

Revisiting the Relevance of Conceptualism of Godard's Film

ABSTRACT

Jean-Luc Godard's filmmaking is analyzed as a conceptual art, as in agreement with his most accomplished role as a film critic, not a classical filmmaker. In his 1970 manifesto, Godard argues that (1) we must make political films, and (2) we must make films politically. While the first point provokes a constructive critique of the art of cinema, the second point leads to the provision of an absolute cinematic experience. Correspondingly, it is argued that albeit rare and systematically unsupported in the academic setting, the most prolific scientific work is such that it implicitly questions the dominant presentation styles and methodological paradigms in parallel with providing meaningful basic and/or practical findings. Multiple other scientifically relevant elements of Godard's conceptual approach to revolutionizing the art of cinema are elaborated too. Particularly highlighted is the importance of *ad hoc* improvisation, deliberate imperfectness, the aesthetics of poverty, the embracement of all-encompassing uncertainties, and the eagerness to constantly get lost to be found. "I don't make movies; I make cinema" is Godard's precept, whose translation to any professional field, including scientific research and teaching, could produce uncountable benefits. Correlating well with the Buberian ontology, Godard's art is intimately tied to the iteration of the point that the value of an act is measured by the extent to which it reaches out away from the subject and into the world. Corresponding annihilations of the protagonists symbolize the necessity of the artist's working against the self in the attempt to use his art to destroy the art in question and point at everything as an equally precious art. At the religious plane, this longing for the incessant negation of the self and the attraction to epistemic and existential poverty are perceived as a route to the birth of a diviner self. The discourse follows an impulsive and unstructured course so as to veritably reflect Godard's approach to filmmaking.

KEYWORDS

ADIEU AU LANGAGE (FR 2014), anarchism, conceptual art, HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA (FR/CH 1988–2000), Jean-Luc Godard, natural science, La Nouvelle Vague

BIOGRAPHY

Vuk Uskoković was appointed assistant professor of bioengineering at the University of Illinois in Chicago in 2013 and of biomedical and pharmaceutical sciences at Chapman University in Orange County, California, in 2016. He is the founder and the

director of the Advanced Materials and Nanobiotechnology Laboratory, the world's first conceptual science lab, where research distances itself from R&D entrepreneurialism and shares the approach common to conceptual arts. Albeit rooted in natural sciences, the work of Dr. Uskoković and his lab draws inspiration for research from humanities and arts, including music and, particularly, film.

LESSON ON DELIBERATE IMPERFECTIONS, RELIANCE ON INTUITION, AND GETTING LOST AS A PREREQUISITE FOR BEING FOUND

The making of a Godard movie has always been a matter of relying on intuition, *ad hoc* improvisation, creation with an eye for the moment, never ever acting the same thing twice. This will be our first premise in the discourse that follows. Our second premise is that an attempt to reflect on an object without reflecting its nature on every single level of the structure of this reflection is a vain attempt, an act of hypocrisy, as it were. For example, to analytically dissect poetry using a prosaic language of not poets but dry philosophers presents an unfaithful way of reflecting on it. In this case, to talk about Godard without riding on the same go-with-the-flow momentum would be a dishonest act and, must I say, blasphemy with respect to the implicit message that his filmmaking intended to convey.

Henceforth, this essay will be written without much looking back and restructuring; rather, a surf on the waves of intuition, verbally chaotic and disheveled, bestowed breathlessly, will be used, evoking the style in which Blaise Pascal, that undercover hero of *La Nouvelle Vague* martyrs, wrote his *Pensées*: “I will write down my thoughts here as they come and in a perhaps not aimless confusion. This is the true order and it will always show my aim by its very disorder. I should be honoring my subject too much if I treated it in order, since I am trying to show that it is incapable of it”.¹ Hence, we will substitute strict script following with *ad hoc* improvisation, preplanning with an eye for the moment, and setting things in stone with sketching them in the air, never knowing what will come next and, thus, potentially finding the destination in every point of the path on this plane of reality that resembles Pascal's sphere whose circumference is nowhere and center everywhere.

To preplan and overthink everything in advance is a sin in Godard's filmmaking universe and if we wish to faithfully map a quest for the semantic essence of this universe, we have no choice but to obey. Now, does this mean that we should approach our creative acts the way Isaiah Berlin approached lecturing,²

1 Pascal 1966 [1662], 216.

2 Berlin 2002.

Fig. 1: HISTOIRE(S) DU CINEMA:
UNE VAGUE NOUVELLE (Jean-Luc
Godard, FR/CH 1998) –
“It’s about time that the thought
becomes once again what
really is: dangerous for the
thinker.”³



that is, by coming up with a dozen-page draft a week before the talk, though only to shorten it gradually, ending up with one page only on the morning of the lecture, a single paragraph an hour before it, a single sentence while waiting behind the curtain to be called and then tossing even that single sentence into the garbage can when stepping out onto the podium? The answer is, undoubtedly, Yes, but sometimes. For, sometimes the right structure of the whole can make up for a rather trivial content and make it timelessly beautiful. Think, for example, of Powell and Pressburger’s *A CANTERBURY TALE* (GB 1944), whose unique structure is the key to its quality: quiet and sweetly mysterious for the majority of the movie and then exploding into a fantastic finale in its last moments, reflecting life more veritably than the classical twist-climax-resolution form. Henceforth, the conception of an overarching structure wherein beginnings and ends would reconnect and fit into each other like a hand into a glove is desirable, so long as each moment, each brick in it is infused with the spirit of the moment and given a dose of imperfection that would make it appear always fresh and new, like a well-improvised jazz tune. For, an utterly perfect structure is also an utterly lifeless structure, resembling a peak from which one could only tumble down, when only structures that contain cracks of imperfections can transmit light through them, bedazzle the viewer and act as a stairway to the stars, leading to the top exactly because of never aspiring to be on the top. “Don’t show every aspect of things; allow yourself the margin of indefiniteness” was Godard’s explicit precept,⁴ reflecting his belief in the liberation from the shackles of ostensible perfectness and the unleashing of infinitely potent creative powers through the renouncement of the strivings to reach absolute exactness in expression.

At this point, already, Godard, that relentless breaker of conventions, flirt with the paradox and master in directing digression and a loss of focus from the

3 HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA: LE CONTRÔLE DE L’UNIVERS (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/CH 1998), 00:07:00.

4 HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA: TOUTES LES HISTOIRES (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/CH 1988), 00:00:48.

central thread of the storyline, must be proud. For I have begun this discourse about Godard, yet already in the first paragraph I wandered off the topic and got so far from the intended subject that we could wonder how I might get back now to this central thread of discourse without making the reader suspicious about my ability to run its course. Again, not that Godard would object; in the only movie, albeit short, which he codirected with François Truffaut, *UNE HISTOIRE D'EAU* (FR 1968), a couple gets lost and stranded on a flooded land on their way to Paris and a woman, the protagonist – lest the screenwriter, as it were, be a hypocrite for not reflecting the sense of being lost, the major point of the movie, at each and every of its levels – tells a story about Louis Aragon lecturing at the Sorbonne on Petrarch by starting off with a 45-minute-long eulogy about Matisse, then being interrupted by a student who demanded he move to the subject and finishing the sentence cut short by the student with the claim that the originality of Petrarch “lay precisely in the art of digression”⁵. This, however, brings us over to two other major points of Godard’s philosophy that he conveyed through his filmmaking. First, in agreement with Warren McCulloch’s view of life as a construct made of “unreliable components that achieve reliable outcomes”,⁶ the life Godard praised is the life of Outlands, life lived in complete contrast to that of machinelike *Alphaville*, wherein everything proceeds according to preplanned programs and nothing is ever lost. If “behaving illogically”⁷ – such as by considering faith and love as meaningful for human existence⁸ or expressing grief or joy through crying⁹ – was a crime calling for capital punishment in the dystopian city of *Alphaville*, then the necessity to fall apart every now and then, into pieces, semantically and existentially, was an anarchic standpoint naturally praised and promoted by Godard. Secondly, the greatness of an act in Godard’s microcosm is determined by how far it reaches away from itself. “The greatness of a piece of art equals the distance between the two concepts that it brings together”, as Godard himself says in *HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA: UNE VAGUE NOUVELLE*.¹⁰ “Bring things together that don’t seem ready to be”, he says on another occasion.¹¹ The farthest beginnings and ends, theses and antitheses are thus called to be merged in our expressions, yielding little or big Hegelian syntheses and bursts of light emerging from them. “Philosophy is a being, the heart of it being the question of its being insofar as this being posits a being other than itself” is what Godard says in *ADIEU AU LANGAGE*

5 *UNE HISTOIRE D'EAU* (Jean-Luc Godard / François Truffaut, FR 1968), 00:04:10.

6 Beer 1999.

7 *ALPHAVILLE* (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1965), 00:42:20.

8 *ALPHAVILLE* (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1965), 00:43:20.

9 *ALPHAVILLE* (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1965), 00:42:30; 00:46:30.

10 *HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA: UNE VAGUE NOUVELLE* (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/CH 1998), 00:21:10.

11 *HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA: LES SIGNES PARMİ NOUS* (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/CH 1998), 00:27:20.



Fig. 2: *PIERROT LE FOU* (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1965): Pierrot and Marianne impersonate Uncle Sam's nephew and Uncle Ho's niece, as they make fun of American tourists. Godard has never hidden his anti-American sentiments and has repeatedly assaulted the fabric of the American culture, from its cutthroat capitalism to shallow, mediocrity-fostering commercialism to prostituted professionalism and beyond. As an illustration, his 1967 manifesto insinuates the intention to demolish "the vast Hollywood-Cinecitta-Mosfilm-Pinewood etc. empire" and "create cinemas which are national, free, brotherly, comradely and bonded in friendship."¹² Hinting at the manipulative machinery of Hollywood, Godard turned cinema halls into mass execution sites for those who refused to conform to the dehumanized lifestyle of Alphaville.¹³ Hollywood cinemas, per Godard's metaphor, thus become halls where the spiritual is subtracted from the material and which brainwashed attendees leave deadened on the inside.

(Jean-Luc Godard, FR 2014).¹⁴ The greatness of an act is thus measured by the extent to which it reaches out away from the subject and into the world, away from I and into the heart of that ethereal, Buberian Thou. It is for this reason

¹² Godard 1968, 243.

¹³ *ALPHAVILLE* (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1965), 00:59:40.

¹⁴ *ADIEU AU LANGAGE* (Jean-Luc Godard, FR 2014), 00:12:30.

that Godard kills the protagonists in countless of his movies, from *À BOUT DE SOUFFLE* (FR 1960) to *VIVRE SA VIE* (FR 1962) to *PIERROT LE FOU* (FR/IT 1965), that is, to demonstrate that the best lived life is life selflessly streaming toward the extinguishment of this very life and toward the unreserved merging with the world. Hence, “it was as if I were the world and the world were me”, says Juliette in *2 OU 3 CHOSES QUE JE SAIS D’ELLE* (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1967).¹⁵ To that end, Godard fragments the world, inner and outer, into the finest of pieces, producing a sense that something is missing, that something has been lost, being the cracks through which one falls and arrives at the penultimate freedom and connectedness of all things.

Annihilation of the artist symbolized by the death of his protagonist also serves the purpose of liberating him from the limitations of the given art and releasing him into the freeness of being, a state of mind in which literally everything becomes a piece of art worthy of astonishment and in which creation becomes guided by Godard’s norm, “Things are there, why manipulate them”.¹⁶ This, in a way, is the logical extension of Dziga Vertov’s idea that the most authentic cinema grows not from a fictional construction of the filmed material, but from an impromptu immersion of the eye of the camera into the world, as spontaneous, unpredictably evolving and tuned to the spirit of the moment as it can be. In its extreme, terminal destination, this approach to artistic creation echoes the way of Friedrich Munro from Wenders’ *LISBON STORY* (DE/PO 1994) and his shooting movies by walking around the city with a camera tied to his back, sticking on to Nabokov’s finding patches of butterfly’s wings more artistically pleasing than “dark pictures, thrones, the stones that pilgrims kiss, poems that take a thousand years to die”¹⁷ and seeing everything as an equally blissful art – preconceived or spontaneously captured, directed or natural, structured or arbitrary. Through one such liberation, the viewer immortalized in the following line from *HISTOIRE(S) DU CINEMA: LA MONNAIE DE L’ABSOLU* is rescued from the desensitization of the senses, that is to say, from the blindness that confinement to the cinematic world imminently leads to:

A German, Erich Pommer, founder of Universal, today Matsushita Electronics, declared, “I will make the whole world cry in their armchair”. Can we say he succeeded? On one hand, it is true that newspapers and television all over the world only show death and tears. On the other end, those who stay and watch television have no tears left to cry. They unlearned to see.¹⁸

Is this the only thing Godard wishes to tell us with this symbolic act of obliterating the subject, then panning the camera away from it and toward the world,

15 *2 OU 3 CHOSES QUE JE SAIS D’ELLE* (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1967), 00:30:40.

16 *HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA: LA MONNAIE DE L’ABSOLU* (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/CH 1998), 00:26:10.

17 Gould 2002.

18 *HISTOIRE(S) DU CINEMA: LA MONNAIE DE L’ABSOLU* (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/CH 1998), 00:06:30.

Fig. 3: PIERROT LE FOU (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1965): Pierrot, the symbol of the artist, is about to blow himself apart, annihilate the artist, and open the path to realization that life is greater than art.



that is, an open sea, as in *LE MÉPRIS* (FR/IT 1963) or *PIERROT LE FOU*, bearing resemblance to what Fellini also did in the 1960s, in *SATYRICON* (IT/FR 1969) and *JULIET OF THE SPIRITS* (IT/FR 1965)? Certainly not. In fact, when the artist is guided by the precept with which we opened this discourse, when he creates in concert with his intuition, allowing the work of art to create the artist as much as the artist creates the given work of art, he is bound to realize the multiplicity of meanings that have become embedded in the semantic substratum of the product of his creation, all without the artist's explicit intention. In fact, what distinguishes cinema from other forms of art is the infinite diversity of meanings ascribable to every scene and their every element – like in real life, where one sees eruptions of subtle positivism, another might see suppressed bitterness; where one sees lectures in morality, another might see cynicism, and so forth. In fact, one might argue that, in view of this correspondence between cinema and life, celluloid tapes should be obliged to engrain such multifaceted enactments; conversely, a naïve imposition of semantic linearity ought to be considered a cinematic *sin par excellence*. Oftentimes in addition to semantic multiplicity, there is also the contradiction – for example, the subject of prostitution frequently employed by Godard could be seen as submissive selling of one's soul to the devil for the sake of acceptance by society or as being enlightened in nature, coinciding with a wish to make everyone content even at the cost of one's own descent into moral lowlands, the two interpretations being diametrically opposed, the former utterly negative and the latter utterly positive with respect to the life of the protagonist. As if being lured by the simultaneous cursedness and blessedness of Sophocles's Oedipus at Colonus, Godard must have intuitively sensed that the embodiment of contradictions is a sign of greatness, in life yes, but all the more so in arts. Hence, there is no doubt that the repeated resorting to the subject of prostitution was Godard's way of attacking the streams of

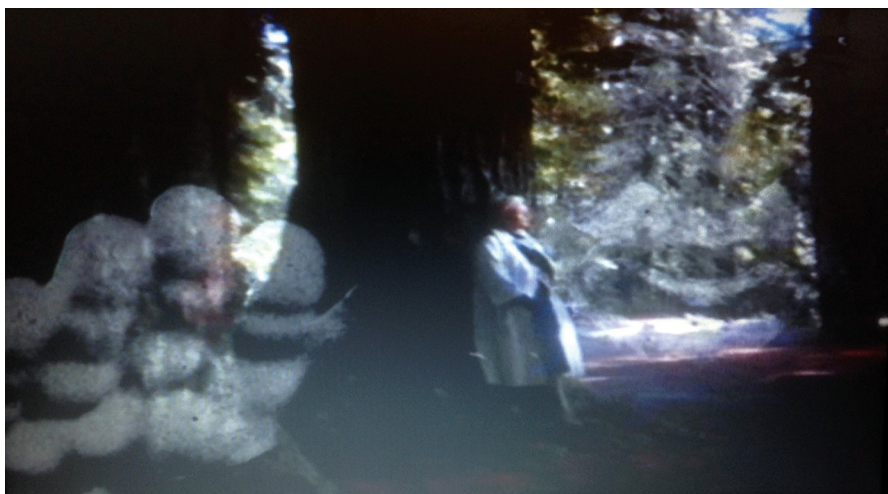


Fig. 4: HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA: LE CONTRÔLE DE L'UNIVERS (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/CH 1998). "So it's a braless blond followed by a detective scared of heights who will prove that this is all just cinema, which means it's child's play",¹⁹ says Godard in his reflection on Hitchcock's *VERTIGO* (US 1958). The question is if we can make every science and art as playful, simple, intuitive, and unpretentious as the child's play that Godard's vision of filmmaking and quite possibly every other creative process was and liberate our minds from the stifling chains of adulterated extravagance thereby.

sell-out phoniness spilling out like vomit from corporate offices, grocery stores, coffee shops, concert venues, billboards, ads and TV, itself the reason why he has heartily refused to appear on TV all throughout his lifetime, but there is also a perpetual wonder whether prostitution as giving oneself wholly to another, albeit promiscuously, has also been a way of liberating the spirits of some of his favorite female protagonists. Take, for example, the ambiguous 360 degree panning shot preceding the final shot of *2 OU 3 CHOSES QUE JE SAIS D'ELLE* – does it prove that the protagonist, Juliette Janson, has finally become the world, the way she had dreamt of, or does it demonstrate a sense of being more lost than ever in this inhumane, mechanical, soulless world of skyscrapers and sickening staginess? But that is the sign of the greatness of one's work – it cannot be pre-planned and it will keep the quarreling critics busy for ages to come.

Relying on one's intuitive skills in creation is, in a way, similar to handing Nature a piece of the paintbrush with which the images are drawn and making sure the co-creational process involving oneself and the world begins to resemble Escher's painting of two hands, each drawing the other, confounding the viewer in her every attempt to decipher who is drawing whom.²⁰ This approach

19 HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA: LE CONTRÔLE DE L'UNIVERS (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/CH 1998), 00:15:20.

20 Uskoković 2011; Uskoković 2015.



Fig. 5: 2 OU 3 CHOSES QUE JE SAIS D'ELLE (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1967). The movie marks a turning point in Godard's career, for it is his first cinematic essay in which images are accompanied by the narration using his own voice and in which characters are repeatedly directed to break the fourth wall by gazing directly at the camera and introduce themselves to the viewer.

whereby one hands over one's authority, forsakes the role of a despot and humbly joins creative forces with multiple others is the only one that deserves the epithet of authentic when it comes to the art of filmmaking. For to become a filmmaker is to renounce any cravings to directly copy one's visions onto the screen and be aware that whatever the vision one wishes to have projected on the celluloid tape, the result will always be $1+2+3=4$,²¹ as Godard put it in the attempt to say that the actualization of the abstract in the cinematic realm always entails a partial fading of the abstract. Also, when he combines the images of bomber aircrafts and atrocities of fascistic regimes caught on tape with the word "Tout", that is, "Everything" as the answer to the question, "What does cinema want" in HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA: LA MONNAIE DE L'ABSOLU, he insinuates the same point, namely spiritual, if not material fatalities whenever the filmmaker despotically aspires to copy one's inner visions onto the celluloid tape without any input of Nature and/or other people. Therefore, what the directorial element of the art of cinema teaches is creation in convergence with other people's visions and propensities. "False love means I don't change; true love means both you and I change", says Juliette in 2 OU 3 CHOSES QUE JE SAIS D'ELLE, describing the essence of the art of filmmaking *bona fide*: one must not rigidly impose one's ideas onto the crew and the actors, but must live and change with them, making every take a surprise, a step leading in an unknown and unforeseen direction.

²¹ Godard 1968, 242.

QUESTIONING ART THROUGH ARTISTIC EXPRESSION

Perhaps the most essential element of Godard's art, embraced unequivocally by all the French New Wave filmmakers, was the dual path of cinematic creation that the artist is supposed to follow. His 1967 manifesto, correspondingly, states only the following:

Fifty years after the October Revolution, the American industry rules cinema the world over. There is nothing much to add to this statement of fact. Except that on our own modest level we too should provoke two or three Vietnams in the bosom of the vast Hollywood-Cinecitta-Mosfilm-Pinewood etc. empire, and, both economically and aesthetically, struggling on two fronts as it were, create cinemas which are national, free, brotherly, comradely and bonded in friendship.²²

The two fronts Godard mentions are points 1 and 2 of his 1970 manifesto,²³ reflecting the dual nature that a work of art is to ideally embody: (1) we must make political films; (2) we must make films politically. Hence, one of these paths leads to constructive critique of the art of cinema, a precept that goes back to Sartre's observation that the artist is, more than anything, expected to call into question the art itself.²⁴ The other one, however, leads to the provision of an absolute cinematic experience. Accordingly, one ought to strive to be a storyteller and inspire the audiences with the aesthetics of a plethora of elements of cinematic expression, from choreography to cinematography to character development and beyond, but at the same time one ought to pose implicit questions through one's art, questions that shake the reigning paradigms in the realm of cinema at their foundations. For some members of the French New Wave, such as Truffaut or Rohmer, this balance appeared to have been effortlessly maintainable. In the case of Godard, however, there was a pervasive inclination toward film critique at the cost of deliberately deconstructed and thoroughly *ad hoc* improvised storylines. Hence his famous remark, "I don't make movies; I make cinema."²⁵ It is for this reason that I revert to the point made earlier: has Godard only ever been just another film critic? Has his *raison d'être* ever changed after he left the position of a journalist at *Cahiers du Cinéma* and began to make auteurs' movies? Or could it be that he was still paying as much attention to narration as he was devoted to questioning the stale standards of commercial cinema, even when this attention was oriented toward destroying the dramaturgical shackles which confined cinema within their narrow limits and freeing it from the rusty clutches of theater for the first time since the dreams of Dziga Vertov and his man with a movie camera?

22 Godard 1968, 243.

23 Godard 1970.

24 Roud 1968, 8.

25 Coutard 2003.



Fig. 6: HISTOIRE(S) DU CINEMA: UNE VAGUE NOUVELLE (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/CH 1998). Godard is intercepted in his reading by two displeased young spectators and asks them, "Did you like it?" "We keep seeing images of the art pieces, but never people", they say, hinting at Godard's lack of interest in characters on the account of the interest in criticizing the art of cinema through his cinematic works, epitomized in his saying, "I don't make movies, I make cinema", to which end he could be justifiably considered as a film critic, not necessarily a filmmaker in the classical sense of the word. "You are right – art first, and then, the men", responds Godard. "Don't you have a heart", asks back the annoyed young lady, to which Godard says, "We can film the work, not the hearts", before lighting up a cigarette and continuing his musings in now empty room, with his confronters long gone: "Some times have too many hands and not even hearts; yes, times without hearts but not without work. When an era is sick and lacks work for all hands, it sends us a new exhortation. The exhortation to work with our hearts instead of using our hands. And I haven't known a time, not yet, that lacked work for all hearts"²⁶.

If that is true, then Godard might not have only wanted to challenge the conventions, but he might have also strived to be an inspirational storyteller, even when this storytelling involved a thorough deconstruction of the story or at times its almost complete abandonment, all until a hardly recognizable, semi-ruinous structure would be left in place of what could have been a lavish edifice, complying all the while to his own guideline: "To make an image, you have to unmake it."²⁷ Famously, in 2 OU 3 CHOSES QUE JE SAIS D'ELLE, Godard deliberates what to focus his storytelling on, the protagonist or an autumn leaf, concluding that "both, on this October evening, trembled slightly"²⁸ and mirroring his own hesitant outlook thereby. Thus, one could say that, cinematic anarchist as he is, his style of creative

26 HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA: UNE VAGUE NOUVELLE (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/CH 1998), 00:24:30.

27 Royer 1999.

28 2 OU 3 CHOSES QUE JE SAIS D'ELLE (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1967), 00:47:00.

construction has been tied to dismantling and deconstructing the reigning standards of cinematic expression while simultaneously living up to the principle his hero Pierrot le Fou read to himself: “Language of poetry rises from the ruins.”²⁹

INSTRUCTIVENESS OF GODARD’S CONCEPTUAL APPROACH FOR NATURAL SCIENCES AND BEYOND

It is not unusual to find inspiration and guidance in a person who creatively expresses herself in a domain of the sciences, arts or humanities completely different from the one in which one expresses oneself. Natural scientist as I am, dividing my efforts between research and teaching, I unreservedly live up to this dual role that artistic creation as envisioned by Godard and his New Wave comrades ought to embody. Correspondingly, I believe that scientific presentations at conferences or in journals should always implicitly question the dominant presentation styles and methodological paradigms in parallel with providing meaningful basic and/or practical findings. To that end, my vision of a prolific scientist coincides with Godard’s vision of a complete artist as the one who uses his/her art to cleverly question the norms that dominate the field, while simultaneously telling an inspirational story and enriching the collective knowledge or ethos of humanity. However, as must have been known to Godard, following such an approach causes many doors to be shut in one’s face, the reason being the sheepish, gate-guarding, paradigm-obeying inclinations of the typical recognized member of academia and of reigning artistic circles. The interdisciplinary promiscuity of attempts to restore romanticism and renaissance in the heart of scientific enterprise, at times as playful and seditious as Nana from *VIVRE SA VIE*, will thus be punished by professional extermination by the regular straitlaced members of the academic universe, much like the treatment that awaited Nana herself or Joan of Arc, whom Nana sobbingly watched from the dark of the Panthéon theater at 13 rue Victor Cousin. “Follow that man; persecute Godard”,³⁰ the Spanish film critic Manolo Marinero wrote at the peak of Godard’s assault on the art of cinema, and much the same whisperings ring behind the back of all those who walk through the fields of science in a style straightforwardly assaultive to anything phony, insipid, and unpoetic in it. Regardless of these persecutions, you and I should not cease to live up to the ideal of being Lemmy Cautions, souls on a mission to crash the cold, deterministic brain behind the wheels of modern science and use poetry to conquer the sterilely rigid mechanism governing its workings, a mechanism run by a computer program, not the infinitely lively, unpredictable, and imaginative human intelligence.

29 PIERROT LE FOU (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1965), 00:45:20.

30 Aller 2014.

Fig. 7: *VIVRE SA VIE* (Jean-Luc Godard, FR 1962): Interdisciplinary inclinations that extend beyond the boundary of natural sciences and into the sphere of arts and humanities are seen these days as acts of promiscuity in need of severe reprimands by the scientific authorities. In spite of their belief that such ventures to the other side of the globe of human knowledge must compromise the quality of the science that such adventurers are capable of producing, the feeding of artistic senses and the viewing of science from socioeconomic, geopolitical, theological, and other perspectives can be powerful motivators to sustain its excellence.



In addition, we should strive to revolutionize the scientific writings in the same way Godard revolutionized the art of cinema, that is, by creating works that implicitly question and criticize its trends and clichés while feeding on improvisatory imaginativeness and anarchically disobeying any established principles and precepts, having no beginning or end in the classical sense of the word, like *HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA*, but rather being mishmashes of impressions and ideas that magically trigger the pathways to enlightenment in the viewer. Godard’s *TOUT VA BIEN* (with Jean-Pierre Gorin, FR/IT 1972) was to a great extent his protest against the brevity demanded of public commentaries, the reason why the striking workers deliberately deliver irksomely long monologues to the camera; similarly, my writings in which each sentence strives to be a universe unto itself are also a revolt against the expressional vulgarity of the modern Twitter age, wherein no elaborate unwinding of the threads of thoughts from here to the Moon is given space to in public forums, wherein snappy news has taken the place of lengthy social analyses, wherein daily communications come with the incisiveness of a knife rather than with the softness for the soul of a poem or a symphony that takes time to open, develop, and close, and wherein the characteristically Americanized simplicity of sentences has fully eclipsed the rollercoaster strings of words, with endless ups and downs and no end in sight, that typified the works of Hegel, Kant, Faulkner, Joyce, Kerouac, and many others, alongside this very sentence that is just about to come to its end. Still, unlike Godard, who openly admitted that he was a more skilled film critic than a filmmaker,³¹ in the sense that he more efficiently shook the art of cinema than human hearts with his cinematic works, the ideal I impose onto myself and dis-

31 Cavett 1980.

seminate in the classroom is to be equally effective in both, that is, in bringing a multitude of aspects of scientific research and science communication into question and in carrying out research that shifts the paradigms and advances human knowledge and also inspires peers and the public to keep on investing their hearts and hands in the great adventure of the human mind called science.

This, of course, is one of many things Godard's art can instruct an aspiring glass bead game *magister ludi*³². The instructiveness of the conceptual anarchism of Godard's approach in the scientific domain, for example, lies in its fostering paradigm-shifting stances and feeding the sense of urgency to disobey the standards and counteract the clichés; after all, that is how every knowledge evolves – by challenging the canons instead of blindly conforming to the paradigms. Then, when Godard quotes a verse from Dante's *La divina commedia* in HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA: LA MONNAIE DE L'ABSOLU, "you wished to possess virtue in poverty",³³ he also gives guidance as to how science could be made and presented: with the emphasis on indie, DIY simplicity, on Mother Teresa's aesthetics of poverty, using handmade drawings, modest setups, and minimalistic presentations instead of computerized images, expensive experimental settings, and convoluted wordings, dressing it all in simple and unpretentious clothes in search of a proof that mind rules over matter and ideas over technologies. Another instructive point comes from Godard's abolishment of the classical concept of the storyline in an effort to prove instead the ultimate beautifulness of a scene *per se* and its characters. Likewise, rather than their being components of a broader scheme or a plot, each sentence in a written work could be made a universe unto itself, a chain and a centerpiece at the same time, a symbolic proof that Nature is not a linear stream of events in space and time towards a predestined aim, but a magical place wherein destination is present in every point of the journey. The other side of this coin of attempting to craft sentences as universes is the utmost appreciation of every thought, every natural object, and every observable relationship, as if a whole universe lies dormant in the subtlest of them, with all of its secrets and treasures. For this reason, nothing is wasted in my scientific research and philosophical writings, not a single piece of data or luster of ideas, thus complying with Godard's habit of "throwing away very few shots and basically using everything that was shot".³⁴ Then the scientific quest for discovery feeds on uncertainties, on permanent wonder over everything. Consequently, scientific communications ought to pulsate with the spirit of uncertainty and be intercepted with mumbles and stammers more often than those of rock stars stonewalling interviewers; this is where their similarity with

32 Hesse 1943.

33 Dante, *Divine Comedy*, Purgatory, Canto 10, 26, cited at HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA: LA MONNAIE DE L'ABSOLU (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/CH 1998).

34 Karina 2002.

Godard's film comes into play, wherein gestures and dialogues emerge from a collective sense of uncertainty and, exactly because of that, become infused with a spirit that captivates the viewer. In that sense, thanks to Godard's insistence that actors should never get fully into their stage characters and leave their real-life characters behind, Godard's film could be even said to have contributed to the birth of mumblecore, a rare fresh new genre of the American indie film, alongside being true to Truffaut's vision of *La Nouvelle Vague* as "not a 'new' cinema, but a realer and more believable cinema"³⁵ than the "compartmentalized", theatrical French cinema "ruled over by an Inquisition-like regime",³⁶ as Godard christened the tradition against which he heartily rebelled in the 1960s.

In dissecting the ideological core of Godard's filmmaking in an attempt to discern the source of these intrinsic questions, David Sterritt recognized three major influences: (a) Brecht's idea of the epic theater, which would, unlike the traditional, dramatic theater, circumvent the emotional identification of the spectator with the characters or events on the stage and prompt self-reflection instead, playing a metacognitive role to that end and influencing the viewer from a deeper angle, affecting his/her worldviews and subsequent effects on the world more than a theatrical experience built on climactic catharsis; (b) Dziga Vertov's idea that preconceived visions should give way to images emerging from spontaneous encounters between the eye of the camera and the world in the most genuine form of filmmaking; and (c) Mao Zedong's "commitment to the Third World as a key site of struggle against bourgeois oppression and superpower imperialism".³⁷ Every element of this triad can be found in the approach to creative expression in natural sciences idealized here. As for (a), for example, the way of presenting science that I have championed is all about forsaking the style that would be comparable to watching a soap opera wherein one finds a momentary emotional solace, may laugh and decompress, but eventually leaves it without deep insight, the style that is common among the most appreciated instructors and presenters in natural sciences today. As in accordance with Brecht's idea of the epic theater, the teaching method I proposed is based on the renouncement of camaraderie and the embracement of remoteness and secrecy, all so as to spur self-analysis, foster individuality, and perpetuate nonconformity. For science, like everything else, evolves by drawing differences, not by having everyone confirm the paradigm and try hard to be yet another sheep in the flock. This is not to say that science is to be deprived of a sense of geniality; rather, it is to say that the sense of unity and integrity, the peak of every creative expression, as ever, is best achieved when it comes from such depths of our

35 Laurent 2010.

36 Labarthe 1964.

37 Sterritt 1997.



Fig. 8: 2 OU 3 CHOSES QUE JE SAIS D'ELLE (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1967). The final image, of a colorful graveyard composed of boxes of detergents and other inanimate denizens of supermarket shelves, epitomizes the essence of the deliberately shallow pop artiness; does it arise from a state of true enlightenment or from sheer stupidity and years of brainwashing with the surface values? Not incidentally at all, in this miniature model of a luxurious high-rise *banlieue* of Paris, itself a model of an alienating urban landscape, itself a model of modern society, one finds a box of Hollywood bubblegum.

being that not even the finest traces of submission to social standards could be found therein. Still, science is indisputably a social question and must be analyzed from a variety of nonscientific perspectives in order to be approached in a creative fashion. For this reason, the narrowness and linearity of the scientific method followed by the academic masses is mercilessly fought against in my lab and classroom, all in an attempt to lift this new generation of scientists to the top of Bloom's taxonomy pyramid, where the creative and the metacognitive intersect.³⁸ As for (b), the aim has been to discard the old, rigid way of presenting science, be it in the written or the oral form, and substitute it with a style that signifies spontaneity and more veritably reflects the route to innovative ideas along the corridors of the human mind, which is such that it relies on analogies, poetry, swells of aesthetic senses and intuitive flashes of light along the way. As for (c), the idea that siding with the disempowered must be the way to go in my roaming through the chambers of the Kafkaesque castle that the Ivory Tower is has been another guiding light, the reason why everything, from experimental methods to research subjects to researchers and collaborators to research locations to political voices aired through these lungs, has been adjusted to afflict the affluent and uplift the poor and the underprivileged.

Last but not least, yet another thing Godard could instruct one in is attention to detail, the awareness of the enormous power of the minutest of actions

38 Pintrich 2002.

or images. Science, needless to add, is in need of frames of mind capable of plunging into the finest details of physical systems, focusing on events that are incredibly small and yet finding a universe therein, a universe that will speak endless stories about the explorer's life and guide her/him along the way. Or, as Godard himself put it in his celebration of the colossal power of minute details decorating the silver screen,

We forgot why Joan Fontaine leans over the cliff edge. And what was Joel McCrea doing in Holland? We forgot why Montgomery Clift remains forever silent and why Janet Leigh stops at the Bates Motel and why Teresa Wright is still in love with Uncle Charlie. We forgot what Henry Fonda is not entirely guilty of, why exactly the American government hired Ingrid Bergman. But we remember a handbag. But we remember a bus in the desert. But we remember a glass of milk, the sails of a windmill, a hairbrush. But we remember a row of bottles, a pair of glasses, a music sheet, a set of keys. Because through them and with them, Alfred Hitchcock succeeded where Alexander, Julius Caesar, Hitler, Napoleon failed. Take control of the universe.³⁹

Indeed, from Citizen Kane's Rosebud (CITIZEN KANE, Orson Welles, US 1941) to Zuzu's petals (Frank Capra, IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE, US 1946) to the steamed bun from GOODBYE, DRAGON INN (Tsai Ming-liang, TWN 2003) to Don Corleone's lighter (Francis Ford Coppola, GODFATHER, US 1972) to the executioner's straw hat in Berlanga's EL VERDUGO (ES/IT 1963) to the pocket rose of Conductor 71 in A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH (Michael Powell / Emeric Pressburger, GB 1946) to Veronica Voss's vase in Fassbinder's VERONICA VOSS (DE 1982) to Frederic's pull-over in Eric Rohmer's L'AMOUR L'APRÈS-MIDI (FR 1972) to the stone with which Fellini's Fool solaced saddened Gelsomina in LA STRADA (IT 1954) to Juliette's "galactic"⁴⁰ cup of coffee in 2 OU 3 CHOSES QUE JE SAIS D'ELLE, cinema is teeming with signs that implicitly speak in favor of the beauty of small things, of finding the ladder that leads the searcher to the peaks of his quest for the meaning of life in the littlest details of reality.

All in all, reminiscing over Godard's conceptual approach to filmmaking has been an inexhaustible source of motivation for and clarification of the mission I have strived to accomplish in the realm of science. It is to carpet-bomb everything that is dull, prosaic, rigidly formal, uninventive, gate-guarding, amoral, devoid of metaphysical curiosity, and unappreciative of the poetic sensibility on the surface of science today and to allow for the flowers of wild unconventionality, poetic imagination, egoless wonder, philosophical profundity, anchoring in metaphysical and moral values, and, more than anything, love to sprout from some greater depths.

39 HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA: LE CONTRÔLE DE L'UNIVERS (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/CH 1998), 00:12:20.

40 Vaughan 2012, 67.

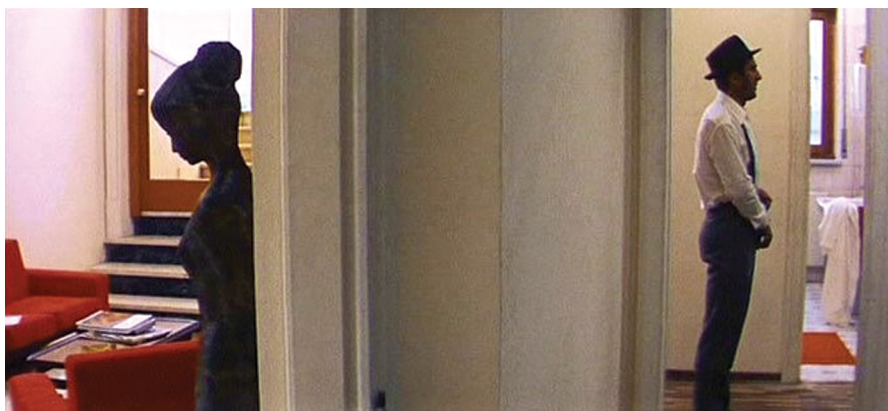


Fig. 9. LE MÉPRIS (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1963): The perplexed artist, the image of a muse, and the wall between them. Characters looking away, distancing themselves mentally and emotionally from one another, is a perpetual motif in Godard's film. Is it a sign of contempt, i.e. *le mépris*, for the society that, as Godard must have deemed, is necessary to elicit the qualities of enlightened being? Does it stem from the belief that one must reject society if one is to find one's true self and deliver the highest potential of one's being to the world?

CEASELESS CONTRADICTION OF ONESELF AS THE ANARCHISTIC ROUTE TO FREEDOM

Godard would not be Godard if he did not contradict all, even his dearest, convictions, including the postmodern idea that the role of art is to abolish art in order to point at the infinite beauty of being. This is why he opens his latest movie, *ADIEU AU LANGAGE*, with the claim that “those lacking imagination take refuge in reality”.⁴¹ Rewind the loop of time to almost half a century earlier and you will find two nerds named Bouvard and Pécuchet as a reference to Flaubert's eponymous novel sitting in a café in *2 OU 3 CHOSES QUE JE SAIS D'ELLE*, randomly pulling sentences from a towering pile of books and finding the long-sought moment of enlightenment in Heidegger's thought that “thought is not merely a quest for non-thought; thought as such is bound to the birth of being; being has always been destined for thought, but also for being as the destiny of thought”,⁴² suggesting the inextricable connectedness between beautiful being as the birthplace of illuminative thought and illuminative thought as the road leading to the doorsteps of beautiful being. Whether thought precedes being or the other way around we no longer know, but by finding ourselves in this insolvable circle, all rules have become

41 *ADIEU AU LANGAGE* (Jean-Luc Godard, FR 2014), 00:00:05.

42 *2 OU 3 CHOSES QUE JE SAIS D'ELLE* (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1967), 01:01:20.

momentarily broken and everything has become possible. Fences screening the sun of our mental celestial sphere have collapsed and its shine escapes toward the infinity. Of course, when all rules are shattered and no rule is left to be followed, any rule can be abided by too. Attained in such a manner is freedom that liberates oneself from the prison that confinement within the limits of any artistic expression inevitably bears: not only are no principles needed to be followed anymore, but all of them could be followed altogether if we so wished. A freedom and a guide – such is the destination toward which Godard’s movies lead one.

The ethos of Godard’s film often coincides with that of a rebel who stands against the society perceived as foul *per se*. For example, in *LE MÉPRIS*, the movie made out of the personal feeling for the film industry suggested by its title, Contempt, the artist forfeits his dreams and gives away his muse – in the same way Ulysses ditched Penelope for ten long years – to a personification of the raw money-centrism of the big fish in the pond, be they producers, editors, research funders, or venture capitalists whose only consideration is marketability and profitability. Eventually the artist learns that the works so dear to his heart turn dead if they happen to be moved only by the power of money and convention rather than by genuine trueness to oneself, along with cliché-shattering innovativeness, such as that which typified Joyce’s reflection on the Homer’s epic or Godard’s filming style in general. This society that Godard’s heroes push and shove is, however, not society in the real sense of the word, communal and bonded by love, but society governed by selfish motives and one-against-many ideals – a cancerous society wherein the intention of individuals threatens to eclipse the whole with their presumptuous greatness. To that end, they launch war against war – a non-Gandhian approach that is, to say the least, questionable in its effectiveness. Still, in spite of their assuming the somewhat arrogant stance of a Wild West outlaw in a modern setting, Godard’s protagonists do serve the role of poking the audience and making them aware that something is missing in their lives, something sacred that they themselves would never talk about, albeit something coinciding with the virtues celebrated by sages the world over. This is why Lemmy Caution, that “saver of those who weep”,⁴³ believes in poetry as the force that “turns darkness into light”⁴⁴ and that can transcend the boundaries of the portentous city of *Alphaville*, in which art was abandoned and substituted by emotionless technocracy, a city governed by artificial intelligence and inhabited by heartless, zombified, machine-like creatures programmed “not to ask Why, but only say Because”.⁴⁵ To that end, God-

43 ALPHAVILLE (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1965), 00:29:40.

44 ALPHAVILLE (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1965), 00:48:40.

45 ALPHAVILLE (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1965), 00:52:20.

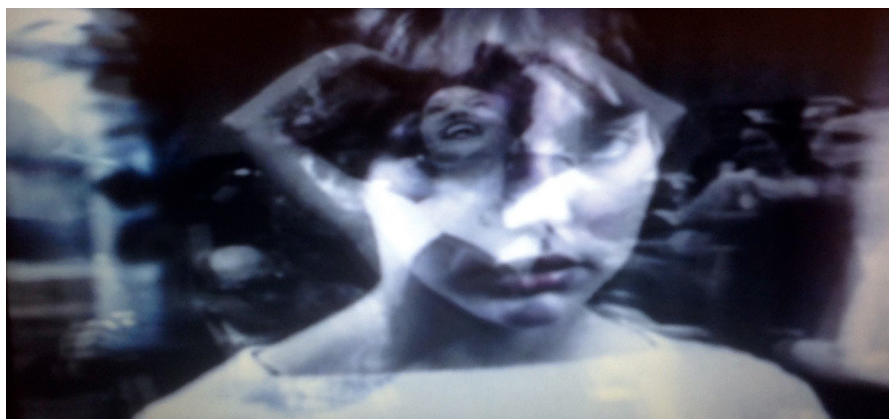


Fig. 10: HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA: LA MONNAIE DE L'ABSOLU (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/CH 1998). Superimposition of the dancer and the dreamer – which one holds the truth (and beauty)?

ard's heroes live up to the idea that to talk about a thing is to lose its essence out of sight. And so they don't talk much. And they are perfectly right, that is, as it were, left.

WHAT'S FREEDOM WITHOUT LOVE?

As an art critic with training in natural sciences who approaches criticism with a dose of scalar literalness, I would never dare give 10/10 or 0/10 ratings to anything. Rather, I praise the keenness that comes from recognizing the taints of imperfection even in the most fantastic of expressions and the humbleness that comes from accepting that even in complete artsy garbage there will be a diamond or two to be found. Whoever remembers *LA PARESSE* (FR 1962), one of Godard's early shorts and a statement in defense of sloth, the deadly sin that, as Godard showed, could stand in the way of other, deadlier sins and pave the way for morality, can be prompted to recognize beauty even in the trashiest of works and redeem their kitsch with kindness, as pop artists and saintly souls would do anyway. The dangers of dogmatism and idolatry that 10/10 or 0/10 ratings lead to need not be mentioned either. This, as you may guess, is a prelude to the claim that, like everything else, Godard's art abounds with taints of imperfections. So what would I change in Godard's films if I could? For one, I would ask him why he was more interested in carpet-bombing the cinema world of his day than in rejuvenating it with new aesthetics pleasing for the soul, an approach that would have earned him the status of a true renaissance master of the new age had he succeeded in it. Then, what if everything that was political in his movies was made poetic? For the resonance of political messages fades

away with time, when contexts change, whereas the poetic expression endows art with timelessness and is what reserves it a space in the pantheon of eternal relevance. Has Godard been but a mighty freedom fighter, a rebel blinded by revulsion, who has forgotten about freedom's greatest complement in life – love? Did he speak from his heart when he said in 1966 that “the only film I really want to make, I’ll never make because it is impossible. It’s a film about love, or from love, or with love.”⁴⁶ Those familiar with his insistence on creating cinema that is “national, free, brotherly, comradely and bonded in friendship”⁴⁷ and those who still remember the ending of *ALPHAVILLE* (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1965) would have disagreed, but those looking at the grander scale of things and those who know that love cannot be put into words, but must be implicit in the totality of one’s expressions as well as in the minutest gestures, might be pleased to muse longer over this point. Yet, where to search for this gestural signs of love and sympathy considering Godard’s habit of reducing faces to expressionless busts, frequently hiding them behind read books and routinely presenting them to the audience from such angles and distances so that the emotional connection between the characters and the viewer is not encouraged but rather averted? It can be assumed that Godard wished to demonstrate that the crushing of the shell of behavioral conventionality and conformity to social norms produces a sense of distantness that, in fact, brings one closer to other people on far deeper cognitive levels and closer to that Hegelian merging of oneself and the world into an indissoluble oneness as “the ultimate aim of Godard’s dialectics”.⁴⁸ Hence the message of the moment when Joseph and Mary in *JE VOUS SALUE, MARIE* (Jean-Luc Godard, CH/FR 1984) discover that love coincides not with the act of coming closer to another, but with the one of moving away, of retreating, as if “to leave space for the desire of the other”.⁴⁹ Still, the shadow of a doubt remains, revolving around the question of what if all of this is merely a wishful spin on what deep down are the symptoms of that misanthropic pathology recognized by Erich Fromm, where one could feel an intimate relatedness to people, love, as it were, only insofar as one stays secluded from them.⁵⁰

Yet another thing I would change in Godard’s movies is the choreographic aesthetics – what if he had made *PIERROT LE FOU* or *Lemmy Caution* move with the same grace with which Monica Vitti or Setsuko Hara glided through space in Michelangelo Antonioni’s *L’AVVENTURA* (IT/FR 1960) and Yasujiro Ozu’s *Noriko Trilogy* (JPN 1949–1953), respectively, the way Satyajit Ray’s *Charulata* (*CHARU-*

46 Kristensen 2014.

47 Godard 1968, 243.

48 Taubin 2009.

49 Kristensen 2014.

50 Fromm 1956.



Fig. 11: VIVRE SA VIE (Jean-Luc Godard, FR 1962): Nina watching Dreyer's JOAN OF ARC (LA PASSION DE JEANNE D'ARC, FR 1928) in the dark of the Panthéon cinema. The watcher becomes the watched that is the watcher that is the watched. Every book is thus written by a scribe; she writes the book, but the book, in turn, writes her, too.

LATA, IND 1964) walked leisurely across her little Calcutta palace with binoculars in her hands, or the way the young maid from de Sica's UMBERTO D (IT 1952) ran errands and opened the window shutters in that old house where dreams of past ages were smeared over the musty walls, if not in the overly flagrant way David Lynch had Sherilyn Fenn move in Twin Peaks⁵¹, as if through a dream of a kind? How come that Godard admired the Little Tramp more than any character that has ever walked across the movie screen, labeling him "the greatest of all",⁵² yet refused Chaplin's idea that the poetry of movement paired with music for the soul is the essence of the art of cinema? Could it be that he who asked us to "make sure we use everything we communicate using silence and stillness"⁵³ failed to implement this point because his anarchistic convictions prevented him from directing with an iron fist, failing to motivate with the authority and the charisma of an Orson Welles, producing as a result somewhat lukewarm emotions on the set? Or, in contrast, could it be that the frequent affectedness of his actors on the screen was the consequence of his directing them too explicitly, oftentimes requesting specific gestures without evoking the right emotion in the actor, thus opposing the directing style of first his comrade, then his nemesis, Francois Truffaut, who would typically tell Jean-Pierre Léaud to simply imagine immersion in a specific social context and then allow the proper action to be spontaneously elicited before the camera, without explicit instruction. Now, the question is whether Godard's symbolic messages would have gained a greater strength had they been coupled to a greater degree of emotionality. Or maybe his message of revolt against everything tied to the modern age and the idea that society and language must be chains that shackle the human spirit and diminish its inner potential would not be transmittable had Godard done so. On the other hand, the large-scale release of one's art implies one's compliance with certain social standards, even if they govern the circles of social

51 TWIN PEAKS (David Lynch / Mark Frost, US 1990–1991).

52 Godard 1968, 202.

53 HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA: FATALE BEAUTÉ (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/CH 1997), 00:11:30.

rejects, which makes one wonder whether the absolute anarchistic rejection of submission to social norms as a key message of his films was hypocritical to some extent, in spite of his frequent reference to the subject of prostitution in an attempt to convey the message that “advertising is a pimp and we are its whores”.⁵⁴ In any case, as pointed out by David Sterritt, “Godard’s audience must decide whether he and his troops are winning this battle (for freedom) on our behalf, or whether ‘freedom is killing freedom’ in a political-aesthetic skirmish that may prove Pyrrhic at the final fade-out”.⁵⁵

Asked if he had ever “registered a script for a film”, Godard says, “My scripts are registered in everybody’s daily routine, including yours, so all you have to do is take a look at your own life and you will surely find thousands of them”,⁵⁶ hinting at the failure of narrative in an absolute cinematic experience. Similarly, when he was asked at a press conference why his films never have a story, he asked back “what’s a story”⁵⁷ and then, ironically, told a story about his parents telling him “not to tell stories” when he was a child and “made up a lot of things”, the advice that would make Bergman’s Alexander Ekdahl⁵⁸ blink with surprise, but the one he continued to listen to throughout his entire career. Consequently, as a sign of revolt against cinema driven by the narrative and cinema as but the right hand of the theater, the concept of the storyline has gradually faded in Godard’s movies as his career progressed. So they evolved from (a) story-driven *À BOUT DE SOUFFLE* to (b) mid- and late-*La Nouvelle Vague* period, during which he did not reject the concept of the story probably because he knew that it could be deconstructed only insofar as the story is told in one form or the other, to (c) his political documentary era and, finally, to (d) stream-of-consciousness video works in which no storylines or plots whatsoever were left to be deployed, returning to the anti-plot ideology intrinsic to the plot of Godard’s fellow *Cahiers du Cinéma* critic’s, Jacques Rivette’s, *PARIS NOUS APPARTIENT* (FR 1961), a nucleus around which most pioneers of *La Nouvelle Vague* gathered and which in many respects helped launch the movement as a whole. As a reminder, this homage to the aesthetics of *Mystery* is about a girl caught in a twisted plot revolving around her seeking to solve the murder of a poet who “was plotting”,⁵⁹ a plot that, as it turned out, was a product of ill imagination of, not accidentally, an American in Paris. In the course of this search, her dear friend and the director of the play in which she acted was murdered, insinuating all the harm caused by the concept of the plot and its devoted following. The

54 Sédouy and Harris 1966.

55 Sterritt 1997.

56 Royer 1999.

57 Royer 1999.

58 *FANNY OCH ALEXANDER* (Ingmar Bergman, SE 1982).

59 *PARIS NOUS APPARTIENT* (Jacques Rivette, FR 1961), 00:59:30.

anti-plot message of the movie served as a major inspiration for the French New Wave directors, who went on to either completely reject or heavily distort plots in their subsequent movies.

Still, from his earliest to his latest works, Godard's movies, even when they have a story, have no plot whatsoever, if we were to employ the distinction between the two terms proposed by E. M. Forster.⁶⁰ In his later works in particular, Godard deconstructed the plot and the dialogue to the point of impossibility of predicting or insinuating what will be said or done by a character next. In such a manner, as in *FILM SOCIALISME* (FR/CH 2010), he portrayed a brighter future of verbal communication, while immersing the viewer into a magical space of anarchic freedoms that liberates the spirit as no cinematic expression revolving around a narrative thread can do, alongside creating an authentic Brechtian experience, which may be boring, painful, or perplexing to the audience but will have the viewers leave the cinema hall enriched with a sprinkling of divine sense to be disseminated into the world, influencing them deeper and more lastingly than the most captivating, amusing, and mouthwatering plots are able to achieve. One could argue that Richard Linklater's switch from one central character to the next in the Austin, Texas, classic *SLACKER* (US 1990) would have been a natural progression in Godard's rejection of storytelling in the 1960s, as implied by his aversion to character development and erasure of any traces of central threads in his plots. This, however, raises some questions: for one, aren't all pieces of art analogous to trees or rivers or cities, to whose central lines and avenues one could always return after roaming around little passageways? Yes, freedom is being won and burdens vanish like charms from the back of the minds carrying visions of monumental constructs on their shoulders, but wouldn't it all be reduced to the chaotic arrangement of stars of the night sky and be drowned into an eternal entropy of things had we abandoned the detailed structuration of our works? Arguments could be, of course, given in favor (a) of life's not having a distinct classical storyline intrinsic to it, (b) of Godard's making sense when he noticed that "life is so different from books"⁶¹ in *PIERROT LE FOU* and rejected the Aristotelian division into the sacred triad composed of the opening, the climax, and the resolution, and (c) of the fact that a Godard or a Cassavetes movie, always plotless, evolving unpredictably, reflects life more veritably than any preconceived dramaturgical wholes. Godard could be accused of being megalomaniacal at times as well. "I wanted to include everything: sports, politics, even groceries. Everything should be put in a film", he says, echoing Gustav Mahler's aspiration to compose symphonies that are "like the world – they must embrace everything".⁶² Whether

60 Forster 1927.

61 *PIERROT LE FOU* (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1965), 00:14:00.

62 Hefling 2002.

Fig. 12: WEEK-END (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1967). The epic final screenshot drawing the curtain on cinema in Godard's eyes and on the entire *La Nouvelle Vague* era. The carpet bomb was detonated, everything that made cinema what it was lay deconstructed and demolished, and the end of cinema as we had known it could be announced. Would all other social spheres be revitalized, fostered to evolve at an unprecedented rate or simply be sentenced to permanent desertion and infertility had everybody's aim been to create something similar to what Godard strived to create under this "the end of cinema" banner, that is, to shatter the paradigm, to get rid of the old, to erase the standards and, effectively, abolish the need for the given sphere to exist under the Sun?



that was an honest aim, especially in view of the limitations of cinema that Godard strived to explicate in his cinematic expression, we know not, but we could endlessly talk about. Whether that was also a goal that could be proven passé in view of (a) the pending shifts to punk and electro minimalism that many pop arts were to undergo shortly after the pretentious, prog-rock, Sgt. Pepperish trends paralleling the peak of *La Nouvelle Vague* were over, and (b) the minimalism that the European cinema had to embrace to differentiate itself from the pageantry of Hollywood, we know not either. With all these things changed, maybe everything in Godard's art that resonated solely with the 1960s generation would have been made timeless and maybe even *WEEK-END* (FR/IT 1967), that parody of almost every single feature of the Hollywood blockbusters of the 1960s, would be a more relevant movie today than it is. As it stands now, understanding Godard requires perceiving him from a stance well familiarized with the history of cinema. Even more importantly, it requires focusing on the invisibles, on that implicit message hidden at the conceptual, not plainly visible, level of expression. The subtlety of such an approach to communication, of course, presents beauty in itself.

ART FOR THE DIMINISHMENT OF THE ART'S SAKE

Still, wonder remains if all these drawbacks were deliberate, serving the purpose of annihilating oneself for the sake of becoming One with all that there is; destroying the cinema for the sake of pulling the dreamers away from its darkened rooms and into the daylight of life, the destination of every dreamer's dream. In his most recent movie, *ADIEU AU LANGAGE*, Godard toys with the ety-

mological curiosity that the Russian word for camera was derived from the word for prison. This is a natural addition to the question Roland receives in WEEK-END, “Are you in a film or in reality?”,⁶³ hinting at this blurring of the boundary between art and life that presents the central goal of Godard’s filmmaking. To shatter the camera and symbolically erase the distinction between art and life is thus an act analogous to crushing the prison walls and allowing the prisoner, a metaphor for the moviegoer, to escape into freedom. One could perceive the proposition of this analogy as a culmination of the artist’s working towards self-annihilation as the most sublime act on his spiritual quest, the act that uses art to destroy the very art in question and point at life as art itself, an art more artistic than any of the formally presented pieces of art in museums, galleries, music halls, and cinemas. The ultimate point of this anarchic endeavor is, of course, for an artist to disappear and make way for life, the beauty of which all arts have been pointing out anyway. PIERROT LE FOU, for example, the personification of an artist in this postmodern cinematic milestone and an archetypical post-modernist anti-film, first leaves society behind to run away with his muse, only eventually to sacrifice her and then, in an effort to show us the beauty of life untainted by human pettiness and sinful spirits, commit suicide, killing himself, the artist and the art, ending it all with a view of the endless sea, the symbol of the utmost spiritual fulfillment that is the death of one’s ego and the merging of the self with the omnipresent ocean of transcendental being encompassing everything. ’Tis the blissful moment in which everything becomes the emanation of the most wonderful art conceivable and in which we could repeat after Juliette from 2 OU 3 CHOSES QUE JE SAIS D’ELLE: “I am the world”.⁶⁴ ’Tis the moment at which we enter the state of utmost spiritual poverty and become blessed in an instant (Matthew 5:3). Freed from corporeal bonds and artificial attractors, we become tied to it all and, like Joseph from JE VOUS SALUE, MARIE, able to touch the most precious of natural details without touching them physically. ’Tis also the painful moment in which art, as a concept, along with the artist, a conscious creator of something more sublime than the all-pervading beauties of the commonest of things surrounding us, ceases to exist. If we disobey this call and delay the death of our ego and of the formal artist, the creator in us, the chance is that we might find ourselves in the shoes of the painter from VIVRE SA VIE, he who zealously portrayed muses and, as the last tint on his painting was drawn, stood up, marveled over his accomplishment, and concluded that “this is Life itself”.⁶⁵ However, when he turned his eyes away from the canvas to look at the living muses walking next to him, muses whom he had painted so devotedly, he

63 WEEK-END (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1967), 01:03:40.

64 2 OU 3 CHOSES QUE JE SAIS D’ELLE (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1967), 00:30:40.

65 VIVRE SA VIE (Jean-Luc Godard, FR 1962), 01:18:30.



Fig. 13: HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA: LA MONNAIE DE L'ABSOLU (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/CH 1998). "... here is the question, it's bigger than India, England or Russia, it's the small child inside the mother's womb".

realized that they have long disappeared into the dark of the night. If the key attempt of Godard's filmmaking was to use cinema as a tool that obliterates that very same tool and shows us the beauty of life, the only faithful way to end this essay is to use the words piled up here as a tool to destroy that very same tool and, like Wittgenstein at the end of his debut treatise⁶⁶, leave us speechless and in awe under the starry sky of life and its infinite beauties, lying beyond what any camera or pen could capture. The purpose of this whole array of words is, therefore, to make the reader look away from them, being the same goal that Godard strived to attain throughout his entire filmmaking career. For, what point other than this could Godard be making with the opening scene of LA PARESSE, where the female protagonist reads a book and the page she reads shows an unpunctuated, grammatically broken excerpt from Beckett's *Comment C'est*: "Suddenly afar the step the voice nothing then suddenly something something then suddenly nothing suddenly afar the silence"⁶⁷ "Reality", after all, "is too complex for oral communication", as it is said in the opening scene of ALPHAVILLE, and all that language is, as Juliette from 2 OU 3 CHOSES QUE JE SAIS D'ELLE reminds us, is "the house man lives in",⁶⁸ suggesting the safety and comfort that abiding in it brings, but equally insinuating that the most exciting things, life as it were, happen strictly outside of it.

66 Wittgenstein 1922.

67 Beckett 1961, 11.

68 2 OU 3 CHOSES QUE JE SAIS D'ELLE (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1967), 00:10:55.

Indeed, this space outside the verbal and the cinematic frames is where the world begins. And ends too. So I leave you here. Beyond words, at the entrance to life lived to its fullest. It is in a moment like this that Apu tosses his treasured notes into the wind (APUR SANSAR, IND 1959) and Kurosawa's woodcutter Kikori leaves behind the inextricably looped and labyrinthine lines drawn by the mental pen (RASHOMON, JPN 1950), and they both lift a child up into the air. At the same moment, on the opposite, darker side of the globe, as Godard's heroine becomes liberated from the city of *Alphaville* and is on her way to the Outlands, where she could afford to be an outsider and a beautiful spirit once again, she forgets language and comes up with all the words she would need on this new, celestial plane of reality whereon life is lived, not only vainly discussed: "I... You... Love... I Love You."⁶⁹ It is then that we realize that no Word could save the world. Only life can save life. It is then that silhouettes begin to dance on the walls, with shadows of eucalyptus trees and swaying snowdrop wildflowers. It is then that we wave a soft goodbye to language, that good old corruptor of feeling and the source of hypocrisies that have plagued humanity and sickened human spirits ever since its dawn. It is then that firmaments begin to shake with love and the wonder of a child, untainted and infinitely pure, born to this world. Hence the sound of a baby crying in the dying moments of Godard's most recent movie, his characteristically convoluted farewell to language. Or, as put forth by Godard himself in HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA: LA MONNAIE DE L'ABSOLU:

Squabbling about public indignation, nothing more pathetic. Toning down makes things worse. Subtlety pleads for barbarism. Let's call things by their name. Killing a man in the Bondy Forest or Black Forest is a crime. Killing a country in the other forest called diplomacy is a crime as well, but just bigger. Where will it stop? When will the martyr of this heroic small nation end? So they tell us, "You forget there are some questions". Killing a man is a crime. Killing a country is a question. Each government has its question. We answer, "Humanity also has a question". And here is the question, it's bigger than India, England or Russia, it's the small child inside the mother's womb.⁷⁰

Hence the reduction of the consciousness to that of a preverbal child, Taoist in nature, aware that "arguing is unwise" (Tao Te Ching 81), feeling all the way through "as if I were the world and the world were me",⁷¹ presents the last and the final step of our walking in Godard's anarchic footsteps through this enticing cinematic forest, in search of a flower here, a balloon there, and the whisper of *Je vous aime* everywhere.

69 ALPHAVILLE (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1965), 01:38:20.

70 HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA: LA MONNAIE DE L'ABSOLU (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/CH 1998), 00:04:00.

71 2 OU 3 CHOSES QUE JE SAIS D'ELLE (Jean-Luc Godard, FR/IT 1967), 01:04:00.

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