


 FILM-PHILOSOPHY

Godard Alone?

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For Ever Godard

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Of all the revered directors, perhaps Godard alone has been honoured with so many superlatives and hyperboles in book titles and retrospectives. Starting with the book under review, a selective list would include: *For Ever Godard* (conference in 2001 and book in 2004); *Godard For Ever* (Retrospective at the Cinematheque Ontario in 2001-2002); and *Nul Mieux Que Godard* (None Better than Godard) by Alain Bergala (1999). In a similar vein Colin MacCabe's recent first biography of the French-Swiss filmmaker (interestingly, written by a British and not by a French scholar) *Jean-Luc Godard: A Portrait of the Artist at 70* (2003) thrives on superlative adjectives and statements building up to an apotheosis of Godard.¹

Just what is it that makes Godard so different, so appealing a filmmaker that justifies or explains these honorific titles – their canonisation and even adulation of him? Why has Godard outnumbered in devoted scholarship the author of "*la politique des auteurs*", the filmmaker Francois Truffaut?² Is it his uniquely diverse, still ongoing output for 50

¹ For example: "*Passion* (1982) is one of the great works of European modernism" (MacCabe: 2003, 278), "The level of Godard's mastery of the production process is without obvious parallel in the history of cinema" (288).

² The "Totally Truffaut" full retrospective on Truffaut's work at the French Institute of London in April 2005 might be a gesture of lifting the tone of admiration for his films. But, apart from that, the

consecutive years? Is it his unparalleled tendency to “confront vague ideas with clear images”?³ The list of possibilities could be long and even outnumber the already long list of books, articles, special editions and retrospectives on the filmmaker.

One way to explain why Godard might deserve such an outpouring of admiration and respect is to look at this certain tendency within his oeuvre for self-analysis, reflexivity and self-consciousness about his chosen medium, film. From the very beginning of his “métier d’artiste”⁴ Godard has deployed both words and images to pose questions about “what film is” and “what cinema is” after André Bazin’s ontological questioning on the nature of cinema and after Truffaut’s manifesto in defence of film art and the art of being a filmmaker. Godard has also *paused* to reflect on the medium’s aesthetic, economic and political specificity at many points in his career: from the re-visitation of film genre and reflexive re-invention of filmic language in every single feature film for commercial release (from *Breathless* in 1960 to *Notre Musique* in 2005) to his engagement in collaborative, anti-commercial, experimental projects under the “Dziga Vertov Group” banner and later under “Sonimage” with Anne-Marie Miéville; the extensive reflexive work for television; and the tour-de-force series *Histoire(s) du Cinéma* (1998). Godard’s meditations on cinema have never faltered; he has made films about it,⁵ written analyses and histories of cinema, given long, inspiring interviews⁶ and has even often appeared on

scholarly interest in Truffaut is much less and the lack of superlative praises is notable. The list of books and articles on Truffaut in the fascinating biography by Antoine De Baecque and Serge Toubiana (1999) pales by comparison to the one in MacCabe’s biography of Godard and in *For Ever Godard*.

³ Dictum written on the wall of the bourgeois apartment where the students prepare the revolution in his prescient film *La Chinoise* (1967).

⁴ Godard’s divided role between his social and artistic commitments, his struggles to maintain integrity through the Scylla and Charybdis of the “métier d’artiste”, (profession: artist) was the subject of the conference “Godard et le métier d’artiste” in Cerisy-La-Salle, France in 1998 (Delavaud et al, 2001).

⁵ A selective filmography of Godard’s films about cinema, history of cinema and the process of filmmaking would include: *Contempt* (1963), *Passion* (1982), *Grandeur and Decadence of a Small-Time Filmmaker, a.k.a The Rise and Fall of a Small Film Company* (1986), *King Lear* (1987), *JLG/JLG : Self-Portrait in December* (1995), *2 x 50 years of French Cinema* (1995), *Histoire(s) du Cinéma* (1998). Interestingly, in his last film *Notre Musique* (2005) Godard addresses and films the process of teaching film.

⁶ For example, Jean-Luc Godard, *Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma* (1980); the impressive two thick volumes *Jean-Luc par Jean-Luc Godard I and II* (1950-1998) revised edition by Alain Bergala (1998). *For Ever Godard’s* selective bibliography (438) includes a quite long list of works by Godard himself including the aforementioned titles.

television talking about his films as well as cinema in general.⁷ Considering the breadth and variety of Godard's visual and written "commentaries" on cinema, books like *For Ever Godard* can run the risk of becoming meta-discourses on Godard's own discourse about his films.

Is it possible for film critics, historians, theorists and philosophers to analyse Godard's oeuvre without the anxiety of working under Godard's authorial influence? Can we see, read and analyse Godard's works without his "voice of God" commentary, so prominent in many of his films, hanging above our heads like the sword of Damocles? *For Ever Godard's* eclectic collection of authorities on Godard provides a unique assemblage of up to date textual and visual responses to Godard's authority on cinema. Justifiably, one essay in the collection by Roland-Francois Lack is devoted to "*Sa Voix*" ("His Voice") discussing the formal aspects of how Godard makes use of his own voice or substitutions of it in many of his films.

But the question of authority persists. Before presenting the collection and delving into it in detail, I would like to give priority to those essays which deal with Godard's polymath authority.

What Michael Witt, in his essay about Miéville and Godard's television project *France/tour/detour/deux enfants* (1979), proposes is a productive, historically grounded intervention in this problematic by posing the crucial issue: "To claim a place for filmmakers alongside philosophers, historians and theoreticians will doubtless always be an uphill struggle" (210). No matter how uphill the struggle, Witt proves this point by discussing how Godard, Miéville, Deleuze and Foucault had all been working along parallel lines, but on different media; Godard's science-fiction and dystopian films of the 1960s anticipated *France/Tour* and even informed Deleuze and Foucault's theories.

In this sense, Serge Daney's point in the opening essay of the book, "The Godard Paradox", that Godard is "a philosopher, a scientist, a preacher, an educator, a journalist, but all this as an amateur" (70) needs to be qualified with the prefix film- in front of all these different professions. Godard might be an amateur philosopher - which creates the excessive trend amongst Godard scholars to import tones of Theory to analyse his films - *but* he is a professional *film (or filmic)* philosopher. It can be argued, thus, that Godard is a

⁷ Two films screened during the NFT retrospective in June 2001 alongside the conference 'For Ever Godard' were revealing about Godard's public and media persona: *Godard on TV: 1960-2000* (France, 2000) and *Godard 1980* (UK 1980, dir. Don Jost)

professional in many related branches of filmmaking. He is a film philosopher (*Histoire(s) du Cinéma* can be discussed as a filmic treatise on the ontological question “what is cinema”), film historian (each of his films can be analysed as a work of cinema historiography due to their cinéphilia), film sociologist and anthropologist (in, for example, *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle* (1967), *La Chinoise* (1967), *Weekend* (1967), and *France/tour/detour* (1979) he has composed precise analyses of modern consumer society, comparable (each one in his field) to Michel Foucault’s *Punish and Discipline* (1975) and Pierre Bourdieu’s *La Distinction* (1979)) and, last but not least, as Colin MacCabe highlights in the his essay *The Commerce of Cinema*, he is a “*petit commerçant*” of cinema, with collaborations and co-operative projects (e.g. The Dziga Vertov Group, SonImage) and numerous independent productions.

It becomes pertinent, thus, to approach Godard as we would approach any thinker, historian, philosopher or sociologist: to discuss and critique his work in the context of, and in comparison with, that of his peers: other filmmakers and film historians, film philosophers or film anthropologists and to scientifically question his authorial voice. Godard’s films need to be juxtaposed with, say, the iconophilia in the films of Murnau and Hitchcock; the film philosophy of Alain Resnais, Marguerite Duras, Hollis Frampton and Michael Snow; the film history of Chris Marker; the film anthropology of Jean Rouch (whom Godard much admired); the film sociology of John Cassavetes’ debut *Shadows* (1959) and Martin Scorsese’s *Mean Streets* (1973), or that of the anti-commercial co-operative film production of the New York and London Film-Makers Cooperatives.

For Ever Godard offers this magnifying lens with two essays which put Godard in the perspective of his peers. A comparison of these two essays will explain how Godard’s authorial “voice-over” hovers over the analysis of his films and how or if it can be challenged. Both Rancière and Saxton’s essays stand out because they orchestrate a dialogue between Godard and two other directors, Alfred Hitchcock and Claude Lanzmann.

Jacques Rancière’s essay “Godard, Hitchcock and the Cinematographic Image” in the second part of the book, “Form and Figure”, tackles the ontological problem of what a “cinematographic image” is by questioning Godard’s “transformation of functional Hitchcockian images into pure images” (230) in *Histoire(s) du Cinéma*; taking as an example the appropriation of the emblematic image of the glass of milk from Hitchcock’s

Suspicion (1941). Rancière takes a bold step outside the closed circle of Godardian hermeneutics and analyses the filmmaker's method within an impressively broad context of theories about the privileging of the visual presence over narration and vice versa. Rancière's position is clear: "It is important to acknowledge properly here that an image is never a pure visual presence. An image is an operation that binds together the demonstration of something visible and a mode of signification" (217). By comparing Godard's use and even abuse of the fragmented cinematographic image with aesthetic strategies which privilege the narrative continuum (217), Rancière, thus, contextualises the politics of Godard's use of distortion and fragmentation of the images of other directors; Hitchcock's in particular.

Rancière's essay demonstrates a scheme of distantiation in reading Godard's method of connection and disconnection of the images in *Histoire(s)*, punctuated with provisos like: "We should not be led astray by Godard's emphasis on the purity of the image..." (224) and "I do not wish to accuse Godard of misunderstanding or distorting his colleagues' films" (227). Such precautionary sentences are more than rhetorical devices. They are part of an orchestrated philosophical dialogue between the images of Godard and Hitchcock, Godard and Rossellini, Godard and contemporary video artists. "What matters is not who is wrong or right" (215), as Rancière puts it from the start of his essay, but the fact that a debate is created in this essay between Godard's method and that of other film philosophers of the cinematographic image.

Rancière concludes that "Godard's narrative of a lost battle of the cinematographic image against the power of text and plot" (231) and which follows "the French ideological trend of mourning the death of the Image, Art, Thought, History, Politics" (231) is not what matters. What matters is that Godard's philosophical method of "symbolist" connection and disconnection of the cinematographic image within "the aesthetic regime of art" (221) needs to be channelled towards its proper object, that is "the real battle between dialectical and symbolist ways of making this linkage" (231): otherwise it might be diverted towards reinforcing the symbolist rather than the dialectical way.

Rancière claims that "concerns with 'humanity' and the 'human' in contemporary art [and, I would add, in cinema too] are increasingly prevailing over political concerns" and that this trend might be a perverted aftermath of Godard's mourning the death of cinema. Curiously or, maybe, strategically, this important claim and key issue is left suspended for a proposed future essay.

Rancière explains that contemporary artists like Vanessa Beecroft, Matthew Barney, Sam Taylor Wood and Bill Viola appropriate, connect and disconnect the cinematographic image in “a symbolist way”; that means in a way which moves away from “the critical tradition” and dialectical way and which tends,

rather than to disclose the relations of power hidden between things and images, to present us with sets of images and items that bear witness to the mystery of co-presence or to frame symbolic representations of the human condition. (231)

This is a very accurate criticism of these artists’ video installations to which I would like to add the “humanist” video work Gillian Wearing and Richard Billingham which presents common people as nothing else *but* common and which is usually praised for its “humanism” and democratic spirit. On the contrary, I believe that these grandiose concerns with human destiny and common people safely kept within the institutional walls of museums and galleries are nothing but a denial of the politics of the image.

I found Rancière’s essay the most incisive way to bypass Godard’s authorial voice and reflect on image-life after Godard because it defamiliarises and exposes Godard’s method of appropriating “a pure image” in *Histoire(s)*. By showing the futility of Godard’s lament for the death of the power of image, Rancière triggered the alarm button of the shift away from dialectical images towards appeasing symbolist, humanist (or in-humanist) visual rhetoric which some contemporary films (*Irréversible* (2002) or *Ultranova* (2005)) and video art by the artists mentioned above thrive on.

To return to my initial question of whether it is possible to switch off the voice of Godard in order to discuss the *work* of Godard, an example of the opposite strategy from the one followed by Rancière, is Libbi Saxton’s essay “Anamnesis and Bearing Witness: Godard/Lanzmann” in the last part of the book “History and Memory”. Saxton embarks on the original pursuit to interrogate Godard’s *Histoires* (1998) and Lanzmann’s *Shoah* (1985) as “heuristic lenses through which to view each other” (365) in relation to the stance each film takes towards the cinematic witness of the Holocaust. The essay starts by querying Godard’s provocative dismissal of Lanzmann’s *Shoah* because of its refusal of the logic of proof, the logic that the cinematographic can be a visible evidence to bear witness of the Holocaust (369). Godard’s belief in the contrary is such, that he has famously repeated in his later films and writings that “the medium has failed to keep faith with its ethical commitment to presenting the Nazi extermination camps” (364)

Despite *Shoah's* nine hour cinematic elaboration on the Holocaust, Saxton informs us that Godard dismissed it on the grounds that it did not afford the cinematic medium the ethical "redemption" it seeks, to actually bear witness. (365) Saxton's essay is a brilliant and original comparative analysis of the two filmmakers' ideas about the visual representation of the Holocaust. The conclusion Saxton arrives at is that "the work of each director can be understood as the correcting – and corrected – image of the other" (379). Her approach could set an example for comparative film interpretation so much needed in the field of film studies, especially if one considers the frequency in art history and comparative literature with which this method has proved a radical and enlightening tool.

However, the crucial question, which is not addressed, is to what extent the shortcomings of Lanzmann's iconophobic method of diagnosis of the absent reel (the lack of visual evidence) "which conceals the absent real" (373) seem to have been dictated by the same ideological trend set by Godard's own initial regret over the failure of the cinematic medium to show the concentration camps. The assessment of these two films and their discourses of "iconophilia" and "iconophobia" as both complementary and antithetical seems ineffective at producing a counter-dialogue to Godard's messianic belief in the "redemption" of the cinematic image which hovers over the discussion very oppressively. Saxton does not manage, like Rancière, to step out from Godard's self-analysing "voice-of-God" discourse. By taking as its premise Godard's own dismissal of the attempt of the cinematic medium to seek redemption in films like *Shoah*, the essay returns to its starting point, having come full circle.

Saxton informs the reader that *Shoah* (according to Godard) "showed nothing at all" (364). But, one can counter argue that Alain Resnais' *Night and Fog* (1955) and *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959) showed everything. However, these two films are briefly mentioned in the essay as "intriguing antecedents" (373). A detailed analysis of these films and their reception⁸ in relation to Godard's claims in *Histoire(s)* and his claims against Lanzmann would render the trial of the cinematographic image's redemption meaningful, fair and historically grounded.

I found that Saxton's essay did not separate Godard's actual films from admiration for his films, a tendency which has perpetuated analyses of his work through the overbearing voice of its author. Whereas Rancière's confrontation with the Godardian spectre shows

⁸ The significance of *Night and Fog* is explained in a new publication: Ewout van der Knaap's edited collection *Uncovering the Holocaust: The International Reception of Night and Fog* (2006).

that by going against the grain of Godard's arguments on the purity of the image we might find out more about Godard and his legacy, Saxton's essay, despite its critical stance towards Godard's claims, operates within the set agenda of the filmmaker and does not propose an escape from his ethical dilemmas.

The question that emerges from the above comparison between Rancière and Saxton's essays is: Can a constructive "estrangement" from the Godardian discourse be accommodated in a book devotionally entitled *For Ever Godard* and prefaced as "For Ever Divided" with Raymond Bellour's sweeping statement that "It is through the filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard that the history of cinema understood as the history of twentieth century was forever divided" (11)? A critical edge *can* find its space (as Rancière's essay proved), because this title is not just a glorification. Evoking and invoking Godard's critical revision of European political and cultural history in his film *For Ever Mozart* (1996), this collection of 24 essays (22 essays, one programmatic introduction and one filmography essay) is 24 times true to the editors' manifesto to take Godard out of the containment of the "radical 60s" and reclaim his "*politique des auteurs*", in consonance with the filmmaker's recent filmic output. The collection's editorial is confirmed by Godard's latest film *Notre Musique* (released after the book's publication) which reaffirms the political power of the image, from its prelude bombardment of the audience with a montage sequence of war images to its main theme of life in post-war Sarajevo, where Red Indians traverse the ruins of a city which was "saved" by the UN/USA "humanist", yet belated, intervention. In the last part of the film, the sight of American marines guarding Heaven's Gates is transformed into pure image, which should go down in cinematic history like Hitchcock's pure image of the glass of milk.

The interdisciplinary editorial work shows a progressive spirit, a continuation and progression of previous projects which engaged in setting Godard free from the shackles of conventional nostalgic association with the 60s Nouvelle Vague and persistent negligence, especially in the Anglophone world, of his post-68 output. *For Ever Godard* is thus a logical extension of: Colin McCabe's (with Mick Eaton and Laura Mulvey) *Godard: Images, Sounds, Politics* (1980); the impressively illustrated book which accompanied the exhibition of Godard's post-60s work in New York edited by Raymond Bellour and Mary Lea Bandy *Jean-Luc Godard: Son+Image: 1974-1991* (1992); and *Cinema Alone: Godard 1985-*

2000 (2000) a book all three editors were involved in and which focussed exclusively on the most under-discussed period of the filmmaker and depicted him as an active, still ground-breaking filmmaker rather than as a phantom from the 60s.

In this last book Temple and Williams' (the editors) polemical attack on this nostalgia within film criticism was spelt out challengingly:

Despite such manifest evidence of creative vitality, however, Godard would probably have done better not to have survived his famous motorbike crash of 1971. This would surely have been a kinder fate than to see himself represented in the year 2000 as a radical sixties film-maker who appears selfishly not yet to have died. (Temple and Williams: 2000, 11)

As a continuation of this manifesto the editors, joined by Michael Witt, a Godard scholar with a thesis on the work of Godard and Miéville's "Sonimage" films, went on to celebrate Godard's ongoing vitality with the conference *For Ever Godard* (21-24 June 2001)⁹ enveloped by BFI's meticulously organised "definitive tribute" film retrospective of the entire oeuvre of the filmmaker (1 June - 31 July 2001). In his essay "Projecting Godard" James Quandt (Senior Programmer at the Cinematheque Ontario, Toronto and collaborator for the London retrospective) puts this tribute in context of the complexities of projecting Godard in his entirety.

The book *For Ever Godard* complements the conference, which had a main focus on the late work and especially *Histoire(s)*. However, the collection displays a confident openness towards the whole corpus of Godard's work. Thus, the editors emphasise that it is not a "simple proceedings volume" because they commissioned 11 new essays to add to the 10 essays based on papers from the conference "to enhance the book's critical range beyond the mainly late focus that characterised the conference agenda" (15). The 22 essays are broken down to four clear parts: "Work and Works", "Form and Figure", "Sound and Music" and "History and Memory". Whereas the parts on music and history remain ostensibly anchored on the late work and predominantly *Histoire(s)*, a timely and original breadth in scope characterises the first two parts. A very interesting chapter in "Godard studies" is re-opened in the editors' "Introduction", that is Godard's numerous unrealised projects¹⁰ complemented by an illustration of a "longstanding cherished project" but

⁹ The full programme of the conference is online at : <http://www.forevergodard.com/FEG-Conference-Site>

¹⁰ Material of unrealised projects is included in MacCabe (1980) and Bellour (1992).

never completed *Moi je* (1972-75). It is a pity that the editors perceptive suggestion of the need to look at the unfinished projects as a “parallel corpus to Godard’s completed works” (15) is not followed up in the book with an essay devoted to this aspect. It seems even more pressing to look at the other side of the Godard corpus considering the filmmaker’s frequent philosophical invocations about the “films that were never made” in *Histoire(s) du Cinéma*.

The editors’ fresh approach is also visually suggested by the cover of the book, a black and white photograph of the cinematic corridors of power: Godard’s back turned during the making of *Alphaville* (1965) as he looks down a corridor at his collaborators and a movie camera pointed towards him. The cover’s photograph shows the director’s gaze in *mise-en-abyme*, as our eyes move back and forth, between Godard looking at the movie camera looking at Godard. The sense of infinite regression this evokes is concretised by the seemingly endless corridor. The implication is of a recursion which arises from Godard’s self-conscious scrutiny of the movie camera. In a self-referential paradox, director and camera both become the subject and object of the cinematic gaze. The title, *For Ever Godard*, is thus qualified; the photograph suggests that the infinitude of “for ever” applies to the persistent reflexivity of Godard’s work rather than the vaunted immortality of his oeuvre.

The *For Ever Godard* book is, thus, the result of a fervent debate between film scholars and Godard devotees, accompanied and inspired by screenings of rarely seen films alongside reruns of the most famous ones. The conference’s cinéphile and revisionist spirit is clearly reflected in the book’s 43 page illustrated filmography, compiled from a wide range of international sources of rare and previously unseen material – film stills, meticulous frame enlargements, production stills, posters, lobby cards, production documents – which gives a uniquely spatial and historical perspective to Godard’s work. This visual and filmic exposition democratises the Godardian output and sheds light on the numerous blind spots that the various “basic stories” of the filmmaker’s trajectory have created. It must be the first time, not only for Godard, but for any filmmaker that such an affectionate and thoroughgoing effort has been made to put together such an original pictorial filmography.

The trace of the cinéphile’s care is confirmed by the picture credits of this lavishly illustrated book (400 pictures in total); a large number of the illustrations of the filmography and the rest of the book are credited to the collections of the two editors,

Michael Temple and Michael Witt, who, like Godard, must have kept their own visual diaries and compiled photo albums of cinematic history. The book resembles Godard's famous photo-notebooks, which the director has long filled with dialectical combinations of film stills, stars' photos and artwork reproductions: a breadth equal to that of his *Histoire(s) du Cinéma*.

This meta-pictorial approach is expanded with two pieces: James Quandt's fascinating essay about retrospectives on Godard, "Here and Elsewhere: Projecting Godard", illustrated with retrospective posters, and Philippe Dubois' photo essay (all images from his own collection), "The Written Screen: JLG and Writing as the Accursed Share". The latter is about written textual citations on screen and "ways of presenting written text in and through images" (232) in Godard's films.

For Ever Godard's strategic insistence on the visual and the filmic makes a point that academic "coffee table" film books on directors (rather than, as is usually the case, on the entire history of cinema) are much needed and well justified when they include such rare collections of illustrative material, accompanied by critical and thoroughly researched essays. The collection's innovation lies also in the meticulous reproduction of film strips, even the reproduction of the chains of black images (174-5) from *Lotte in Italia* (1970) to punctuate the discussion of the role of the black image in cinema. This simulates Godard's dialectical montage of textual and visual information and in the same time gives a flavour of filmic history. By maintaining the filmic qualities in the reproduction of the cinematographic image, the collection successfully makes a point that this is a book about film *art* and about the *art* of filmmaking. For the book's visual originality, the publisher, Black Dog Publishing, should be equally praised for accommodating and obviously supporting this unique endeavour. This book should also set an example to publishers of film studies and film history books, which rarely demonstrate similar generosity to the visual.

The conference's international perspective is reflected in the book with essays from scholars and critics from nine different countries and with reproductions of posters, flyers and lobby cards for the films from all over the world (Mexico, Germany, Japan), reaffirming the sense of Godard as a filmmaker viewed and studied extensively outside the francophone world. Godard's Anglophone reception could easily make a whole new book. However, it is a theme which is scarcely touched by the British editors, all experts with publications and theses on Godard. Since the UK is the only country apart from France and

Switzerland in which Godard has worked more than once after *One Plus One* (1968) and received commissions for the films *British Sounds* (1969), *Soft and Hard* (1985), *Armide* (1987) and *2 x 50 ans de cinema français* (1995), it would have been productive if this international perspective had been bolstered by a discussion by the editors about why Godard has been admired and supported in the UK more than any other French director. In this respect, Colin MacCabe and James Quandt's accounts of their professional and commercial encounters with Godard and his work put the filmmaker's global circulation in a new, concrete perspective.

The essays included in the first two parts "Work and Works" and "Form and Figure" approach the Godard corpus with an impressive openness and inclusiveness, for which praise is due both to their authors and to the editors of the book.

"Work and Works" opens with Serge Daney's "The Godard Paradox" (published here in English for the first time), which sets the tone for the whole book in terms of identifying and analysing some inherent ambivalences in Godard's films. Keith Reader's essay "Godard and Asynchrony" logically follows with a discussion of the idea of asynchrony in the formal and historical aspects of six films from 1963 up to 1986. Catherine Grant's interestingly entitled essay "Home-Movies: The curious cinematic collaboration of Anne-Marie Miéville and Jean-Luc Godard" brings to the forum the "unusualness" of the couple's collaboration and at the same time raises further questions about the idea of the "collaborative auteur", especially in relation to Godard's own auteur status. Antoine de Baecque's essay "Godard in the Museum" about the filmmaker's interest in the institutional ideology of vision and in museology is timely considering the forthcoming exhibition-installation "Voyages en Utopie" that Godard himself will stage in the Centre Pompidou in Paris (April 2006), alongside an exhaustive film retrospective. In recognition of their achievements, the editors of *For Ever Godard* have been invited to edit the accompanying forthcoming publication *Jean Luc Godard: documents*, which will be "a collection of unpublished documents and other original materials"¹¹.

The essays included in the second part "Form and Figure" advance our understanding not only of Godard's work but of the cinematographic image in general in

¹¹ Information on the exhibition from Centre Popidou's website: <http://www.centrepompidou.fr>

its stylistic forms. Alongside Rancière's philosophical essay and Dubois' imaginative stills-essay, in all the essays there is a common thread of original and incisive ways of seeing and reading films: Godard's films as trailers by Vinzenz Hediger; the philosophical base of Godard's formal use of the question in his films by Nicole Brenez; the embodiment of the cinematic image in the ways bodies pass through the frame by Christa Blumlinger; the abstract form of line and the immobile frame lines in Godard's late films acquire a metaphorical even sacred sense according to Vicki Callahan; and the use of altered motion in Godard's *France/Tour* is interpreted as evidence of cinematographic corporal resistance by Michael Witt.

The same sense of exhaustive, thorough analysis of film style and visual form is evident in all five essays of the last part "History and Memory" which mainly focus on *Histoires du cinema*. We might be tempted to castigate the editors for allowing *Histoires* to monopolise the discussion of the ideas of History and Memory when these ideas are in fact prevalent in most of Godard's films, especially thematised as unfolding history (e.g. *Le Petit Soldat*, *La Chinoise*, *Germany Year 90 Nine Zero*). However, what these essays fulfil is the need in film interpretation for intensive analysis – in this case, five different theoretical approaches on *Histoires*: as a materialistic form of historiography (Junji Hori); as a Benjaminian dialectical image (Monica Dall'Asta); as iconophilia (Libby Saxton); as a remedy to the fever of the film archive (Trond Lundemo) and as an articulation of Blanchot's notion of the "neuter" (Leslie Hill).

Despite the breadth and scope of analysis, some key empirical issues are not addressed. Firstly, there is *Histoire(s)*' own troubled history of use of film archives, distribution and exhibition. Due to problems with copyright clearance of the archival film material, Godard was unable to use some of the clips he specifically wanted. This history is a fountain of philosophical, aesthetic and political issues about the power and the circulation of the cinematographic image. Another fundamental aspect which is not discussed is the position of *Histoire(s)* in relation to other filmic histories of cinema in its various national and international variations many of which were made on the occasion of the celebration of the 100 years of cinema. Martin Scorsese's own *Personal Journey Through American Movies* (1995) is an obvious example.

The editorial tendency for interdisciplinary openness is also evident in the third part "Sound and Music" which includes four original essays on the "other half" of Godard's

audiovisual matchmaking, music and sound. Laurent Jullier shows how well Godard manipulates image and sound despite his own allegations that he “doesn’t know anything about music” (273). All essays are exemplary in suggesting original ways of engaging with and discussing sound, the still unknown friend of the cinematographic image. The focus on the voice (Roland-Francois Lack) and the recitation of poetry (Adrian Martin) set an example for ways of listening to the moving image and of looking at other sound elements alongside music. For example, Williams’s essay “Music, Love and the Cinematic Event” puts in new perspective the centrality of music and its variations in Godard’s late work, as he argues that “the primacy, permanency and projection of music may actually be said to constitute *the* cinematic event” (305)

However, the absence of two key-sound films from the discussion is conspicuous. None of the essays make a connection or even comparison of Godard’s cinematic juxtaposition of music in his late work with two of his early films. *Masculin Feminin* (1966) (featuring the famous French pop singer Chantal Goya in ways which anticipated and even pre-empted the advent of the postmodernist music video) and *One Plus One* (1968) (showing the Rolling Stones rehearsing “Sympathy For the Devil” in parallel with the Black Guerrillas) could add to the essays’ scope due to their original sound editing. Williams’ analysis of the ways music themes are cut and replayed in Godard’s late work can be traced to the way Godard strategically *cut* Rolling Stones’ performance in a dialectical montage with the Black Guerillas and Anne Wiazemsky’s impersonation of Freedom. It is exactly his insistence on the interrupted theme that enraged him against the producer’s final cut which included a continuous performance of “Sympathy for the Devil”.

Another criticism is about Adrian Martin’s original essay on the under-researched area of the lyrical recitation of poems in film. Martin reveals that the citation and recitation (and reordering by Godard) of poems is a much more complex process of intermediality than it might seem at a first viewing of the film. However, when trying to transpose the cultural significance of the use of canonical poetry in a popular medium into the Anglophone cultural context, there is a difference that Martin does not heed.

The practice of setting the verse of canonical poets like Aragon to popular music is a practice (almost a genre) that has very specific connotations and aims in French post-war culture.¹² The transposition of a poem from its literary enclave to the

¹² The practice of turning published poems into chansons in France has been mapped and analyzed by Dimitris Papanikolaou in his unpublished thesis *Singing poets. Popular music and literature in*

unbounded world of the French chanson has no real equivalent in the Anglophone world. How many English or American poems have been set to modern popular music? Have poems by Auden (who wrote verse for Grierson's *Nightmail* (1936)) or even Larkin been sung by British pop musicians? Even if there have been some cases (which I am not aware of), they are extremely rare and certainly cannot be compared to the popular phenomenon of the French post-war poem-set-to-popular song. This is a crucial difference that Adrian Martin fails to recognise and explore further.

Godard's playful inclusion in his films of Aragon's poetry, through Jean Ferrat's song, in order to present a poetic-realist account of every day life, is in no sense comparable with The Kinks' self-penned song "Waterloo Sunset" (270) for the simple reason that The Kinks belonged in the popular culture realm and the lyrics of the song, regardless of their poetic value, did not come out of a "high" poetic literary tradition as Aragon's verse did. The poems recited were written by poets from the pantheon of those recognised as literary figures, regardless of the later popular song version. *A Bout De Souffle* (1960), *Bande a Part* (1964) and *Alphaville* (1965) (the films that Martin discusses) were all narrative feature films made for commercial release and popular consumption exactly like Jean Ferrat's music.

In this sense, Godard brought "high" poetry into these intentionally popular films: a filmic process equivalent to the French popular song's adoption of established poetry. In this way, Godard reassessed the links between "high" literature and popular culture. By reciting poetry in film, Godard transposed into film a French artistic practice, which evidences the power of the popular song and popular culture to emerge as "both the space of a re-constructed utopia and as a subversive 'other' to high cultural forms" (Papanikolaou: 2002, 2) By highlighting this idiosyncratic and political tendency of the time in France to set poetry to music, it can be argued that a positive context was created for merging high art and popular culture. In this sense, Godard's invocation and subversion of the literary prestige and idealised view of poetry were part of his own anxiety over the

France and Greece (1945-1975) (University of London, 2002). Papanikolaou discusses the particular cultural phenomenon of "high" poetry set to "popular" music in France and in Greece where in both cases this marriage was part of a post-war democratisation of high culture and politicisation of popular art. The influence of the French tradition is very clear in the case of the Greek composer, Mikis Theodorakis, who started his career composing music for films in the 50s in France and UK and on his return to Greece set to popular music the poetry of high modernist poets including Seferis and Elytis. This work came to be considered the pinnacle of political art, especially when it was customarily banned by the Greek dictatorship in the late 60s.

influence of the “high” modernists. As he has put it in the oft-quoted interview with Serge Daney “writing was terrifying. How could you expect to write better than Joyce or Rilke? In the cinema though, it was allowed. We could do things with no ‘class’, with nothing, with neither head nor tail” (Godard in Bellour and Bandy: 1992, 160).

Godard’s “classless” work is confirmed by the wide range of disciplines represented and invited in this book (art history, film studies and philosophy) and a series of impressively interdisciplinary essays which was impossible to discuss in detail one by one in the space of this review. Godard is, indeed, difficult to classify but easy to mystify. I would like to conclude with an observation of missing links in this book, which are telling of a certain tendency to discuss Godard (either in his early or his late phase) alone with Theory as his only company.

For example, one of the many missing links could be the American New Cinema and especially its experimental strands, which have not been invited to participate in the debate about Godard. John Cassavetes’ *Shadows* was shown to the American public at the same period that *A Bout de Souffle* was shown to French audiences. The 60s and early 70s constituted a moment of intense aesthetic experimentation (Jonas Mekas, Stanley Brakhage, Hollis Frampton) and denunciation of commercial art cinema, with the Film-Makers Cooperative in New York set up by Mekas as early as in 1961.¹³ The inevitable question emerges when we try to put Godard in context: has Godard been in dialogue with other film philosophers, filmic historians and “*petit commerçants*” of cinema and, if so, how? For instance, Godard’s interest in Hollis Frampton, American avant-garde filmmaker and film philosopher, has not been picked up in this book or in other scholarly studies.¹⁴

Godard alone has received such glorification, because Godard alone has been thinking cinematically so intensively, expansively and productively about cinema itself. Godard is the film theorist par excellence. At the same time, Godard has been alone on his Olympian throne – alone perhaps because film scholars might have left him so.

¹³ Interestingly, Jonathan Rosenbaum’s essay “Eight Obstacles to the Appreciation of Godard in the United States” (in Bellour and Bandy: 1992) informs us that the first time Godard’s films were compared and discussed (dismissively though) in tandem with other film philosophers of the cinematographic image (Jonas Mekas, Andy Warhol) was not by the American champions of Godard (Sontag, Kael, Roud, Sarris) but in a hysterical attack against Godard and the Godardians by John Simon, an American specialist in theatre and European Literature.

¹⁴ Godard cites Hollis Frampton in *JLG/JLG: Self-Portrait in December* and acknowledges affinity of thinking with the American avant-garde filmmaker in *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard II*, 445.

This paradox in Godard studies is also evident in the recent monograph *Jean-Luc Godard* by Douglas Morrey (2005). Morrey acknowledges that “Godard’s cinema is not simply *about* philosophy or cinema *with* philosophy, rather it is cinema *as* philosophy. The cinematograph is a machine for thinking, for propelling thought...” (2005, 242) [author’s italics] However, throughout this concise and incisive monograph, Godard’s films are mainly in dialogue with philosophy (Bergson, Derrida, Deleuze) rather than with actual films *as* philosophy and actual film philosophers.

Peter Wollen’s contextualisation of Godard’s films in the perceptive essays “The Two Avant-Gardes” and “Godard and Counter-cinema”, for example, could provide a springboard for putting Godard in dialogue with others. On a philosophical level, Godard’s self-consciousness of solitude within the history of cinema has been pointed out by Jonathan Dronsfield’s Deleuzian analysis of the I and the Other in *Histoire(s)* which refers to Godard’s concern to ask throughout *Histoire(s) du Cinéma*: “Where do I come into it?...” (Dronsfield, 2000: 64). Godard’s work needs more company with filmmakers rather than with philosophers and as the comparative essays by Rancière and Saxton show in *For Ever Godard*, there are many films and filmmakers with whom the Godardian image can talk, ontologically, aesthetically and historically.

The book’s table of contents and some illustrations can be found online at:
<http://www.forevergodard.com>

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