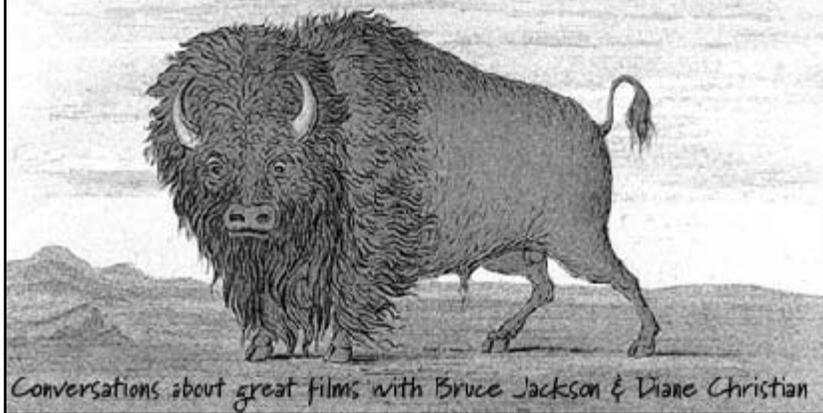
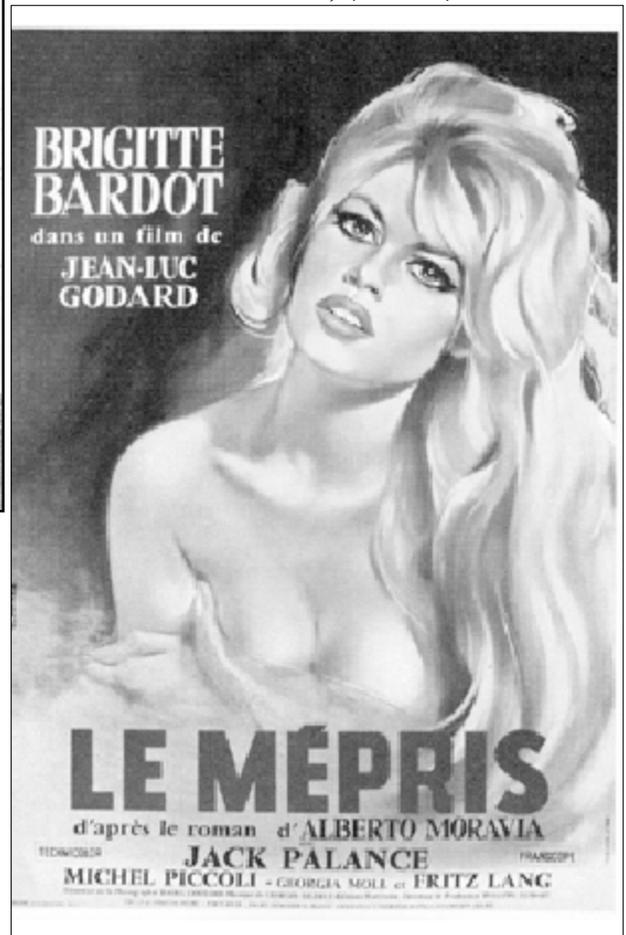


## The Buffalo Film Seminars



**JEAN-LUC GODARD** (3 December 1930, Paris, France)

from the *British Film Institute website*: "Jean-Luc Godard was born into a wealthy Swiss family in France in 1930. His parents sent him to live in Switzerland when the war broke out, but in the late 40's he returned to Paris to study ethnology at the Sorbonne. He became acquainted with Claude Chabrol, Francois Truffaut, Eric Rohmer and Jacques Rivette, forming part of a group of passionate young film-makers devoted to exploring new possibilities in cinema. They were the leading lights of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, where they published their radical views on film. Godard's obsession with cinema beyond all else led to alienation from his family who cut off his allowance. Like the small time crooks he was to feature in his films, he supported himself by petty theft. He was desperate to put his theories into practice so he took a job working on Swiss dam and used it as an opportunity to film a documentary on the project. The construction firm bought the film, an early indicator of Godard's more recent success working on corporate video commissions. *À bout de souffle* (*Breathless*) (1959) was his first feature, based on an idea by Truffaut. Made on a shoe-string budget with Chabrol as artistic supervisor, it was spontaneous, vibrant and groundbreakingly original. Suddenly the typical B-feature crime plot was reborn, with startling cinematic techniques, hand-held camerawork and natural lighting. References to Sam Fuller and Humphrey Bogart and quotations from Faulkner, Aragon and Apollinaire mixed up pop and literary allusions in a dazzling jigsaw of hip cultural awareness. It was a revelation and made Jean-Paul Belmondo a star. It was to be Godard's only box office hit. By the early 60's Jean-Luc Godard was probably the most discussed director in the world. He made an enormous impact on the future direction of cinema, influencing film-makers as diverse as Robert Altman, Martin Scorsese, Jim Jarmusch, Wim Wenders, Steven Soderbergh, Quentin Tarantino and Wong Kar-Wai. As the 60's progressed, Godard became less and less accessible, both in his personal life and his work. After making *Week-end* (1967), which features a ten-minute tracking shot of a hideous traffic jam, Godard abandoned his increasingly antagonistic relationships with film industry colleagues (his mutual disaffection with Truffaut, for example, is well documented). He left Paris for Switzerland, which has been his home for the last 20 years. Fascinated with developments in new media, he has experimented with video, making several on commission for clients including Channel 4, France Telecom and UNICEF. Amongst his 'revolutionary films for revolutionary people' is his highly regarded eight-hour history of cinema, recently edited into a 90-minute version. His latest film is *Eloge de l'amour* (*In Praise of Love*), concerning in part an elderly couple who are former heroes of the Resistance and whose life story Steven Spielberg has offered to buy. The film has just received its premiere at the Cannes Film Festival 2001 to great acclaim. It is expected to have a British release later this year. Godard's reputation for being a bitter and reclusive figure clearly does not go unnoticed, but is not observed without humour, as a recent anecdote in the *New Yorker* illustrates. He told Richard Brody that he and his partner (the filmmaker Anne-Marie Mieville) had clipped a cartoon from the paper which exemplifies their situation: a unicorn in a suit is sitting at a desk and talking on the phone with a caption reading "These rumours of my non-existence are making it very difficult for me to obtain financing." Some of his other films are *Meeting Woody Allen* (1986), *Sauve qui peut* (*la vie*)/*Every Man for Himself* (1979), *Sympathy for the Devil* (1968), *La Chinoise* (1967), *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle*/*Two or Three Things I know About Her* (1967), *Masculin, féminin* (1966), *Pierrot le fou* (1965), *Alphaville, une étrange aventure de*



### LE MÉPRIS 1964, 102 min

Brigitte Bardot ....Camille Javal  
 Michel Piccoli ....Paul Javal  
 Jack Palance ....Jeremy Prokosch  
 Georgia Moll ....Francesca Vanini  
 Fritz Lang ....Himself  
 Raoul Coutard ....Cameraman  
 Jean-Luc Godard ....Lang's Assistant  
 Director  
 Linda Veras ....Siren

Directed by Jean-Luc Godard  
 Writing credits Jean-Luc Godard  
 based on Alberto Moravia's novel *Il Disprezzo*  
 Produced by Carlo Ponti, Georges de  
 Beauregard and Joseph E. Levine  
 (uncredited)  
 Original Music by Georges Delerue  
 Cinematography by Raoul Coutard  
 Production Companies: Compagnia  
 Cinematografica Champion [it], Les  
 Films Concordia [fr], Rome, Paris  
 Films [fr]

*Lemmy Caution* (1965), *Bande à part/Band of Outsiders* (1964), *Le Mépris/Contempt* (1963), *Les Carabiniers* (1963) and *Une femme est une femme/A Woman is a Woman* (1961). Some of his most quoted lines: "I don't think you should FEEL about a movie. You should feel about a woman. You can't kiss a movie." "Tracking shots are a question of morality." [on Los Angeles] "It's a big garage." "All you need to make a movie is a girl and a gun." "There is no point in having sharp images when you've fuzzy ideas." "It's funny how things make sense when they're finished." A web site with many good Godard links: [www.geocities.com/glen\\_norton/essays.html](http://www.geocities.com/glen_norton/essays.html).

**BRIGITTE BARDOT** (28 September 1934, Paris) *from Leonard Maltin's Movie Encyclopedia*: This blond siren trumpeted one of the first blasts of the sexual revolution by baring her beautiful body in then-husband Roger Vadim's ...*And God Created Woman* (1956). She came to personify a kind of "French naughtiness" and frank sexuality to more straitlaced-and censorship-bound-Americans. She worked with Jean-Luc Godard, most memorably as the female lead in his international coproduction *Contempt* (1963), in which her character went by Bardot's own real name, Camille. By the 1960s she was able to poke fun at her own sexy image, teamed with French beauty Jeanne Moreau in Louis Malle's lighthearted *Viva Maria!* (1965), and playing herself, the object of young Billy Mumy's affection in the Hollywood concoction *Dear Brigitte* (1965). Bardot retired from films in 1974 and has become a champion of animal rights; every couple of years or so she makes news with some kind of bizarre action or pronouncement, usually related to her pet cause. Her son Nicholas Charrier is also an actor.

**FRITZ LANG** (5 December 1890, Vienna, Austria—2 August 1976, Beverly Hills, Los Angeles) directed 47 films, from *Halbblut (Half-caste)* in 1919 to *Die Tausend Augen des Dr. Mabuse (The Thousand Eye of Dr. Mabuse)* in 1960. Some of the others were *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* (1956), *The Big Heat* (1953), *Clash by Night* (1952), *Rancho Notorious* (1952), *Cloak and Dagger* (1946), *Scarlet Street* (1945). *The Woman in the Window* (1944), *Ministry of Fear* (1944), *Western Union* (1941), *The Return of Frank James* (1940), *Das Testament des Dr. Mabuse (The Crimes of Dr. Mabuse, Dr. Mabuse's Testament, The Last Will of Dr. Mabuse, 1933)*, *M* (1931), *Metropolis* (1927), *Dr. Mabuse, der Spieler (Dr. Mabuse, King of Crime, Dr. Mabuse: The Gambler, Inferno 1922)* and *Harakiri (Madame Butterfly)* (1919). He appears in a number of interesting interview films, among them Jean-Luc Godard's *Cinéma de notre temps: Le dinosaure et le bébé, dialogue en huit parties entre Fritz Lang et Jean-Luc Godard* (1967). The BFI site has the 1962 National Film Theatre interview with Lang on line at <http://www.bfi.org.uk/features/lang/interview.html>. Michael Grosz's excellent critical bio of him is on line at <http://members.aol.com/MG4273/lang.htm>. There's a good deal of Lang material on line at the British Film Institute web site: <http://www.bfi.org.uk/features/lang/>.

**from Great Film Directors A Critical Anthology. Ed. Leo Braudy and Morris Dickstein. Oxford Press NY 1978**

In the early 1960s [Godard] made several highly personal imitations of genre films, including a spy thriller (*Le Petit soldat*, 1960), a musical (*Une Femme est une femme*, 1961), an absurdist war movie (*Les Carabiniers*, 1963), a gangster movie (*Band of Outsiders*, 1964), and a science-fiction film (*Alphaville*, 1965). Increasingly these films detach themselves from the relation to models offered by literature illuminates a major part of the history of cinema. Film, both protected and patronized by virtue of its dual status as mass entertainment and as art form, remains the last bastion of the values of the

from narrative cinema and use plot as the ground for an associative collage of scenes and images. Like Bresson, Godard pares away the psychological concerns that films have inherited from novels and plays. Like Antonioni, he gives relentless attention to the glossy surfaces of modern life in a way that heightens the solitude of his characters, letting them dangle in an environment that lacks the consolations of intimacy and personal affect.

Godard's use of Brechtian alienation effects, including direct political harangues and interviews with real people, re-introduces modernism into the cinema for the first time since the surrealists of the 1920s. It was this self-consciousness about the film process that had the most dramatic impact on younger filmmakers in the sixties. By the time of *Made in USA* and *Two or Three Things I Know about Her* (both 1966), his sound track had become as much a collage of disparate materials as his imagery.

Godard is especially daring in his treatment of ideas. Instead of integrating them dramatically, he offers us chunks of abstraction in the form of monologues, propagandistic speeches, interviews, or philosophical arguments—the cinematic equivalent of a politics of direct action. In his episode in *Far from Vietnam* (1967) Godard contributed a film essay, a lucid and brilliant personal meditation with only the barest visual accompaniment, mainly Godard himself behind his camera. In *La Chinoise* (1967), a prescient anticipation of the French upheaval of May 1968, Godard orchestrated an astonishing cacophony of talk, talk, talk. In many other films, however, his intellectuality proved more elusive, disjointed, and ungainly.

After political events of 1968, which heightened and transformed his commitment to radicalism, Godard completed few feature films, devoting himself instead to collective and political projects of an agitational nature. But between 1950 and 1968 he was a true filmmaker, however tedious and infuriating his experiments sometimes became. His eye for apt images never deserted him, even in the most puzzling contexts, and his ear for lucid texts and ingenious, intuitive juxtapositions can always startle us. His originality lay in his disjunctive style, which stood as a major challenge to the whole tradition of narrative cinema. As with Bresson, however, his best films were those that made concessions to personal experience and became affecting stories almost in spite of themselves. These include *Breathless*, *My Life to Live* (1962), *Contempt* (1963), *Band of Outsiders*, *Pierrot le fou* (1965), *Masculine-Feminine* (1966), and *Weekend* (1967), as well as his brief return to commercial filmmaking in *Tout va bien* (1972).

### **"Godard" Susan Sontag**

nineteenth-century novel and theater—even to many of the same people who have found accessible and pleasurable such post-novels as *Ulysses*, *Between the Acts*, *The Unnamable*, *Naked Lunch*, and *Pale Fire* and the corrosively de-dramatized

dramas of Beckett, Pinter, and the Happenings. Thus, the standard criticism leveled against Godard is that his plots are undramatic, arbitrary, often simply incoherent; and that his films generally are emotionally cold, static except for a busy surface of senseless movements, top-heavy with undramatized ideas, unnecessarily obscure.

At the Cannes Film Festival Godard entered into debate with Georges Franju, one of France's most talented and idiosyncratic senior directors. "But surely, Monsieur Godard," the exasperated Franju is reported to have said at one point, "you do at least acknowledge the necessity of having a beginning, a middle and end in your films." "Certainly," Godard replied, "But not necessarily in that order."

"I don't really like telling a story," Godard has written, somewhat simplifying the matter. "I prefer to use a tapestry, a background on which I can embroider my own ideas. But I generally do need a story. A conventional one serves as well, perhaps even best." Thus Godard has ruthlessly described the novel on which his brilliant *Contempt* was based, Moravia's *Ghost at Noon*, as "a nice novel for a train journey, full of old-fashioned sentiments. But it is with this kind of novel that one can make the best films." Although *Contempt* stays close to Moravia's story, Godard's films usually show few traces of their literary origins.

Godard proposes a new conception of point of view, thereby staking out the possibility of making films in the first person. By this, I don't mean simply that his films are subjective or personal, like those of many other directors, particularly in the cinematic avant-garde and underground, but something stricter and more original—namely the way in which Godard, especially in his recent films, has built up a narrative presence, that of the film-maker who is the central *structural* element in the cinematic narrative. This first-person film-maker isn't an actual character within the film. That is, he isn't to be seen on the screen...though he is to be heard from time to time and one is increasingly aware of his presence just off-camera. But neither is this off-screen persona a lucid, authorial intelligence, like the detached observer-figure of many novels cast in the first person. The ultimate first person in Godard's movies, his particular view of the filmmaker, is the person responsible for the film who yet stands outside it as a mind beset by more complex, fluctuating concerns than any film can represent or incarnate. The most profound drama of a Godard film arises from the clash between this restless, wider consciousness of the director and the determinate, limited argument of the particular film he's engaged in making. Therefore each film is, simultaneously, a creative activity and a destructive one.

Godard: "the cinema is somewhere between art and life."

**from Peter Bogdanovich's *Movie of the Week: 52 Classic Films for One Full Year*. Ballantine NY 1999**

While Brigitte Bardot was at the height of her international superstar fame and success—having been responsible through Roger Vadim's *And God Created Woman* in 1956 for breaking French cinema out of U.S. art houses and into the mainstream and thereby inadvertently also paving the way for the takeover in France of the New Wave filmmakers—she agreed to act in a movie by the most revolutionary of these *nouvelle vague* directors, Jean-Luc Godard, making his first (and pretty much only) "star picture."

The film makes no moralizing statements, nor does it nudge you into complicity. Like Otto Preminger, whom he always admired, Godard presents all the facts—often only fleeting moments—and lets the audience decide what happened and why. *Contempt* is a cool, very troubling work, speaking directly to the most difficult war of all, the battle of the sexes, incisively revealing that central difference in how most men and most women think and feel.

Fritz Lang's presence—a superbly shaded portrait of cynicism and sagacity, combined with an innate artistic conscience—is equally significant: the inescapability of fate was Lang's great theme. Godard here links fate irrevocably to character. Lang also brings a strong sense of aged wisdom, the only ray of hope in the entire piece.

**from Jean Luc Godard *The Future(s) of Film Three Interviews 2000/2001*. Verlag Gachnang & Springer Berlin 2002**

The two things that were least liked in the 20<sup>th</sup> century are history and psychoanalysis, the history of everyone and the history of oneself. They are venerated yet loathed. I really like the history of others, I like it too much even; I don't like my own. I am slow to come around to analysis. The relationship between these two types of history is very rarely shown. I am thinking about a text by James Agee, which I had Alain Cuny read aloud but never used, and which can be heard, although very poorly, being read by someone else in *For Ever Mozart*. In *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, Agee says that what really makes his blood boil is people's misunderstanding of the camera, in the broad sense of the term: a chamber for recording, etc. People think that the camera always films straight on, that they are seeing reality because they are staring at it straight on. Even a philosopher like Lévinas thinks that when you really see someone's face you could never want to kill him. The shot/reverse-shot technique is wrong. The true reverse-shot must be more or less aligned with the two figures. To hear the other person, you have to place the camera behind him so as not to his face and hear him through the person who is listening. You find that in Welles: people move a lot, there are a lot of shadows, a lot of shots that are moving from the first frame, even in films that he didn't edit like *The Lady from Shanghai*.

Today's cinema is a script-oriented cinema, Since Gutenberg, the text has triumphed. There was a long struggle, marriage or liaison between painting and text. Then the text carried the day. Film is the last art in the pictorial tradition. People talk a lot about images but there is only the text nowadays.

I've never understood why *Contempt* is so well liked.

Commercially, it's a film that has made a lot for those who own the rights. 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's a film that has a number of weaknesses.

...even professional video is less sensitive than 35mm. There is something tactile in the photographic image that doesn't exist in video. The phenomenon of the cave is no more. Digital technology was not invented for production but for distribution. Many more things can be kept in a much smaller space because you're dealing with numbers and they can be compressed. In digital technology, everybody likes it. But part of the image is

lost. For the sake of distribution, quality and precision are reduced. They say that the image is of <film quality>. It remains to be seen what quality we're talking about.

from World Film Directors. vII. Ed. John Wakeman. H.W.Wilson Co. NY 1988. Piece signed by John Monaco  
—dashes introducing indicate summarized material. Otherwise quotation.

Between 1952 and 1954 he wrote for *Cahiers du Cinéma*, often using the pseudonym “Hans Lucas” (“Jean-Luc” in German). He also traveled extensively with his father in North and South America. In 1954 he returned to Switzerland for his mother's funeral (she had been killed in a car accident) and got a job as a laborer on the Grand Dixence Dam. With the money he earned he financed his first film, a documentary about the construction of the dam called *Operation Béton*. In 1955 he made his second short film, *Une Femme Coquette*, in Geneva, and then returned to Paris, where from 1956 through 1959 he wrote regularly both for *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Arts*, earning a living meantime as a press agent for Artistes Associés.

More than thirty years later, he explained to an interviewer: “For us at that time, doing criticism wasn't at all sterile. To do criticism was just like doing film: talking about one thing and another.”

Godard made three more short films during this period. . . . *Une Histoire d'eau* (*A History of Water*, 1958) which was assembled from footage François Truffaut had shot. His work as a critic in the 1950s was overshadowed by Truffaut's—Truffaut, after all, was the *enfant terrible* of the New Wave who wrote the scathing essays that called attention to this new group of critics. During this period, Godard more quietly developed an ambitious rhetoric of cinema, which, taken together with his later filmed “essays,” is regarded by many as the most influential theory of film and filmmaking since Sergei Eisenstein's.

As a student of ethnology, it seems, Godard picked up a unique attitude toward the world of ideas, emotions, and language that was to color his career for more than thirty-five years. For him, “There is a clear continuity between all forms of expression. . . . I think of myself as an essayist, producing essays in novel form or novels in essay form: only instead of writing, I film them.”

In these essays, the important governing relationship is not between the characters in the screen in the story, but rather between the essayist/filmmaker and the audience/reader. Where Godard's films are powerful and poetic, as they often are, it is because of the delicacy and passion of the conversation between him and us. Godard's films are often thought of as cold and unemotional: that's true only if you restrict film to character and narrative. Godard is not a storyteller: he is an essayist, perhaps the only one of our time to use the film medium so powerfully to express and investigate ideas. His passion is intellectual. Godard was once asked by an exasperated old-line filmmaker whether he would at least admit that a film should have a beginning, middle and end. “Yes,” he replied, “but not necessarily in that order.”

—in 1959, w/help of Truffaut able to finance first feature *À Bout de souffle* (*Breathless*)

*Breathless* took the cinematic world by storm when it was

released in the spring of 1960. There had been earlier films in the New Wave, but none so clearly demonstrated that a new generation of filmmaking had begun.

The story itself is probably the most conventional Godard was ever to use. (It was based closely on a fifteen-page scenario by Truffaut.) It wasn't the story that gave filmgoers around the world a sense of radical departure: it was the style, the attitudes of the film. Like others of the New Wave, Godard got out into the streets, away from the studio. But unlike the others, Godard's streets were rhetorical streets, full of the clash of images and sounds, words and images, metaphors and syllogisms, political half-truths and cultural clichés. A homage to the past of American B-movies and to Belmondo's hero, Humphrey Bogart, *Breathless* is also a map of the future for Godard, the poet-thinker.

*Breathless* was a commercial as well as a critical success. According to Godard, all of his thirty-plus movies since, with the single exception of *Sauve qui peut la vie*, have been commercial failures. Nevertheless, Godard had found a new and different way to write essays, using a camera rather than a pen.

In 1985, when a new edition of *Godard par Godard* was published, celebrating thirty-five years of the essays he has created on paper, film, and video, Godard and his editors divided “the life lived so far” into five neat compartments: the *Cahiers* years (1950-1959), the Karina years (1960-1967), the Mao years (1968-1974), the video years (1975-1980), and the eighties years (1980-1985).

[*Une Femme est une femme/A Woman is a Woman*] This is a love story and Godard's attempt at a musical, or at least an essay about musicals. At one point Angela and Alfred (Anna Karina and Jean-Paul Belmondo) announce that they want to be in a “musical by Gene Kelly with choreography by Bob Fosse.” Godard knows those days are gone: *Singin' in the Rain* can never be made again, and as a result an air of nostalgia suffuses *Une Femme est une femme*.

In early 1962 he shot his fourth feature *Vivre sa vie* (*My Life to live*), in less than four weeks. It's as dark as *Une Femme* was light: a dramatized Brechtian essay on prostitution and feminism. For the first time, Godard brings himself into a film as himself, enacting his role as narrator, reading statistics that are juxtaposed against the story of Nana (Anna Karina), a young woman who casually turns to prostitution to pay the rent and is casually shot down in a quarrel between pimps.

By this time Godard was very involved—we can tell with hindsight—in experimenting with different modes of discourse. He had been fascinated with the philosophical phenomenon of film since he was twenty years old. In an early essay he had quoted the philosopher Brice Parain: “the sign forces us to see an object through its significance.”

Godard turns *Contempt* into a resonant essay on commercial movie-making in the mid-sixties.

At the end of the opening credits Godard quotes André Bazin: “The cinema gives us a substitute world which fits our desires.” But what Godard is after is not a substitute world but a real

cinema. Levine required a nude scene with Bardot. Godard gives it to him: the opening scene of the film lasts more than twenty minutes with Bardot lying nude in bed but the scene is shot through red and blue filters. The images are beautiful but On Monday, February 12, 1968, he joined a spontaneous demonstration of several hundred filmmakers and cinéphiles in front of the Cinématèque Française to protest the French government's plan to oust the founder and director of the Cinématèque, Henri Langlois. His old friends from early days were there, including Truffaut and Chabrol. The demonstrations for Langlois are generally remembered as the opening shot of the Events of May 1968. By the time of the Cannes Film Festival, a few months later, Godard, Truffaut, and the others were able to bring the festival to a halt "in solidarity with workers and students on strike."

Early in 1970 Godard and Gorin went to Palestine to shoot *Jusqu'à la victoire*, about Palestinian politics. It was never finished, but Godard's involvements with Palestinian issues remains a contentious subject for many critics and observers. *Vladimir et Rosa* was shot early in 1971. The film is nominally about the Chicago Eight trial which is parodied effectively; Godard undercuts this impression by explaining at the beginning: "Why are we making this film? Well, the last film was the Palestinian film. We are making this film to pay for that film. Economic necessity."

In the fall of 1972 Gorin and Godard made "Letter to Jane," a forty-five minute analysis of a still photograph of Jane Fonda in Vietnam which had been published in the French magazine *L'Express* in the beginning of August 1972. . . . It is meant as a commentary on *Tout va bien* (whose star was Jane Fonda) and "asks the same question as that film: what part should intellectuals play in the revolution?"

Between 1978 and 1980, Godard wrote numerous versions of a script for an American film that was to be entitled, successively, "Bugsy," "The Picture," and "The Story." About the gangster Bugsy Malone, the film was going to be produced by Francis Ford Coppola and star Diane Keaton and Robert De Niro. Like his earlier abortive attempts to make an American movie, this project was never realized.

from *The St. James Film Directors Encyclopedia*. Andre Sarris, Ed. Visible Ink Press NY 1998 signed by Robin Wood and Rob Edelman

If influence on the development of world cinema is the criterion, then Jean-Luc Godard is certainly the most important filmmaker of the past thirty years; he is also one of the most problematic.

Godard's importance lies in his development of an authentic modernist cinema in opposition to (though, during the early period, at the same time *within*) mainstream cinema; it is with his work that film becomes central to our century's major

they are not erotic. The attempt is an investigation of the persona of characters too. Jack Palance was never more "Jack Palance" and Fritz Lang and Godard himself appear to contrast with the actors.

aesthetic debate, the controversy developed through such figures as Lukács, Brecht, Benjamin, and Adorno as to whether realism or modernism is the more progressive form. As ex-*Cahiers du Cinéma* critic and New Wave filmmaker, Godard was initially linked with Truffaut and Chabrol in a kind of revolutionary triumvirate; it is easy, in retrospect, to see that Godard was from the start the truly radical figure, the "revolution" of his colleagues operating purely on the aesthetic level and easily assimilable into the mainstream.

A simple way of demonstrating the essential thrust of Godard's work is to juxtapose his first feature, *Breathless*, with the excellent American remake. Jim McBride's film follows the original fairly closely, with the fundamental difference that in it all other elements are subordinated to the narrative and the characters. In Godard's film, on the contrary, this traditional relationship between the signifier and signified shows a continuous tendency to come adrift, so that the *process of narration* (which mainstream cinema strives everywhere to conceal) becomes foregrounded; *À Bout de souffle* is "about" a story and characters, certainly, but it is also about the cinema, about film techniques, about Jean Seberg, etc.

This foregrounding of the process—and the means—of narration is developed much further in subsequent films, in which Godard systematically breaks down the traditional barrier between fiction/documentary, actor/character, narrative film/experimental film to create freer "open" forms. Persons appear as themselves on works of fiction, actors address the camera/audiences in monologues or as if being interviewed, materiality of film is made explicit (the switches from positive to negative in *Une Femme mariée*, the turning on and off of the soundtrack in *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle*, the showing of the clapper-board in *La Chinoise*.) The initial motivation for this seems to have been the assertion of personal freedom: the filmmaker shatters the bonds of traditional realism in order to be able to say and do whatever he wants, creating films spontaneously. (*Pierrot le fou*—significantly one of Godard's most popular films—is the most extreme expression of this impulse.) Gradually, however, a political motivation (connected especially with the influence of Brecht) takes over. There is a marked sociological interest in the early films (especially *Vivre sa vie* and *Une Femme mariée*), but the turning point is *Masculin-féminin* with its two male protagonists, one seeking fulfillment through personal relations, the other a political activist. The former's suicide at the end of the film can be read as marking a decisive choice: from here on, Godard increasingly listens to the voice of revolutionary politics and eventually (in the Dziga Vertov films) adopts it as his own voice.

**Join us next week, Tuesday November 4, for Robert de Niro and Jodie Foster in Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* ("You talkin to me? YOU talkin to me? You talkin to ME?")**

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...for the series schedule, links and updates: [www.buffalofilmseminars.com](http://www.buffalofilmseminars.com)