres.[7] Second, within the context of the "essay-film," Godard is scarcely alone in turning to the self-portrait, as many other examples could be cited in comparison, such as Varda's *Les plages de'Agnès* (2008), Akerman's *Chantal Akerman par Chantal Akerman* (1997), Farocki's two-screen installation *Schnittstelle* (1995), or the "diary films" of Jonas Mekas. But these examples should not be confused with less essayistic strands of documentary in which a filmmaker records his or her actual experiences over time and constructs a narrative with a stable "I" at its center, such as Ross McElwee's autobiographical chronicles. And the concern with the self that registers in Godard's self-portraits bears very little resemblance to a trend in recent nonfiction cinema that Paul Arthur labels "self-therapy," where a filmmaker gives a candid, exhaustive account of past traumas, using the medium as a kind of talking cure.[8]

These distinctions will become clearer as we move along. I state them up front to establish proper bearings and to clear the way for the specific dynamics of self-portraiture that mark these three late-period works by Godard, the implications of which speak to the overall sense in which the director inhabits and lays claim to the projects he undertakes. To use a term that is crucial for Montaigne, Godard emerges in these self-portraits as a figure "consubstantial" with the sights and sounds he produces. My claim in this chapter is that by approaching Godard's self-portrayal in terms of this consubstantiality towards which he inventively strives, we can both understand his creative labor without recourse to autobiography or the conventional notions of auteurship that Godard himself critiques in his late phase, and grasp the *public* stakes of these idiosyncratic and frequently obscure exercises that have special significance for Godard's collective body of work.

Ouvrage **and** *Ouvrier*

"I have no more made my book than my book has made me," Montaigne asserts in and of the *Essais*, "– a book consubstantial with its author, proper to me and a limb of my life" (II.18: 755, trans. modified). This statement has met with a great deal of debate and confusion among Montaigne scholars, with some taking it as a daring metaphor that is strictly hyperbolic in its function and others clinging to the theological underpinnings of the term, often within a Trinitarian framework. Part of this interpretive trouble stems from the essayistic manner in which Montaigne makes the assertion. It comes as one of numerous images that he invokes throughout his three-volume study in order to describe, with varying degrees of self-deprecation, his immediate connection to it. His book is, by turns, a "regurgitation," the offspring from his "commerce" with the Muses, a "fricassee,"

a "bundle of varied pieces," a "badly joined marquetry," an "impoverished portrait." The difficulty lies in knowing whether the "consubstantial" idea encompasses or only adds to these images that Montaigne enlists without stated priority, as if they are interchangeable.

Painting, specifically portraiture, is by far the most frequent trope of connection between author and work invoked in the *Essais*, and it carries a set of tensions to which Montaigne's sense of consubstantiality responds. Montaigne refers to portraiture usually in passages where he claims to give the reader a plain, unembellished picture of himself, his flaws not concealed, his writing opposed to the pretenses and structuring systems of both classical rhetoric and medieval scholasticism. What he wants his book to possess is the volatile and digressive character of his thinking *process*, even if this means allowing errors and rushed observations to stand, and even if this risks losing the reader (that is, a reader with "weak and inattentive ears") in a jumble of seemingly misleading reflections. He doubts whether such a self-portrayal can be realized in the "flimsy medium of words" (II.6: 425), but he doesn't regard painting as a better alternative. A static picture, even a series of them over time, would be no more suitable, since he wishes to paint *transience* and *transition*, a self embroiled in the turbulent flow of thought (III.2: 907-908). At the same time, as Montaigne is well aware, this truer-to-form sketch must be contrived and must involve a calculated self-performance. His prefatory address to the reader submits (albeit with irony) to the rules of social decorum that prevent a "wholly naked" portrait, and later he states: "No description is more difficult than the describing of oneself … To be ready to appear in public you have to brush your hair, you have to arrange things and put them in order. I am therefore ceaselessly making myself ready since I am ceaselessly describing myself" (II.6: 424).

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Montaigne's striving for a self-portrait free of artifice necessarily involves the construction of a textual persona (which Montaigne at times professes not to recognize completely). His famous declaration of consubstantiality occurs as part of a passage, one of many in the *Essais*, that confronts this paradox. "Since I was modeling this portrait on myself," he admits, "it was so often necessary to prepare myself and to pose so as to draw out the detail that the original has acquired more definition and has to some extent shaped itself. By portraying myself for others I have portrayed my own self within me in clearer colours than I possessed at first." Somehow it is only after restating this conflict between genuine embodiment and public performance that he can claim, in the very next sentence, that his *Essais* and himself are "of one substance" (II.18: 755). But how is this connection conceivable on the heels of a disclosure that suggests distance and disparity?

Here it's important to point out that Montaigne knowingly uses *consubstantiel* as a loaded word having potentially different and contested meanings for his late-sixteenth-century readers. The term is of Gnostic origins, owing to the Greek *homoousios*, which means "of the same substance." Initially it referred to the Father's divine paternity of the world, only later becoming, through interpretation of writings of Tertullian in Latin (his neologistic use of *consubstantialis*), a Christological notion in orthodox doctrine. It was deployed to name an essential link between the eternal Father and the historical, earthly Jesus, giving the latter a divine status and the former a human incarnation. In the model attributed to Tertullian, the bond is between generator and generated: Christ is to God as the shrub is to the root, the river to the source, and the ray to the sun. Tertullian forged a similar connection in terms of speech, with Christ (as Logos) figuring as a projection of the Father's divine thought.[9] From its Gnostic foundation to its Catholic orthodoxy to its

use among the Protestants, the term had a rather complex history before Montaigne gave it a secular inflection in the *Essais*. He would have known from his travels its contentious status in religious debates. He probably would have read the term in Tertullian and Scève, and more than likely he would have spoken or sung it during Mass as part of the Nicene Creed.[10] His skeptical disposition kept him from accepting or adopting an analogy of the human to the divine, but the consubstantiality between person and speech (the matter of his writing[11]), as a parent to its offspring, would have been an attractive premise (indeed, he relishes the metaphor in his chapter "On the Affection of Fathers for Their Children"). When Montaigne claims a consubstantial link to his essays halfway through Book II, this *generative* model is its most probable basis.[12]

Understood in this light, Montaigne's claim does not contradict his thoughts on self-portrayal in the same passage – it establishes that the intimate connection between himself and his book in progress is not predicated on likeness, as the painting metaphor might seem to imply, but on a generational unity of "substance." If he must perform for the reader, to the point he sometimes sees little resemblance to himself on the page, this has no impact on his physical and metaphysical attachment to his *Essais*, which are still "proper to me and a limb of my life." With this relation intact, Montaigne, each time he reads back through earlier passages, each time he revises, encounters in those moments himself as estranged, multiplied – a consequence of the changes he has since undergone (in fact, were it not for this fluctuation of mood and thought and judgment, he could not claim, within his general philosophical perspective, to present an authentic portrait). The consubstantial relation is two-way and reciprocal: his book, he tells us, has made him as much as he has made it. Adding a wrinkle to the concept, he suggests a double origin of

the fluctuant self that takes shape through and across his writing. This binds the author to

the work all the more inextricably, such that to "touch one," as Montaigne elsewhere puts

it, is to "touch the other" (III.2:909). In addition to alleviating his worries about authentic

self-depiction, this consubstantial link has, for Montaigne, two direct consequences. On

the one hand, it discourages – and promises to confound – interpretations that place the

author prior to and outside of the composed text. Montaigne stakes the uniqueness of his

enterprise on this inseparability of work [*ouvrage*] and workman [*ouvrier*]. Only at peril,

he writes, can the two be regarded or judged in isolation.[13] On the other hand, by shifting

the relation from matters of likeness (that is, imitation, *mimesis*) to generation, he offsets

his concerns that his *Essais* are perhaps too greatly indebted to other authors. In the next

paragraph, he reveals that his ample borrowing, for which he gives a number of apologies

throughout his book, is concurrently on his mind.

> And what if I now lend a more attentive ear to the books I read, being on the
> lookout to see whether I can thieve something to decorate and support my own?
> I have never studied so as to write a book, but I have done some study because I
> have written one, if studying a little means lightly touching this author or that and
> tweaking his head or foot – not so as to shape my opinions but, long after they
> have taken shape, to help them, to back them up and to serve them. (II.18:756)

This is to say that his reliance on citation does not threaten the link he has just sketched,

wherein imitation plays no substantial part (whether the original is himself as the model,

or the antecedent texts he "thieves"). As an appendage to his consubstantiality thesis, the

passage reminds his readers that he but "lightly touches" prior authors and "tweaks" what

he takes from them so that their thoughts "decorate" and "support" his own.

Working from this set of terms and problems alone, we could shed light on much

of what Godard is up to in his self-portraits. While Montaigne aspires to a consubstantial

relation through a strictly verbal medium, the questions he raises and assertions he makes

are, despite the historical distance that separates the two figures, certainly transposable to the audio-visual conditions in which Godard labors – indeed, Montaigne's meditations on self-embodiment, performance, and a substantial, intimate bond between author and work scream out for application to the cinema, given its automatic recording capacity and its spectral yet sensuous presentation of bodies. But before turning to Godard's work with these questions in mind, it is necessary to acknowledge another set of aesthetic practices that cross with and complicate Godard's ties to the essay form – namely those belonging to self-portraiture in painting, a genre that Godard, through citations and resourceful self-arrangement in the frame, reveals himself to know quite well.

The painted self-portrait and Montaigne's undertaking share an "early modern" history in sixteenth-century Europe,[14] as both testify to a broadscale shift towards a new and recognizably modern conception of selfhood, replete with interest not simply in self-expression but in extensive self-scrutiny and self-exploration. Montaigne's sketches of himself in different attitudes and "poses" over many years could be viewed as a parallel project to the self-portraits executed by the two prolific founders of the genre in the West, Dürer and Rembrandt. However static and restricted to one time and pose per canvas, the form entailed a rendering visible, a manifestation of the corporeal self, that Montaigne, as his fondness for the metaphor attests, longed to match in his writing.[15]

Since its Renaissance inception the self-portrait has channeled and, more often than not, nourished the myths of genius, insight, and virility associated with individual artistic production. The self-portrait can wield an auratic force in this regard, in that the image lends personification to the worked substance that indexically marks the painter's activity. What most interests me here – what I find to be most pertinent to Godard's self-

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portrayal in a different medium – is the *dispositif* that distinguishes the genre, the kind of engagement it sets up with the beholder. Standing before the finished painting, the viewer occupies more or less the physical and visual position in which the painter maneuvered as he or she, as both model and maker, brought the image into existence, transforming base matter into a self-likeness (and a display of skilled, distinctive brushwork – the "artist's hand"). Though this sharing of positions generally applies to most paintings irrespective of genre, the self-portrait, with the intense outward gaze of the artist that meets with ours in return, has its own, exceptional way of making this relation palpable.[16]

This meeting of gazes is, more accurately, an intricate oscillation of gazes that extends from the moment of creation to the moment of observing the finished artwork. The "outward" gaze of the depicted figure, so often characterized by its directness and concentration, is itself a look trained on the features of the painter as studied in a mirror. What the picture shows, then, is the artist looking at him or herself looking – inspecting and to some extent doubling the reflection, while knowing the look committed to paint will end up facing out at the viewer. It's through this circuit and exchange of looks that the self-portrait often (there are, of course, exceptions) exploits its particular commerce with the observer, triggering all sorts of identifications and complicities; and we do not have to have foreknowledge of how the picture was made (the artist's material reliance on a mirror) for the work to compel such an interrelation through its texture and address. There are no shortage of examples in which the artist acknowledges, whether directly or indirectly, the terms of this exchange. An early, reflexive instance is a 1646 self-portrait of Johannes Gumpp, which depicts the process typical of the genre: the artist is shown in his studio, positioned with his back to the viewer, between a mirror (to his left) and what

looks to be the finished or almost-finished painting (to his right). His right hand, holding a brush, is withdrawn from the painting-within-the-painting and, at first glance, the work seems to be a celebration of the moment in which the painter judges his canvas complete. However, the picture critically confronts this premise. The three-part presentation of the artist (as mirror reflection, as subject of the portrait in progress, as model/artist/observer) dramatizes an endless circuit of gazes that includes the viewer, who can find a surrogate in the figure at the center of the composition – the figure whose "true" face is concealed and whose black, void-like cloak takes up over a third of the immediate foreground. As a discrepancy in the position of his pupils shows, the artist, working from mirror to canvas, redirects his gaze to the viewer on the "outside" of the scene. Yet this relay of sightlines is achieved by distorting the angles and perspectives of the two paired faces so that they accord with *our* vantage, not the inscribed artist's. The composition thus "invalidates the documentary aspect of production," and far from enshrining the artist-at-work as a figure with privileged vision, it suggests "the disparate nature of identity and self-knowledge: of seeing oneself and being seen, of knowing oneself and being known."[17]

Self-portraits have displayed a wide range of compositional tactics that put under strain, or attempt imaginatively to overcome, two boundaries common to all painting that does not involve, at the site of exhibition, a simultaneous performance by the artist – the boundary between the corporeal activity of the painter and the painted artwork, and that between the artwork (its rendered "world") and the external viewer. Some contributions to the genre have supplemented the exchange of looks (described above) with poses and gestures and other graphic aspects that bring into play *the bodily orientation of the artist during the act of painting*; and this can be done, no less effectively, without recourse to a

scene *of* painting. There are no more apt examples than Gustave Courbet's self-portraits, which, as Michael Fried has demonstrated, strive to attain a "quasi-corporeal merger" of the painter and the painting. Fried shows that many of Courbet's works that do not depict the artist at all are nonetheless "'real allegories' of the activity that produced them." And in Courbet's self-portraits proper, the positions and contortions of the hands, even where the artist is not shown in the act of painting, correspond to their specific functions during that process. In *Man with the Leather Belt* (1845-6), for instance, Courbet paints himself sitting with his right elbow propped on a desktop and both hands in oddly strained poses. But the left hand, with its thumb and fingers tightly clutching his belt, corresponds to the painter's left hand holding his palette, and the right hand, seemingly unnaturally elevated and "turned back into the picture space," suggests, in turn, "the orientation and in a sense the action of the painter-beholder's right hand and arm as they reached toward the canvas bearing a brush loaded with paint."[18]

Courbet's self-portraits also endeavor to break down, or rather to break through, the barrier between the place of the depicted figure and the place of the observer on "this side" of the canvas. In *Man Mad with Fear* (1843-4) (which Godard and Miéville cite in the "logic of images" sequence in *The Old Place*, 1998[19]), the frontal figure of Courbet, dressed in a medieval costume (role playing is a recurring feature of his self-depictions) looms aggressively at the "nearest" plane, in sharp relief from the landscape behind him. Kneeling and lunging forward, with his right hand and arm outstretched and caught in a mysteriously intense patch of sunlight that also touches his face and delineates his torso, he appears to be reaching beyond the painted surface, as though about to leap out of the composition entirely. Contributing to this impression is the lower portion of the painting,

which dissolves into a bare mass of smudges and lines not integrated with the rest of the scene. Though it is possible that Courbet abandoned the canvas before completing it, the picture, as we have it, implies an effacement of the barrier that contains the artist's virtual presence. Thus, on both "sides" of these pictures – those of production and reception – Courbet devises quasi-physical ways of crossing the gulfs that separate, first, the painter and the painting in progress, and, second, the painting and the spectator.[20]

Embodiment, corporeality, observing and being observed: these are matters that figure just as critically in Godard's self-depictions, not least those I have singled out for analysis in this chapter. In his attempts to achieve a physical continuity with the work in progress, Godard effectively takes up and combines – and this is no minor feat – the two forms of self-inscription we have touched on thus far, those operative in the painted self-portrait and in the Montaignian essay. In Godard's cinematic self-portraiture, it isn't just that he finds rough equivalents in audio-visual terms for these two forms he adopts from other mediums. Godard also takes on board the stakes and anxieties tied to self-portrayal. As with the essaying of Montaigne, Godard suggests and reflects on a substantial merger of *ouvrier* and *ouvrage* to the point of inseparability. And, as with the basic structures of address and engagement in the painted self-portrait, he does so in a way that, through his gesturing, his self-placement in the frame, and his performance as an observer, draws the spectator into a relationship of exchange. Inspecting his projects in this light reveals that his self-depictions are not, as they may at first seem (and as they have been dismissed by critics), hermetically withdrawn and solipsistic but strongly committed to seeking out a dialogue with the spectator. As we shall see, Godard's self-portraiture opens out onto the

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larger concerns and ambitions of his late period, including his attempt to demonstrate the extraordinary (though tragically neglected) *historical* resources of the cinematic medium.

The Work to be Done is Seeing

Let's begin with *Scénario du film Passion.* While not a self-portrait in name like *JLG/JLG*, and while humbler in its objective than *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, the video essay features some of the most indelible and significant images of Godard at work in his late period. As Godard, addressing the camera directly, explains at the outset (after his casual greeting, "Friend and foe, good evening"), the video is conceived as an exercise in *seeing* the scenario of his film *Passion* (1982) *before* it is written. "I think we see the world first, then we write," he maintains. "The world described in *Passion* had to be seen first, to see whether it existed before being filmed." Godard frames all that follows as a preliminary outline of *Passion*, but in truth he has already completed the feature and he integrates its scenes throughout the *Scénario*. His video is thus a strange kind of reenactment in which the images belong at once to the film he hopes to make, the video he is presently making, and the film he has just recently made.[21]

Through this contrivance, the *Scénario* is cast as an adventure in seeing-on-the-spot, with Godard – as actor and author, the only participant in the video – in the role of observer. He presents himself in his studio before a panel of controls, with a large white screen in front of him, his back to the camera and his figure in silhouette. Speaking to us from this position, he describes the screen first as a Mallarméan blank page, then – more visually evocative – as "a beach in a blinding sun." He tells us, "You want to see, re-cei-

ve [*rece-voir*]. A blank page confronts you, a dazzling beach, but there's no sea. So you invent waves, I invent waves. You imagine a wave." Just then a stilled shot from *Passion* appears on the screen, gently fading in and out as Godard dictates from his panel. "Just a murmur. Only a vague idea, but already there is movement," he says (now punning on the two senses of the French word *vague*, "wave" and "indefinite"). "I have a vague idea: a woman running with flowers, a young woman in the flower of youth. Here just a faint disturbance, which the film will make a storm. A wave. It comes, it goes. Just an echo."

The "wave" from *Passion* seems projected or otherwise exhibited from a point physically internal to where Godard stations himself, but its contents liberally overspill the borders of the screen. In fact, Godard is using video cross-fades: the screen he faces in his studio technically remains blank as the clips from *Passion* are superimposed onto the *entire shot* of Godard at work. There are monitors, one on either side of the screen, in which he can observe – in an effect comparable to a TV meteorologist gesturing against a map – his actions relative to the *composite* images he shows us.

Figures 111-112. *Scénario du film "Passion"* (**Godard, 1982**)

As in an audio-visual variation on the play of mirrors intrinsic to the self-portrait in painting, we see the artist, Godard, seeing himself as an image, seeing and presenting

the image while he composes it, and seeing – from a position *within* the image –what his

spectator will see on the "outside" looking at what we might call the "master screen," the

frame containing the others. It's only after revealing this apparatus that Godard moves to

tighter compositions of his shadowy figure against the blank surface, its edges flush with

the master screen. Godard explains his bodily self-inscription in direct opposition to those

assumed by TV news broadcasters, and to verify this point, he inserts a clip of a German-

speaking announcer with a keyed-in image "behind" him. "In television they see nothing

because they turn their backs on the images instead of facing them. The image is behind

them. They can't see it. The image *sees them*. So do the people manipulating the images.

They shove the news up the anchor's ass." To prevent getting "buggered," as Godard puts

it, one has to confront and interact with images head on.

There are two further, more germane implications arising from this position that

Godard assumes. The first is that due to the cross-fades and the "*mise en abyme* effect of

the inset self-image-in-process,"[22] Godard's figure is made to merge with the multi-part

images he constructs and orchestrates. His silhouette cannot be located "this side" of the

superimpositions – the "waves" claim him as an integral element. And from this position

Godard attentively and lovingly embraces the scenes that appear from *Passion* (and from

footage he shot on video before the film's production). He waves his hands over graphic

contours, discerning formal patterns and deriving, as part of the reenactment conceit, the

organizational logic of his film. On two occasions (once with Jerzy Radziwilowicz, then

again with Isabelle Huppert), Godard caresses and kisses the pictured faces of his players.

Figures 113-114. *Scénario du film "Passion"* **(Godard, 1982)**

His wraith-like figure, in mingling with the images that take shape, itself falls into visual

patterns and resonances that seem fortuitous: it attends the meeting point of outstretched

hands, or nestles in an opening of the *mise en scène*, such as the space between a couple

conversing. Superimposition thus becomes, for Godard, a particularly dynamic means of

inhabiting his work in progress, of indicating a consubstantial relationship with what he

produces. And though his emphasis is predominantly on seeing, Godard's self-depiction

suggests that this activity goes beyond mere ocular perception and involves an embodied,

gestural engagement with the sights and sounds that materialize.

Seeing, for Godard, is receptive but not inactive. Seeing, he asserts in the video, is

something difficult to accomplish: "The work to be done is seeing." This brings us to the

second major implication of the position and activity he embodies in the *Scénario*. While

the video might seem a tribute to "the hieratic and suffering figure of the creator himself

at the center of the cinema,"[23] it is, to put it more accurately, an attempt on Godard's part

to bring the spectator into the practice of seeing that he espouses and defends by example.

This project registers both in his bodily inscription and his manner of speaking. Not only

does he portray himself as a spectator facing the screen; he also alternates freely between

first- and second-person pronouns and verb forms as he thinks through his process aloud. "See and you find. I find myself, and I find myself seeking. You find yourself faced with the invisible." "You want to see, re-cei-ve … So you invent waves, I invent waves." This slippage bespeaks, in part, Godard's desire not to retreat inward, or to declare himself an artist with matchless powers of vision, but to extend his process outward, to share it with the spectator he addresses. His use of second-person is casually instructive and longingly inclusive. At the same time, the alternations in his speech are strangely mercurial. Neither the "I" nor the "you" has a stable assignment, and so an ambiguity attends his comments, which seem to refer interchangeably to Godard and to us.

Godard's endeavor in the video to draw the spectator into a shared form of seeing is motivated in no small part by his frustration during the filming of *Passion*. He tells us plainly that his crew and actors – his "employees" – were unable to grasp this concept of seeing things first. Over cross-fades of his first meeting with the production team (shot on video) and a reproduction of Tintoretto's *Bacchus and Ariadne* (1576), Godard remarks, "I was trying to tell them that we had to set out from an image that was yet to be made. I told them traces already existed. The film would show great moments of humanity using great painters." He says he showed them the Tintoretto as inspiration for a possible love triangle in *Passion*, but they merely "saw a finished image, whereas I hadn't reached that stage yet." Lacking the imagination on which he'd hoped to depend, the crew and actors, he recalls, could only think in terms of the final, reified images shown to the audience. "It was difficult," he says. "I'd talk of something I could see but they mostly saw themselves and what the audience would say about them … I always ended up here alone, before this purity, this beach without a sea."

This somewhat resentful complaint implies that Godard's self-placement before the blank screen in the *Scénario* is geared towards orienting the spectator to that initial, *substrative* point of the image-forming process that his collaborators – always ahead of themselves in envisioning the finished product – proved incapable of sharing. He avails himself and his work to this sharing by suggesting, through speech and superimposition, an overlap of authorial and spectatorial roles – a "confusion" of tasks of beholding. And at one point, as though to assuage any ill sentiment to his demonstration, Godard, lighting a cigar against the white screen, makes a direct plea: "Audience, don't harden your hearts against me. If you pity me, pour soul, God will have pity on you. Thank you."

Godard then proceeds to discover his scenario by spotting connections between images of love and images of work, the main premise on which *Passion* pivots. He tells us that he needed to see, through conducting "research," whether the gestures of factory workers bore some relationship to the gestures of love he had in mind for the film. With cross-fades he shows us for comparison shots of a seamstress, Tintoretto's *Bacchus and Ariadne* (a scene of three figures intersecting: Bacchus offering a ring to Ariadne while Venus glides overhead, crowning Ariadne), and Isabelle Huppert's character in *Passion*, a factory worker. Godard traces a "movement" with his hand across the screen's surface and declares a gestural link among the fragments. "You can see that love and work . . . it isn't just Jean-Luc's usual ravings. It's something that exists."

Godard's contention here – and as we'll see, this is for the most part true of his montage in *Histoire(s) du cinéma* as well – is that in bringing these disparate fragments together, he has not concocted a resonant image so much as he has brought one to light. The work of seeing, he tells us, involves looking for "movements and gestures that look

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for themselves," that is, in putting together two or more given elements that are, perhaps despite their contextual differences, predisposed to combine. By exhibiting this principle in a project of self-portraiture, Godard does more than assure himself the last word in his dispute with his collaborators; he has, in effect, the "first word" in different conditions of exchange, in a longed-for dialogue with his spectators.[24]

What Cinema Can Do with Godard

This movement towards social interaction and dialogue with the viewer returns across Godard's late self-portraiture, no matter how withdrawn and inward-looking the director seems in these works, now matter how abstruse his reflections, now matter how bewildering his references. In *JLG/JLG*, we find Godard working on a larger canvas and maneuvering through a much wider span of topics in a film explicitly designated a "self-portrait in December." *JLG/JLG* does play up the remote, solitary state of Godard's life in Rolle, and there are no telling instances, like those in the *Scénario du film Passion*, of direct address and "second-person" slippage. Yet the film still revolves around two basic gestures through which Godard contemplates his social responsibilities and the prospect of friendly, loving exchange: the first entails overcoming his own legendary status as an auteur; and the second (conditional on the first) has to do with entering into social bonds in which those involved avoid the snares of what Godard refers to as "identification" and "stereo" projection. It's through the interrelation of these two gestures that the underlying goals and stakes of Godard's self-portrait are made apparent.

Since his "return to cinema" in the 1980s, a major concern of Godard's has been to challenge and even dismantle his celebrated name and image (while cannily using his renown to attract financing and promote his projects). Continuing a leitmotif in his late-period interviews, he says, "I realized my name was doing me harm, and I was wrongly benefiting from it. It took me some time to understand that it was working against me. I would like to present a film under a different name, although that's unrealistic."[25] This predicament of authorial identity is threefold: Godard, as with any director who could be considered a "star," is vulnerable to commercial strategies that reduce the auteur to a sort of brand name[26]; the reverence he tends to command by reputation, without necessarily inviting it, makes it difficult to establish a dialogue with his collaborators in the making of a film; the undue stress on the filmmaker over the work prevents a sensitive response from his audience. Though Godard came to prominence through his direct participation in the auteurist film culture of postwar France, he insists in his late period that the basic premise of auteurism is misguided. "Auteurs aren't important," he says to Serge Daney. "Today we supposedly respect [the] man so much that we no longer respect the work."[27] And in the final moments of 3B in *Histoire(s)*, an episode entitled "Une vague nouvelle" ("A New Wave," or "A Vague Bit of News"), he maintains, "Not the auteurs, the works!"

With *JLG/JLG*, Godard devotes an entire project to addressing – in his typically oblique and roundabout manner – these issues of authorship and the obstacles presented by his own name and biographical legend. In interviews around the film's release where he permits himself to be somewhat more forthcoming, Godard is eager to distinguish his "self-portrait" from autobiography, and, further, to explain the slash dividing the initials doubled in his film's title. As he tells Gavin Smith, he objected to Gaumont's addition of

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"by" to the title for its North American distribution as "JLG by JLG." "If there is a 'by,' it means it's a study of JLG, of myself by myself and a sort of biography, what one calls in French *un examen de conscience*, which it is absolutely not. . . . A self-portrait has no 'me.' . . . I was interested to find out if it could exist in [motion] pictures and not only in paintings."[28] Commenting elsewhere, and there too drawing a comparison to painting, he insists that the slash in *JLG/JLG* denotes a reflection, "JLG in the mirror," and he goes on to claim that it is not just his body he portrays but his thought process, since, after all, the cinema was "made to inscribe thought," to give it "a certain visible form."[29] The sense of self-portraiture he adapts from painting also entails a severe examination of the medium. He calls his film a self-portrait "in the sense that the painters have practiced this exercise; not by narcissism, but as an interrogation on painting itself. . . . *JLG/JLG* is an attempt to see what cinema can do with me, not what I can do with it."[30]

This attempt leads Godard to use cinematic resources to distribute "JLG" across multiple and complex registers of self-inscription.[31] He materializes in a voiceover track that wavers between different vocal inflections, in a photograph of himself as a child, in handwritten intertitles on ruled notebook paper, and in citations of both his earlier work – *La Chinoise* [1967] can be seen playing on a television monitor at one point – and some of his earlier public remarks recalled, oddly enough, by his scantily dressed housemaid. When Godard appears "in the flesh," he is shown mostly from the side or from the back, in heavy shadow, engaged in reading and thought in various stations inside his dimly lit Rolle home (his "chambre noire," as an intertitle puts it, alluding also to the French term for camera obscura). Here again Godard depicts himself as a tenebrous figure, backlit in the orange-shaded lamplight and the bluish-toned natural light that comes in through his

windows. In a rare, inventive instance of "facing forward," he includes within the shot a viewfinder of a video camera positioned in front of him, its lens pointing back at him, its monitor signaling insufficient light (the body of the camera is hidden in darkness). When Godard strikes a match and lights a cigar, his gesture is noticeable on the right side of the frame, and the viewfinder reports back a portrait of his face. In this visual complement to the film's title, the image evokes a shot-countershot relationship, as though JLG and JLG are involved in a dialogue scene, the face of one pictured over the shoulder of the other.[32]
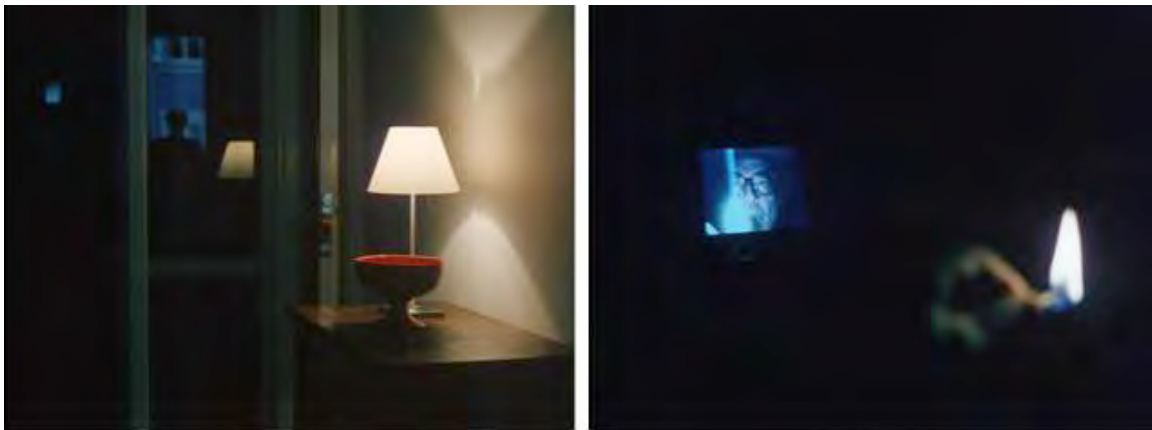
Figures 115-116. *JLG/JLG* **(Godard, 1994)**

If Godard is situated dispersively and obscurely in *JLG/JLG*, he takes measures from the outset to announce and mourn his own death, or the death of a certain sense of (authorial) selfhood: unitary, wholly individuated. In a hoarse voiceover, moments after talking through steps of preparation as though he is both directing and starring in a stage play ("Cast the roles. … Settle problems of the *mise en scène*. Perfect the entrances and exits. Learn your lines by heart. Work to improve your acting. … Be, as the case may be, a success, a triumph, or on the contrary, a failure, a flop."), Godard professes that he has "put on mourning" before death's arrival instead of afterwards as per custom. The death in question, his own, is not quite a literal event (though his awareness of his mortality is

sharply apparent in the film). As the camera leisurely tracks from one unoccupied room in his house to another (with a cut just as it reaches the threshold), his voice, now joined by the "Entombment" movement of Paul Hindemith's *Mathis der Maler*, tells us: "I was already in mourning for myself, my sole and unique companion. I suspected that my soul had stumbled over my body and that it had left without offering a hand."

While this self-portrait is of a person isolated, removed, and loathe even to pick up the phone that rings intermittently in the film, *JLG/JLG* does not celebrate a life lived in seclusion. The repeated intertitle "I am Legend" alludes both to Godard's standing as an eminent filmmaker and to Richard Matheson's 1954 science-fiction novel, implying that JLG, like Mattheson's protagonist, is the sole remaining survivor in a world that has undergone a pandemic of vampirism. Clearly Godard relishes the image of a man driven into solitude and doomed to obsolescence, but at least for the JLG personified in the film, this is not a desirable state. If the film has a main structuring principle, it unfolds as a set of trials through which Godard seeks to escape from his condition, and this requires him to throw off the legend bound to his name, to *dispossess* himself of the authorial self on which it rests. In a statement that profoundly re-imagines the practice of self-portraiture, Godard, speaking gruffly while a shadow, presumably his own, falls across the photo of himself from his youth, declares: "He possessed hope, but the boy didn't know that what counts is to know by whom he is possessed, what dark powers are entitled to lay claim to him." Straight away the film cuts to waves lapping against the shoreline of Lake Geneva, the Alps lining the sky in the distance, as though to situate the landscape as a "possessor" of Godard. That is, Godard wishes to portray himself not as being in possession of certain

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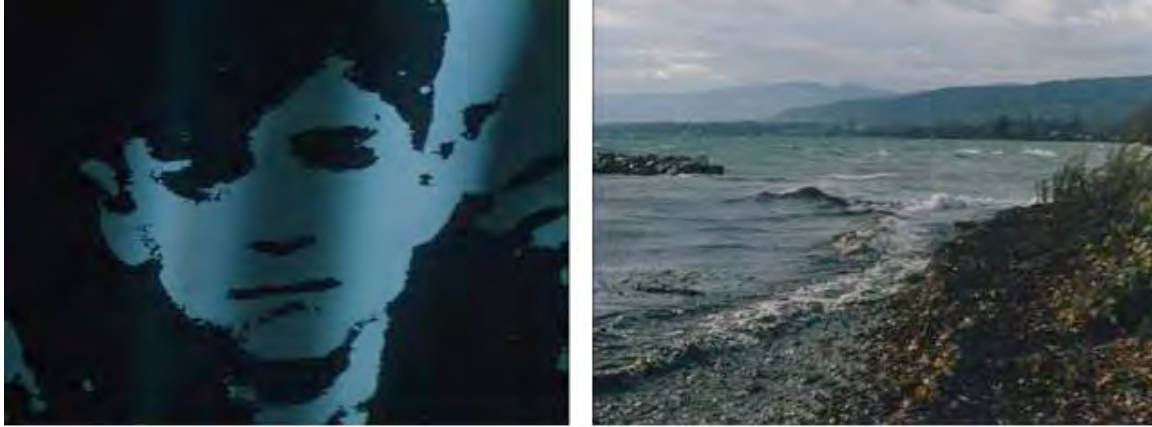
Figures 117-118. *JLG/JLG* (Godard, 1994)

attributes and accomplishments but as possessed by external forces demanding attention.

Verbally, Godard does not elaborate on this provocative transfer from possessor to possessed, but it is plain enough that not least among the "dark powers" laying claim to him is the cinema. As we've noted, the conception of self-portraiture he mobilizes in the film – an effort to see what cinema can do *with him* – is one in which self-inspection is co-extensive with an investigation into the medium. The distribution of "JLG" across several registers of inscription – sound, voice, shadow, figure, writing, citation, and even landscapes and domestic spaces haunted by his absence – generates a cinematic presence in which Godard is at once diffuse and profuse, a man seeking "authorial divestiture" and "biographical erasure"[33] through committing himself to the sonic and visual fabric of his work. This is to say, his abdication of his legendary authorial status does not come at the cost of a consubstantial bond to the film he is making; what is sacrificed is the idea of an author removed from the gestures, the materials, the "substances" that comprise the work. We might say Godard is "possessed" by the cinema insofar as he embodies its operations. Both *JLG/JLG* and *Histoire(s)* dramatize a "becoming-medium" on his part. He presents himself as a channeler of givens – of texts, sounds, and sights he has assembled more so

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than created.[34] And channeling applies here in a spiritualist as well as an aesthetic sense. As Godard likes to say, invoking the powers of cinema is always a kind of conjuring act, and citation, a communication with dead spirits. "The filmmaker," he contends in a 1986 interview, "has the vocation, like a sorcerer, to make his body the medium for words, the way that others are the mediums for the words of God or nature."[35]

In *JLG/JLG* we find Godard, despite his solitude, in constant contact with others living or dead (mostly the latter) through citation – sometimes direct, more often indirect and potentially, if not likely, imprecise. The obscurity of his figure in his "dark chamber" has its counterpart in this murky realm of citation, where the source is seldom named and yet often reworked in ways in which the original context remains significant. Godard has fewer worries than Montaigne about his indebtedness to previous authors. In an interview concerning *JLG/JLG*, he disputes the notion that his reliance on citation conflicts with the imperatives of self-portraiture by yielding to other voices that insulate his own. "Citations don't protect me," he explains. "They're my friends."[36]

Yet citation is not the only activity through which Godard moves from isolation towards interaction with others in the film.[37] At various points we see him converse with other characters, namely two housemaids,[38] a "wet nurse," two "cinema inspectors" who show up, like emissaries from the world to which he has become an outlier, to make him answer for his past deeds, and an elderly woman, wearing a black shawl and speaking in Latin, whom he meets in the snow-covered environs near his residence. We also see him in a curious match of "doubles" tennis: he plays a point now on the side of a young boy, now on the side of a young woman, his striped shirt changing colors between shots so as to match his teammate. While riffing on a line by Faulkner ("The past is never dead. It's

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not even past"[39]), he makes a pun on his opponent's successful passing shot. After it sails
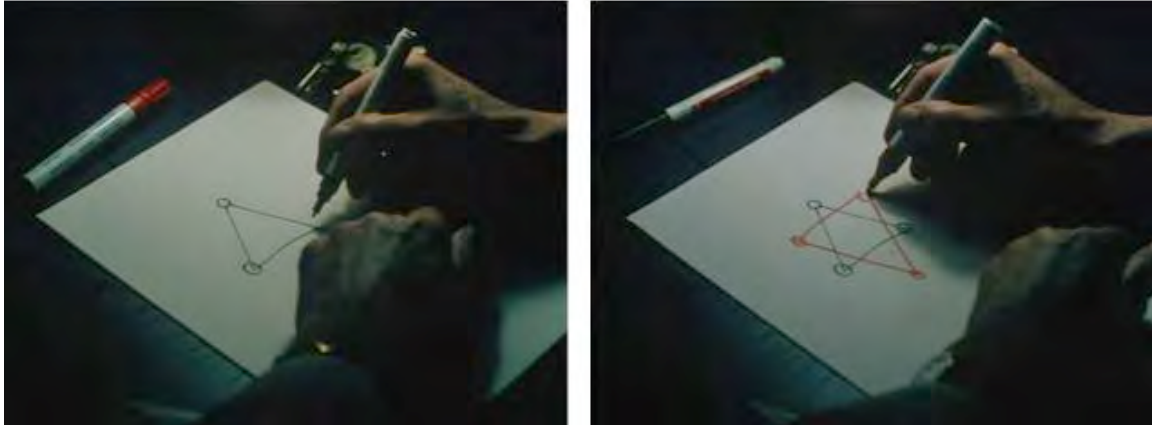

Figures 119-120. *JLG/JLG* **(Godard, 1994)**

by his racquet, he states, "I am as happy to be passed [*passé*] as not to be passed [*passé*]."

These encounters give thematic support to passages where Godard's reflections raises the potential for social interaction that escapes certain errors of observation. I will discuss these weighted passages in the order in which they occur, though we should bear in mind that Godard's path of assertion in the film is anything but direct and continuous. In essayistic fashion, these passages converge associatively around common tropes, with Godard gesturing towards a desired outcome but suspending all conclusions, voicing his concerns tentatively and from various angles, relying heavily on citation, divagating from one exercise to the next without conspicuous motivation. It would simply be inaccurate to say that these moments dovetail to drive home a thesis, but collectively they do sketch the self-portrait's most critical movements of thought.

The first passage in question shows Godard at his writing desk, illustrating what he calls "the law of stereo," just his hands visible. With two magic markers (one red, one black, the same colors he wears alternatingly in his tennis match) he draws two triangles

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intersecting on a blank sheet of paper to form a hexagon. On the basis of this diagram he

articulates a series of relations involving a projection and a responsive reflection between

separate beings as well as between entire groups. Initially speaking in hypothetical terms,

Figures 121-122. *JLG/JLG* **(Godard, 1994)**

he indicates the inversive positions described by the figure. Then (retracing it on a clean

sheet over the previous one beneath), he says that this principle of stereo manifests itself

in history. "There was Euclid, and then there was Pascal, Pascal who reflected … But in

history, the history of history, there was Germany which projected Israel. Israel reflected

this projection, and Israel found its cross." He claims that this adversarial interlocking of

sightlines is reconstituted in future relationships. "And the law of stereo continues. Israel

projected the Palestinian people, and the Palestinian people, in turn, bore their cross. That

is the true legend of stereo." In Godard's stubbornly figurative manner of thinking, it's no

accident that the Star of David diagrams this relational logic.

What can we deduce from this exercise that, like so many of Godard's thoughts,

submits a frustratingly compact provocation?[40] Although critics have tended to gloss or

ignore the scene, it has the markings of being pivotal – from the peels of thunder on the

sound track to the trousseau of keys blatantly placed at the top-right corner of the frame,

as though to promise that an understanding of this stereoscopic principle might "unlock" some of the mysteries of *JLG/JLG* and, more broadly, the "history of history."[41] So what, then, is Godard after in this eccentric history lesson?

It's important to note that Godard initiates this scene, which is shot in one static take of his desk, by reading aloud a passage from Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* and then from Diderot's *Letter on the Blind* – the former asks whether we can know and confirm that we have two hands by looking at them, since in doing so we implicitly have to trust our eyes; and the latter concerns a blind woman who takes solace in the fact that she will never "lose her head" at the sight of a handsome man. It is tough to determine the extent to which Godard imports these two philosophers' agendas into his own. I take it that the underlying thrust of his two-part recitation is to place sight, in the narrow ocular sense of registering the visible, under suspicion and to shift attention to a conception of vision that incorporates tactile and mental activities.[42] But then does the ensuing "law of stereo" bear out such a conception? Are we meant to think that the diagram he sketches is a testament to the last words in the Diderot passage ("Men of geometry live their lives with their eyes shut") and perhaps thus, in principle, a good thing?

In setting the two books aside and moving to the hexagram, Godard implicates himself in his illustration as one who receives a projection and projects in return: "And now, Jeannot, which rhymes with stereo." Once he assigns an historical function to the figure, the dynamic of exchange he postulates takes on a rather monstrous cast: an ever-repeating cycle of projection/reflection in which one hostile opposition leads to another, then another, and so on: the "true legend of stereo." Surely these aren't the conditions of

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interaction that Godard longingly pursues in the film and that the concept of vision he has in mind (over and above mere sight) is geared to engender.

That Godard wants to avoid the pitfalls of such "stereo" circumscription is made apparent in the following scene-fragment where we find him – again, a shadow-figure, a creature of obscurity – in bed reading from a book whose cover we cannot make out and whose title he does not reveal. After a short, darkly comic exchange with his housemaid, he reads aloud: "He was stupefied, but strangely enough he had no desire to dwell on the point … A thing is not what you say it is. It is much more. It is an ensemble in the largest sense. A chair is not just a chair. It is a structure of inconceivable complexity, atomically, electronically, chemically, et cetera." He lifts his head from the book and the film cuts on his glance to a shot of a chair in his bedroom, its wicker seat partially smashed in. Now in a different vocal register (lower, much more guttural, closer-miked; we can't see his lips but it seems to be a voiceover), he continues: "Therefore, thinking of it simply as a chair constitutes what Korzybski calls an identification. And the totality of these identifications produces nonsense and tyranny."

Figures 123-124. *JLG/JLG* (**Godard, 1994**)

The text from which Godard is quoting, with slight modifications, is A. E. van Vogt's 1948 science-fiction novel *The World of Null-A*. To be exact, the passage is an epigraph to a chapter and attributed to "Anonymous." Perhaps on one level – given the novel's plot: a man who, emerging from ignorance, embarks on a quest to discover his true identity, to harness mental and nervous capacities previously untapped (he finds he exists in multiple bodies that share the same thoughts and memories), and to bring down a vast, repressive empire – the citation adds to Godard's self-characterization in the film as the sort of protagonist familiar to science-fiction, the individual radically isolated in a dystopian society. More pertinent here is the matter of "identification" Godard broaches in the scene through his encounter with the chair. Van Vogt's novel has its major source of inspiration in Alfred Korzybski's 1933 volume *Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics*. A fundamental premise of Korzybski's argument is that we are ineluctably separated from reality by our perception of it, and that language, far from grasping what it names, only approximates and represents, in essence supplying a "map," as Korzybski puts it, for an infinitely more complex terrain than it is capable of describing. The habitual, often unconscious (but therein pernicious) mistake of "identification" results when the things of the world and the language we use in reference to them are taken as one and the same, when we act *as if* this is the case.

Through this citation, Godard doesn't so much recommend or take on board the Korzybskian principles that color van Vogt's *The World of Null-A* as he introduces into the essayistic discourse of *JLG/JLG* another problem of observing he wishes to outflank in his movement from isolation towards some form of sociability. Indeed, a continuation of sorts between the stereo illustration and this scene is implied by the prominent sound

of rain, as though the downpour has followed the thunder peels we heard minutes earlier. While enlarging on the perceptual limits to which Godard has just directed our attention in the previous passage, here he brings language into the picture and with it the danger of assuming that how we speak is in fact adequate to the structure of reality. "Identification" here is conceptually related to the fatal mistakes of projection we have just been warned about: both involve reactive thoughts and actions in which no genuine seeing (that is, no seeing *first*, before the imposition of categories) happens. The chair that Godard looks at in this scene is not a "chair" but more precisely a whirling dance of electrons that eludes and exceeds the name we assign it, as well as the *shot* Godard presents of it. The issue is complicated still further by the film medium which is no mere innocent instrument in the passage. What we're shown is a point-of-view shot, Godard looking at a quotidian object, unremarkable except for its damaged seat (which further discourages us from assigning it a preconceived function). In this self-depiction, JLG – or rather, one of his voices – warns us of the "tyrannical" consequences that follow the error of identification; and at the same time, while observing as spectators a picture of this object-"ensemble," we find ourselves situated and encouraged to think (if I may use a citation of my own, this from Epstein): "I see what is not and I see this unreal thing exactly."[43]

So Godard, in terms roughly consistent with the "seeing first" he espouses in his *Scénario du film Passion*, is calling for a manner of beholding that doesn't immediately ascribe things perceived to language and that doesn't succumb to delusions owing to the conflation of the object with the words used to describe it. His next decisive step in this movement we are tracing, however, is to recognize he is incapable of escaping from the "prison-house of language," as Godard's investigating couple put it, citing Nietzsche, in

Le Gai savoir (1968). This problem of language is indeed an old one for Godard, and its resurgence in *JLG/JLG* comes as a last-ditch effort to come to terms with it. In doing so, he once again looks to Brice Parain, whose appearance and philosophy of language form part of a key dialogue scene in *Vivre sa vie* (1962). Over a long-held shot of bare trees in a winter landscape Godard says: "When we express ourselves we say more than we want to. We think we express the individual but we speak the universal. 'I am cold.' It is I who am cold, but it is not I who am heard. I disappear between these two moments of speech." Just as he says "disappear," the film cuts to handwritten intertitles with the pages turning between them – "I am legend" and "the eternal house" – while he adds: "All that remains of me is the man who is cold, and this man belongs to everyone." Just as he completes the sentence, there is a cut to a black screen and another report of thunder.

Lifted from Parain without direct attribution, these lines allow Godard to imagine a gesture of "becoming universal" connected to, in fact stemming from, his abdication of his "legendary" authorial status – that is, a gesture of intense and willful submersion into language, the "eternal house" in which he effectively "belongs to everyone."[44] The black screen abruptly lights up as Godard strikes a match and examines a reproduction of de la Tour's painting *Le Nouveau-né* (1645), a scene of two women huddled around a newborn child. Still citing Parain, he elaborates the stakes of this passage into language:

> Where do you live? In language and I cannot keep quiet. In speaking, I throw myself into an unknown foreign order and I become responsible for it. I have to become universal. To realize with humility, with precaution, by means of my own flesh,[45] the universality I recklessly threw myself into. That is my sole possibility, my sole commandment. I said that I love, that is the promise.

Godard, approaching the end of his self-portrait, resolved to inhabit and to be possessed by language as a condition of universality, casts this culminant gesture as a "promise" –

more specifically (though he designates no specific recipient) a promise of "love." What he takes from Parain most crucially is the sense of language as an "order" into which we enter, assuming responsibility for what we speak, regardless of whether our words grasp the reality of what we think or feel, or the reality of things. With words come obligations even as through language the individual gives way to the universal. Godard can say he is cold no more assuredly than he can name the chair in his bedroom. Just the same, he can promise love inasmuch as language makes him an other-among-others – each to whom he
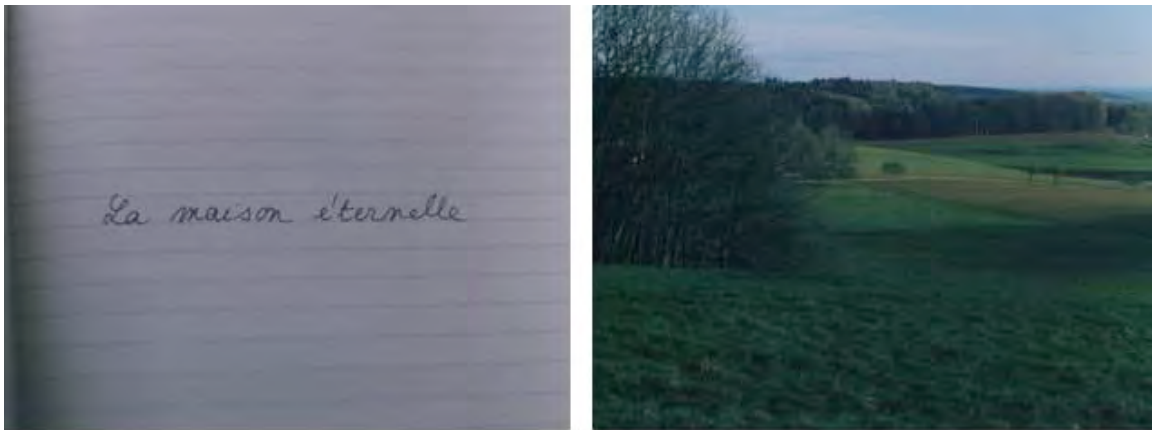
Figures 125-126. *JLG/JLG* **(Godard, 1994)**

"belongs." In this, language remains an instrument of possibilities.

 JLG/JLG comes to a close as Godard implies that his passage into language, into public discourse, is coterminous with a passage of JLG into the very texture of his work. Encountering the old, Latin-speaking woman outside his home, and translating her lines, which, through a ventriloquist displacement, communicate Godard's thoughts on his own fate as an artist, he says: "Whatever the extent of American power over conquered lands, its peoples will read me and once famous, throughout eternity … If I believe. If I believe. If there is any truth in the mouths of poets, I shall live." Probably borrowing these words, too, from a source I don't recognize, he imagines a "life" that obtains in having his work

"read" not least by the people of the nation whose dominance he has spent the better part of his career resisting. If the last minutes of the film enact the authorial death he has been suggesting all along, this takes place on the order of a death and subsequent resurrection. Somewhere between the winter landscapes of bare trees and the last shot of the film – an early springtime scene of green hills against a blue sky – JLG, as a legend and as a figure portrayed in the film, vanishes, expires. And yet, committed to the substance of his work, he "resurfaces" in the form of shadows (of clouds) sweeping over the landscape towards the horizon (and recalling his first, likewise ethereal appearance in the film, as a shadow swaying over his childhood photograph[46]). His voice persists, too: accompanied by David Darling's sonorous cello, it speaks further to the meaning of his parting gesture.

> I said I love. That is the promise. Now, I have to sacrifice myself so that through me the word love means something [*prenne un sens*], so that love exists on earth … In recompense, at the end of this long undertaking, I will end up being he who loves. That is, I will finally merit the name I gave myself … A man, nothing but a man, no better than any other, but no other better than he.

With these words, Godard ultimately conceives his self-portrait as a gift of love requiring self-sacrifice.[47] The last sentence, spoken over black leader, finishes or rounds off for the time being his movement towards sociability, a movement in which he points out tragic errors of projection and identification that he seeks to elude. This last sentence is also a citation of Sartre's closing comment in his literary self-portrait *Les Mots* (1964): "A whole man, composed of all men and as good as all of them and no better than any."[48] As such, it engages Godard in a context of self-portrayal in which there is already on the part of Sartre an attempt at revision with respect to preceding, more self-centered models. Sarte's words echo those of Rousseau that open his *Confessions*: "Simply myself. I know my heart and understand my fellow man. But I am made unlike any one I have ever met;

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I will even venture to say that I am like no one in the whole world. I may be no better, but at least I am different."[49] Where Rousseau gallantly asserts the singularity and originality of himself (and also of his work "which has no precedent" and "will have no imitator" on its completion), Sartre indicates a leveling of himself among others and a hard-won sense of community into which his words have at last thrust him.

Likewise, in *JLG/JLG*, Godard makes his parting claims and expects them to be valid to the extent he has earned them through the foregoing exercises in the film, that is, on the condition he has, by the film's end, vacated his biographical legend, inhabited the sounds and images for which he is responsible, and acknowledged (and made his viewer to acknowledge in return) the dangers of equating language with the thing described and of interaction on the basis of adversarial projection-reflection. Instead of simply picturing an aging director in lonely retreat, Godard's self-portrait undertakes a mission of "making love mean something" on the grounds that these endeavors succeed.

Abii ne Viderem

The appeal to dialogue (and through it, the assumption of public stakes) that we have seen at work in *Scénario du film Passion* and *JLG/JLG* returns with equal stress in *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, which to date is Godard's most ambitious effort at self-depiction. As a voice, a figure, a participant in a filmed conversation, an orchestrator of the sounds and sights that assail us in increasingly challenging forms, Godard is all-pervading in the video series, his presence even more broadly dispersed over the work's surface than it is in *JLG/JLG*. If *Histoire(s)* is the centerpiece of his late period, it also in a sense contains his preceding phases: it integrates throughout many citations of Godard's earlier projects

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from different moments in his career, and using multi-layered superimpositions it stages

encounters between "Godard" and "Godard," as when, in episode 1B, he revisits the last

shot in *Le Mépris* (1963) of Lang filming Ulysses salute an unseen Ithaca, and we see, in

a composite image, Godard lighting a cigar in his library circa 1988 alongside the young

Godard playing Lang's assistant. Even the selection of film-fragments beyond Godard's

oeuvre is a dimension of self-portraiture insofar as it is connected to his personal history

with the medium, not only as a filmmaker but as a critic and viewer (hence the European

and American focus of the cited films, few of which post-date *À bout de souffle* [1960]).[50]

Figure 127. *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (Godard, 1988-98)

As with his *Scénario du film Passion*, Godard portrays himself in the series as a

spectator and again intertwines the roles of author and spectator according to the shared

activity of beholding, making connections. But in *Histoire(s)*, though there is much talk

about the key importance of montage (and innumerable figurative riffs on the gesture of

montage in and across the video montage itself), we don't see Godard handling controls

on his equipment to conjure up and adjust images before him. He cites a sequence from

JLG/JLG in which he and a blind female editor cut together a scene from his film *Hélas*

pour moi (1993), but in the newly shot scenes of Godard in *Histoire(s)* there are no shots

of him technically "at work" as a filmmaker. Instead, we see him typing short, evocative phrases (often citations) on a mnemonic typewriter, which, with its staccato clacking, is made oddly to replace the technical apparatus of cinema. Just as often we see Godard by his bookshelves, removing a book at random (a contrivance, of course) to report its title aloud (e.g. "Matter and Memory") or read from its contents, an act which, like the typed-out phrases from his desk, gives rise to a videographic stream of montage that issues forth suddenly as if from Godard's cinematic imagination.[51]

In these moments, Godard at times turns his eyes upward just before the images arrive, as though to cast his look onto a screen somewhere out of frame; and sometimes he holds his eyeglasses in place with one hand and stares ahead, looking inside-out from

Figures 128-129. *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (**Godard, 1988-98**)

the superimpositions of which he is an integral element. He still meets and receives the images from a frontal position but no longer with his back to the spectator: the "visions" materialize somewhere between Godard and ourselves and are (unlike the titles that often join them) not quite inscribed on the surface of the picture plane; more delicate, they take shape as though projected onto the smoke rising from his cigar.

That Godard takes a spectatorial position in his self-portraits can be viewed as a Montaignian maneuver. Montaigne describes his strategies of reading, and his library in

which this work occurs, in vivid detail; and, figuring in the *Essais* as his own first reader, he remarks and passes critique on the writing as he scampers along and upon successive revisions between editions. This performed overlap of reading and writing, a core trait of the essay form he inaugurates, is less an attempt to preempt "wrong" interpretations than an appeal to dialogue with a diligent, sensitive reader who, in friendship, both cooperates and shares responsibility. I want to suggest that we think of Godard as a "first viewer" in *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, and that his performance of spectatorship in the series is pitched to an implicit interaction between "first" and "second" viewers.[52] I believe that his impulse towards sociability and dialogue in his self-portraits ultimately takes the form of this tacit dynamic between fellow observers, and that his rather bold claims regarding montage and its power to reveal should be seen in the light of such an exchange.

In order to bring the nature of this relationship into sharper relief, first we need to consider it in the context of Godard's overarching mission in *Histoire(s)*. I use "mission" in the singular with some hesitation since the series, which is much greater in scope than our other examples in this chapter, in no way boils down to a central thesis (located in the voiceover commentary) and a set of arguments tidily corroborating it.[53] But if its episodes raise a number of complicated matters (to list a few: cinema's inheritance from the older arts; cinema's privileged relation to history in the twentieth century; cinema's role in the construction of national identities; cinema's ethical obligation to confront, and make and distribute images of, real events ranging from the most quotidian to the most horrific), its method of essaying these concerns is persistently driven by a certain montage-based logic of images. This, too, is a risky claim, given that the episodes display great formal variety, oscillating in manner from sequences that come to us with the fragments precisely (not to

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say unambiguously) organized by ideas, events, and propositions to sequences that seem half-willed, half-accidental and work more in a lyrical register of feeling and imagination. Still, Godard's videographic practice stems from his contention, repeated countless times in his interviews over the past three decades, that cinema, through its particular resources of montage *deployed in a popular medium*, "allowed people to see," providing them with a power of vision that was ultimately lost thanks to the arrival of the talkie, the victory of speech and narrative over the image, and, not least, Godard's *bête noire*, the "occupation" of cinema and its reception modes by television.[54]

What *Histoire(s)* presents is not quite the "cinema" Godard describes in the series (video, after all, is not cinema for Godard but a tool for the critical exploration of cinema and its possibilities).[55] Nor, strictly speaking, is the series an attempt to restore (to a prior state) the kind of montage he claims was tragically abandoned. Godard is well aware that both his relatively small audience ("100,000 friends around the world," as he once said in a news conference promoting *Histoire(s)* at the Cannes Film Festival[56]) and the extremely demanding character of his projects bar him from the popular circumstances under which the cinema whose loss he is mourning thrived.[57] Rather, the video series offers an account of (or, to use Godard's terms in his dialogue with Serge Daney in episode 2A, it tries to "recount") a particular conception of cinema that made possible the seeing he embraces and puts his faith in; and according to Godard, who feels he owes to this conception his formation as a filmmaker, as well as his sense of having a (personal) history, to recount it in *Histoire(s)* is, at the same time, to "take account of myself."

Histoire(s), then, is a videographic intensification of the "cinema" that Godard recalls and recounts but doesn't reconstitute so much as he summons up its underlying

logic of images within different and profoundly more essayistic conditions of exchange with the viewer. Godard, as the first viewer in his video series, believing in the way of seeing he defends, but knowing that he alone cannot affirm its efficacy, undertakes the work of montage with an eye to our dialogical involvement (as another "toi" alongside himself in the "histoire(s)" of cinema). We find Godard discussing his montage in these such terms in his earlier video essay *Scénario de 'Sauve qui peut (la vie)'* (1979). There, while he playfully tests out some of the same montage devices that texture and punctuate *Histoire(s)*, he tells us in voiceover:

> What I'm trying to show you is how I see things, so that you can judge whether I am able to see, and what I have seen. I want to show you the relationships between images and then you would be as in a court of law where you are both the defendant and the prosecutor . . . and you can see if I see something. I show if there is something to see and how I see it. And you can say, "No, he's wrong, there's nothing to see." So what I would like to show you is a way of seeing – for example, superimpositions, cross-fades, and slow motion.

The statement makes clear that Godard is relentlessly essaying the manner of looking he espouses – seeing if he has indeed seen something, seeing *whether* there is something to see at all. And, as is also evident from his comments, this is an open-ended activity that, extending beyond Godard, requires our participation and discernment. In *Histoire(s)*, the public stakes of montage, the appeal to dialogue with "second" viewers, still obtains. To word it more strongly, the terms "cinema," "montage," and "history" belong to a critical constellation in Godard's thinking, each predicated on the condition of sharing, which is less a prerequisite than a desired goal.[58] And the fact he issues this appeal to the spectator suggests there is every chance his video montage might not succeed, that the relationships he "discovers" might be little more than aestheticist concoctions.

Subtending and supporting Godard's claims about montage is a discourse on the miraculous that is woven throughout *Histoire(s)* (a discourse already present in the films of his late period, namely *Je vous salue, Marie* [1985], *Nouvelle Vague* [1990], and *Hélas pour moi*). Across the episodes are frequent reminders of the cinema's ability to show us miraculous happenings: we see Johannes clasping hands with his young niece and raising Inger from the dead in Dreyer's *Ordet* (1955); Christ healing a leper (between a shot and countershot) in Pasolini's *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo* (1964); Michel and Jeanne pressed affectionately to one another, through prison bars, in Bresson's *Pickpocket* (1959); Karin overwhelmed and altered on the volcano in Rossellini's *Stromboli* (1950); and the double exposure from Hitchcock's *The Wrong Man* (1956) in which the face of Manny overlaps with and dissolves into the face of the "right man" who is shortly after apprehended in the film. Godard invokes the category of the miracle not to make a theological argument but to reflect on the conditions by which a "miracle of seeing" can emerge through cinematic form. These examples orient us to cinema's capacity to bring into sight – with a force of conviction – events and relations that would otherwise remain obscure and that challenge our usual ways of perceiving and knowing the world. In Godard's videographic montage, superimposition comes especially freighted with "miraculous" capabilities, hence the link Godard forges in episode 4A between his own montage practice and the double exposure from *The Wrong Man*, an image that in *Histoire(s)* becomes an elegant demonstration of *rapprochement*, of two disparate, heterogeneous elements coming together to generate a composite image that reveals something previously undisclosed. The miraculous power of the device is made most explicit in the much-discussed sequence in chapter 1A where scenes of Elizabeth Taylor sunbathing on a lakeshore in George Stevens's *A Place in the*

Sun (1951) are superimposed with corpses at Auschwitz (also filmed by George Stevens) and Giotto's fresco *Noli me tangere* (1304-6). Over this ensemble, Godard says in a half-whisper, "O how marvelous to be able to look at what one cannot see. O sweet miracle of our blind eyes," then the image suddenly vanishes.

If Godard's findings through superimposition are miraculous it is because their emergence is sudden and without warning and contrary to the known course of things, because they furnish – for "our" blind eyes – the possible grounds for belief in cinema's singular capacity to reveal, and because they elicit a sense of wonder (*miraculum* being bound conceptually to *mirari*, "to marvel at"). There is little question that Godard wants his multi-layered images not just to impress but to *astonish* and, in doing so, to move us into the orbit of an exchange his seeing initiates. But precisely how does this work in the series? That is, at what moment do we judge his material combinations or begin ourselves to assume the form of seeing that is ultimately at stake?

To pose this question another way: what, in the throes of watching and listening to *Histoire(s)*, does being "second" involve? Being "second" after all means that we are playing catch up at each juncture, a task that even for a well-viewed spectator, and even for a devotee of Godard's familiar with and predisposed to embrace his twists of thought, can prove daunting. If Godard is already far ahead of us in making connections, the pace and (citational) density of the montage make many passages in the chapters too complex, too tumultuous to take in and process without multiple viewings, indeed without a remote control to intermittently pause and dissect. The rather chaotic situation into which we are thrown doesn't neatly square with the "court of law" scenario of which Godard is fond of speaking when he discusses his montage and the sort of viewing it invites. Moreover, the

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notion of *rapprochement* that he takes from Pierre Reverdy – an image made of two more or less separate realities brought together, "the more distant and just the relations between them, the stronger the image will be" – doesn't translate as conveniently as we might like to a schematic procedure on display in the series: for every combination limited to two or three superimposed elements at once (e.g. the Elizabeth Taylor/Auschwitz passage, or the recitation of Baudelaire's poem "Le Voyage" by Julie Delpy combined with *The Night of the Hunter* [Laughton, 1955] in chapter 2A), there are many more streams of montage in which the composites take shape, dissolve, and drift associatively into new combinations according to *ongoing* motifs. The seeing at issue in Godard's practice is *itinerant* and not limited to occasional, pregnant moments where he taps the brakes and presents us with an especially significant, stakes-bearing, "rapproched" image.

The arduous task of the spectator is something Godard warns us about from the very beginning of *Histoire(s)*, which opens with titles telling us that the labor at hand is difficult, "hoc opus / hic labor est."[59] The first sight we encounter is of James Stewart in Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954), his eyes shifting behind his telephoto lens at a slowed and gently uneven rate. More titles assert that we'll have to "negotiate" for ourselves the relations among the manifold fragments, since Godard, now reciting a Bresson aphorism, will refuse to show us "all sides of things" and will "leave a margin of indefiniteness."[60] Our integral role is embodied here in Hitchcock's vigilant and imaginative Jeffries who constructs a fuller picture from the fleeting details he takes in from across the courtyard (and who of course obsessively projects his desires and anxieties onto those half-caught events). Straight away, then, Godard indicates that our charge as "second" viewers goes beyond weighing the material combinations he exhibits, beyond retracing the connective

steps he has already taken. Because *Histoire(s)* burdens us with its incompletion (and no logic of *pars pro toto* points us towards a grand unity), our dialogical role consists – just as crucially – in responding to the gaps and the blind spots in the ensembles we are given.

This means that the seeing Godard hopes to share with us is as actively *synthetic* as it is analytic, just as the image process on display is always, no matter how pristine and astounding its rapproched images, projected towards further, yet-to-come manifestations, always a matter of (often figurative) transference and transposition even as at certain key stages in its perpetual movement the emphasis falls on what is, for the moment, brought together and offered up as "evidence," as Godard puts it, for whether or not he has seen something.[61] Secondly, the relation between "first" and "second" beholders, mediated by the video montage, turns on a way of seeing that is, above and beyond a technical device restricted to the filmmaker, a psychic process. In his discussion with Youssef Ishaghpour, Godard insists that he uses the device of superimposition "Not all the time, but to remind, to show that it's there."[62] In other words, superimposition involves a constant interplay of the patent and the latent: it enacts a means of thought that is irreducible to what coalesces on the screen, that is active even when it does not find material support in the composites that Godard shows us. If Godard portrays himself as a spectator in *Histoire(s)* and, unlike *Scénario du film Passion*, removes his figure from his technical apparatus, this is largely because the way of seeing his montage assays springs from the position and perspective of the audience. And through intertwining the work of the montagist with the perceptual and intellectual work of the spectator, the video series demands that, as "second" viewers, we become skilled in the task of montage, too.

I Was that Man

Even as Godard endeavors to share the process of making connections, the act of montage is a creative gesture to which he lays claim, assuming responsibility for what he gives to be seen. As many commentators on *Histoire(s)* have noted, hand actions drawn and modified from films, photographs, and paintings figure conspicuously in the series, traversing widely different historical contexts and different types of dramatic situations – from open palms receiving a newborn child to Cocteau's Orpheus groping for the mirror entrance to the Zone to the contorted oratorical gestures of Adolf Hitler. While this hand imagery bears a metonymic relation to the work of montage – to what Godard himself is in the midst of performing – it must be emphasized that this link has implications that are not merely artistic (the inventive aptitudes of the hand that Focillon praises[63]) but ethical.

These ethical stakes are perhaps made most visible in the penultimate episode of the series, where Godard proceeds from an extended reflection on Denis de Rougemont's 1936 essay *Penser avec les mains* ("to think with one's hands") to an intensive reworking of Hitchcock's cinema, a sequence that contends (in a puzzling, not at all straightforward manner) that Hitchcock, at the height of his popularity in Hollywood, took "control of the universe" and in doing so succeeded where military conquests before him failed. The two main sections of the chapter are bridged by recurring scenes of hands that highlight the work of joining and separating, and given the terms of the cited de Rougemont passage, montage takes on an ethical dimension – it figures as "a hand held out," an "act of love for one's neighbor," a creative thought extended into action. And yet, still following de Rougemont, while thinking with the hands wields a power to transform human relations, it is also violent and potentially destructive, even to the person who exercises it ("Every

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creative act contains a real threat to the man who has dared to perform it – that's how a work touches the spectator or reader. If the thought refuses to bear down, to do violence, then it is exposed to suffering fruitlessly all the brutalities released by its absence.") It is no accident that throughout the Hitchcock sequence Godard reprises the same black-and-white photo of Hitchcock with a hand raised as though commanding a scene before him, orchestrating the "miraculous" disclosure through superimposition in *The Wrong Man* (a composite of faces to which Godard adds the still of Hitchcock, which flickers and fades in and out). More than a tribute to artistic creation (and more than a simple self-reflexive gambit), this repeated showing of the hand is a gesture in which the montagist is indelibly implicated – it is pitched to the assumption of responsibility for what the deed of montage gives to the world, what it makes *manifest*.[64]

The gesture of self-implication pertains, of course, to Godard's montage practice as well.[65] The concerns of episode 4A double back on those that surface in 2B where we see Godard seated at his typewriter in his dimly lit study (inexplicably shirtless, wearing a tennis visor with a blue translucent brim and casting a thick shadow on the wall behind him). He writes and says out loud "dirty hands," then holds both hands in front of his face and examines his palms and fingers. "To have or have not," he says, then a flurry of stills, including one of the main character in *Orlacs Hände* (Robert Wiene, 1924) looking at his hands, leads to the intertitle "to think with one's hands." Soon thereafter a stilled close-up of Louise Brooks from *Die Büchse der Pandora* (Pabst, 1929) merges, via cross-dissolve, with a stilled shot from the opening of *Persona* (Bergman, 1966) in which the young boy (shirtless like Godard) reaches out and places his hand over the enlarged face of a woman in soft focus, an image that in turn superimposes with Godard sitting at his desk, doubled

as figure and shadow, his gaze slightly upturned, the blue from his visor projected exactly onto the position of the woman's right iris.[66]

Figures 130-131. *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (**Godard, 1988-98**)

One could spend several pages unraveling the intertextual significance of this nimble and "miraculous" passage (underscored as such by the Arvo Pärt choral music from his setting of the *Te Deum*), but I will limit my brief comments here to its bearing on Godard's self-portraiture.[67] "Dirty hands" alludes to Sarte's controversial play *Les Mains sales* (1948), which concerns the quandary of politically committed individuals where ethically wrong actions appear unavoidable on the path to achieving the greater collective good. *Orlacs Hände* involves a concert pianist who loses his hands in a train accident and receives a surgical transplant, only to worry his new hands have malicious designs of their own as they once belonged to a man convicted of murder. When Godard looks at his own hands in *Histoire(s)*, the implications of these two citations transfer onto the hands of the filmmaker. Yet Godard's articulation of "dirty hands" doesn't hinge on a scenario of difficult choices made and justified with the agent fully aware of the pending consequences. Just before he says the phrase and performs his self-inspection, he claims almost in passing that F.W. Murnau and Karl Freund invented the lighting effects used in Nuremberg rallies when Hitler still couldn't afford a beer in a Munich café. Although the

factuality of this claim is quite doubtful, Godard suggests that the act of filmmaking bears with it enduring responsibilities even for what the filmmaker cannot foresee – for adverse political motives to which his or her inventions are put by others.

Godard, inspecting both sides of his hands and asking himself, "To have or have not?" acknowledges these public stakes as belonging to his own projects, to the past and present acts of montage in which he is implicated. Both "thinking with one's hands" and "dirty hands" posit in Godard's discourse the inscription of the doer, the montagist, in the deed carried out. There is no comforting conception here of a subject somehow "behind" and disconnected from the doing.[68] And if the gesture of montage manifestly means self-implication, it also establishes an ineradicable bond between Godard and the sounds and images he produces – a bond between *corps* and *corpus* that I want to call, following the Montaignian definition of self-portraiture, consubstantial. This consubstantiality after all finds expression in the fact that Godard haunts his superimpositions from within while he broaches the public and ethical stakes of montage.

Histoire(s) du cinéma comes to a conclusion (and for all the open-endedness and incompletion of the series, the last moments in 4B do have, much more so than the prior chapters that end with "to be continued" titles, a sense of finality about them, a feeling of culmination if not closure) as Godard, while layering citation upon citation according to a nexus of shared motifs, imaginatively reaffirms a consubstantial relation between himself and his work. This parting instance of self-portrayal is prepared for in the chapter (which Godard dedicates to himself and Miéville, as a tribute to their creative partnership) by the voiceover comments of Godard and others reciting on his behalf, their use of "I" having the tenor of an authorial confession more or less specific to Godard (although most of the

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remarks are in fact borrowed from, among others, Charles Péguy, Georges Bataille, Guy Debord, Arthur Rimbaud, and Emily Dickinson). The chapter is also thick with citations from within Godard's own corpus, spanning his career stages: we see snippets of *Pierrot le fou* (1965), *Ici et ailleurs* (1976), *Scénario du film Passion*, *Je vous salue Marie*, *King Lear* (1987), *Nouvelle vague*, *Allemagne 90 neuf zéro* (1991), *Hélas pour moi*, *JLG/JLG*, and *For Ever Mozart* (1996). Taking his written criticism into account as well, he has the unidentified voice of a woman read a long, modified section from his "Pierrot my friend" article, published in *Cahiers du cinéma* in 1965 (a passage about the inability of words to capture cinema, which "has life as its subject," and also about what he still believes to be a pressing problem: "where and why to start a shot, and where and why to end it").

As the chapter nears its end – the montage slowed a bit, the music diminished to a tranquil Ketil Bjørnstad piano composition – Godard depicts himself as an artist trying to seize hold of something irrecoverable through close engagement with artists before him, and he does so using citations that already contain variations on this task. Following two shots taken and reworked from *JLG/JLG* (they are made to recombine with Mischa Auer staring through a magnifying glass in Welles's *Mr. Arkadin* [1955] and with the slicing of the eye in Buñuel and Dalí's *Un chien andalou* [1929]), we hear the voice of Ezra Pound reading from his *Cantos*, while we see Orson Welles as Othello, spying on Desdemona as she walks hurriedly through a dark, temple-like structure. Already the motifs of adapting, recapturing, and perceptual investigation are in play (and perhaps also skepticism, given the motive of Othello's spying). Where Welles adapts Shakespeare, Pound, in the passage taken here from the first Canto, creatively translates, from a Latin translation into archaic English, Homer's *The Odyssey*, namely the scene from Book XI where Odysseus and his

crew encounter, upon summoning up souls of the dead from Hades, the "pitiful spirit" of their fallen friend Elpenor, whom they had left unburied "since toils urged other."

On the heels of the Welles and Pound citations, we see a shot of a single yellow rose standing out against a hazy, verdant backdrop, momentarily combined with the text "machine of dreams" (which follows from an intertitle shown just seconds earlier, "only the cinema"). The flower is from Godard's own *Allemagne 90 neuf zéro*, but where it is white in that film to express mourning for the death of Sophie Scholl, a German student beheaded in 1943 for distributing anti-Nazi leaflets, here the color has changed, through videographic tinkering, to yellow. We catch an intertitle, "Jorge Luis Borges," that alerts us to the relevance of this switch, and then Godard's gravelly voice intones: "If a man … If a man wandered through paradise in his dreams and kept a flower to remind him where he'd been and on waking found the flower in his hands …What's to say, then? I was that man." As he speaks, a black-and-white still of him, unshaven and wearing sunglasses, is integrated into two consecutive ensembles: first, in a pulsing alternation with the yellow rose, then in a superimposition with a cropped reproduction of Francis Bacon's *Study for a Portrait of Van Gogh II* (1957), Godard's face impressed upon a depthless and smeared landscape and his shades balanced on either side of "van Gogh," a phantasmal figure who is not distinctly separated, in line and texture, from his shadow (nor from the trees behind him) and who, like most of Bacon's bodies, seems to bear out the forces deforming him.[69]

Figures 132-133. *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (Godard, 1988-98)

We have here, in these last seconds of *Histoire(s)*, Godard's montage at its most acutely palimpsestic, the idea of layering already built in to the citations he gathers. The tale of a man waking from a dream and holding a flower as proof of his journey through Paradise comes from Borges citing Coleridge who, in turn, was already adapting lines by John Paul.[70] By another extension, the yellow tinge of the flower owes to Borges's short poem "A Yellow Rose," in which an aging poet hailed by others as "the next Homer and the next Dante" is given a yellow rose on his deathbed and, after uttering to himself some "inevitable" poetic lines that even he finds boring, suddenly sees the rose "the way Adam must have seen it in Paradise" and realizes that his words hardly begin to mirror, let alone possess, the things of the world they name.[71] Godard has selected and composed the final fragments of his video series with utmost care, so that collectively they riff on notions of old friendship mourned, of journeys to underworlds and paradisal realms, of dream states and waking discoveries and end-of-life revelations.[72] There is also, moving through these scenarios of authors drawing on authors before them, a strong undercurrent of failure and remove, a sense of irretrievability despite the proof-of-passage suggested by the rose. We find in these different examples ghostly recreations that depart from the sources on which

they are based – sources well beyond reach. Bacon's painting distantly evokes the spirit (and drowns out the optimistic mood, with a heavy impasto that gives the artist-figure a torpid and somber aspect) of van Gogh's autobiographical self-portrait *The Artist on the Road to Tarascon* (1888), the original of which is believed to have been destroyed when the Allied forces bombed Madgeburg in 1945. In Pound's recital of his own *Cantos*, we find an endeavor to channel, from classical antiquity into a modernist poetics of citation and commentary, the spirit of Homer's epic verse, now freed from its narrative confines, so that it might shed light on the present and future (a motive that reflects, at one remove, Odysseus's conversation with the dead in the cited *nekyia* episode). But here the distance between source and destination is of less concern than the insidious cultural aims and the delusional view of history towards which this endeavor, cited at its germinal root, would soon work. That Godard includes Pound in this elaborate stream of citations, at the close of a project that tirelessly addresses the ethical responsibilities of art and the atrocities of the twentieth century, in particular those attributable to fascism, should not be viewed as a naïve aesthetic comparison. While there are affinities between *Histoire(s)* and Pound's "epic," the nature of this citation is more precisely one of differentiation. The suggestion isn't just that *The Cantos* are implicated in the Shoah but that, more broadly, poetic forms have political ramifications from which they cannot be removed, sanitized.

How, then, do Godard and the project of *Histoire(s)* figure in this conclusion? What is the rose retained from the dream meant to betoken? What does the line "I was that man" suggest about Godard and the video series as a whole? Here it's important to note that these last words echo the ending of *JLG/JLG* where Godard, having decided to embrace the universality into which he passes responsibly through language, states that

he is just a man "no better than any other, but no other better than he," adapting Sartre's revision to Rousseau's assertion of complete singularity. In *Histoire(s)*, where Godard's voice and visage lay claim to these final fragments, it seems there is greater ambivalence between marking his singular status and subsuming his importance into a community he belongs to through language and citation. But to read these last moments with recourse to a notion of authorship that rests on individual origination would be to miss how Godard, in keeping with the Montaignian essay, works primarily as an orchestrator of givens and how he refuses a fundamental distinction between the existing sounds, sights, and words he appropriates and what he produces from scratch. After all, one of the chief lessons of his self-portraiture is that the activities he undertakes as author (as "JLG") are intensely *dividual*, whether he has a direct interlocutor or engages with other voices and materials called up from the past.[73] There is no contradiction in the fact that Godard claims rather emphatically to be (or to have once been) "that man" while speaking words and handling images that are not, in terms of their origins, his own.

Whether "I was that man" affiliates Godard with one of these artist-figures more closely than another is not made clear, but the "dream" in question is most certainly the cinema ("only the cinema . . . machine of dreams") and, in particular, the conception of cinema that Godard embraces and tries to recount in *Histoire(s)*. By invoking the parable of the retained flower at the end of his magnum opus, Godard declares that he "was that man" who witnessed firsthand in his experience as a spectator, critic, and filmmaker the reality of a cinema that enabled people to see things, events, and relations between them, and to share in this seeing, to take active part in its "miraculous" discoveries. The flower plucked from his dream is the vestige of this glimpsed reality on which his video series is

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founded. And it is fitting that Godard, in claiming this special circumstance for himself, his history, and his body of work, inhabits the last two superimpositions, dissolved into their resonant contours, looking out at us looking at him, as an integral component of the montage, the performative deed into which his figure is thrown.

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Notes

[1]Michel de Montaigne*, The Complete Essays*, trans. and ed. M.A. Screech (New York: Penguin, 2003), 909, hereafter cited in text by book, chapter, and page number.

[2] Gilles Deleuze, "Three Questions About *Six fois deux*," trans. Rachel Bowlby, in *Jean-Luc Godard: Son + Image, 1974-1991*, ed. Raymond Bellour with Mary Lea Bandy (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1992), 35.

[3] Godard, "The Carrots are Cooked," interview by Gideon Bachman, in *Jean-Luc Godard: Interviews*, ed. David Sterritt (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), 132.

[4] Godard, *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard, tome 2: 1984-1988*, ed. Alain Bergala (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1998), 438.

[5] On Godard's presence in his work and his visibility in French culture during his late period, see Jacques Aumont, "The Medium," trans. Rachel Bowlby, in *Jean-Luc Godard: Son + Image*, ed. Bellour, 205-213. For a list of Godard's appearances on television, see

Nicole Brenez, David Faroult, Michael Temple, James S. Williams, and Michael Witt, eds., *Jean-Luc Godard: Documents* (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 2006).

[6] Aumont, "The Medium," 206.

[7] Godard, interview with Gavin Smith, "Jean-Luc Godard," in *Jean-Luc Godard: Interviews*, ed. David Sterritt (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), 183.

[8] Paul Arthur, "The Moving-Picture Cure: Self-Therapy Documentaries," *The Psychoanalytic Review* 94, no. 6 (2007): 865-885.

[9] Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle, "Montaigne's Consubstantial Book," *Renaissance Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (1997): 724-727.

[10] Ibid., 733.

[11] Montaigne does not firmly distinguish between written and spoken language, and he argues that the written should maintain the essential character of oral expression, hence his critical departure from the "deceptions" of rhetoric.

[12] Boyle, "Montaigne's Consubstantial Book," 727-745.

[13] Donald Frame's translation of this key passage is more revealing in this respect: "… a book consubstantial with its author, concerned with my own self, an integral part of my life; *not concerned with some third-hand, extraneous purpose, like all other books*" (my italics). Montaigne, *The Complete Works*, trans. Donald Frame (New York: Everyman's Library, 2003), 612.

[14] My use of "early modern" follows what Terence Cave outlines in his essay, "Locating the Early Modern," *Paragraph* 29 (2006): 12-26. Cave looks to Montaigne's *Essais* as an exemplary early modern text.

[15] Montaigne does not seem to have known of Dürer's pioneering work in Germany, and there is only one specific example of a painted self-portrait invoked in the *Essais:* "I saw one day in Bar-Le-Duc King Francis II being presented with a self-portrait by King Réne of Sicily as a souvenir of him. Why is it not equally permissible to portray yourself with your pen as he did with his brush?" (II.17: 742).

[16] This description is not all-encompassing of the rather flexible genre, but it highlights a prime feature of its allure and effectiveness.

[17] Nicole Lawrence, catalog description in *Self-Portrait: Renaissance to Contemporary*, ed. Anthony Bond and Joanna Woodall (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2006), 123.

[18] Michael Fried, *Manet's Modernism, or the Face of Painting in the 1860s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 374.

[19] In their video essay, Godard and Miéville also include material citations of self-portraits by (among possible others I have not identified) van Gogh, Chardin, Gaugin, and Francis Bacon.

[20] Jacques Aumont makes a quick but compelling observation that the "multiple appearances of Godard" in *Histoire(s)* could be fruitfully compared to Courbet's self-portraiture. Aumont, *Amnésies: Fictions du cinéma d'après Jean-Luc Godard* (Paris: P.O.L., 1999), 25.

[21] Nicole Brenez nicely captures the principle that characterizes Godard's scenario-sketches: "the film to be made is confused in turn with the film that has already been made, and with the film that is impossible to make. The image becomes simultaneously optative, conditional, imperative, indicative." Brenez, "The Forms of the Question," in

For Ever Godard, ed. Michael Temple, James S. Williams, and Michael Witt (London: Black Dog, 2004), 174-175.

[22] Michael Renov, "The Electronic Essay," in *The Subject of Documentary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 186.

[23] Richard Brody, *Everything is Cinema: The Working Life of Jean-Luc Godard* (New York: Metropolitan, 2008), 443.

[24] Godard, speaking of his Sonimage work with Miéville, tells Colin MacCabe that he is not out to "convince" his audience through the "way of thinking" he exhibits, but to have, in effect, the "first word" in a tacit dialogue. MacCabe, *Godard: Images, Sounds, Politics* (London: Macmillan/BFI, 1980), 160. And Godard here is actually citing a line that "Betty" says to "Albert" in the seventh movement of *France/tour/détour/deux/enfants* (1978). Only Betty goes on: "The word comes so seldom because we're too few to do this sort of work. So the first word, being the only word, becomes the last, and we look as though we must be proven right."

[25] Godard, "The Future(s) of Film," interview by Emmanuel Burdeau and Charles Tesson, in *Jean-Luc Godard: The Future(s) of Film: Three Interviews 2000/01* (Bern: Verlag Gachnang & Springer AG, 2002), 37-38.

[26] For a general discussion of film authorship in this context, see Timothy Corrigan, "The Commerce of Auteurism," in *Film and Authorship*, ed. Virginia Wright Wexman (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 96-11. Corrigan writes, "Placed before, after, and outside a film text and in effect usurping the work of that text and its reception, today's auteurs are agents who, whether they wish it or not, are always on the verge of being self-consumed by their status as stars" (100).

[27] Godard, interview with Serge Daney, "Godard Makes [Hi]Stories," trans. Georgia Gurrieri, in *Jean-Luc Godard: Son + Image, 1974-1991*, ed. Bellour with Bandy, 160.

[28] Godard, interview with Smith, "Jean-Luc Godard,"183.

[29] Godard, *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard, tome 2*, 306.

[30] Godard, quoted in Kaja Silverman, "The Author as Receiver," *October* no. 96 (Spring 2001): 24-25.

[31] The ways in which Godard inhabits his own film, explicitly engaging and modifying his own authorial status, fit roughly with a tendency that Lucy Fischer has identified in films that offer representations of authors (her focus is on the figure of the writer) and therein complicate poststructuralist notions of the "death of the author," as asserted by Barthes and frequently taken to extremes by theorists writing in his wake. Fischer, "Body Double: The Author Incarnate in the Cinema," Inaugural Distinguished Professorship Lecture. University of Pittsburgh. October 13, 2009.

[32] Dialogue is further suggested by an overlapping of Godard's voice on the sound track. It is not surprising, then, that Godard follows this instance of self-portraiture with a scene of a tennis match, one of his preferred figures of shot-countershot.

[33] These are terms that Kaja Silverman deploys in her important essay on *JLG/JLG*, "The Author as Receiver," *October* 96 (Spring 2001): 17-34.

[34] In this sense Godard's self-portraiture is an outgrowth of what Serge Daney once called "Godardian Pedagogy." See my Chapter Two.

[35] Godard, quoted in Aumont, "The Medium," 207.

[36] Godard, *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard, tome 2*, ed. Alain Bergala, 297.

[37] One of Godard's citations is an apostrophic nod to Miéville. Sitting and smoking at his desk, his head framed between two lamps, he reads aloud a poem by Paul-Jean Toulet (while the sound track includes a clip from Bresson's *Journal d'un curé de campagne* [1951], the priest remarking on how wonderful it is to give what one does not posses): "While the orchestra plays its outdated repertoire, amid the crowd, I see you from afar. And you, divine, in silence, your chin poised on one finger, your eyes half-shut, you think. I want you to be thinking of me." Just seconds after Godard looks up from the book and takes a draw on his cigar, we hear another fleeting French-language sound clip, the source of which I have not identified: a woman's voice saying "I am Anne-Marie."

[38] Karla Oeler focuses on the significance of Godard's interactions with these two characters in her essay "The Housemaids of JLG," *Critical Quarterly* 51, no. 3 (October 2009): 25-40.

[39] The line is spoken by Faulkner's detective/attorney Gavin Stevens in *Requiem for a Nun* (1951).

[40] This is a problem of interpretation that inevitably arises in the face of an essayistic discourse, as Montaigne well knew when he spiritedly invited his reader to "pluck" and further develop the matters on which he merely touched in passing but which contained the seeds of a potentially infinite number of essays (I.40: 281-282). One also thinks of Nietzsche's line in a discarded draft of "Why I Write Such Good Books" for *Ecce Homo*: "I am *brief*; my readers themselves must become long and comprehensive …" Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Geneology of Morals* and *Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), 340.

[41] It is just as likely that Godard is mocking the need to resolve problems through an interpretive "unlocking." As he says in *Notre musique* (2004), "Everyone talks about the key to a problem. No one talks about the lock."

[42] This point is further elaborated in a segment in *JLG/JLG* in which Godard hires a blind woman to help him edit a scene from *Hélas pou moi*. See Christopher Pavsek, "What Has Come to Pass for Cinema in Late Godard," *Discourse* 28, no. 1 (Winter 2006): 177-180.

[43] Jean Epstein, "Cine-Mystique," trans. Stuart Liebman, *Millennium Film Journal* 10-11 (1984): 192.

[44] Pavsek connects the emphasis on language to Godard's use of citation as an instrument and medium of co-belonging. "[T]this expression of a self through citation passes into an emptying of the self, a dispersal into citability, in which all belong to him and he belongs to everyone." Pavsek, "What Has Come to Pass for Cinema in Late Godard," 170.

[45] "Flesh" is a loaded term here, continuing as it does from a Merleau-Ponty passage cited only seconds earlier. Cutting across the film, and subtending the focus on language, is a phenomenological sense of being entwined with the "flesh of the world."

[46] I am indebted to Andy Horball for pointing out the bookending function of these two shadow moments in the film.

[47] Silverman persuasively argues that *JLG/JLG* is devoted to refiguring the acts of giving and receiving outside the dynamics of power and exchange. Silverman, "The Author of Receiver," esp. 28-31.

[48] Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Words*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: George Braziller, 1964), 255.

[49] Jean-Jacques Rossueau, *The Confessions*, trans. J.M. Cohen (New York: Penguin, 1953), 17.

[50] In this "history of cinema" that professes to encompass "all the histories," the selection of films is limited mainly to France, Italy, Germany, the United States, and Russia. There are few citations post-1960, and there is precious little accounting for East Asian cinema, beyond a few citations of Mizoguchi and Ozu. "The East" comes across mainly through Western filmmakers who ventured there, namely Renoir, Rossellini, Duras, and Ivens.

[51] Godard's various postures and gestures in his appearances across the series are never in a naturalistic style and are frequently burlesque, to the point of eliciting laughter.

[52] My conception of the link between "first" and "second" viewers is loosely borrowed from Michael Fried's use of such a notion in his studies of painting. See in particular his *Courbet's Realism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990). I should note that such a relation has a rough counterpart in critical discussions of Montaigne's *Essais* that frame the French essayist as the "first reader" of his work-in-progress. See for example John O'Neill, *Essaying Montaigne: A Study of the Renaissance Institution of Writing and Reading* (London: Routledge, 1982).

[53] For an example of gross oversimplification of the video series that is typical of the author's dullness, see Brody, *Everything is Cinema*, 512. There, Brody absurdly argues that *Histoire(s)* is "the embodiment of a single, dominant, coherent argument, which Godard himself voices with the clarion directness of a lecturer."

[54] For a general account of Godard's sustained emphasis on montage in his late period, see Michael Witt, "Montage, My Beautiful Care, or Histories of the Cinematograph," in *The Cinema Alone: Essays on the Work of Jean-Luc Godard, 1985-2000*, ed. Michael

Temple and James S. Williams (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, 2000), 33-50.

[55] Michael Witt usefully unravels just what the term "cinema" means for Godard in his article "'Qu'était-ce que le cinéma, Jean-Luc Godard?' An Analysis of the Cinema(s) at Work in and around Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma*," in *France in Focus: Film and National Identity*, ed. Elizabeth Ezra and Sue Harris (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 23-41.

[56] Colin MacCabe, *Godard: A Portrait of the Artist at Seventy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 333.

[57] Herein lies the major significance of Hitchcock's work for Godard, since it offers an example of formal innovation in the most mainstream, *popular* context imaginable. Godard first voiced some of the claims that appear in 4A of *Histoire(s)* in a 1980 interview for *Libération*, which he gave two days after Hitchcock's death and shortly before the premier of *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* at the Cannes Film Festival. In the interview he says that Hitchcock "restored for the people – the public and critics – all the power of the image and of *enchaînements* of images!" Godard, *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard, tome 1: 1950-1984*, ed. Alain Bergala (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1998), 412 (my translation).

[58] On the "sharedness of perception" at the crux of Godard's project in *Histoire(s)*, see Richard Neer, "Godard Counts," *Critical Inquiry* 34 (Autumn 2007): 135-168.

[59] The quotation in Latin, famously worked over by poets from Ovid to Dante – "this is the task, this is the toil" – is from Virgil's *Aeneid* (6.125-29), where the Sibyl explains to Aeneas the grueling task of returning from the Underworld.

[60] Robert Bresson, *Notes on the Cinematographer*, trans. Jonathan Griffin (London: Quartet, 1986), 94 (French original modified by Godard). "Let every eye negotiate for itself" is from Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* (II. i.178).

[61] As a welcome corrective to the critical tendency to describe Godard's videographic montage *solely* in terms of its Deleuzian "between-ness," James S. Williams stresses that the montage in *Histoire(s)* is keyed to "a process (or trope) of transferral, transition, transposition and transformation." Williams, "European Culture and Artistic Resistance in *Histoire(s) du cinéma* Chapter 3A, La Monnaie de l'absolu," in *The Cinema Alone*, ed. Temple and Williams, 134.

[62] Godard in discussion with Youssef Ishaghpour, *Cinema: The Archaeology of Film and the Memory of a Century*, trans. John Howe (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 34. In French his comment is subtler: "Pas tout le temps, mais en laissant penser, en montrant qu'elle est là." To "remind" doesn't quite express the sense, at once passive and constructive, of bringing an image to thought or letting it be mindful. Godard and Ishaghpour, *Archéologie du cinéma et mémoire du siècle: Dialogue* (Tours : Farrago, 2000), 27.

[63] Henri Focillon, "In Praise of Hands," in *The Life of Forms in Art*, trans. Charles B. Hogan and George Kubler (New York: Zone, 1992), 157-184.

[64] On the significance of "thinking with one's hands," see Williams, "European Culture and Artistic Resistance," 115-118; and Neer, "Godard Counts," 141-147.

[65] Thomas Elsaesser has emphasized the term "self-implication" over "self-reflexivity" as a more accurate and advantageous term to describe the essayistic work of Harun Farocki. See Elsaesser, "The Future of 'Art' and 'Work' in the Age of Vision Machines," in *After*

the Avant-Garde: Contemporary German and Austrian Experimental Film, ed. Randall Halle and Reinhild Steingröver (Rochester: Camden House, 2008), 31-49.

[66] Neer points out this detail in "Godard Counts," there crediting Miriam Hansen with the observation.

[67] For an account of the complex problem of "dirty hands," see Daniel Morgan, "'A Feeling of Light': Cinema, Aesthetics, and the Films of Jean-Luc Godard at the End of the Twentieth Century" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2007), 191-208.

[68] Here I think of Nietzsche's point in *On the Genealogy of Morals* that "there is no 'being' behind doing, effecting, becoming; the 'doer' is merely a fiction added to the deed – the deed is everything." *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Kauffman, 45.

[69] See Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

[70] MacCabe, *Godard: A Portrait of the Artist at Seventy*, 407-408n50.

[71] Jorge-Luis Borges, "A Yellow Flower," trans. Kenneth Krabbenhoft, in *Selected Poems*, ed. Alexander Coleman (New York: Penguin, 2000), 77.

[72] For an insightful take on the conclusion of *Histoire(s)* that informs my own analysis somewhat, see Roland-François Lack, "Sa Voix," in *For Ever Godard*, ed. Temple et al., 325-329.

[73] My sense of authorial dividuality here owes to Colin MacCabe's invocation of the term in his essay, "Bazinian Adaptation: *The Butcher Boy* as Example," in *True to the Spirit: Film Adaptation and the Question of Fidelity*, ed. MacCabe, Kathleen Murray, and Rick Warner (Oxford University Press), forthcoming 2010.

AFTERWORD

Questions of Coherence

It's equally fatal for the mind to have a system and to have none. It will simply have to decide to combine the two.

–Friedrich Schlegel, *Athenaeum* fragment no. 53[1]

Tho' my errors and wrecks lie about me.
And I am not a demigod.
I cannot make it cohere.
If love be not in the house there is nothing.
[…]
to "see again,"
the verb is "see," not "walk on"
i.e. it coheres all right
           even if my notes do not cohere.
Many errors,
        a little rightness,
to excuse his hell
        and my paradiso.

–Ezra Pound, Canto CXVI[2]

As a final way to consider the principles of Godard's essayistic style, I want to raise a simple but important question concerning *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988-98). Does the series cohere? Do its episodes hold together separately? Do they cumulatively make something of a piece, despite the relentless discontinuity and the general unresolved feel of things? And if "wholeness" is outside the realm of possibility, do we find coherence of structure or meaning in intermittent moments – this or that bit of commentary, this or that bit of montage surging up from a noisy, confusing texture of collage?[3]

These questions could be said to apply to all of Godard's audio-visual work, or at least to each of his projects that I have inspected for their essayistic tendencies. To watch

and listen to a Godard film or video is to confront – time and again – moments that reach

a strange poignancy without relating a unifying theme or argument, moments that agitate,

confound, and evade our understanding even as they conduce an intensive engagement:

moments that enthrall through their inventiveness but that also call for further thought,

for thinking that forces us outside our usual habits of thought.[4] In this study, I have tried

to show how the essay form handles the difficulty of communicating ideas and concepts

as essential to its experiments, less as a dramatic theme anchored in the narrative or the

psychologies of characters than as a series of critical problems with which the spectator,

along with Godard, is meant to struggle, the odds being that nothing *within* the work will

arise to tie up loose ends. I've tried to show that Godard doesn't revel in abstruseness so

much as he strives to make discoveries at the limits of mutual comprehensibility. In this

afterword, I will focus on *Histoire(s) du cinéma* because it stylistically reveals the stakes

of this striving in particularly vivid ways with respect to Godard's standing as an essayist.

      With *Histoire(s)*, considering the question of coherence requires us to address a

host of other questions. Which elements in the heterogeneous mix – visual, sonic, and

linguistic – should be given priority in our effort to discern coherence? To what extent

should we invest in Godard's comments and bodily self-depictions? Is there an overall

effect that governs, at each step, the distribution of fragments? Are some segments more

pivotal or revealing than others in their embodiment of an overarching formal logic? If

such a logic is indeed evident, is it the same for all eight episodes, or does each episode

offer its own manner of orchestrating fragments, in accordance with its particular goals?

Is "coherence" the best term to describe the kind of significance that the series pursues or

the videographic process through which it does so?

Whether *Histoire(s)* coheres has been a point of division between commentators looking to understand Godard's montage in systematic terms. Sam Rohdie, for instance, values *Histoire(s)* precisely because he believes it fails to cohere. He contends that the series, much like Godard's 2006 installation at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, *Voyage(s) en Utopie*, displays a formal logic according to which the constituent elements (images, sounds, citations, objects, documents, "realities") are ever-shifting and dispersive: never stabilized or stabilizing, everywhere suggesting multiple "pathways" and openings onto other possible configurations. He takes up specific examples only sparingly and excuses his methodology by claiming the work is unpossessable. "How do you get hold of, begin to possess, a Godard work, which is unfixed and often opaque, so that you have a place and it has a place?" he asks. "Even when you believe you can render it in an explanation, it slips beyond your grasp, and so you slip. It is designed to do this."[5]

If Rohdie celebrates the explosive incoherence of the series, Jacques Rancière takes issue with the means by which it *does* cohere, or rather imposes a false feeling of coherence. For Rancière, the montage is emblematic of an "inter-expressive" poetics – that is, a poetics in which each fragment "speaks twice": first as a "pure presence" that attests to a world *prior to* determinants of narrative action; then again as a metamorphic element that reconnects with other purified potentialities in a boundless, inter-expressive continuum. The trouble with this poetics, according to Rancière, is that it generates "co-belonging" among its varied fragments when in fact there is none; coherence results not from originary relations among the things swept up in the montage but from the *rhythmic enchantment* of the montage itself, its "fraternity of metaphors."[6]

For Rohdie, every transitory element in Godard's "collage-montages" (Rohdie's term) scatters, disturbs, eludes, echoes, and shoots off in multiple directions at once. For Rancière, everything spell-bindingly merges. In a way, both accounts are half-right, and for opposing reasons. Whereas Rohdie speaks to the discordance and disruptiveness that mark what I take to be the collage texture of the videographic process, Rancière, with his emphasis on rhythmic fusion and its capacity to absorb whatever conflicts are apparent in the composition, speaks to the power of montage. But because both commentators ignore the sense in which Godard gropingly works through the ensembles he composes, with the tension between collage and montage everywhere intact, their half-rightness misconstrues the dynamics by which his videographic style operates. Neither interpretation allows for a case of montage in which co-belonging is *essayed*, with the possibility of failure and of error built in to the process. Neither Rohdie nor Rancière observes how Godard situates himself as a spectator in the series; nor do they attend to how his conception of an image (in the strong, composite sense) becomes a medium for a tacit exchange with a spectator on whose diligent perception he depends.

In my account of the video series and of Godard's late output more broadly, my claim has been that between "incoherence" and "coherence," a wide range of dialogical possibilities opens up, and that much of Godard's critical and creative activity happens within this experimental field. I have argued that an essayistic way and address are vital to the French-Swiss director's ambitions, and in doing so, I have sketched and explored precisely the aspects of work that Rohdie and Rancière respectively fail to acknowledge. What I would like to do here is continue to shade in the role of the spectator (that is, the

"second" spectator) in this negotiation and to demonstrate how the matter of coherence is tied to the social and ethical concerns of Godard's montage.

For the spectator of *Histoire(s)*, the sounds, sights, voices, texts, and statements are indeed by turns evasive and charming; there are moments when things vanish or fly apart before we can get our heads around them, and there are passages where it appears that each fragment in the mix combines according to the same music. Yet there are also moments where something is at stake, where concepts and arguments are condensed into images, whether through material superimposition, through juxtaposition (successive or alternating), or through "vertical" linkage that occurs, over the course of a single episode as well as over the course of the entire series, between fragments that are placed far from one another in the video's phenomenal arrangement. At times we are shown an ensemble that appeals to our judgment, as Godard alone cannot affirm its poetic or historical value; at other times, the weave of the process, its interplay of superimpositions and deliberate lacunae, prompts us to play a game of the actual and the virtual, the patent and the latent. We're asked to contribute where the material discourse breaks down: where connectives and "counter-shots" are missing, where there are insolubilities and unresolved chords. In *Histoire(s)*, then, the work of montage isn't to synthesize all the assorted elements and to enchant all who take in the spectacle, as in a *Gesamtkunstwerk*. The montage is effective only inasmuch as its powers and its findings can be shared between the montagist and the discerning, imaginative spectator sought through Godard's essaying.

As I have shown in my study of *Histoire(s)*, Godard figures the binding force of montage in a variety of ways: as a couple's passionate embrace, as a "miracle" of seeing that exceeds our habitual forms of perceiving, as "thinking with one's hands." Here, as a

way of taking into account the co-operative task accorded to the spectator, I want to note the significance of still another concept that figures in this respect – what Godard himself has called the "justice" of montage:

> There is a shot before and afterwards, and between the two, there is a support, which is the cinema. One sees a rich person, one sees a poor person, and there is *rapprochement*, and one says: it is not justice. Justice comes from *rapprochement*. The same idea [is at work] in montage. It is the scales of justice.[7]

Linking "justice" and *rapprochement* resonates with the poetic notion of the composite image that Godard takes from Pierre Reverdy, which demands that an ensemble be not only "distant" in its crossing of separate realities but also "just." Moreover, this view is true to the spirit of the essay, which etymologically means not only "to attempt" and "to test out" but also "to weigh." In this sense, the superimpositions that Godard offers in the video series can be understood as "weighings," as provisional efforts to see whether there is "justice" in the relationships that fleetingly emerge.

Herein lies the figurative import of the double exposure from Hitchcock's *The Wrong Man* (1956) that Godard reworks in episode 4A, culminating his section on the English-American director's "control of the universe." If the superimposition is both a "miracle" for Godard and a counterpart to his own, more exploratory use of the device, this is partly because its combination of close-ups is – in the context of Hitchcock's film, all narrative complications aside – a gesture of "justice." Even as it doubles the two men, its sudden disclosure, to the viewer, of their ineffaceable difference has the strange effect of releasing the protagonist from an inexorable chain of false identifications.[8] Translated to *Histoire(s)*, where a flickering photo of Hitchcock with his hand raised is added to the ensemble, the image evokes the responsibility of the montagist to perceive and respond to unjust social circumstances. Godard "cheats" a bit by blackening the sides of Hitchcock's

face with a magic marker so it is more congruent with the double exposure, but the point isn't to make Hitchcock blend in with the image so much as to inscribe his creative hand in the moment's orchestration, to show how the director haunts and commands the bodily interval between the two converging figures.

Figures 134-135. *Histoire(s) du cinéma* **(Godard, 1988-98)**

What is meant to be shared in the exchange between Godard and the diligent viewer is both a manner of seeing and the responsibility that comes with it. As I have argued in this study, Godard's use of the essay form in his late period insists on there being an irrevocable ethical link between the doer and the deed – a link communicated most forcefully around the gesture of montage. But how in this conception does ethical responsibility reach from doing to seeing, that is, from Godard's acts of montage to the spectator's perceptual labor? To make this question more specific to the task of viewing *Histoire(s)*, how does this ethical dimension bear on our encounter with the series when we are not shown a striking *rapprochement* and the work of "superimposing" falls on us?

Here it is necessary to think less in terms of single, crystallizing images than of motifs that repeat throughout the series, constituting a broad network, both associative

and differential. The recurring motif that most urgently impresses on the spectator the ethical need for social justness is that of the disaster. At each turn, we encounter echoes and remnants, taken from fiction and documentary films alike, of the twentieth century's catastrophic events – cities in ruins, massacred corpses, sights whose traumatic content makes them obstinate to the "inter-expression" that Rancière theorizes. The spectacle of humans killing other humans is pervasive in *Histoire(s)*, and all trains lead to Auschwitz, where the medium's failure to confront injustice is, for Godard, most unforgivable – it is an act of negligence that effectively signals the cinema's demise.

It's in chapter 4A that Godard's thoughts concerning the power of montage vis-à-vis this ethical calling register most compellingly. Two of the major segments that make up the chapter – the recitation of de Rougemont's "To Think with One's Hands" (1936) and the reflection on Hitchcock's universal command through film form – are among the most frequently discussed in scholarship on the series, but how these two parts interrelate in the context of the chapter is seldom noted. During the de Rougemont section – which makes a plea for human friendship, grounded in creative thought extended into action, in the face of organized state oppression – we see two citations from Hitchcock's work that look forward to the section on Hitchcock's montage and illuminate its stakes. First, there is a decelerated shot of a schoolgirl under attack and screaming for help, her face streaked with blood, in *The Birds* (1963). The fragment continues the thread of violent catastrophe that is woven across the series; it reverts back to chapter 3A, where Godard superimposes the same scene with footage of a World War II aerial assault.[9] Then, a few seconds later, there are six shots of the protagonist in *The Wrong Man*, pacing in his prison cell, looking at his open hands and then clenching them into fists.

While these two citations work in part to transpose de Rougemont's reflections on creative thought into cinematic terms, they raise the public stakes of montage that persist into the Hitchcock sequence, which, beyond popular triumph and stylistic invention, has to do with the responsibilities of the montagist. The raised hand in the recurring photo of Hitchcock suggests, beyond a gesture of creation, an ethical obligation to respond when the "scales of justice" reveal an imbalance, and to assume responsibility for the aesthetic

Figures 136-139. *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (**Godard, 1988-98**)

form this response takes. Godard, in this way, acknowledges the public stakes of his own montage in the series. At the same time, the hand imagery that relays this concept across the chapter is – beyond authorial – affectionate, aggressive, defensive, and *receptive*. We have a role in this formation, too: the montage makes a claim on our involvement through

its power of responsive *confrontation* with the world's events.[10]

But the way this works in *Histoire(s)* differs from montage theories with which film studies is more familiar, most of which rest on the conversion of the spectator from passivity to activity (which, in essence, is a transformation of the spectator into an actor). Traces of such views haunt the series, from citations of Godard's own militant period to near-obsessive reworkings of Eisenstein's Odessa Steps massacre, which is paradigmatic of the montage-based aim of inciting a response to social injustice through stoking anger and resentment. The videographic process in *Histoire(s)*, by contrast, dwells firmly in the realm of the spectatorial, content to work its forces within those limits, while calling into question the efficacy of cinematic strategies that find their organizing center in a need for immediate action – a logic that tends to disguise the actual challenges that an appropriate response to a given situation would entail.[11] The tentativeness, the contingent search that distinguishes an essayistic cinema is devoted to the attitude that further thought is needed, that no surefire course of action follows from our perceptual findings or from our ethical, bodily-felt imperatives. *Histoire(s)* gives extended thought to the disparity between the need for action and the neglect or misuse of our most capable tools. The imbalance that registers in chapter 4A between de Rougemont's urgent plea and the immense potential tapped by Hitchcock's innovations in Hollywood is, perhaps, the severest injustice of all.

The mutually constitutive relation between montagist and spectator that I have repeatedly stressed in my discussion of *Histoire(s)* is fundamental to Godard's essaying. The dynamics of address and exchange involved are further important to consider in the effort to situate properly Godard's magnum opus in a modernist horizon of experiment.

Where Rohdie and Rancière lose sight of the series is tied to the modernist legacies they claim for it. Rohdie, concerned primarily with chaotic de-framings and de-formations in *Histoire(s)*, makes comparisons to Surrealist and Dada collage, to Cubist painting, and to such works as Kurt Schwitters's constantly changing and expanding *Merzbau* (1937…). Rancière, for his part, derives his view of Godard's inter-expression from Early German Romanticism, in particular Friedrich Schlegel's notion of *Witz* (which I believe Rancière miscasts as well[12]). But when the main sentiment offered to define our engagement with Godard's undertaking is either perpetual disorientation that follows from incoherence or fascination that follows from spurious rhythmic coherence, the essayistic impulse at work in the video series fades from critical view.

The question of how Godard's series fits into the larger picture of modernism is both unavoidable and potentially hazardous, not least because in the series itself, such a dizzying array of traditions and figures – from literature, painting, sculpture, music, and of course film – surface as possible candidates for affiliation. This isn't a topic to which Godard speaks directly, but his acoustic citation of Ezra Pound reading from *The Cantos* in the final moments of the series is particularly significant. Of all the twentieth-century works that have been suggested as precursors for *Histoire(s)*, Pound's "poem containing history" is arguably the most appropriate, despite the difference in medium. *The Cantos*, not unlike *Histoire(s)*, intersperses poetic and critical modes and is a collage of fragments aspiring to be a montage. A volatile work in process, it puts steep demands on the reader by refusing to supply connectives, by occulting and abrogating meanings, and by courting arbitrariness with its composition. However, there are two key differences between these two projects. First, Pound's view of history is premised on myth and archetype and is not

dialectical – it establishes points of contact in which differences dissolve and all excess is eliminated. As is well-known, Pound finds justification for his outlook in the fascist state, and all manner of excisions, identifications, and simplifications stem from this alignment in the poem's push towards coherence – towards what Pound calls "paradise." The music of Pound's voice in *Histoire(s)* is double edged: it lends the stream of citations (Godard's as well as Pound's) an undeniable beauty but it also gives pause, occurring as it does near the end of a work (Godard's) that has bemoaned the cinema's failure to confront the mid-century disaster in which *The Cantos* is, to an extent, embroiled. I take it that the point of Godard's use of Pound at a moment in *Histoire(s)* where he declares a consubstantial link with the images he has sculpted is to recognize that poetic forms are indissociably bound to ethical consequences in history (and also that within this relation, "paradise" and "hell" belong to a treacherous dialectic).

Second, Pound's effort to achieve coherence in *The Cantos* does not partake of an essayistic exchange. He worries for a minute (in the aftermath of Mussolini's death) that he "cannot make it cohere," only to insist a few lines down in the same Canto, "it coheres all right." As Richard Sieburth has argued, the recurring tropes of money and economy in *The Cantos* bear on how Pound's montage demands the assent of the reader:

> If credit, as Pound defines it, is the "future tense of money," so *The Cantos* are also written on credit, on the belief that in some forever deferred or future tense they will all cohere, that all the surface gaps and discontinuities will eventually disclose a deeper unity and harmony that will arise from the sheer force of their author's will to order or will to beauty (*to kalon*). In the meantime, we are simply asked to credit the sovereign poet's intentions, to take the epic ambitions of *The Cantos* on faith. In Pound we trust.[13]

Thus, even as Pound dons many personae and integrates several voices via translation and citation, and even as "errors" (factual, typographical, structural) exist in the final

text,[14] the poem projects a "sovereign" author, what Pound himself calls "my authority, ego scriptor ["I, the writer"] cantilenae," who *wills* coherence.

Contrastingly, in *Histoire(s)*, what must confirm the strength and "justice" of the montage is not the presumed will of the artist but a dividual *moi-toi* relationship through which a way of seeing is shared. This fundamental trait, and the sense in which Godard's montage treats it as a condition of possibility, must be taken into serious account in order to place *Histoire(s)* in the context of the modernist heritage it forcefully but ambiguously claims for itself. This question, then, ultimately comes down to the task of the spectator and the kind of participation that Godard actively seeks. As Colin MacCabe argues, "The paradox of modernism is that it fully lives the crisis of the audience while postulating an ideal audience in the future; it fully explores the slippage of significations which become so pressing as a securely imagined audience disappears while holding out the promise of a future in which this signification will be held together."[15] Pound's undertaking, with its multi-faceted concept of "credit," is symptomatic of this tendency. (MacCabe's primary examples of yearned-for, unspecified audiences are Joyce's "ideal reader suffering from an ideal insomnia" and Nietzsche's "far off" reader.[16]) Godard, as MacCabe observes, is perhaps the crucial figure in cinema whose career manifests the numerous forms through which the medium has responded to this modernist predicament.

What makes *Histoire(s)* something of an anomaly is that it never yields to the concept of total coherence, whether "now" or in a deferred future. Instead of postulating an ideal audience to come, Godard's montage, doubting of its own provisional ensembles but still believing in its potential powers, seeks the diligent, ruminative co-operation that is necessary for the videographic process to attain to significance in the short term. Thus,

although there are several possible ways that one can engage *Histoire(s)* in its modernist context, the matter of spectatorship, as it pertains to Godard's use of the essay form, must have a central place in that discussion.

Notes

[1] Friedrich Schlegel, *Friedrich Schlegel's* Lucinde *and the Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 167.

[2] Ezra Pound, *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1996), 816-817.

[3] This question is both inevitable and potentially misleading; asking it has a way of nudging us toward "loaded" moments, singled out bits and segments (extracts of our own making) that stand in for overarching themes and arguments, if not for the "whole" of the work – a convenient synecdoche that tends to convey a false impression of what's going on formally and conceptually. Indeed, so far, much of the critical literature on *Histoire(s)* has circled around the same four or five *moments choisis*, mining them for encompassing significance. It is, of course, a necessary aspect of analysis to isolate and interpret with a view to part-whole relationships, but it is striking just how much of the series has not yet been examined – the "messier," murkier, more oblique passages that intervene and form a substantial part of the eight episodes.

[4] The difficulty of communicating ideas and sentiments is a recurrent motif in Godard's work in all of its stages, from the dialogue on language in *Vivre sa vie* (1962) right up to

Film socialisme (2010), a three-part mosaic of sketches, riffs, citations, and multi-lingual exchanges that is arguably his most cryptic film to date. Godard's troubling of coherence has earned him more foes than friends over the years (the response to *Film socialisme* has been no exception), though it is interesting just how hard his shrewdest detractors work to show that the ideas in his projects fail to coalesce, or that he has little of substance to say (take, for instance, Raymond Durgnat's energetic but dissenting critiques, which use the prefix "schizo-" almost obsessively to describe Godard's formal games). See Raymond Durgnat, "Asides on Godard," in *The Films of Jean-Luc Godard*, ed. Ian Cameron (New York: Praeger, 1970), 147-153.

[5] Sam Rohdie, "Deux ou trois choses …" *Critical Quarterly* 51, no. 3 (2009): 85-99, 92.

[6] Jacques Rancière has interpreted Godard's *Histoire(s)* in such terms in a number of recent essays, none of which quite amounts to a naysaying critique, but all of which raise suspicions as to the *communal* aspect of the montage, its way of securing consent through unfaltering inter-expressivity, through "mystery" and the formalist contrivance of pure image matter, freed from dramatic causation. For Rancière, Godard can be situated alongside Jean Epstein, Robert Bresson, and Gilles Deleuze in this respect, in that they all embrace this concept of purity, when in fact they merely institute another dramaturgy in place of the one they have thwarted: the dramaturgy of poetic inter-expression. See Rancière, "Godard, Cinema, (Hi)Stories," in *Film Fables*, trans. Emiliano Battista (London: Berg, 2006), 171-187; Rancière, "Godard, Hitchcock, and the Cinematographic Image," in *For Ever Godard*, ed. Michael Temple, James S. Williams, and Michael Witt (London: Black Dog, 2004), 214-231; Rancière, "Sentence, Image, History," in *The Future of the Image*, trans. Gregory Elliott (New York: Verso, 2007), 56-67. Rancière,

"The Ethical Turn of Aesthetics and Politics," in *Aesthetics and its Discontents*, trans. Steven Corcoran (Malden, MA: Polity, 2009), Rancière, "Problems and Transformations of Critical Art," in *Aesthetics and its Discontents*, 57-59. Rancière's earliest critique of *Histoire(s)* centers on what he takes to be Godard's illogical argumentation in the first chapters of the series and the moment in 1A in which Elizabeth Taylor is juxtaposed with documentary footage of the extermination camps. Rancère, "The Saint and the Heiress*:* A propos of Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinema*," trans. T.S. Murphy, *Discourse* 24, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 113-119. For a contrasting view of the role of montage in the same sequence, see Georges Didi-Huberman, "Montage-Image or Lie-Image," in *Images in Spite of All*, trans. Shane B. Lillis (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2008), 120-150.

[7] Godard, "ABCD … JLG," in *Documents*, ed. Nicole Brenez et al. (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 2006), 330.

[8] Noa Steimatsky offers a close analysis of the trope of misidentification in Hitchcock's *The Wrong Man* as it pertains to the film's critique of "anthropometric measures," which involve not only the situations depicted in the plot but the "regimentation" of Hitchcock's découpage. See Steimatsky, "What the Clark Saw: Face to Face with *The Wrong Man*," *Framework* 48, no. 2 (Fall 2007): 111-136. It will be pointed out by Hitchcockians that the "miracle" remains in doubt in *The Wrong Man* since we only see the "right man" attempt a single, botched hold-up and therefore can't be sure that he is guilty of the crimes for which Manny stands accused. In *Histoire(s)*, Godard's *appropriation* of the superimposition as a miracle doesn't hinge on a narrative logic by which it is affirmed or disaffirmed as such (or on the theological aspect of the scene, the fact that Manny is praying while facing a portrait of The Sacred Heart, a detail that Godard chooses not to

show); the dramatic causes and effects are stripped away so as to situate the miracle as a

potential one, dependent on a process of looking and judging.

[9] It is interesting that Godard, everywhere troping on vision and optical investigation in

the series, does not include the close-up of the young girl's smashed eyeglasses in this

citation. The emphasis in this stretch of the chapter is primarily on touch, *manifestation*

of thought, charitable assistance, and the aggressive confrontation with unjustness.

[10] I should also note that this ethical focus in Godard's late work is not quite a new

development since in some important ways it follows from the ethical orientation of the

Cahiers line from which his cinema emerges – the major points of reference perhaps

being Bazin's writings on Italian neorealism and Rivette's oft-cited critique of a tracking

shot in Pontecorvo's *Kapò*. For a look back on this *Cahiers* view of cinema as an "art of

showing" and "conduct" in which vision is rooted "in an obligation between viewer and

artist," see Sam Di Iorio, "Three Tracking Shots: Jacques Rivette Towards a Masterless

Cinema," *Contemporary French Civilization* 32, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 85-112.

[11] My thinking here is shaped partly by the political significance that Paola Marrati sees

in Gilles Deleuze's two cinema books. She writes: "Deleuze describes modern cinema as

a cinema in search of more thought. This is not to say that classic cinema was stupid; it is

to say, rather, that new situations require new cinematic forms because the old ones have

lost their power of conviction for us. The same holds true for politics: politics need more

thought (and creativity) instead of empty mimicries of the past. Along the same lines,

certainly there is no politics without agency, but agency requires more than the fiction of

a self-transparent and almighty subject." Marrati, *Gilles Deleuze: Cinema and

Philosophy*, trans. Alisa Hartz (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2003), xii-xv.

[12] While Rancière is right to insist that social, not merely formal, bonds are at stake in *Histoire(s)*, his highly schematized argument proves incapable of handling an essayistic enterprise, and this drawback goes both for his discussion of the montage in *Histoire(s)* and his account of the "Schlegelian poetics of the witticism" that he maps onto the series. It's true that in Schlegel's conception of fragmentation, each fragment (whether newly created as such or extracted from works of the past) is at once absolutely individual *and* absolutely multiple – just as it's true that for Schlegel and his Jena cohorts, this poetics makes permeable the spheres of art and common life through a principle of dormancy and re-actualization. Up to this point, Rancière's view of "inter-expression" is well-founded. Yet when it comes to Schlegelian wit (*Witz*), this poetics takes a less systematic and presumptive cast. *Witz* is at the core of what Schlegel calls the "combinatorial spirit"; it is a faculty that allows us to find affinities among elements that are outwardly unconnected; it thrives in unruliness, in contradiction, and it wields its powers in sudden bursts like a "bolt of lightning," as Schlegel puts it. But for Schlegel, this faculty, far from being sure-fire and neatly methodic, is inextricable from the concept of *Versuch*, which translates as "essay" or "experiment." There is no value in *Witz* apart from its possible failings, apart from the risks of clutter, absurdity, and non-sense incurred by the poet-experimenter, who has only partial control over the combinatorial process. See Rancière, "The Aesthetic Revolution and its Outcomes," *New Left Review* 14 (March-April 2002): 133-151. For a take on Schlegel that brings into view the aspects of his Romantic poetics that Rancière fails to mentions, see Michel Chaouli, *The Laboratory of Poetry: Chemistry and Poetics in the Work of Friedrich Schlegel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002). For an overview of traditions in German literature involving the concept of *Versuch*, see Peter

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J. Burgard, *Idioms of Uncertainty: Goethe and the Essay* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 4-23. For contrasting views of Godard's indebtedness to Jena Romanticism, see Jacques Aumont, *Amnésies: Fictions du cinéma d'après Jean-Luc Godard* (Paris: P.O.L., 1999), 114-115, 120-122; Nicole Brenez, "Jean-Luc Godard, *Witz* et invention formelle (notes préparatoires sur les rapports entre critique et pouvoir symbolique)," *CiNéMAS* 15 no. 2-3 (2005): 15-43; and Vinzenz Hediger, "A Cinema of Memory in the Future Tense," in *For Ever Godard*, ed. Temple et. al., 144-159. Aumont's claim is that it was French art criticism (Diderot, Baudelaire, Faure, Malraux – all of whom are important figures for Godard), not the German Romantics, who most fully realized the concepts of poetry and criticism that Schlegel theorized (Aumont, 114). Given that optics and seeing are of major importance for Godard's "wit," Diderot and Baudelaire are especially key intermediaries between linguistic and cinematic forms of the essayistic. See Alexandra K. Wettlaufer, *In the Mind's Eye: The Visual Impulse in Diderot, Baudelaire, and Ruskin* (New York: Rodopi, 2003). Of particular interest is Wettlaufer's discussion of the "active eidetic imagination of the reader" as prompted by Diderot's and Baudelaire's inventive prose strategies.

[13] Richard Sieburth, "In Pound We Trust: The Economy of Poetry/The Poetry of Economies," *Critical Inquiry* 14, no. 1 (Autumn 1987): 161-162.

[14] On the significance of error and erring in *The Cantos*, see Christine Froula, *To Write Paradise: Style and Error in Pound's Cantos* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).

[15] Colin MacCabe, "The Revenge of the Author," in *The Eloquence of the Vulgar* (London: British Film Institute, 1999), 35. MacCabe considers Godard's work in terms of

this modernist dilemma in "Eloquence of the Vulgar," collected in the same volume, 151-154.

[16] Colin MacCabe, *Godard: A Portrait of the Artist at Seventy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 79-82.

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