The Pennsylvania State University

The Graduate School

Department of French and Francophone Studies

JEAN-LUC GODARD:
THE EVOLUTION OF A RADICAL

A Thesis in
French

by

Amruta Satish Kulkarni

© 2007 Amruta Satish Kulkarni

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

December 2007
The thesis of Amruta Satish Kulkarni was reviewed and approved* by the following:

Allan Stoekl  
Professor of French and Comparative Literature  
Thesis Adviser  
Chair of Committee

Thomas A. Hale  
Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of African, French, and Comparative Literature  
Head of the Department of French and Francophone Studies

Bénédicte Monicat  
Associate Professor of French and Women’s Studies

Sanford Schwartz  
Associate Professor of English

Monique Yaari  
Associate Professor of French

*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School.
This dissertation aims to study four recent films by French filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard. Although most of Godard's early work of the 60s and 70s has received considerable attention from researchers, fewer studies focus on his more recent films such as *Nouvelle vague* (1990), *JLG/JLG: Autoportrait de décembre* (1994), *For Ever Mozart* (1996) and *Éloge de l’amour* (2000). Several scholars have made observations stating that Godard’s later work is very contemplative. Others opine that this body of work concentrates more on the notion of beauty, and still others see Godard’s later work as distinct from his earlier work, especially with respect to its content.

Although I agree with observations stating that Godard’s later work is much more self-reflective and contemplative than his earlier work, I would not agree with those who see it as being distinct in content or being in a ‘consistent digression’ because of this. In fact, as I argue in the chapters that follow, much of Godard’s later work follows a steady pattern of reflection and autocritique of his earlier work. Several of Godard’s central concerns from his earlier films return in his later films and he reworks his strategies and positions vis-à-vis these same concerns in his new reflective phase. Consequently then, Godard’s work of the late 80s and 90s is not distinct in its concerns but rather in its response to those same concerns of the 60s. It is therefore of particular importance that his later films be studied in comparison with his earlier films to trace the changes and evolution in Godard’s thought process through the span of more than 40 years of filmmaking.

Each of the four chapters of this dissertation explores one recent film in connection with one earlier film discussing a similar concern. A detailed comparative
analysis of the issue as seen in both films demonstrates a similarity in concerns but
significant difference in outlook in Godard’s later work. Needless to say, this study
cannot be only thematic, for aesthetics play an extremely important role in Godard’s
cinema and for that matter, in the cinema of any serious filmmaker. Along with a
discussion of the major themes of these films, I will also discuss Godard’s use of form
and different cinematic techniques and their interaction with the content of the films that I
will be comparing. It is, in fact, impossible to discuss one without the other.

With these aims in mind, I have chosen four of Godard’s more recent and little
researched films, viz. *Nouvelle vague* (1990), *JLG/JLG: Autoportrait de décembre*
(1994), *For Ever Mozart* (1996) and *Éloge de l’amour* (2000) for the purpose of this
dissertation. I study a central theme in each new film and I compare it to an earlier film
focusing on the same theme. My analysis demonstrates that although Godard has become
much more reflective in his later work, and less volatile and reactionary, he has certainly
not become less radical in his thoughts. In fact, he has become more groundbreaking than
before, albeit in a slightly less visually jarring way.

The aim of this dissertation is thus threefold: first, to bring further attention to
Godard’s recent films; secondly, to demonstrate that these films occupy a privileged
space within Godard’s work wherein he takes a marked autocritical stance and looks back
upon his earlier works; and lastly, to demonstrate that Godard’s reflective stance in his
later films does not imply a more mellow or resigned outlook but rather an equally, if not
more far-reaching one than in his earlier films.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ................................................................. vii

Introduction ............................................................................. 1

Chapter 1 Violence: Manifestations and Cures from *Week-end* to *Nouvelle vague* . . . 8

*Week-end* ................................................................. 10
  Scenes of Violence: Cars and the Bourgeoisie ......................... 10
  The Aftermath of Violence: Love or the Lack of it ................... 15
  The Forest as Cure: A Respite from Violence ........................ 18
  The Failed Solution: Violence to Counter Violence ............... 22

*Nouvelle vague* ............................................................. 25
  The Inevitability of Violence: Cars, Assembly Lines, and the New
     Aristocracy ................................................................. 26
  Compassion as Cure: To Give What One Doesn’t Have ............ 30
  Failure and Perseverance: The Ultimate Triumph ................. 34

Film Form .............................................................................. 37

Chapter 2 From *Pierrot le fou* to *JLG/JLG*: The Journey of an Artist ............ 41

*Pierrot le fou* ............................................................... 43
  The Artist’s dilemma ....................................................... 43
  Escape of the Artist into Isolation .................................. 47
  The Death of the Artist .................................................. 52

*JLG/JLG: Autoportrait de décembre* ...................................... 55
  A New Dilemma ............................................................. 55
  The Return of the Artist .................................................. 58
  The Artist Lives to Communicate .................................... 62

Film Form .............................................................................. 69

Chapter 3 Interceptions with War: *Les Carabiniers* and *For Ever Mozart* ........ 74

*Les Carabiniers* .............................................................. 77
  A Fictitious War ............................................................. 77
  Interceptions with War: Forced and Callous ....................... 82
  War Fails All ................................................................. 88
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My deepest thanks and gratitude go to my advisor, Professor Allan Stoekl. His constant support and encouragement, strong belief in my capabilities, and profound commitment to academia and scholarly research have been an indispensable source of inspiration and guidance throughout my stay at Penn State and during the writing of this dissertation. I am also very grateful to my committee members: Professors Monique Yaari, Bénédicte Monicat, and Sanford Schwartz. I thank them for their abundant patience, encouragement, time and feedback throughout my years at Penn State, as well as during the writing of this dissertation.

My family, particularly my parents and my brother, have undoubtedly played a significant role during this time. Their patience, humor, support, and encouragement have been precious and I could not have done this without them. Most of all, I would like to thank my husband, Vineet. He has been incredibly supportive throughout the writing process. I would not have been able to complete this dissertation without him.

I would like to thank all of my teachers from school, Fergusson College, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Penn State, and the Alliance Française de Poona. They have all given me a lot and without them I would not have come this far.

My sincere thanks also go to all my friends in India, in the U.S.A. and in France. They have always cheered me on enthusiastically and I feel lucky to have them all in my life.

I sincerely thank the Department of French and Francophone Studies for awarding me travel grants during my graduate study. And last but not the least, a big thank you to Carol Toscano and Becky Bressler for all these years of support, smiles, and hugs.
Introduction

Audacious, innovative, pioneering, vague, abstract, and incomprehensible—Jean-Luc Godard has been simultaneously hailed as well as criticized almost throughout his cinematic career. From tentative beginnings in *Opération béton* (1954) (Godard’s first short documentary), to the Maoist video works of the 70s and now the more self-reflective works of the post 90s, his films have gone from being wildly popular to completely ignored. Although most of his early work of the 60s and 70s has received considerable attention from researchers, fewer studies focus on his more recent films such as *Nouvelle vague* (1990), *JLG/JLG: Autoportrait de décembre* (1994), *For Ever Mozart* (1996) and *Éloge de l’amour* (2000). Several scholars have made observations stating that Godard’s later work is very contemplative. Others opine that this body of work concentrates more on the notion of beauty, and still others see Godard’s later work as distinct from his earlier work, especially with respect to its content. Temple and Williams observe:

As the last fifteen years have confirmed, the work pursued by Godard has always proceeded by trial and error, fits and starts, in a consistent digression rather than a steady progress, and even those amongst us who have tried to keep pace are frequently astonished by where it has taken us.

*(The Cinema Alone 11)*

---

1 Temple and Williams explain: “In the English-speaking world, several studies of Godard’s films have been published over the last five years, by Josefa Loshitzky, Wheeler Winston Dixon and David Sterritt, yet they are concerned essentially with early and middle Godard (i.e. Godard’s work up until 1985), and provide at best only a summary of the corpus since 1985. Similarly, the most recent film considered by Kaja Silverman and Harun Farocki in their series of engaged dialogues entitled *Speaking about Godard* (1998) is *NOUVELLE VAGUE*, which dates from 1990. All these volumes fail by a long way to acknowledge that Godard is a presently active film-maker who, over the last fifteen years, has found the time and energy to make not only the monumental *HISTOIRE(S) DU CINÉMA*, but also twenty-three discrete works.” *(The Cinema Alone 10)*
Although I agree with observations stating that Godard’s later work is much more self-reflective and contemplative, I would not agree with those who see it as being distinct in content or being in a ‘consistent digression’ because of this. In fact, as I argue in the chapters that follow, much of Godard’s later work follows a steady pattern of reflection and autocritique of his earlier work. Several of Godard’s central concerns from his earlier films return in his later films and he reworks his strategies and positions vis-à-vis these same concerns in his new reflective phase. In consequence then, Godard’s work of the late 80s and 90s is not distinct in its concerns but rather in its response to those same concerns of the 60s. It is therefore of particular importance that his later films be studied in comparison with his earlier films to trace the changes and evolution in Godard’s thought process through the span of more than 40 years of filmmaking. As Susan Sontag argues:

Godard’s work— unlike that of most film directors, whose artistic development is much less personal and experimental— deserves, ultimately demands, to be seen in its entirety. One of the most modern aspects of Godard’s artistry is that each of his films derives its final value from its place in a larger enterprise, a life work. Each film is, in some sense, a fragment— which, because of the stylistic continuities of Godard’s work, sheds light on the others. (149)

I would add that the continuities are not only stylistic but also in content. It is these continuities that I analyze in the course of this dissertation to demonstrate that although Godard has become much more reflective in his later work, and less volatile and reactive, he has certainly not become less radical in his thoughts. In fact, as I demonstrate through
each of the later films that I analyze in the chapters that follow, he has become more groundbreaking than before, albeit in a slightly less visually jarring way.

Significant among the few works that do discuss Godard’s later work are *The Cinema Alone* edited by Temple and Williams, *Jean-Luc Godard* by Douglas Morrey and the seminal biographical work *Godard: A Portrait of the Artist at Seventy* by long time Godard scholar Colin MacCabe. Godard’s recent work has slowly but steadily been gaining more attention from scholars as can be seen from the extremely thin but steady stream of articles on these films.

While *The Cinema Alone* does focus on Godard’s newer films, a majority of the essays in this collection discuss his video project *Histoire(s) du cinéma*. In addition to this primary focus on *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, *The Cinema Alone* does not make any connections between Godard’s films, and also fails to make note of any changes and evolutions that Godard’s work has undergone since the early sixties. As with most other articles on Godard’s recent films, it is not the aim of the essays in this volume to make connections between recent films and earlier ones. Morrey’s book is significant in its insightful discussion of Godard’s more recent work; nevertheless, connections to earlier films are only incidental. Again, it is not Morrey’s aim to follow through and analyze these connections in depth. Colin MacCabe’s biography is on a different plane as compared to these two books as well as to my dissertation. The former, although extremely insightful and contributive to an understanding of Godard’s work, follows Godard’s personal life, the production of his films and other events surrounding his cinematic career. Having been closely associated with Godard over a long span of time, MacCabe is able to provide a deep understanding of the connections between events in
Godard’s personal and work life. While these are crucial to an understanding of
Godard’s personal and cinematic choices, the book is more biographical than analytical.

My dissertation thus forwards the cause already put forth by The Cinema Alone—that of bringing more scholarly attention and discussion to Godard’s more recent work. But, it goes a step further in this effort to see how this recent work connects to his earlier work. Each of the four chapters of this dissertation explores one recent film in connection with one earlier film discussing a similar concern. A detailed comparative analysis of the issue as seen in both films demonstrates a similarity in concerns but significant difference in outlook in Godard’s later work. Needless to say, this study cannot be only thematic, for aesthetics play an extremely important role in Godard’s cinema and for that matter, in the cinema of any serious filmmaker. Along with a discussion of the major themes of these films, I will also discuss Godard’s use of form and different cinematic techniques and their interaction with the content of the films that I will be comparing. It is, in fact, impossible to discuss one without the other.

The aim of my dissertation is thus threefold: first, to bring further attention to Godard’s recent films; secondly, to demonstrate that these films have a privileged space within Godard’s work wherein he takes a marked autocritical stance and looks back upon his earlier works; and lastly, to demonstrate that Godard’s reflective stance in his later films does not imply a more mellow or resigned outlook but rather an equally, if not more far-reaching one than in his earlier films.

With these aims in mind, I have chosen four of Godard’s more recent and little researched films, viz. Nouvelle vague (1990), JLG/JLG: Autoportrait de décembre (1994), For Ever Mozart (1996) and Éloge de l’amour (2000) for the purpose of this
dissertation. I study a central theme in each new film and I compare it to an earlier film focusing on the same theme.

The first chapter of the dissertation discusses *Nouvelle vague* (1990) in comparison with *Week-end* (1967). The central issue in both films is that of everyday violence. I argue that whereas *Week-end* saw a certain hopelessness in the decadence of modernity and the ensuing frustration, aggression and violence, *Nouvelle vague* calls for a new look at modernity. It seeks beauty where *Week-end* could only see ugliness and horror and aims for peace through compassion and understanding, where *Week-end* saw a return to savagery as the only possible outcome of modernity.

The second chapter shows how the position and role of the artist in society has changed from *Pierrot le fou* (1965) to *JLG/JLG: Autoportrait de décembre* (1994). Whereas the artist in *Pierrot* is completely frustrated with the downfall of communication in the age of consumerism and thus seeks escape and isolation from this world, he returns in *JLG/JLG* to stay on in that same world. This is not because he has resigned to it, but because he sees the value of being within society and trying to counter the degradation of communication even though society treats art and artists as exceptions to the rule of mass culture.

The third chapter explores the question of war as seen by *For Ever Mozart* (1996) and *Les Carabiniers* (1963). *Les Carabiniers* blames the common man for his apathy and ignorance of the war situation; it sees the death and destruction caused by war as necessarily being the consequences of this apathy. On the other hand, *For Ever Mozart* shows that war is in fact a tool used by the media and those in power to divert public attention away from more the serious issues at hand. In this film, Godard is severely
critical of art and films in particular for their failure to bring out this nexus; he sees no hope for such a cinema, which has failed in the most basic of its responsibilities—to remember and record the horrors of history. Towards the end of *For Ever Mozart*, he abandons film in favor of music, which he feels has the capacity to heal and provoke thoughtful behavior, much more so than cinema.

In *Éloge de l’amour* (2000), Godard comes back to a slightly more hopeful position than in *For Ever Mozart*. He discusses the failure of the image in depth in this film, but also sees hope for redemption. Godard first discussed a connection between love, commitment and hope for a better cinema in *Le Mépris* (1963). In *Éloge de l’amour*, he brings to fulfillment his belief in love and a sense of commitment to life as a possible solution to restore to cinema its capacity and potential to prevent any more crimes against humanity.

The conclusion to this dissertation brings together the four main issues discussed in each of the four chapters to show that along with the connections between each of the four earlier and newer films, there are also strong connections between the four central concerns of these films. The themes of everyday violence, war, the artist and the role of cinema are intrinsically connected and it is therefore most fruitful to study Godard’s work as continuous rather than separate and digressing as some of it might appear at first viewing. To quote Susan Sontag again:

> Like every important body of work in the canon of modern culture, Godard’s films are simply what they are and also events that push their audience to reconsider the meaning and scope of the art form of which
they are instances; they’re not only works of art, but meta-artistic
activities aimed at reorganizing the audience’s entire sensibility. (152)

It is this sensibility or rather the continuum of this sensibility that I aim to recapture
through this dissertation, as I bring together some of Godard’s seminal films of the past
and the present.
Chapter 1

Violence: Manifestations and Cures from *Week-end* to *Nouvelle vague*

*Nouvelle vague* was among the first films to mark Godard’s return to feature films and the commercial circuit of production and distribution after what are known as his video years in the 70s and 80s. There is an evident duality in the title of this film, indicating a new phase in Godard’s work as well as alluding to the New Wave of the 1960s wherein Godard played a significant role. Indeed, *Nouvelle vague* does both — looking back, it reconsiders certain issues, in particular that of violence, a theme that Godard first discussed in his film *Week-end* in 1967, but at the same time, points to new directions as it re-evaluates the issue such as to find new answers to old questions.

Scholars often divide Godard’s work into three phases. The first, from 1959 until the early 70s, the second from the 70s until the late 80s, also known as the video years, and the last from the late eighties until the present, what is also known as Godard’s reflective phase. *Week-end* was made towards the end of the early phase, when Godard was experiencing a growing discontent with traditional means of cinematic production and distribution and linear narratives that he had adopted during his early films. Morrey explains in regard to the making of *Week-end*:

As a result of the perspective developed over these films, the political situation appears to be so complicated and intractable that Godard is repeatedly led to call for a *return to zero*: we can only change society, Godard seems to say, by changing *everything*, by rethinking everything.

(72)
And that is precisely what he aims to do in *Week-end*. MacCabe explains further that *Week-end* “(…) is clearly made by someone who has reached a position of total disgust and rejection of his own society.” (200) It is therefore the success of *Week-end* within the very society that Godard is disgusted with that was the breaking point after which he launched into video work and set up a system of private production and distribution to evade any interference from the producer in his work. *Nouvelle vague*, on the other hand, is on the other end of the spectrum of Godard’s work; it was one of the first of his new series of films, which marked a return to traditional means of cinematic production and distribution. Although some critics assumed a compromise in this return to traditional linear narratives and less radical visuals and arguments², a deeper understanding of *Nouvelle vague* reveals that this is hardly so and that the film expresses a lot more than mere resignation.

Although a fair amount of scholarly attention has focused on both these films to bring out the development of materialism and the ensuing commodification of the human body as well as the focus on the tyranny of images in *Week-end* (Sterritt 89-128, Silverman and Farocki 83-111) or the centrality of memory and the relationship of man and nature as explored in *Nouvelle vague* (Silverman and Farocki 197-227), no studies draw parallels between the two films.

With the intention of bringing together these two films, I will explore, in this chapter, *Nouvelle Vague* as a rewriting of Godard’s earlier film *Week-end*. My discussion

² Sterritt mentions that during the first U.S. screening of *Nouvelle vague* during the New York Film Festival, “(…) Vincent Canby, the powerful and generally insightful critic of the New York Times, published a review so savage (and so unexpected, given his longtime support for New Wave cinema) that Godard left town early, hopes for timely distribution of the movie were dashed, and those of us who deeply admired it were left wondering how its point could so profoundly have been missed, not only by Canby but also by numerous others who might have risen to its defense.” (223)
of *Week-end*, which will comprise the first part of this chapter, will focus on how Godard explores violence as it exists in society along with how he ambivalently toys with violence in the form of revolution as a possible retaliation against this everyday violence. In the second part of the chapter, I will demonstrate that in *Nouvelle vague* Godard once again comes back to an exploration of violence, but this time in a very different setting—that of the industrial aristocracy, and with a very different solution—the proposition of compassion and understanding as a cure for everyday violence. In keeping with the larger question of this dissertation, I hope to demonstrate that although Godard was more overtly radical in *Week-end*, in *Nouvelle vague* he brings forth a new and more subtle yet equally powerful opposition to violence. In order to do so, I will discuss specific scenes from both films and analyze them in terms of the plot, characters, and motifs, to bring out the theme of everyday violence as explored in the two films. Following this thematic analysis, I will also do a formal analysis of the films, to discuss the techniques used and their contributions to the overarching question of violence.

*Week-end*

**Scenes of Violence: Cars and the Bourgeoisie**

As *Week-end* begins, the phone rings and Roland, the male protagonist, comes out of the balcony of an apartment to take the call. The camera moves in on Roland and as he goes out of frame, it enters the balcony where Corinne, the female protagonist and Roland’s wife, is seen with another man. As Roland leaves the balcony, “the fiction of bourgeois propriety is quickly shattered. Within seconds, we learn that the friend is in fact Corinne’s lover, and that she and Roland are both scheming to kill each other”
(Silverman and Farocki 83). Cars and car crashes are returning motifs throughout *Week-end* and are a significant symbol of violence in the film. They never appear as serene symbols of human power, development, and sophistication as often depicted by the mass media; quite to the contrary, whenever cars appear in *Week-end*, they always signify turmoil, distress, chaos, confusion, and a dilapidated condition of society. Kristin Ross points out that in post-war France, the modernization of everyday life in the form of cars and new technologies for better hygiene served to distract from the tensions of the Algerian conflict. Cars, in particular, were effective as both means of transport to work as well as objects of desire (39). As we shall see, *Week-end* tries to disrupt this notion of comfort and uses cars as motifs of destruction and wreckage resulting from the limitless modernization of everyday life.

As if to visually play out Corinne’s wish that Roland be involved in a car crash, we see an overhead shot of two cars crashing into each other. A loud and bitter quarrel ensues between the two owners. Several other people in the street get involved and the scene turns into a nasty brawl. The people in this scene are all dressed in fancy suits and accessories, perhaps to highlight the contrast between appearances and natures. They fight savagely and then go off screeching their brakes and speeding off. The fight involves the use of expletives, sticks, and rifles and thus successfully breaks the stereotype of bourgeois sophistication.

A couple of scenes later, we see Roland and Corinne engaged in a similar fight. However, this time we see the scene in more detail and this brings out the crudeness in it more strongly. This scene occurs in the same location as that of the previous one. As Roland backs up violently and recklessly, he brakes suddenly making the car screech as it
bumps into another car behind. The owner of the other car comes screaming outside and instead of decently asking what happened, starts abusing and creating a scene. Thereafter, Roland gets out of the car and starts shouting as well and soon he brandishes a gun at the lady. As she continues to shout loudly, he even fires in the air and then gets into his car and speeds off.

Interestingly, this scene begins with a little boy running around parked cars and dressed like a Native American, wearing feathers on his head, but carrying a toy gun in his hand. Godard briefly creates the image of the idyllic suburban life with houses and gardens and space for children to play, but again, only to subvert viewer expectations and contrast it with what happens later. Even the little boy creates quite a commotion and adds to the violence and crudeness of the scene, perhaps bearing witness to the inherent nature of human violence. The location of the scene with its fancy cars, big houses and well dressed people is extremely bourgeois in nature; however, this modern urban society is by no means as sophisticated as we expect it to be. The little boy dressed up as a Native American is symbolic of what we have retained from primitive civilizations. As Haroun Farocki explains:

The protagonists behave more “choreographically” than realistically, and the passions motivating their struggle seem assumed rather than organic; it is as if they display rage less because they experience it than because their roles call for it. But there is the suggestion that under the thin veneer of this “civilization” beats the heart of a more affectively vital “barbarism.” (91)
Earlier, Silverman argues that this brawl scene “suggests that in the world of *Week-end* only material goods are capable of eliciting passions” (84). I would further argue that these material goods are only capable of eliciting negative passions and although progress and development as we see it today has always privileged the bourgeoisie, yet it has only made them more discontent and therefore more anguished. Thus cars, symbolic of this very progress, only add to violence in society. Their speed and the resulting power and conquest of time fail to contribute to a better and more compassionate society. In fact, this progress, as shown by these two scenes in *Week-end*, is leading to a society even more insatiate, even more greedy and thus more violent in a bid to fulfill that greed.

The scene ends with Roland and Corinne speeding off to Oinville where they are planning to go, not for a weekend vacation as the title of the film might suggest, but in fact to execute a weekend crime. However, as the following analysis of another very important scene from *Week-end* demonstrates, violence is not just the destination of Roland and Corinne but also very much part of their journey to that destination. This scene is in fact a single ten-minute traveling shot of a traffic jam that Roland and Corinne get caught in, while traveling to Oinville to try and fleece Corinne’s mother of her money. This traveling shot very effectively flattens out the scene and aptly represents the stagnated and wrecked state of industrialized life. David Steritt says: “Since everything takes place on the roadway, the action seems stretched and flattened into a two-dimensional spectacle, as shallow as the society that has allowed everyday life to degenerate so badly (97).
The traffic jam is full of crashed cars, of people waiting endlessly for the line to move, playing chess and fighting one another savagely as they wait. We also see corpses, streams of blood, and cars on fire, and we continue to encounter such scenes of violence throughout the remainder of the film. Farocki rightly says: “The burning wrecks by the side of the road are heart-breakingly beautiful, but the hearts of our heroes are not broken.” (84) Not only do Roland and Corinne remain unaffected by these sights, they also try to steal clothes, purses, and whatever material goods they can find in these wreckages. Although the rest of the cars in the traffic jam remain almost stationary and make no attempt to make their way out of it, Roland and Corinne inch forward through whatever spaces they can spot; they shout, scream, hit other cars and finally, turn and speed off, leaving the unyielding traffic jam far behind them.

Roland and Corinne’s movement through the traffic jam points out more clearly than before what Godard has been trying to allude to since the beginning of the film—the attempt to overcome violence with yet more violence. Roland and Corinne, plagued by everyday violence, try to fight it with yet more aggression and violence. On each occasion where they are confronted with someone trying to get the better of them, someone trying to intimidate them, or with life itself—in its various ways as manifested by the traffic jam, they react aggressively to that situation. They are ridden with anger and bitterness and yet, they still have a little bit of will and desire to struggle out of it. Nevertheless, this desire is not to achieve freedom from the perils of violence by trying to eliminate it; quite to the contrary, the desire is merely to become the perpetrators of violence and thereby to become the oppressors. The desire is to liberate themselves from domination, but not to liberate others as well in the process. Instead, the desire is to
trample others and become the dominant. This selfish desire does not aim to attain freedom from the system in the true sense. Instead, the desire is to move up and repress others so as to become liberated from that repression themselves. Furthermore, the desire for oppression only provides a false sense of liberation since Roland and Corinne are still practicing violence, although they may not be victimized by it, and therefore still very much in its clutches. As St. Juste, one of the characters that Roland and Corinne meet later in the film explains: “Freedom, like crime, is born of violence. It is as though it were a virtue, which springs from vice fighting in desperation against slavery. The struggle will be long and freedom will kill freedom.”

**The Aftermath of Violence: Love or the Lack of it**

Another effect of this constant everyday violence against which *Week-end* tries to revolt towards the end, is the death of love itself. In fact, love seems to be long dead and gone in the era of *Week-end*, such that we do not find so much as traces of it anywhere along the varied landscape of the film—from the city to the countryside, through the forest, there is no sign of it whatsoever. As I have explained in the beginning of the chapter, the myth of the married couple has been destroyed early on in the film. Furthermore, Godard works to destroy the myth of the couple itself. Not only do Roland and Corinne fail to find love in each other’s company, they fail to find it with anyone else as well. When Roland talks to his mistress on the phone as Corinne is with her lover on the balcony, we only hear talk of money, killing, and sex. There is no mention of love in the conversation, and this is only a prelude to the unmistakable lack of any basic positive human emotions such as tenderness or compassion throughout the film.
Corinne’s simultaneous discussion with her lover too is devoid of love and is solely centered on money. As she looks out from the balcony on to the car crash fight I have discussed above, she wishes it were Roland who was being beaten up in that situation. Again, it is not because he is in the way of her lover, but because he is in the way of her money. Her lover further wishes that Roland and her father die in a car crash together so both obstacles in the way of their getting money from the father’s will are taken care of in one go.

An important scene that I will discuss in this context is that of Corinne describing a particular sexual encounter to her lover. This scene, both aesthetically as well thematically, subverts all viewer expectations and thwarts all voyeuristic impulses. The scene begins with Corinne sitting on top of a table and her lover sitting on a chair at the table. The camera then pans to leave Corinne’s lover out of the frame. Corinne is in her underclothes throughout the scene. Farocki explains:

Shot against the brilliant illumination of a window, both figures are dark silhouettes. Silhouette photography usually beautifies, but that is not the case here. Nothing solicits the look. The seduction of the scene resides not in the image, but in the words of Corinne. (86)

Although I agree that the image is devoid of seduction, as I shall explain below, the word too is devoid of seduction.

Corinne begins explaining that she and Paul were in the car but as she was not comfortable there, he asked her to come home. When she goes to Paul’s place, Monique, who as Corinne explains is Paul’s ex-wife, opens the door. Throughout Corinne’s description, viewer expectations are shattered at all levels. To begin with, Corinne is
sitting on the table like an accused sitting in the interrogation room, being questioned by the police. When she is describing the events of that particular Tuesday afternoon, she very meticulously begins with the day and the time when the events started. The entire description follows the events as they happened, in strict chronological order, with timely questions and interventions from Corinne’s lover sitting on the chair listening to her. “Her voice stays as flat as the table she’s sitting on, making wild statements and banal ones in the same affectless tone” (Sterritt 94). There is none of the excitement or build-up usually associated, more so in cinema, with a sexual encounter, particularly as elaborate and unconventional as the one that she claims to have experienced. The novelty is thus completely crushed because of the flat monotonous way in which the sequence of events is being described one after another. “What matters about the scene is that it escalates Godard’s war against the tyranny of images. Convinced more than ever that show business is bad for us, he now wants to undermine the very idea of cinematic spectacle.” (Sterritt 95)

It appears as though the characters in Week-end fail to experience any kind of love or spontaneous desire. It seems as though the only desire they can experience is the one for consumer products like the clothes and bags which Corinne admired in the car wrecks— that is the desire artificially created by a consumerist economy. As Corinne explains all the minute details of the encounter with Paul and Monique, her lover listens calmly and without any emotion. As a final undercut to any spectator expectations, he calmly tells Corinne at the end of her monologue, “Viens m’exciter.” His tone is as flat as Corinne’s tone throughout the monologue.
So far in the film, Godard does much to illustrate the violence that has pervaded our lives. He has pronounced the end of love and all other human emotion and has questioned the very notion of industrial progress through the symbol of the automobile as perpetrator of aggression. However, it is not without an attempt to provide a certain cure for this violence that Godard ends the film. In fact, he proposes two possible alternatives that I shall explore in the next part of this chapter.

**The Forest as Cure: A Respite from Violence**

After Roland and Corinne manage to make their way out of the traffic jam, they still cannot find their way to Oinville. Finding themselves lost, they enter a forest where they encounter several literary characters with whom they enter into involuntary dialogue. Whereas these characters try to engage them into a conversation that could lead them to some introspection, all Corinne and Roland want to do is to find their way to Oinville. The first character they encounter is St. Juste who is reading from a play about the French revolution. By bringing in characters from the past and citing past events, Godard seeks the relevance that these events might hold for us in the present. To escape the unprecedented growth and progress made by industrialization, perhaps we must bring about another revolution. It may be time to once again overthrow the people in power, to take over power from the dominant class. However, as I have stated above, Roland and Corinne are not to be convinced of the need to change the system; they only want to climb to the top of the social order where they can then make their own claims to a dominant position in the society where money determines power. The two other characters that Roland and Corinne meet in the forest—Emily Brontë and Tom Thumb—
could be interpreted as symbols of creativity and fantasy. However, as we see, this symbolism and the opportunity to liberate their thoughts and thus their repressed will is lost on both Roland and Corinne. Both Emily Brontë as well as Tom Thumb try to engage them in puzzles that challenge the analytical ability of the mind as well as in conversations that question their present mode of life:

Emily Brontë and Tom Thumb hold up a stone and a tree branch to Corinne and Roland, and ask them what they are. Both times our protagonists provide the linguistic category into which we are accustomed to slotting those objects, a category which works to suppress their diversity. Emily Brontë responds with two quotations from Lewis Carroll, quotations which fracture the categories of “cat” and “fish” into a multiplicity for which there can no longer be any common denominator (kittens without tails, kittens who are ready to play with a gorilla, kittens who like fish and can be educated; fish who cannot dance the minuet, fish who have three rows of teeth, corpulent fish. (Silverman and Farocki 100-101)

But the fairy tale characters eventually realize the futility of their efforts: “Ils ne veulent le savoir que pour le revendre.” And in yet another violent act, Roland and Corinne set fire to both characters. They succeed in getting rid of the only two people who had some chance of saving them from what they had become and thus indicate that society has perhaps gone too far to make a comeback, to return to this retreat from modernity.

We thus see that Roland and Corinne do not recognize or perhaps do not want to recognize and avail of the retreat that the countryside or the forest and the abundance of
nature could provide from their angst-ridden modern lives. Even their trip to Oinville, in the countryside, is not really a relaxing weekend vacation as the title of the film might suggest. They are, in fact going to Oinville to try and get money from the will that Corinne’s father has left behind. Corinne’s mother, however, refuses to part with any money and hence Corinne and Roland murder her, fake an accident to burn up her body and escape with the fifty million francs that they steal from her. Godard is indeed parodying the typical modern day weekend as can be seen from the supertitle which appears as Corinne and Roland are making their way to Oinville: “De la révolution française aux week-ends gaullistes.”

In this supertitle, Godard brings up several points of similarity between the two periods. First and foremost, he seems to suggest throughout the film that although the revolution was an overtly bloody massacre of many innocent lives in the process of bettering the lives of certain others, modern day weekends are no less a blood bath. For certain people to enjoy their weekends, certain others have to give up not only their weekends but also much of their lives. So that a privileged few enjoy their weekends, others have to sweat and toil under conditions of extreme exploitation. But even more tragic is the fact that somehow, even those who are supposedly privileged enough to enjoy their weekends are unable to do so. In their hurry to possess everything, from money to pleasure, there is no time for relaxation. And thus, just as the French revolution failed in many ways, most importantly in its promise of a better future, Gaullist weekends too have failed to deliver.
Before concluding this section, I would like to analyze, in some detail, the sequence of the mother’s murder, as it is significant in its attempt to force us to see the gravity of the violence that is otherwise banalized by mass media.

Having killed their possible saviors, Roland and Corinne finally find their way to Oinville and reach the mother’s house. However, the father has already passed away and it is therefore too late to make him change his will. Realizing this, they try to convince Corinne’s mother to share the fortune. They start with wanting to share it equally but eventually as they keep negotiating, they even come down to an 80/20 division. However, Corinne’s mother stands firm and eventually suffers the consequences of her stubbornness. Godard’s camera makes very interesting movements here. First, as we hear Roland trying to negotiate with his mother-in-law, we never see their faces but only their feet as Roland follows her from the house to the garden. There is a certain expectation at this point that the camera will move from the feet to the face; however, the camera keeps its low angle and suddenly we see a skinned rabbit and blood flowing heavily from outside of the frame onto its lifeless body. We hear screams and assume that they come from Corinne’s mother but we see none of the actual action. Instead we see blood flowing onto the body of the rabbit. Whereas cinema typically reinforces an important moment by a sudden movement of the camera, Godard’s camera in fact achieves a greater effect by not changing the angle. Whereas typically the camera looks away after having shown us a glimpse of the horror, Godard’s camera has the courage to look this horror in the eye. It is as if Godard, by giving in to the spectator’s voyeuristic instinct, is turning him off it. If we want to see ‘action’ this is what it is— blood flowing onto the skinned rabbit. David Sterritt summarizes:
The rabbit shot is an unusual sort of synecdoche, inverting that trope’s ordinary purpose of allusiveness and discretion. Rarely has any filmmaker thrown audiences such a stunning one-two punch of contradictory emotional cues in such a hypercondensed period of time. (119)

Godard dares his spectator to look horror in the face, to take it on; he makes no effort to make it palatable, the more raw its form, the better. He is not going to show us only as much as will tickle our appetite and then conveniently look away when it starts disgusting us. If we have the courage, we must look at the whole scene; if not, we are not going to see only the palatable stuff, like a knife going up and down and the victim’s horrified face. These are faces of horror that we are accustomed to, that satisfy our urge without making us uncomfortable, but *Week-end* refuses to play along. It will definitely be a while till we demand a ‘horror’ scene again. This shot also “prepares the way for the next scene, which will push much further the thematization of human flesh as meat.” (Silverman and Farocki 105-106)

**The Failed Solution: Violence to Counter Violence**

By now, we are nearing the end of *Week-end* and clearly Roland and Corinne have survived all the obstacles that tried to make them stop and perhaps think about where they were going. They have escaped the traffic jam, Tom Thumb and Emily Brontë, and Corinne’s mother. Not all of these tried consciously to stop them, but they were occasions to pause, none of which Roland and Corinne took advantage of. At this crucial point, when nothing is working when trying to save this bourgeois couple, Godard experiments with a somewhat shocking solution, that of countering violence and
aggression with more violence. It is here that we see more clearly than before that the films insists “strenuously upon the “primitive” as something which lies not in the past but the present, and not without, but within” (Silverman and Farocki 104).

As Roland and Corinne are returning from Oinville, they run into a group of picnickers from whom they try to steal food. While they are at it, a band of revolutionaries with machine guns turns up and starts firing at them. We do not realize at first why the revolutionaries pick on this group of picnickers. When they take them hostage and start walking through the forest, we see that the revolutionaries are not even interested in money since they ignore repeated pleas from both Roland and Corinne who offer to share with them their fifty million francs. Roland gets killed on the way and Corinne has to bear witness to this without being able to do anything about it.

This walk continues for a long time, until we reach a sort of clearing in the forest where drums are playing and a chef is cutting up a human body. It is then that we start to realize that this is some sort of ritual. Godard emphasizes all the elements of a ritual or a tribal sacrifice of human beings—the drums, the sword, and the eggs, which are ceremoniously broken on the body before it is cut up, sacrificed, and then cooked and offered to the Gods³.

Kalfon, the chief of the revolutionaries explains, “Il faut dépasser l'horreur de la bourgeoisie par plus d'horreur encore.” And Godard plays out this horror in utmost detail

---

³ Jean-Luc Douin suggests reading the car wrecks in *Week-end* as sacrifices (189). Haroun Farocki also states: “Cars and corpses pile up on the road as a blood offering to the god of the highways.” (83) However, as we can see, Godard is not satisfied with merely sacrificing the cars, which symbolize the aggression of modernization; he ends up sacrificing the human beings who, in the first place, created the cars as an expression of that aggression.
to bring out the savage nature of these rituals. Kaja Silverman points out: ‘The desire for resacralization of a flat or desacralized world which surfaces from time to time in *Week-end* finds its fullest expression in the forest scenes’ (107). Evidently, things did not come across as Godard had wanted them to. As Robert Stam says:

*Weekend*, Godard’s most Artaldian film, would seem to incarnate Artaud’s recommendations for a “theatre of cruelty,” for the film animates a good deal of crime, eroticism, and ritualized violence. (…)

Godard, disturbed by the popularity of *Weekend*, came to see the dangers inherent in the Artaldian alternative. The more one indulges in spectacle, he admitted subsequently, the more one becomes immersed in what one is trying to destroy. (182)

I would argue that it was much before the popularity of *Week-end* that Godard had seen the failure of this cure. *Week-end* had certainly recognized this failure, as we see in the last scene where the chef is cooking some meat. As Corinne and Kalfon enjoy their meal, the chef tells them that along with the meat he has also cooked Roland and some of the English tourists that they had killed earlier. This revelation has no effect on Corinne as she keeps eating and says to the chef: “Après j’en prendrai encore.” So far then, everything has failed to cure violence of itself; not just attempts to discuss and prod thought but revolt and counter-violence as well. In the end, violence remains and shows no signs of abatement. It is in *Nouvelle vague* that Godard once again comes back to this...

---

4 This notion of violence to counter violence brings to mind Walter Benjamin’s notion of ‘divine violence’ Benjamin argues that unlike mythical violence which is involved in the making and maintaining of the law, divine violence is the only violence that can purify life as it expiates the guilt of a mere life and rids that life of the law itself (297). By extension, if the bourgeoisie represents maintenance of power by means of oppression, any violence against the bourgeoisie would be divine violence, as it would annihilate that power itself.
unresolved issue and tries to make headway again, this time not by trying to pull the aggressors out of their natural habitat, as he brought Roland and Corinne from the city to the forest, but by bringing the forest to them.

**Nouvelle vague**

*Nouvelle vague* begins with a monologue by Jules, the gardener of the Torlato-Favrini estate belonging to Elena, the heiress and owner of the Torlato-Favrini industries and a successful and dynamic industrialist. Jules is a gardener-philosopher who muses over the beauty of nature and the significance of life in relation to nature, all the while tending to the garden and operating tractors and lawn mowers—machines symbolic of industrialized society. This juxtaposition is one of the film’s points of focus. Although in *Week-end*, the escape to the forest eventually fails, in *Nouvelle vague*, we are once again brought back to the forest. This time though, as I mentioned above, the forest co-exists with all the luxuries of the city. It is a sort of middle ground where it doesn’t become a shock and a complete breakaway from the city; instead, it brings to the city what the city is lacking—a little peace and some harmony. The Torlato-Favrini estate is comprised of a modern house built in concrete but set in the midst of a thick forest, far away from the rest of the city. The estate is symbolic of an acceptance of modernity and an understanding of its benefits, without rejecting nature and its beauty. The resulting beauty is that of an abundance of material comforts coupled with the peace of nature. This discovery of the beauty of modernity is similar to one that Calinescu describes as Théophile Gautier’s argument that,
the ugliness of modern industrial life can be transformed. The result
would be a *modern kind of beauty*, different from the canonic beauty of
antiquity. Obviously, this can be achieved only on the basis of an
acceptance of modernity as it is. (45-46)

It is also important to note that as much as *Week-end* experimented with the idea
of the forest as a place where one might possibly find respite from violence, towards the
end of *Week-end*, the forest was also the haven of the revolutionaries. It is in the forest
that they performed their sacrifices and achieved their goal of destroying the bourgeoisie.
It is in the forest that they realized their goal of violence for violence and horror against
the horror of the bourgeoisie. The forest thus remains a lost possibility of peace; although
*Week-end* did briefly look at peace as a solution, it probably did not find it very
convincing and therefore seemed to believe more in savagery as a solution. However, as I
stated at the end of my discussion of *Week-end*, Godard did not seem to be completely
convinced of this solution either and thus returns in *Nouvelle vague* to consider the
possibility of peace as a solution. My discussion of *Nouvelle vague* will focus on this
reconsideration of violence, its manifestations, and possible solutions.

**The Inevitability of Violence: Cars, Assembly Lines, and the New Aristocracy**

As Jules is still ruminating over the abundance of nature that surrounds him, he
explains that Spring was late in coming that year but when it did come, it came in all its
glory with flowers blooming in plenty and rushes of green spanning the entire visible
landscape. Jules’ monologue is, as I shall demonstrate, very symbolic of Godard’s ode to
peace and love in this film. It states very poetically that love and only love and the peace
that it brings, can save us from the inherent violence and savagery that otherwise engulfs us. As we hear Jules’ poetry in the background, we see Elena Torlato-Favrini come out of her house and get into the car as her assistant briefs her on the latest economic news and brings her newspapers. “The first glimpse of La Contessa makes clear that she belongs to the new, working rich” (Silverman 200). However, Godard also adds softer nuances to her character. As her assistant is briefing her, she is also impatiently shouting for Jules to bring Elena’s bag and other files. The longer Jules takes, the more impatient the assistant gets and as she screams and curses at him, Elena very patiently tells her that it’s alright that he’s running a little late and that she should be a little more lenient on him because she loves him. But just as we start to appreciate her recognition of love, she is then quick to add that he is also useful around the estate. Elena thus appears to be someone capable of thinking beyond business and money, but she seems to be unable to get out of the hold that her business acumen has over her mind. She seems to be trained to think of money and value before all else, even though she has not completely lost the ability to think beyond capitalistic gains. This scene is an important one because it sets the tone, not just for Elena’s character but also for the direction that the film takes.

In *Nouvelle vague*, Elena represents someone who is prey to the violence of everyday life. However, although she definitely shows strong traits of bitterness and aggression just as Corinne and Roland did in *Week-end*, she is more receptive to change, and to other ways of being. As I shall further demonstrate, she is someone who can be transformed, someone who can be saved from aggression and the resulting violence. This is the first marker of Godard’s renewed faith in humanity in this film. Although in *Week-
end he believed the human condition was ruined beyond salvation, in *Nouvelle vague*

his renews his belief that human beings, although prone to aggression, can also find it in
themselves to be compassionate to the condition of others, in a conducive situation.

Along with his belief in human beings, his belief in their surroundings too has changed.

Kaja Silverman explains:

> It’s not finally so easy to differentiate the landscape from the human
> characters in *New Wave*. At first, the film seems to tell two stories, that of
> Elena and Lennox, and that of the house, park, and lake. Sometimes one is
> more prominent, sometimes the other. (199)

However, we realize later in the film that they are both equally important; in fact, it is the
two put together that can bring about the salvation that Godard seeks.

After Elena leaves in her car, the next scene, one that I will analyze in some
detail, introduces Roger (we learn his name a little later in the film) as he is walking
along a highway. Godard’s camera first tilts from the ground where it focuses for a short
two seconds on Roger Lenox walking to the clear blue sky above him. It then pans along
the sky for almost five seconds before it tilts down on to the trunk of a tree, and then
slowly tilts upward on to a branch of a tree. In a slow pan, it then goes from one end of
the branch until it gradually reaches the other end of the branch. All the while, in the
background, we hear cars speeding along the highway as well as occasional car horns,
which always serve to break the serenity of the landscape that the camera is panning. It is
not nature in isolation that we are made to appreciate here; on the contrary, the
juxtaposition of nature and man-made highways and cars shows us that we can appreciate
nature and its beauty even as we continue to lead our lives and do what we have to. In
fact, as we move further and further away from natural ways of life to more ‘civilized’
ways of being, we should try that much harder to bring ourselves in proximity to nature
as and when possible, in order to escape the hyperstimulus\(^5\) of our lives. It is only when
we walk instead of driving that we will be able to look at a tree for as long as Godard’s
camera does. The cars speeding along are gone before they even have time to notice the
tree.

Just as the camera takes a moment to stop at the end of the branch, we hear a loud
horn and the screeching of brakes. The next shot shows Roger Lenox on the ground, by
the side of the highway and then Elena bringing her car to a stop and getting out. She
walks over to where Roger is and asks him if he is hurt. This once again shows that Elena
is capable of compassion, much unlike Corinne and Roland, who never once stop to help
any of the victims of the many car accidents they see on their way to Oinville. Not only
that, the violent deaths in those accidents never seem to disturb them. They look at them
and move on as if they were the most banal scenes one could encounter. This banality of
violence is what \textit{Nouvelle vague} tries to transform. The first step to overcome violence
would be to sensitize ourselves to it, but the revolutionaries in \textit{Week-end} retaliate with
more violence and therefore only add to its banality. This scene shows that although
external violence, caused by the many developments of an industrialized society may be
inevitable, we can do our best to overcome the internal violence that it may provoke in
us.

\(^5\) I borrow the term from Ben Singer’s essay, “Modernity, Hyperstimulus, and the Rise of Popular
Sensationalism,” in which he analyzes the unprecedented rapid developments in technology as well as
media (hyperstimulus) and their effects on human beings in terms of their emotional responses, which gave
rise to such phenomena as a taste for sensationalism.
Compassion as Cure: To Give What One Doesn’t Have

Thus, *Nouvelle vague*’s idea seems to be to ignite the compassion that already exists in human beings in order to counter the violence that we have to co-exist with. As Elena realizes that Roger is still alive, she helps him up to his feet and there is a close-up of their hands coming together. This image resembles the hands in Michelangelo’s painting *The Creation of Adam* where the hand of Man and the hand of God reach out to each other. However, the significance of the two hands in *Nouvelle vague* is quite the opposite. There is no clear distinction between Man and God; in fact, as Godard emphasizes, it is the “miracle de deux mains vides.” And the idea is “donner ce qu’on n’a pas.” To try to give what one does not have, one has to first try and create it within oneself. In this case, Elena has to give love, that she may not have time for in her busy life, but by entering a situation in which she has to help someone she has hurt, she has to find that compassion which exists deep within her and has to bring it to the surface.

And bring it she does, for we see in the following scene that Roger is dressed in a suit and is accompanying Elena as she makes a round of her factory. Whereas *Weekend*’s Emily Brontë and Tom Thumb had failed to make Roland and Corinne think, *Nouvelle vague*’s Roger has succeeded in making Elena feel compassion. And that perhaps is the essence of the difference of approaches of the two films. Whereas *Weekend* focuses on reaching out to Roland and Corinne intellectually, *Nouvelle vague* reaches out to Elena emotionally. And it seems to be successful so far. There will, of course be challenges on this path and I will further discuss how Roger and Elena overcome these.

As life in the factory continues, with machines and workers on the assembly line and Elena and her business partners making decisions, discussing, and generally
supervising the running of the factory, Roger does not really seem to be interested in what is going on around him. He is merely standing around, half-listening to the business conversations that surround him. He has not yet found the confidence that Elena will be able to show him in exchange for the compassion that he has been able to help her find within herself. This is an exchange of two very different worlds, but it is this exchange that can produce a better world by bridging the gap between the two worlds.

Nevertheless, the exchange cannot be without any friction. Two worlds are being taken out of their comfort zones and put into contact with each other. Two very different perspectives are being made to see eye to eye and communicate and it is therefore not surprising that they each feel a little out of place, as Roger points out when asked by someone in the factory as to what he is doing there: “Je fais pitié.” And we certainly do pity him, as he is so completely and helplessly out of place in the factory. However, *Nouvelle vague* proves to us that in the end, this discomfort is not in vain. It will produce good results and is therefore worth the effort. It has already begun to show results in Elena’s compassionate response to Roger’s accident and thereafter to his discomfort in her house and factory. She makes sure to show her affection towards him and tries to create a place for him in her life.

Another scene that advocates this sometimes awkward bringing together of different classes is the one where Cécile, one of the domestic help at the Torlato-Favrini estate, is being trained by her mother. As Cécile is training to walk gracefully with a tray full of glasses, she keeps fumbling and tripping, and the more she is aware that she must be graceful, the more her hands tremble. So much so that, at one point her mother shouts in frustration, “Un peu de rigeur Cécile! On est des pauvres!” However, as if to apologize
for her outburst, she later explains to Cécile, “Les riches sont différents de nous, ils ont plus d’argent.” This explanation, rather than distinguishing between the classes, explains away that difference by stating that it only exists because of the money. Other than money then, there seems to be no essential difference between the rich and the poor. If we were to take away the money factor, both classes would be the same. This in turn is more of a warning than an optimistic vision of social equality. If money is the only element that makes the difference between the rich and the poor, it is then the only element that makes the difference between being compassionate as Roger and Cécile have been so far and being aggressive and selfish as Roland and Corinne were in *Week-end*. Perhaps then, if Roger and Cécile were rich, they would be no different than Roland and Corinne and that is precisely the danger that *Nouvelle vague* wants to avoid by demonstrating that an inter-mingling of different socio-economic classes can work towards eliminating this danger, just as it has in the case of Elena. As Roger lay on the roadside, he didn’t try to engage her in self-examination through intellectual discourse and thereby make her defensive and closed; on the contrary, he simply asked her for help and thereby helped her in turn to save herself from her selfishness.

Hence, in *Nouvelle vague*, there is no hate for the bourgeoisie, represented here by Elena, on the part of the proletariat that Roger symbolizes. Here, Godard differs from Gautier who advocated an acceptance of modernity but only if it continued to “épater le bourgeois” (Calinescu 46). Godard here argues that both the proletariat and the bourgeoisie have something to give as well as take from each other. They are both lacking certain elements in their own ways and if they come together, they might be able
to create a new world, more beautiful than the present one. As one of Elena’s partners explains to Roger, “Elena veut être vaincue à ses propres yeux.”

Abundance is just not enough for Elena, she needs a new challenge, a new adventure, which only Roger can give her because he is the only one different from all the people she knows in her estate. He is an aberration to her world of plenty and more. As Silverman writes,

It seems that, from the vantage point of *New Wave*, it is ultimately the poor for whom luck is in the running, since they are the richest in the only lasting good: desire. (205)

Thus, on the other hand, Roger lacks the abundance that Elena can give him. This abundance will give him a certain boost, a certain confidence to change the system without destroying it.

Although in *Week-end*, modernity and industrialization created a rift between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, *Nouvelle vague’s* new modernity demonstrates that rift and revolt might not be the best way to make life more beautiful. The bourgeois and the proletariat are similar to man and machine; they can bring out the best in modernity if they complement each other; if they don’t, they will be doomed to failure like the revolutionaries in *Week-end*.

And this dream slowly realizes itself as we see Roger becoming more and more confident as the days pass. In the beginning, he listened more as Elena spoke, but we slowly see that he begins to speak more, to share with Elena more and more of his thoughts and revelations. Early in the morning one day, they are in the stables on the estate and as Roger begins talking to Elena, we realize that he is making explicit in this
dialogue what he has implicitly been telling her since the beginning. He tells her that it was his mother who once told him that “La joie, c’est donner ce qu’on n’a pas.” And this is what he had symbolized with his outstretched hand as he lay on the road when he was hit by Elena’s car. Just as Elena shows him how the factory runs and how money is made, Roger shows her how happiness, beyond that which is derived from money, is experienced.

**Failure and Perseverance: The Ultimate Triumph**

However, as I have previously stated, this entire endeavor is not without challenges. Although Roger has succeeded in making Elena aware of the compassion within her, the violence within her has not been completely overcome. The two boating and subsequent drowning scenes that I shall now discuss demonstrate how Roger faces these challenges.

After taking Roger home with her, Elena slowly starts falling in love with him. One day, they go boating and Elena takes a dip in the lake. She asks Roger to join her but he refuses since he cannot swim. When he gives her a hand to climb back into the boat, she pulls him into the water before getting into the boat herself. As Roger struggles to keep afloat and repeatedly asks for her help, Elena cold-heartedly watches him drown. When she comes back home, she lets her domestic help erase all traces of Roger and calmly goes about life as if nothing happened. Elena’s social position gives her the power to trample the proletariat as and when she likes. She takes a fancy to Roger and lets him stay with her; however, when she has had enough of him she simply gets rid of him.
In the second half of *Nouvelle vague*, a Roger look-alike comes back to the Torlato-Favrini estate and wants to take over as CEO of one of their industries. He says that he is Roger’s brother Richard. Slowly, as Elena falls in love with him as well, he takes over more and more of the industrial empire, finally leaving Elena feeling useless. One day, they decide to go boating and as the voice-over narrator clearly indicates, they feel as if they have already lived those moments. However, although the initial moments of the second boating episode are similar to the first one, there is a role reversal this time around. It is Richard who takes a dip in the water this time and insists that Elena join him. When she refuses, he does exactly what she did to him the first time. After pulling her into the water, he climbs back into the boat and watches as she struggles to swim. Her clothes are now completely drenched making it extremely difficult for her to swim. However, after letting her struggle for a while, Richard does not let her drown; he saves her and they return to the estate.

In the very next scene, we see that Elena is leaving her estate for good. She is vanquished in her very own eyes, just as she has always wanted—vanquished not by violence, but by love. She feels conquered because she has seen the power of love over the power of aggression. She hands over the estate to her employees, here representing the proletariat, and herself, in a supreme gesture of acceptance of her defeat, kneels down to tie Richard’s shoelace: “Lennox mimics a professional tennis player as the servants drive off, and as Elena bends down to tie his shoes he compares himself to Art Larson, who once jumped the net to let his opponent tie his shoes.” (Farocki 226) As they walk towards the car, Elena suddenly notices that Richard is wearing the same ornament around his neck that Roger wore. Richard is indeed Roger who has come back under
disguise to save Elena and prove that the bourgeoisie can indeed change; the proletariat can transform the ugliness of modern life and make it conducive to a better life for both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Roger has proven that with perseverance and a continued belief in love, violence can indeed be conquered.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that in *Nouvelle vague*, an acceptance of modernity does not mean an acceptance of the dominance and oppression of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie. Acceptance indicates the development of a new aesthetic necessary to appreciate the beauty of modernity amidst the beauty of nature and at the same time slowly but surely transform the angst of the bourgeoisie into a peace that will enable them to achieve a certain degree of contentment and thus a reduced need to oppress. Thus, it is in fact the proletariat who can save the world but unlike in *Week-end*, they will not save it by means of a return to savagery and revolt. As is evident from the second boating scene, it is only through love that they can hope to achieve the transformation that they are aiming at. Power must change hands, it must be equally distributed for everyone to benefit from modernity, but Godard aims for this transfer of power to be as peaceful and serene as possible. As I have stated in the introduction to this dissertation, contrary to popular belief, Godard has not mellowed down or become any less radical than he was. In fact, he has, in a way, become even more radical than before because this time that radical nature is subtler and therefore only apparent to the true radical spirit. Kaja Silverman explains: “*New Wave* does propose something like an ethics of love. But this principle of transcendence is immanent; it resides within the characters themselves, not in some higher sphere.” (221) Curing the world with love is no easy task and certainly not much talked about in today’s post-industrial society. To even
think of proposing this solution is to risk being written off as naïve, and that is
precisely the risk that Godard has taken. And written off he has been, for a long while,
only to be recently rediscovered. Hopefully this rediscovery will flourish and shed some
more light on Godard’s quiet revolution; in the meantime, Godard is quietly continuing
his silent and peaceful *satyagraha*.

**Film Form**

Before I conclude this chapter, I would like to discuss in some more detail
Godard’s aesthetic choices in both films, in terms of both camera movements and
flashbacks. Although the jump cut that Godard first introduced in *A Bout de souffle* is
often used in *Week-end*, here it is mainly used to interrupt the flow of the narrative and
insert titles and captions on the screen. In *A Bout de souffle*, it was used to disrupt the
notion of smooth transitions, which have traditionally been the pride of film editing. The
rough-cut effect thus achieved became a hallmark of Godard’s style, his way of telling a
story, always unfinished, or to be finished by the spectator. In *Week-end*, Godard takes
the jump-cut a step further, for here it is used almost in spite of itself. That is to say that
in *Week-end*, it is no longer a choice but a necessity. By the time *Week-end* was being
made, it had become impossible for Godard to tell a story smoothly, without any
diversions. He had to stop and point out references to his story, to show and tell, rather
than just tell. David Sterritt furthers this explanation for the intertitles used in *Week-end*:

---

6 I borrow the term from Mahatma Gandhi’s silent struggle for the independence of India. Gandhi defined *satyagraha* as a peaceful and non-violent insistence (*agraha*) for truth (*satya*)—in the case of India, its
right to independence.
In an age when greed and belligerence have overtaken the Western world at large, people like Corinne and Roland hardly stand out from the crowd.

Rather than simply preach this proposition, Godard weaves his disturbing vision into the substance of the film itself. This clarifies further why he punctuates the action with those jarring, disruptive blocks of typography. (…) he surrounds the story with signs of social disjunction and dysfunction. (93)

Starting with letters of the alphabet slowly appearing to form the word ‘Week-end’ at the beginning of the film to several other titles that make connections with other films and texts, this seems to be the story of the making of the story of Roland and Corinne. Godard is laying out the raw materials of the process of writing that story; he is showing us the texts that have inspired this story, and that the story makes connections with. If a film that wants to fight the violence of everyday life itself fails to fight the violence of the image in overtaking the imagination of the spectator, it would be a pity. However, Godard carefully navigates this trap and makes sure that the spectator is very conscious of the filmic construct.

The jump cut in Week-end also does a very unique forward flash at several points when we see shots from scenes that have not yet happened. This kind of forward flash serves to remove the sense of anticipation that most films strive to guard at every point in the unfolding of the narrative. By doing so, Godard puts the onus of paying attention to the film on the spectator. It is not up to Godard to entertain the spectator, and he refuses to play the usual tricks to keep his attention. He does not play on his curiosity, which he
takes care to quell at every given opportunity with these forward flashes. He fully engages the spectator when he solicits unexpected connections between his intertitles (with names of various books and films) and scenes from *Week-end*. For example, Godard interrupts the scene where Roland and Corinne are walking through the car wrecks and stealing handbags and clothes from the burning bodies with the intertitle “Totem et Tabou”. He goes no further to explain this connection, but leaves the spectator to make his own connections. In later films, such as *JLG/JLG: Autoportrait de décembre*, Godard has explicitly discussed this juxtaposition of images which has a lot of potential to engage the spectator actively rather than passively, and Godard does not hesitate to exploit this potential to its fullest.

As Kevin J. Hayes states, it is unwise to assume that Godard has read every book that he quotes from or that he mentions in his films (“*JLG/JLG*” 9); however, the notions surrounding the book, even if one has not read it, is what Godard is interested in. For example, even if every single one of his spectators has not read *Totem and Taboo*, he knows that it is a book by Freud, and so he is capable of making his own connections between this intertitle and the preceding as well as the following scene. Each spectator will thus make connections at very different levels, but this is precisely what makes this and other Godard films ‘viewerly films’ if we were to extend Roland Barthes’ notion of the ‘writerly text’.

---

7 In *S/Z*, Roland Barthes explains that while a ‘readerly text’ engages a reader passively, presenting the world as coherent, orderly, and meaningful, the ‘writerly text’ challenges the reader by presenting its perception of the lack of coherent discourse and order to the world and therefore provides a means for the reader to participate not merely in an interpretation but also in a recognition of the plurality of possible interpretations of the world presented in the text. (4-5)
In *Nouvelle vague*, the jump cut is almost never used. The narrative proceeds at a very smooth and leisurely pace, stopping at several points to admire objects and people that it encounters as it unfolds. I have discussed in detail how Godard’s camera stops and looks at the tree by the highway until it is almost forced to look away. While in *Week-end* the narrative dominated camera movements, in *Nouvelle vague* the camera forces the narrative to stop and watch, and listen to the story. This is in keeping with *Nouvelle vague*’s appreciation of life as it is, to find the beauty where there may be none evident. *Week-end*’s truncated cinematography reflects its desire to escape or destroy life as it was then and start anew. As against this, *Nouvelle vague*’s patience reflected in its extensive use of long takes demonstrates its appreciation of life as it is and the camera’s desire to search for beauty wherever it finds itself.

There are no forward flashes or flashbacks in *Nouvelle vague*; however, there is the ambiguity of the repeated boating scene in which Roger/Richard and Elena drown each other. So although the narrative is linear in one way, it is discomforting in its repetition of scenes. The repetition is problematic in that it is never fully explained. Richard and Elena mention the familiarity of the event at the beginning of the second boating sequence and Richard’s pendant at the end of the film furthers the ambiguity of his being Roger. The desire to shock may seem to be pacified in *Nouvelle vague* as compared to *Week-end*, but this does not mean that the audience is led into a suspension of disbelief. The aim is to disturb the viewers just enough to make them think but not enough to create a spectacle out of the shock. For as *Week-end* amply proved, spectacle overrides shock and satisfies the voyeuristic viewer.
Chapter 2

From *Pierrot le fou* to *JLG/JLG*: The Journey of an Artist

The ringing of a phone signals the opening of *JLG/JLG*, and the credits tell us that the successors of Léon Gaumont, of the famous Gaumont film distribution house are about to continue a legacy— they are about to distribute yet another film by one of the most legendary filmmakers in the history of cinema. These credits, as well as the title of the film, appear on the pages of a handwritten diary. Two aspects are thus clear from the very first moments. First, the film introduces the distributors not as individuals isolated in the present, but as successors of Léon Gaumont, thus placing them in the context of their past, and tracing their origins. The film is evidently very aware of the past and its relation to the present. It promises to be conscious of that relation and to recognize the contribution of the past to the present. Secondly, the credits are not printed, but instead, the camera films the pages on which they are handwritten. The language and words expressing the past and the present are not isolated and objective entities but entirely subjective signs which when appropriated by different people can create different meanings. The passage of the past and present through the individual artist is of particular concern in *JLG/JLG*. This passage and what the artist does with this passage and its understanding is the primary focus of this self-portrait.

The film acknowledges that its questions are not being discussed for the first time and makes due note of the fact that they have been discussed in the past in Godard’s own earlier films. Adopting an openly autocritical stance, Godard actively challenges what he has expressed before and takes this opportunity to debate old issues in new light. He does not hesitate to make revisions to his opinions and to show what he has learnt today after
repeated experiments through several films. He at once reminds us of those experiments and at the same time engages in a summarizing contemplation of his position today.

However, it is certainly not in a chronological manner that Godard discusses these issues. Indeed, as one has now learned to expect from a Godard film, this one too is a *bricolage* of sorts; it is a dense quilt of remarks, observations, quotations, and of course, images. However, as is evident from the title of the film, the central concern of these reflections is the position of the artist and creator within the personal and public space created around him. The two JLGs in the title of the film are perhaps meant to distinguish between the public face of the artist as against his private face, one that only he knows, or, they are perhaps meant to distinguish between the artist in his workspace and in his domestic space. Either way, the overarching concern is with the role and place of the artist in society today.

In this second chapter, as in the previous one, I will primarily discuss this notion of the artist created in *JLG/JLG*, in comparison with the entity of the artist as seen in an older film by Godard— *Pierrot le fou*. By comparing the character JLG, the protagonist of this film with that of Pierrot in the earlier film, I will trace the evolution of the artist and his role in society as seen by Godard, then and now. In effect, my aim is to further my thesis argument of a quieter but deeper revolutionary spirit in this newer film instead of the appearance of resignation that it may seem to give out on the surface. As in the previous chapter, I will analyze specific scenes from both films to support and strengthen the thesis argument through this discussion.
**Pierrot le fou**

**The Artist’s dilemma**

At the beginning of *Pierrot le fou* we see Ferdinand as a typical bourgeois man with a family and apartment in Paris; we see snapshots of Ferdinand buying books at a local bookstore and playing tennis at other times. All these images are shot against the background of Ferdinand’s voice reading a passage from Elie Faure’s *Histoire de l’art*. Soon after, we see Ferdinand in a bathtub, still reading from the Elie Faure book. This time, he reads out a section to his daughter who is too young to understand any of it.

As is evident from Ferdinand’s introduction so far, he clearly believes in educating and cultivating himself. He not only introduces his extremely young daughter to the History of Art, but when his wife asks him why he let their babysitter go to the movies for the third time that month, he answers that they were screening *Johnny Guitar* and it was necessary for the babysitter to watch that film and educate herself. Furthermore, when his friend Frank tells him his phone number, which actually spells out B-A-L-Z-A-C, he gets upset with him because he fails to observe this fact. Later in the film, we learn that Ferdinand has been a professor of Spanish and also worked in television. However, he has quit this job and now works for an oil company. It is very easy to see that Ferdinand is ill at ease with the life he has at this time. He is well to do and comfortable and has the leisure and means to cultivate his interests, but he seems to desire something beyond this. It appears as though he is not satisfied with being a passive consumer of art; he wants to go beyond that and perhaps realize his own creative potential. This presupposition is furthered by the following sequence that I will now proceed to analyze.
Ferdinand and his wife—the daughter of an oil baron—have to go to a party where her father has promised to introduce Ferdinand to the President of Standard Oil. Ferdinand is quite open about his distaste for these kinds of parties and agrees to go only on the insistence of his wife. What follows is a highly stylized tracking shot with deep blue and red filters. Ferdinand makes a complete round of the party and interacts with several different kinds of people, each one leaning against the walls of the room like advertising posters. And indeed, each of them is trying to sell something, be it perfumes, cars, deodorants or underclothes—all objects of desire. Every conversation that Ferdinand overhears is about a product for consumption, and it seems as if no conversation is possible without an aim to sell. In effect, this shot signifies the death of communication without the aim to sell. As Ferdinand says earlier in the film, and Godard here reiterates:

> Il y avait la civilisation athénienne, il y a eu la Renaissance, et maintenant, on entre dans la civilisation du cul.

In his treatise on capitalism and the culture of consumption, *One-Dimensional Man*, Herbert Marcuse writes when explaining his theory of true and false needs:

> We may distinguish both true and false needs. “False” are those which are superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests in his repression: the needs which perpetuate toil, aggressiveness, misery, and injustice. Their satisfaction might be most gratifying to the individual, but this happiness is not a condition which has to be maintained and protected if it serves to arrest the development of the ability (his own and others) to recognize the disease of the whole and grasp the chances of
curing the disease. The result then is euphoria in unhappiness. Most of the prevailing needs to relax, to have fun, to behave and consume in accordance with the advertisements, to love and hate what others love and hate, belong to this category of false needs.

Such needs have a societal content and function which are determined by external powers over which the individual has no control; the development and satisfaction of these needs is heteronomous. (5)

Ferdinand is a lonely misfit in this society of consumers who can no longer distinguish between these true and false needs. These consumers do not realize how much their lives have been taken over by the advertisements aimed to make of them the perfect consumers. They have truly entered the “civilisation du cul”, as they have almost gone to a point of no return where they are so immersed into this culture that they have even become spokespersons for it. They advertise the very products that have captivated them and made them prisoners and it is disastrous that they do not seem to mind this captivity at all. On the contrary, they appear to be more than content in this state of imprisonment that Godard highlights with the use of different colored filters to compartmentalize each group of people in conversation. Their conversation is nothing but an advertisement for a product of mass consumption. Thus in each ‘cell’, demarcated by a different colored filter, we see a different product being shamelessly paraded. The women who are advertising these products are paraded along with the products, just as they are in so many print and television advertisements. The end of conversation and communication as an act of exchange of thoughts is clearly brought out by this scene.
It clarifies what makes Ferdinand ill at ease with the world he inhabits. Although he makes an effort to be a part of this world by marrying the oil giant’s daughter, taking up a job her father offers him and going to parties to meet his father-in-law’s associates, he misses communicating with the purpose of a genuine exchange. His futile efforts to communicate his interests to his much too young daughter express his inability to find anyone else with whom to have a genuine exchange. The party forces him to face the extremely commercialized and consumer-oriented world in which he is living. His disappointment in being unable to find a true conversation is most severe after his encounter in the last ‘cell’ where he meets the American filmmaker Samuel Fuller. Ferdinand makes a final attempt at communication and asks him what cinema means to him. Fuller answers:

Film is like a battleground; it is love, hate, action, violence, death. In one word, emotion.

Yes, cinema is a battleground of emotion and one which can help fight the dehumanization that we have just encountered in the three previous cells, however, the irony is that this battleground (symbolized here by Fuller) is itself trapped in a cell. This encounter proves to be the last straw, and unable to bear his frustration any longer, Ferdinand smashes a huge cake about to be cut in the party and throws it disgustedly at the guests present there. He then leaves the party and hurries home. This is just the beginning of Ferdinand’s journey of self-discovery. He has only realized that he can no longer pretend to be happy where he is and let things lie in their present state of false complacence. He has taken the first step to break the protocol that he is expected to live up to by disrupting the party and leaving it abruptly. And as if to commend this first step,
images of fireworks intercept the cake throwing sequence and celebrate Ferdinand’s actions.

**Escape of the Artist into Isolation**

When Ferdinand returns home, he finds that the babysitter that his friend Frank had brought along with him to take care of Ferdinand’s children while he and his wife go to the party, has fallen asleep on the chair in the hallway. As she has missed the last metro, Ferdinand offers to give her a ride home. Through the next sequence of the car ride, we slowly realize that this is no ride home for the babysitter, who is, in fact, Marianne, the girl Ferdinand was seeing about five and a half years ago. Ferdinand has no plans of taking Marianne home and has no plans of returning home himself either.

As they keep driving into the night, much of their talk focuses on the severely flawed modes of communication that we embrace in the modern world. For instance, while listening to a radio broadcast about the number of people killed at war, they discuss how these numbers don’t mean anything since no one does anything about these deaths even after listening to the broadcast. The broadcast then becomes merely another product of consumption; people listen to it to pass their time while doing other things such as working or driving, and then forget about it later. Reunited with his former love, Ferdinand seems to be seeking in her a companion to find a way out of this maze of consumer products. He seeks in her a companion with whom he can have a true conversation, with whom he can communicate and with whom he can create something through that communication. In his escape into isolation, Ferdinand seems to be looking for the communication that he couldn’t find in a world full of people.
Late that night, Ferdinand and Marianne stop by her apartment where they spend the night and then once again start driving to their escape in the morning. Much of their conversation during their drive delves into issues of the process of communication and creation. They decide that they want to do something together, perhaps write a book or make a film. While Ferdinand wants to write a love story, Marianne wants to make an adventure film. They then decide that they will first make an adventure film and then write a book. During much of this conversation, and until the end of the film, Marianne insists on calling Ferdinand “Pierrot”. And throughout the film, he keeps correcting her and telling her that his name is Ferdinand. However, she does not budge from her position, keeps calling him Pierrot and explains to him: “Oui, mais on ne peut pas dire, «mon ami Ferdinand.»” She is alluding here to the popular rhyme « Au clair de la lune, mon ami Pierrot, prête moi ta plume pour écrire un mot. » Like the girl in the rhyme, Marianne too is asking Ferdinand to be her Pierrot and collaborate on writing her ‘mot’; in this case, her adventure film.

As it turns out, the film that they are making is about them— they are the principal characters in the story and as both Ferdinand and Marianne’s voice over narrates the film story to the spectator, we actually see that story being enacted on screen. Since this is a collaborative creation, there are differences in opinion at several points and we see some scenes from this part of the film being repeated in their various versions. For example, as Ferdinand narrates their escape from Marianne’s apartment, he mentions that they first had to kill Marianne’s uncle, and then escape by climbing down the pipes along the apartment building. While we hear this narration, we see the sequence showing the killing and the escape down the pipes. But immediately after this scene ends with
Ferdinand and Marianne driving off in the car, we see a repeat shot of them in her apartment. This time, they kill her uncle and then escape down the stairs before driving off in the car. T. Jefferson Kline interprets this sequence as follows:

Godard has Belmondo and Karina articulate the voice over narration, alternating every other word. The images begin to be repeated, but not quite, suggesting not only that visual linearity has been forsaken, but also that visual reliability has been compromised. It is as if the camera is trying to “get it right” by repeating their flight from this apartment in a variety of slightly different takes. (212)

My opinion differs from that of Kline in that I see the repeat shots as possible variations of the same shot, all equally viable. It is not important to “get it right” as Kline claims, but rather to see all the various possibilities as equally “right”. It is evident that Godard is highlighting the process of creation here rather than the end product. By repeating the same sequence of events, he invites the spectator to choose the version that she feels is best for this adventure film and thereby participate in the filmmaking process. It is clearly Godard’s effort to recapture the lost exchange in the act of communication by exposing the nature and process of creation instead of simply trying to sell the spectator the final product.

However, after a few more scenes of living their adventure film, stealing cars, killing people and then escaping from the scene of the crime, Ferdinand realizes that there is a limit to this process of creation. He begins to tire of creating and living an adventure film. Although it seemed enough in the beginning to simply be creating instead of consuming, Ferdinand realizes that he must move on from this initial stage because it
is leading him back to the kind of consumption that he was trying to escape. An adventure film is a good exercise to learn the ropes of creation, of knowing how to tell a story, but it doesn’t let him communicate what he truly wants to, with his spectator. He cannot escape consumerism by using the same tools of communication that it uses. He thus explains to Marianne that he is tired of their adventure, as he has started smelling death—the very death of communication that he has been trying to escape. Godard has famously said:

As a critic, I thought of myself as a filmmaker. Today I still think of myself as a critic, and in a sense I am, more than ever before. Instead of writing criticism, I make a film, but the critical dimension is subsumed. I think of myself as an essayist . . . only instead of writing, I film them.  

(Godard on Godard 171)

He further emphasizes:

When I wrote my first article, I simultaneously discovered the cinema and wrote my first novel. Perhaps the young today should consider that writing is as important as anything else, that it may help them, that writing is like filming if they want to make films, and they must find their own language: writing is not merely the application of certain devices. (ibid 229).

This is the kind of film that Ferdinand aspires to make. However, when the film he was trying to make threatens to become a product of consumption instead, he quickly retracts his steps. In what follows in the film, we see that he follows Godard’s advice and turns back to writing in an effort to find that critical element, that essay, which was missing in the adventure film.
When he explains his disillusionment with the film to Marianne, she dares him to change paths and do something different. So he does just that and abruptly skids their Thunderbird off the road and straight into the sea. It is as if they need a more severe escape than the one they have already made. Having lost their car, he and Marianne escape through the woods, and after a long walk and boat ride, arrive on an idyllic island where there is no one but them. However, along with a more severe escape, Ferdinand also gets more and more isolated. While he was making the adventure film, Marianne was with him, but now that he challenges himself further and wants to create something more in tune with his desire to have a true exchange, Marianne gets more and more disillusioned and disinterested in his venture. Godard emphasizes her growing boredom in a series of shots that show her throwing a tantrum at not having anything but books on the island, of not having enough clothes or accessories to distract herself, or simply by filming Marianne walking along the beach, back and forth, repeating “Qu’est-ce que je peux faire? Je ne sais pas quoi faire.” Indeed, this is also the part of the film where there is a breakdown in communication between Ferdinand and Marianne. Angela Dalle Vacche explains this degeneration:

Language between Godard’s two characters repeatedly fails to take the shape of a conversation. (...) Needless to say, they also misunderstand each other. Among the trees, Marianne sings “Ma ligne de chance,...” but Ferdinand answers “Ta ligne de hanche...” (9)

Ferdinand realizes that as interested as she was in making the adventure film, Marianne is not even remotely interested in participating in his writing. She escapes from the idyllic island and chooses to continue making her adventure film with its series of
crimes and escapes as before. Ferdinand, however, plunges into a life focused entirely on reading and writing. With Marianne gone, he is completely isolated now and is surrounded only by his parakeet, his books, and his writing journal. It is in this isolation that he aims to find a way to communicate that he had failed to find in the adventure film.

The Death of the Artist

This part of *Pierrot le fou* comprises a series of scenes that show the parallel but separate lives of Ferdinand and Marianne. We see Marianne going to the discothèque, getting involved in an arms deal, killing, and then escaping. On Ferdinand’s side, we see several long close-ups of the books he reads as well as of the journal he is writing.

We see that although Ferdinand has physically escaped from the world that is imprisoned by language and images, for a while he continues to read books that belong to this imprisoned world. Although some of these classics have been revolutionary in their times, they have now been accepted as the canon and thus circulate as icons in the bourgeois culture that Ferdinand has tried to reject. However, Ferdinand seems to have begun to realize this because the fragments of his writing that we see through the close-ups of his journal show that he is writing a sort of treatise on language; on a new language that he is trying to create. For it is this new language that will truly bring about the freedom that Ferdinand is looking for; it is through this new form of communication that he can escape the imprisonment of the various forms of communication. It is not just by finding himself an isolated island or by making an adventure film that Ferdinand can be truly free. For no matter what he says in the film, if he still uses traditional cinematic language to express his thoughts, he is bound to find himself limited in trying to make a
film for communication rather than consumption. And Godard is no stranger to this danger. Discussing the disturbing success of Godard’s *Week-end*, Jacqueline Doreen Levitin says:

The recuperability of the film, however, demonstrated that an attack on the bourgeoisie which did not at the same time address itself to the language of the bourgeoisie, was bound to fail: the arts cannot be used to enlighten and to raise the consciousness of the masses because they are under a veil of mysticism; any attack which did not first address itself to the problem of mystification was open to cooptation. (47)

Ferdinand’s treatise on a new language demonstrates this willingness to go back to zero and start afresh by rethinking language itself. He realizes that he cannot find true communication using the same language as that used to make a mockery of communication. He is ready to create a new language which will lead him to the genuine exchange that he seeks. The irony of it all is that by the time Ferdinand realizes this, he has isolated himself completely. Although he has found a way to truly communicate, there is no one around him with whom he can communicate. There is no one to read his writing; no Marianne, no wife, no children. He has left them all behind in his quest to seek a purer means of communication. James Green points out: (…) to remove oneself from the details of life, or from political reality specifically, is to admit of no action, which is death, or action without objective context, which is philosophically absurd and psychoanalytically insane (…) That is, a general neglect of or extrication from political reality leads not to idyllic islands but to the wasteland and to war (…) (10-11)
And Ferdinand doesn’t fail to realize this irony. As he begins to feel the same frustration as he felt when he was unable to communicate with the people he met at the party in the beginning of the film, he starts to write more and more furiously and in a style that becomes more and more fragmented and distorted. This leads him further and further away from the possibility of communication, until he finally reaches a point where he can no longer bear the frustration. He then leaves the island and goes in search of Marianne. However, by the time he finds Marianne, she is much too engulfed in the web of crime that she has built around herself. Her film has overtaken her life and when Ferdinand sees that he will not be able to save her, he shoots her in desperation. Roger Greenspun elaborates on the ending of *Pierrot le fou*:

> If the last part of the film, destroying this impossible continuity, returns, in a slower rhythm, to the movement of the beginning, it is because Pierrot has withdrawn bit by bit from this impossible world, from this “anywhere-out-of-this-world” where life cannot last. (101-102)

Indeed, soon after this realization, Ferdinand ties a coil of dynamite around his own head and lights the end in an attempt to commit suicide. His final words: “Après tout, je suis con!” bear testimony to his failed venture of escape. We also see Ferdinand desperately groping around for the lighted end of the dynamite as he says this, and although this could be interpreted as his wanting to stop his suicide, I see this more as a realization of the futility of the entire effort—of life as well as of death. If he truly wanted to live, he could have merely removed the coil of dynamite from his head; instead he makes a lame and halfhearted effort to grope around for the lighted end. He perhaps realizes the futility of killing himself, but he certainly does not see the value of continuing to live. It is
perhaps this ultimate frustration of wanting to neither die nor live that makes
Ferdinand leave the coil on his head and yet grope around for the lighted end. It is like his
discovery of a new language—although he found a new form of communication, it was
limited by his isolation. He was unable to share it with anyone else because of his escape
away from them. As Ferdinand blows himself up, the camera pans to the sea until the
screen goes blank. James Green explains, “The image of the world here is anti-
paradisal—inside the world life is unbearably sad and evil, outside is the surety of death.
Ferdinand is caught between the devil and the deep blue sea.” (5) However, as Angela
Dalle Vacche rightly claims:

At first sight it may seem that the beginning and the ending of

Pierrot are only meant to establish the difficulties or the boundaries of

communication. Yet a more optimistic reading is also possible. Both the
credits and the final sequence are empty spaces out of which something
new and unregimented is struggling to be born. (5)

As I shall discuss in the second part of this chapter, this new beginning comes in
Godard’s later film JLG/JLG: Autoportrait de décembre. Ferdinand returns as JLG—an
artist who has decided to stay and be a part of society instead of escaping it. It remains to
be seen whether this leads to a better chance for communication than in Pierrot le fou.

JLG/JLG: Autoportrait de décembre

A New Dilemma

JLG/JLG is Godard’s reflection on himself as an artist and on the relationship of
this artist to the world around him. In the beginning of the film, JLG seems to be a
recluse; an ageing artist who is no longer making films. However, this impression changes as the film progresses. As I shall demonstrate through the following analysis of specific scenes from the film, JLG’s return to society is in no way his attempt at a compromise. In fact, it is a more determined effort to stay and continue to fastidiously communicate with the very society that has tried to ignore and dismiss him. And JLG has remained steadfast in the face of this dismissal; he has continued to make films that refuse to entertain his spectator and has insisted on challenging him and shaking him awake from his consumerist reverie.

In *JLG/JLG* we see that JLG makes it a point to talk to people and express his opinions whenever he can. He takes every opportunity to share his thoughts. The scene where the officials from the cinema censor board visit him at his house is a perfect example of this. The officials come in and start looking around his house and his bookshelves. They are not interested in conversing with JLG; on the contrary, they simply want to inspect his collection of books and films as quickly as possible and get over with their duty.

Although JLG appears to be resigned to their encroachment and clearly unsolicited visit, he makes an attempt at conversing with them even when they have not really asked for his opinions on anything. The officials mostly converse amongst themselves and pay no heed to what JLG is saying. Nevertheless, he continues talking to them, all the while sitting solemnly on his chair as they browse through his books and films collected over a lifetime. He mostly shares his observations on cinema and its developments during a century of existence. At one point he tells them: “Les films sont des marchandises, et il faut brûler les films. J’avais dit à Langlois. Mais attention avec le
feu intérieur. L’art est comme l’incendie, il naît de ce qu’il brûle.” This is perhaps a warning to them that they cannot ignore him for long. They may ban his works, pay no attention to them, or simply discard them as yet another sermon from him, but his work will remain and in fact even reinvent itself in the face of their rejection. As he says, art even survives fire, so it will definitely survive neglect and persist until they take notice.

In effect, what he is saying is that the artist is here to stay through his art. If he persistently communicates what he has discovered through his art, it will eventually be received. It is clear that JLG, unlike Ferdinand, is here to stay. Whereas Ferdinand took the path of escape when he saw that he was a misfit in modern society, JLG has chosen to stick around in that very society. JLG too is a misfit in this society; he is an exception to the general rules of society, as he demonstrates through several examples in the film. For instance, he tells us that whereas most people wait for death to occur and then go into mourning, he has done the opposite. He first went into mourning and has, since then, waited for death to arrive. However, “La mort n’est pas venue. Ni dans les rues de Paris, ni sur les rivages du lac de Genève.”

Another example is JLG’s expression in his portrait as a young boy. JLG says that it is an extremely melancholic expression, a melancholy that cannot be simply attributed to a slap or a parental thrashing. For it appears to be far more severe and deep for the boy’s age. And that, he says, is the quest of JLG/JLG:

(…) le regard catastrophique que j’ai sur la petite photo, mais qui ne venait pas simplement d’une paire de claques ni d’une entorse, ou alors entorse aux règlements du jugement dernier imaginé, et ce ne devrait être que l’objet de ce film de le déterminer.
In other words, JLG’s quest is to find out why he is an exception, why he is on the margins of society and what he wants to do within those margins. He doesn’t merely accept his being an exception; he questions it and tries to understand its workings.

**The Return of the Artist**

Whereas Ferdinand never really explored why he was an exception and what he could do with that position in society, JLG has chosen to stay on in the very society that has ignored him and kept him at its periphery, to find answers to his own questions. However, it must be specified that JLG does not really ‘stay on’ in the sense of immersing himself in society. He has not escaped to an idyllic island like Ferdinand but he leads a fairly solitary existence in his house, meeting only his tennis partners and his domestic help. At certain times his semi-isolation is intruded upon (for instance the visit by members of the cinema censor board that I have discussed above) and although JLG does not like the intrusion, he is happy to take the chance to have an exchange with his visitors. But other than these few opportunities for a personal exchange, he knows that his best chance for communication is through his work. And he also accepts that because of that very work and profession, he cannot but lead a slightly peripheral existence. He is well aware that: “j’étais déjà en deuil de moi-même, mon propre et unique compagnon.”

The reason for JLG staying on in society, albeit on the periphery, can be seen through his realization of the fact that it is impossible to find answers to his questions by escaping society. Because his questions, in the first place, have been formed within the boundaries of society, it is important that he stay and live there to explore and find answers to his questions. JLG has realized that as much as he wants to make changes in
the world, he must take into account the fact that he too is constantly being changed
due to his interactions with the world. He says of himself in his self-portrait: “L’espoir lui
appartenait, mais voilà le garçon ignorait que l’important était de savoir à qui il
appartenait lui, quelles puissances ténèbreuses étaient en train de le réclamer, lui.”

Whereas the central quest in *Pierrot le fou* was first to find a way to escape
society and then to find a new language to restore the possibility of communication,
JLG’s biggest concern is not necessarily to find answers to his questions, but rather to
communicate his questions, his process of discovery, his failures as well as his successes.
In short, he wants to communicate the journey of his life as an artist. He wants to
communicate it to the very society within which he made that journey. For even at the
periphery, his journey has been anchored by this society. As Kaja Silverman explains:
“One delineates or portrays oneself as an artist, Godard suggests, by making manifest to
whom or to what one belongs.” (“Author as Receiver” 19) Interestingly, as Godard
returned to make feature films in the late 70s, he also started struggling with the notion of
the auteur and the impossibility of individuality in the making of a film. He said in an
interview:

I find it useless to keep offering the public the “auteur.” In Venice, when I
got the prize of the Golden Lion, I said that I probably deserve only the
mane of this lion, and maybe the tail. Everything in the middle should go
to all the others who work on a picture: the paws to the director of
photography, the face to the editor, the body to the actors. I don’t believe
in the solitude of...the auteur with a capital *A*. (Bachmann 132)
It is evident that Godard has been struggling with creation in solitude for a while now. He is aware of his being at the periphery of society, but he doesn’t seem to want to isolate himself any further. As JLG reads out aloud what he is writing:

Il y a la culture qui est de la règle, qui fait partie de la règle; il y a l’exception qui est de l’art, qui fait partie de l’art. Tous disent la règle, cigarette, ordinateur, T-shirts, télévision, tourisme, guerre. Personne ne dit l’exception (…) Cela ne se dit pas. Cela s’écrit: Flaubert, Dostoïevski; cela se compose: Gershwin, Mozart; cela se peint: Cézanne, Vermeer; cela s’enregistre: Antonioni, Vigo; ou cela se vit et c’est alors l’art de vivre: Srebrenica, Mostar, Sarajevo. Il est de la règle que vouloir la mort de l’exception. Il est donc de la règle de l’Europe de la culture que d’organiser la mort de l’art de vivre qui fleurissait encore à nos pieds.

It is more evident for the old and mature JLG than for the young and reactive Ferdinand that culture is bound to marginalize art. Even so, JLG wants to use his art, be it film or writing, to intercept this culture of exploitation and marginalization of art. JLG wishes to learn and share the *art de vivre* by surviving in a society of savagery and war just as the people of Srebrenica, Mostar and Sarajevo have done. The wars consciously and politically started and maintained in these lands have been the culture of exploitation in this case, and the survival of the people in the face of these atrocities has been the exception. And JLG sees his own life in terms of these exceptions of the world. He is an artist pursuing his art amidst the rule of the prevalent culture. He is thus in solidarity with the other exceptions he cites. He knows that they are the marginals of culture as defined by society, and by fact of being the exceptions, they evidently find themselves on the
peripheries of society. It is with these peripherals that JLG identifies himself; it is in their image that he sees himself; his self-portrait is etched out for him in the mirror of these margins of society.

However, JLG does not complain at their being on the peripheries of society, as the quote above clearly demonstrates. It is evident for JLG that the rule strives for the death of the exception and he, in fact, celebrates the fight of the exception in the face of the force of the rule. He basks in the challenges the exception or art must tackle in the face of the myriad obstacles that the rule or culture throws in its path and he revels in the triumph of the exception, which lies in its very survival in the face of the rule. It is this existential triumph that has been Godard’s life long quest. After the huge success of À bout de souffle, he started off as a popular New Wave director, but he did not limit himself to the formula of his first film to gain more success. To the contrary, he moved along and went where he wanted to go, undaunted by the fact that the audiences lost their patience and parted ways with him. The more they isolated him, the more he fought to communicate with them. He understood and accepted their rejection, but continued to communicate what he believed. As John Kreidl says in his book, Jean-Luc Godard:

Godard’s move toward becoming an active director was gradual, as he says, but also, one suspects, a move that picked up its impetus from Godard’s conscious effort to overcome personal loneliness and isolation.

(38)

He did not seek popularity with the masses, but strove to reach them. What is paradoxical is that Godard has been expressing himself through one of the most popular media of our times and yet moving farther and farther away from mass popularity. Godard’s triumph
then has an added edge whereby he works in what could be called the peak of culture and yet defies and challenges it constantly; that is his success as an artist. He has challenged the language of cinema; he has subverted conventions to avoid the trap of creating a product of consumption. His jump cut, his non-linear narrative technique, and his dense *bricolage* of quotations are all examples of this new cinematic language. And it has not been easy to communicate in his new language. A large section of the film going audience has failed to understand it, and yet Godard has not given up on them. His return to feature films is a significant sign of the commitment to constantly look for new ways to communicate with that mainstream audience. And that is where JLG has succeeded where Ferdinand failed. He persisted whereas Ferdinand abandoned.

**The Artist Lives to Communicate**

Even as JLG writes in the film, he reads out his writing to make sure every word reaches the spectator. He even reads out the corrections and additions that he makes, thus involving us in the entire process of thinking and writing. If he makes drawings to explain something, the camera focuses on these drawings and makes sure the viewer has enough time to grasp them. An important point of distinction lies in the function of writing as envisaged in *Pierrot le fou* and *JLG/JLG*. Whereas Ferdinand writes only to be able to clarify the meaning of the world to himself, to be able to answer his own questions, JLG writes for more than that. It is evident in JLG’s reading out aloud that not only does he want to use writing as a method to further his understanding of the world, he also wants to communicate that understanding back to the world. What we see of Ferdinand’s writing is fragmented and distorted and we can only vaguely make sense of
it. This is another reason why his escape and isolation both turn out to be ends in themselves and not the means to the end of deciphering and sharing what he has learned with society. JLG, on the other hand, leads his writing to term by making sure it reaches the society he is trying to decipher. As the lady whom JLG meets towards the end of the film says: “Quelle que soit l’étendue de la puissance américaine sur la terre hantée, les peuples me liront, et désormais fameux pendant toute la durée de l’éternité, s’il y a quelque vérité dans la bouche des poètes, je vivrai.”

Whereas Ferdinand realizes too late that he has defeated the purpose of his creation by failing to communicate it, JLG is making a conscious effort to share his trials and tribulations for a better way to communicate with the people around him. In JLG/JLG, Godard also seems to have come back to a more moderate and accepting position vis-à-vis the image. Instead of rejecting the influx of images (the advertisements at the party) as Ferdinand did in Pierrot le fou, JLG is very intrigued by this bombardment that we are faced with everyday. He is willing to face this influx, be attacked by it, and find out what happens in the face of that attack. He is curious to find out how this rush of images puts into motion our cognitive forces and how they react when faced with this mass of images from so many different sources.

In JLG/JLG, Godard has accepted the fact that we are and will probably remain a civilization of the image in its various forms: cinema, newscasts, videos, photographs, and so on. However, this is not to say that Godard does not want to do anything about the tyranny of these images. He wants to know what we can do to understand their effect on us as spectators, so as to reduce their tyranny. By realizing how images affect us, we can
try not to be manipulated by them. The scene in *JLG/JLG* which has the room full of televisions with fast changing images is a perfect example of this.

As spectators, it is certainly disconcerting to see screens with so many images at once. We do not know which one to focus on and thus do not understand completely the information that each one of them is trying to give us. We try to see as much as possible; somewhere we have the feeling that by seeing as much as we can, we are trying to gather as much information as we can. However, by spending all our time in seeing these images, we rarely have the time to understand what they really represent. We do not get a chance to sit back and think about what we have seen, and we rarely get a chance to synthesize all that has been caught in those fleeting images. But this is exactly what image-makers want to do. They do not want us to sit back and synthesize and therefore have our own understanding of the images we see. For then, we will not be manipulated by the images we see. Having come to our own understanding of those images, we will have our own knowledge and make our own decisions about the information that is coming from them.

Godard is willing to understand and accept this situation; instead of completely rejecting this form of communication as Ferdinand did, JLG shifts his focus and asks his viewer to be more responsible and understand its manipulations. He accepts that the image is going to be abused no matter how much he has protested and continues to protest against it. The logical thing to do would be to educate and thus empower his viewers by training them to find their way through the mass of images that they are subjected to at every moment of their lives. This is an important difference between JLG
and Ferdinand, one that puts JLG back into the center of the action as against Ferdinand’s isolation.

Another significant difference as regards Ferdinand and JLG’s quest for genuine communication is that JLG is convinced that he cannot reject the past. He is of the position that he cannot start afresh; he cannot go back to the beginning as Ferdinand aimed to. He cannot reinvent language as though this were the first time that it were being discovered. He knows that irrespective of their worth, the texts of the past are where the texts of today are going to come from. He does not try to reinvent language, instead he tries to understand how the existing language as well as other means of communication work and sees how the pitfalls of these means of communication lead to wars and other modern disasters. He explains this through what he calls his model of communication—the stereo.

The most important aspect of this stereo model is the evident miscommunication that is inherent in every attempt at communication. This stereo model has broad similarities to Roman Jakobson’s “six poles of communication” (350-377). Through his different perception of how a message travels between the destinataire and destinataire, he not only challenges Jakobson’s model but redefines it as well. According to Godard’s model, the messages hardly travels directly from the destinataire to the destinataire; to the contrary, while traveling to the destinataire, it projects itself in a triangular sort of way as a spotlight might fall on a person on stage. While spotlighting the person in question, it also illuminates, albeit dimly, the conical area surrounding him. Therefore, as the message projects itself towards the destinataire, it also projects itself onto other people. In Godard’s model, words, images and sound project themselves in a conical sphere, just
like light. Thus, although the initiator of the message might not see its side effects, his communication has traveled beyond the path he meant for it to be traveled, in the first place.

In this manner, explains JLG, although Hitler’s torture of the Jews apparently ended with the end of World War II, the stereo’s effect spread far more than what was visible. This torture, although inflicted on the Jews in Europe, had already projected itself onto the Israeli Jews and thus, although the conflict in Europe seemed to have ended, it had far from ended in the Middle Eastern nations. The possibility of genocide had long been projected onto the entire world, for that matter, and it certainly did not go unnoticed. The Israeli people in turn projected the torture onto the Palestinians and the latter then projected the genocide in Sarajevo. In this way, these places all turned out to be the exceptions to the rule; they lived and witnessed times that have since been unmentionable in History. And the role of the artist is to make sure that these exceptions are not forgotten by our means of communication, in their ever-increasing mania to sell. It is the artist’s onus to use those means of communication to bring back the discussion to the margins and make sure that some of that exchange is reserved for the people on the peripheries as well. And how else can he do it but to live that exceptional life himself, to face the consumption of communication and challenge it head on? And what better teacher than the past for the artist to learn from?

This is further demonstrated in the fact that each time we are shown an intertitle in the film, we are first shown the previous page turning over to the next. In this manner, we see each intertitle twice. We are thus made conscious of the passing of time and the turning of the pages of History. We are made to remember that the present is but a
continuation of the past and that we cannot see ourselves and our time in isolation.

Kevin J. Hayes explains in his article “JLG/JLG: Autoportrait de décembre: Reinscribing the Book”:

The particular titles reinforce the film’s prominent themes. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger posited a continuity between received culture, the individual, and the future. For the individual, the idea of time is essential to being, and the process of being involves situating the self in time, using the past to project the future. (158)

And JLG is certainly conscious of the past, of the modes of communication used by artists in the past, and of the genres of film and literature used to express different thought processes. At the same time, he feels that it is not enough for the artist to know his past, and that he must also know how to challenge and change the past where necessary. The artist must know the tools of expression, not simply to reproduce, but to counter-produce when and where necessary. He explains this with the example of the film’s title ‘Autoportrait de décembre.’ Lest we expect to see his autobiography on screen, he clarifies, “autoportrait, pas autobiographie.” Even so, it is not solely a discussion of his self-portrait that we concentrate on in the film. True to his mission, Godard actively challenges the very genre he chooses to use in the film. In fact, this being a self-portrait of Godard, it seems to be even more essential to Godard to ensure that his spectator does not believe that the aim of the film is to provide any account of ‘the authentic story’ of his life. Godard is keen to demonstrate that a self-portrait is also only a construct and therefore has as many elements of fiction as any of his other films may have. He disrupts the spectator’s illusion of reality through a conscious break of the
image-sound continuity that is so strictly observed in mainstream cinema. For instance, in the beginning of the film, we hear several voices talking about an exam in a school but we have no context to anchor this conversation. Just before this conversation, we hear JLG introducing his self-portrait to us and the image we see is the portrait of the young JLG. However, when this narration ends and the conversation starts, the image does not change, and we continue to see only the portrait. The conversation has no apparent connection with the portrait and this helps to jolt the spectator out of his illusion of reality. He has to make connections between what he is hearing and what he is seeing; there are none served on a platter to him.

Furthermore, instead of focusing solely on the self-portrait, Godard takes us on a journey of all his thoughts on the self-portrait. As Godard explains, JLG/JLG is:

an auto-portrait, in the sense that the painters have practiced this exercise; not by narcissism, but as an interrogation on painting itself. . . art is greater than men, greater even than artists. . . . Me, I always regarded cinema as greater than I. JLG/JLG is an attempt to see what cinema can do with me, not what I can do with it. (qtd. in Silverman, Kaja. “Author as Receiver” 24-25)

So starting from one photograph of himself as a child, Godard reflects upon various aspects of his life and work and cinema in general. His work and life are indeed inseparable, and he has no choice but to explore both simultaneously. When he talks of the generic, he reveals more of the personal and when he begins to talk overtly of the personal, he is talking of the universal. As he explains towards the end of the film:
Lorsqu’on s’exprime, on dit toujours plus qu’on le veut. On croit exprimer l’individuel et qu’on dit l’universel. J’ai froid. C’est moi qui dit « J’ai froid » mais ce n’est pas moi que l’on entend. J’ai disparu dans ces deux moments de ma parole. Aussitôt que je l’ai prononcé, il ne reste de moi que l’homme qui a froid, et cet homme appartient à tous.

For Godard, the self-portrait or any image, for that matter, is only an initiation into the meaning(s) it can create. Indeed, the focus of _JLG/JLG_ is the idea that any work of art is not an end in itself, but the means to an end—that of creating meaning and making ‘sense’ of the world we live in, of using communication to create meaning, not just to sell and consume.

**Film Form**

Before I conclude, I would like to discuss important aspects of the forms of both films to see how they contribute to the change in the artist’s position from _Pierrot le fou_ to _JLG/JLG_.

The most striking visual aspect of _Pierrot_ is the stark difference in lighting in the first and second half of the film. Key scenes from the first half of the film are all characterized by darkness, with flashing red and blue neon lights. For example: the scene in Ferdinand’s apartment as he and his wife get ready for the party, or the scene of the party, or even the scene where Ferdinand and Marianne escape in a car. As discussed above, this is the phase when Ferdinand is becoming increasingly disillusioned with the world around him and feeling more and more trapped in this world of consumer products. The flashing neon lights signify the gaudy products that are being touted for consumption
all around Ferdinand. However, as Ferdinand escapes with Marianne, we see less and less of that darkness and neon lights. In fact, the second half of the film is shot almost entirely outdoors with an abundance of natural light and bright colors.

The movement of Ferdinand as an artist is thus from the interiors of his house, where he is claustrophobic because of the cluster of consumer images suffocating him, into the exteriors, where he escapes with Marianne. In fact, Ferdinand first escapes from his house into the city and from the city farther and farther away into the countryside, until he and Marianne reach a sort of idyllic island completely isolated and seemingly uninhabited. This change in physical space suggests the opening up of his spirit, until the open space becomes a bit too isolated for Ferdinand. This isolation then starts suffocating Ferdinand as much as his claustrophobic home did. Around this time, the lighting starts getting a little less bright and eventually fades into an empty black screen after Ferdinand commits suicide. The film thus comes full circle in terms of its lighting.

On the other hand, JLG’s journey in *JLG/JLG* begins in the interiors of his home and is confined to his dark and somber home for a good part of the film. Nonetheless, the dark interiors are contrasted with slightly brighter outdoors as JLG takes frequent walks through the woods or by the seashore, especially in the second half of the film. The difference between the outside and the inside lighting is not as stark as in *Pierrot le fou*. Most of the outdoor scenes are shot in evening light and therefore do not seem like a total contrast to the dark lighting of the interior shots. Furthermore, since it is an *autoportrait de décembre*, it is bleak and white everywhere and this contributes to the dark tone of the lighting.
In his home, we see only a silhouette of Godard moving about, writing, talking to us, and reading from books. This technique reflects very well what the film itself is all about. As Godard presents his self-portrait to us, he himself is not entirely sure of what he is about to reveal. He is discovering and revealing his discoveries to us simultaneously. It is a journey on which we accompany him as he walks us through his world of solitude and cinema. And thus, although the discovery begins with very little light, it goes on to have slightly more light, sometimes as we accompany Godard outdoors and towards the end of the film, even indoors as he is editing in his studio. Compared to the stark contrast in lighting in *Pierrot le fou*, the gradual change in lighting in *JLG/JLG* signifies a less explosive and more mature clarity in the artist’s understanding of himself and the world around him. Whereas the sudden escape of Ferdinand ultimately only leads to his death, the slow paced and continuous back and forth movement of JLG from home to exterior and back home helps him reach a certain understanding of his position and function in society.

The point of similarity between the structures of the films is that they are both fragmented and distort the spectator’s expectations of a conventional narrative. *Pierrot le fou* flows much like a book in the process of being written, with several intertitles such as “Chapter 6” or “Chapter 7” guiding our reading of this book. *JLG/JLG* also presents a fragmented structure but with no narrative as such. While *Pierrot le fou* depicts the journey of Ferdinand in the form of a story being written, *JLG/JLG* goes a step further in that it doesn’t tell a story at all. The latter unfolds in the form of musings and thoughts that JLG shares with his spectator, as and when they occur to him. He moves from one thought to another by pure process of association. JLG thus achieves the process of using
conventional modes of communication but undercutting them. While Ferdinand
unsuccessfully sought to reinvent the wheel, JLG uses what he has and yet subverts
conventions to escape being trapped by them.

It is evident that JLG, although appearing to be a mellowed down version of the
rebellious pie-throwing Ferdinand, has manifested a more radical spirit in the end.
Whereas Ferdinand only realizes towards the end that isolation leads to death, JLG has
realized, more than ever, that he cannot but be firmly grounded in the society into which
he is born. He is extremely aware of the culture of his times, and fights to survive as an
artist, and as an exception in the midst of that cultural rule. Furthermore, it is not only
survival that is his aim today, but survival as a human being, in the truest sense of the
word. As JLG says at the end of the film:

J’ai dit que j’aime; voilà la promesse. À présent il faut que je me sacrifie
pour que par moi le mot d’amour prenne un sens, pour qu’il y ait de
l’amour sur la terre. En récompense, au terme de cette longue entreprise, il
m’arrivera d’être celui qui aime. C’est à dire de mériter enfin le nom que
je m’étais donné. Un homme, rien qu’un homme et qui n’en vaut aucun
mais qu’aucun ne valent.

Indeed, not only does JLG know that isolation is futile, he also knows that to truly be
connected with the world he has to find and nurture the human being in himself.

In conclusion, I would thus say that although Godard seems to have developed a
more resigned position to the tyranny of the image or to the artist’s role in a materialistic
society, this resignation is not a mark of a placid acceptance of things as they are. Godard
is still registering his protest against imperialism in all its forms; the protest is just less
volatile than it was before. In *JLG/JLG*, his protest blames society a little less and he
takes more responsibility on himself to make the changes he wants to see.
Chapter 3

Interceptions with War: Les Carabiniers and For Ever Mozart

Godard’s concern with war and the justifiability of killing in the name of war has been evident since his earliest films such as Le Petit soldat (1960) and Les Carabiniers (1963) and later on in For Ever Mozart (1996), JLG/JLG: Autoportrait de décembre (1995), Éloge de l’amour (2001), and Notre Musique (2004). The discussion of everyday violence in the first chapter makes for a good segue into this discussion of violence on a broader level—a more organized and pre-meditated violence or war. Through this discussion, I aim to bring forth the revisions that Godard makes in his statement on war and ways to counter it. In keeping with the overarching thesis of this dissertation, I will demonstrate that the narratological and formal changes he makes, although appearing to be signs of his having mellowed down, only further his radicalism and make for a stronger criticism of war than before. This more radical stand is furthered in For Ever Mozart by the proposition of music as an art form that can still counter war when all other art forms have failed.

For the purpose of my analysis here, I will choose the two films from Godard’s repertoire that discuss war most directly—Les Carabiniers from the early period and For Ever Mozart from the later period. This will give me a chance to show how Godard first approached war and then how he came back to it in his reflective period. In each of my analyses, I will see how Godard situates war in the film, how he defines the characters in this war setting and how this influences their failure to stop war. I will also discuss the

---

8 Le Petit soldat was made in 1960, but its release was delayed until 1963 due to the ban imposed on it because of its controversial portrayal of the Algerian War and the torture practices of the French Government.
solutions that Godard proposes in the face of these failures to stop war. As with the previous chapter, I will discuss specific scenes from both films and analyze them in terms of the plot, characters, and motifs, to make a comparative analysis of the discussion of war in both films. Subsequently, I will do a formal analysis of the films to discuss the techniques used and their influence on the films’ discussion of war.

*Les Carabiniers*, Godard’s most criticized antiwar film, is a black and white production set in a hypothetical time and space. At the same time, the film also features actual World War II footage. Wheeler Winston Dixon explains:

(…) Godard’s most ardent partisans were taken aback in 1963, when Godard released *Les Carabiniers (The Soldiers)*, a serio-comic study of war shot on Kodak XX negative stock for a newsreel effect, intercut with existing stock footage of war newsreels. As part of Godard’s design for the film, the “staged” sections of *Les Carabiniers* were duped several times over in the laboratory until all the greys and shadings were destroyed, and the “fictional” footage achieved the same visual verisimilitude as the old newsreels. (35)

Evidently, Godard’s experimentation with the newsreel effect did not go down too well. This probably explains why very few books on Godard discuss *Les Carabiniers* and even fewer articles focus on it.

The film tells the story of two peasants, Michelange and Ulysses, who are drafted into war upon the King’s orders. They are promised all the riches that they find during

---

9 Michel Cournot asserted that *Les Carabiniers* was “a badly made, badly lit, badly everything film” (*Godard on Godard* 200). Godard replied: “I consider these lines as praise indeed.” (*Godard on Godard* 196)
the course of the war, but the film ends tragically with the peasants being killed as the King is overthrown. *For Ever Mozart*, on the other hand, discusses war in the context of the real conflict in Sarajevo. The discussion unfolds through the story of two artistic ventures by two different artists—Camille and her uncle Vicky Vitalis. While Camille wants to go to Sarajevo to put up Marivaux’s play *Le Jeu de l’amour et du hasard*, Vitalis is disillusioned with that kind of activism and prefers making a commissioned war film called *Le Boléro fatal*. Camille and her companion Jérôme are killed in Sarajevo, and Vitalis makes a film that fails at the box office, leaving him even more hopeless than before.

Even though we are starting to see some interest in and writing on *For Ever Mozart* recently, it was long avoided by scholars. As Fergus Daly points out, it has been received polemically in the past five years:

> From being hailed as a masterpiece on its appearance to its classification as the runt of the extensive Godardian litter, whereby even as staunch and perceptive a supporter as Nicole Brenez can dismiss the work out of hand (...)(n.p.)

Although studies like those of Wheeler Winston Dixon, Fergus Daly and Elise Maës discuss the structure and certain postmodern tendencies of the film, thus indicating its special place in Godard’s œuvre, these studies do not elaborate on the film’s discussion of war and its connection to the earlier discussion of war in *Les Carabiniers*. It is in order to make this connection and therefore substantiate Godard’s consistent opposition to war, that I undertake the following analysis.
Les Carabiniers

A Fictitious War

The war in *Les Carabiniers* is anachronistic, at the very least, if not completely fictitious. The film begins with an overhead shot of the highway and a car turning off from the highway into the countryside. And then, within this modern setting, soldiers come with the King’s letter for Michelange and Ulysses. Either the invisible figure of the King is an anachronism or it is the highway, cars, and warplanes that are out of place. Or, knowing Godard’s penchant for play and ambiguity, they are both put together simply to create a non-existent time and space with some recognizable elements from different time periods, in order to play with the spectator’s expectations and suspension of disbelief. As Dixon explains: “By this point in his career, Godard was alternating films aimed at a wider audience with films paradoxically designed to alienate the conventional spectator.”

Either way, the attempt to fictionalize war demonstrates a desire to discuss war on a more general level, without seeing it within the framework of a conflict between particular nations and the reasons for the same. In doing so, Godard seems to want to go back to the roots to try and de-mythify war in the Barthesian tradition. In *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes explains the concept of the modern myth:

In passing from history to nature, myth acts economically: it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible, it organizes a world which is without contradictions because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it
establishes a blissful clarity: things appear to mean something by themselves. (143)

War has become just such a modern myth where it is made to seem as if it is a natural consequence of conflict between two nations. A real war portrayed in a film always bears the danger of giving rise to a discussion of the political reasons behind the conflict and rarely gets down to discussing what war is, in the first instance. It is this discussion that is enabled by placing war in a fictitious time and space so as to focus on the act of war instead of focusing on the reasons for a particular war. The following sequences from *Les Carabiniers* that I shall now analyze in some detail, aim to define war in terms of the act rather than in terms of the reasons behind the act.

When the soldiers arrive to hand over the King’s letter, Cléopatre is getting ready for a bath and Michelange is relaxing outside in the garden where farm animals run about and the dog keeps watch. As they go about their routine, they seem oblivious to the war that is raging all around them. When the soldiers first summon Michelange and Ulysses, the latter assume that it is to arrest them and so they try to ward off the soldiers saying: “Mais on n’a rien fait!” But the soldiers keep following Michelange and Ulysses as well as Vénus and Cléopatre. They threaten them with their guns and with their dominating demeanor while their victims keep repeating that they haven’t done anything. This repetition is significant in that it indicates the general public reaction to war. The assumption is that if one hasn’t done anything to start a war, one hasn’t done anything wrong. But the fact that one hasn’t done anything to stop the war is not seen as having done anything wrong. Hence the irony of the reaction “mais on n’a rien fait!”. That is precisely the crime—the act of not having done anything to stop the war.
After a brief tussle where the soldiers finally overpower their victims and calm them down, they explain the purpose of their visit. Michelange and Ulysses are informed that the King has sent them a letter and requested them to go to war. As Michelange is reading the letter, one of the soldiers explains to him: “Oui, en des temps quelques sont ceux que nous traversons, aux temps de souffrance, et de chagrin des gens, la police doit plus que jamais prendre en considération, la distraction de la population.” This is the first of the definitions of war in terms of an act: in difficult times, war serves as an act of distraction. Exactly how this distraction works, is explored in the sequence below that I shall analyze in some detail.

Since it is cold outside, Michelange and Ulysses invite the soldiers into the house to talk. As Ulysses serves coffee, Cléopatre parades and pirouettes around the table, combs her hair in front of the mirror and pouts at the soldiers. Seeing this, Ulysses asks them, “Elle n’est pas belle, ma femme?” Just as she provides distraction to the visiting soldiers, they in turn will enumerate the number of distractions that the war will provide to her husband and his brother. As Michelange walks in, he reads the word “mo-bi-li-sa-tion” from the letter and asks if that means that they must leave for war right away. When the soldiers confirm that they must leave on that day itself, Ulysses says: “C’est pas drôle.” To which one of the soldiers replies: “Au contraire.” He then goes on to elaborate how war can indeed be fun; not only will Michelange and Ulysses be able to enrich themselves because of their travels abroad but they will also become very rich, simply by taking the enemy’s wealth. They can take whatever they want and that includes:

   (...) pas seulement la terre et des troupeaux, mais aussi des maisons, des palais, des villes, des voitures, des cinémas, des Prisunics, des gares, des
aérodromes, des piscines, des casinos, des théâtres de boulevard, des
bouquets de fleurs, des arcs de triomphe, des usines, des cigares, des
imprimeries, des briquets, des avions, des femmes du monde, des trains de
marchandise, des stylos, des bijouteries, des Alpha Roméos, des guitares
d’hawaïen, des paysages splendides, des éléphants, des locomotives, des
stations de métro, des Rolls Royces, des Maseratis, des femmes qui se
déshabillent.

The list of things that can be acquired is varied to say the least. It contains objects
of desire such as cars and palaces, but also ethereal beauty in the form of magnificent
landscapes. Interestingly, even the intangible pleasures are to be ‘taken’ and not just
experienced; they find themselves put in the same league as cargo trains and pens. This
sort of flattening out of the playground by putting all these in the same list serves well to
take the emphasis away from the objects themselves and put it upon the act of acquiring
or amassing these objects. Essentially then, the emphasis is on war as the act of taking—
taking wealth, both material as well as intangible or spiritual. Furthermore, it is the act of
taking by force what does not belong to oneself; in other words, it is an aggressive if not
downright violent act. It is not simply aggression or simply consumption but both— thus
an act of aggressive consumption. This is the second definition of war given in Les
Carabiniers. To summarize, war is then the act of distracting people by making it an
opportunity for consumption.

The protagonists confirm and reconfirm again and again that this is indeed true
and when they are finally convinced that they really can take whatever they fancy at war,
the decision is made; Michelange and Ulysses will go to war. As a final word of
encouragement, they are told: “Vous verrez, c’est extraordinaire! Tout est permis à la
guerre.” But it doesn’t end here. As they walk outside, Michelange asks if they will also
be allowed to steal jukeboxes and break old men’s glasses and children’s arms, burn
women and massacre innocent people. The answer to all his questions is, of course, in the
affirmative. In this scene, Godard makes a connection between unmindful, uncontrolled
consumption and aggression such that this kind of consumption seems to be just as much
an act of aggression as is the actual violent act of burning women or breaking children’s
arms. This is similar to Marcuse’s explanation of technological aggression and
satisfaction:

The phenomenon is quickly described: the act of aggression is physically
carried out by a mechanism with a high degree of automatism, of far
greater power than the individual human being who sets it in motion,
keeps it in motion, and determines its end or target. The most extreme case
is the rocket or missile; the most ordinary example the automobile. (…)
And an instrument cannot, in any moral sense, be responsible or be in a
state of guilt. In this way, another barrier against aggression, which
civilization had erected in a long and violent process of discipline is
removed. And the expansion of advanced capitalism becomes involved in
a fateful psychical dialectic which enters into and propels its economic
and political dynamic: the more powerful and "technological" aggression
becomes, the less is it apt to satisfy and pacify the primary impulse, and
the more it tends toward repetition and escalation. (Negations 263)
Just as machines erase the guilt of aggression, unmindful consumption too displaces the more explicitly violent forms of aggression and satisfies the consumer without causing any guilt.

**Interceptions with War: Forced and Callous**

It is evident that Michelange and Ulysses are not participating in the war of their own understanding. They have been shown a certain picture of the war and they agree to go to war based on the picture that has been created for them. Their initial resistance has been effectively broken and they have been cajoled into going to war based on the fact that “A la guerre un soldat peut faire tout ce qu’il veut car il le fait au nom du Roi.” Not only can they do what they want at war, they do not have to so much as be responsible for what they do since the entire responsibility has been transferred onto the invisible entity of the King. The invisibility of the King is significant in that it represents the same intangible entity that is a nation in a war amongst nations. In such a war, a soldier does not fight and kill on his own account but on the account of the vague notion of the nation. The responsibility is then transferred onto this vague entity and thus somehow justified by its very vagueness. It is this justification that Godard takes to task in *Les Carabiniers* by seeing the war through the interactions of two individual soldiers instead of two nations. As I have stated before, there is, therefore, no discussion of the reasons for the war in this film; there is no background and there are no events leading to war and this helps to focus on what actually happens at war, rather than before and after it.

Since the war picture shown to Michelange and Ulysses is of a flawed, superficial and callous nature and has instilled them with a sense of power to execute their
aggression, we expect that Michelange and Ulysses’s interaction with the war will necessarily be skewed in that direction. Interestingly though, their mostly callous attitude also shows some astute and sensitive observations at times. However, we see that the longer they remain at war, the lesser we see of this initial sensitivity.

This section of the film takes us directly to the battlefield and makes us witnesses to the acts of Michelange and Ulysses. True to what they have been promised, they can kill at will, violate women, and take what they want. And as memoirs of these experiences, they send postcards home to Vénus and Cléopatre. The postcards range from a single sentence to a paragraph, sometimes directly describing the events at war and sometimes describing Michelange and Ulysses’s thoughts about what is happening. The first postcard sent home simply asks, “What do soldiers do before a battle? Before a battle, soldiers are afraid.” The second one describes: “We landed in Italy and left a trail of a thousand corpses. We saw grenadiers, generals die without a sound, their bellies open, their uniforms bloodied, their eyes gorged out.” And another one sent from Egypt says: “From the base of these pyramids we looked at forty centuries of History contemplating us.”

The first postcard brings home a simple yet often ignored fact, that of the fear of soldiers. It also de-mythifies the fearless and patriotic soldier. The soldier too can feel afraid, especially if he is recruited as casually as Michelange and Ulysses. They have been shown the power they can have when killing, but they have not been warned of the fact that they too can be killed. This knowledge perhaps reaches soldiers too late—when they are already at war. In that case, they probably have no option but to continue with their decision to go to war. This is a very thoughtful and critical observation on the part
of Michelange and Ulysses. But the sensitivity and perceptiveness shown in this first postcard is lost in the careless nature of the second one, which describes in a very matter of fact manner the various acts of violence observed at war. And then again, the third postcard intelligently recognizes the value of History and perhaps also regretfully observes our lack of learning from History. We have been able to restore and maintain tangible vestiges of History such as monuments and statues. Yet, we have been unable to remember the intangible lessons it has taught us, and hence the repeated wars leading to the same mistakes.

Postcards such as these pepper the entire middle portion of the film, as we see actual war footage as well as the exploits of Michelange and Ulysses. In what follows, I will analyze two specific sequences that bear witness to the reckless attitude and almost complete lack of understanding of the gravity of the actions taken. The first of these sequences occurs when Michelange and Ulysses forcibly enter the house of a family with a young child. While Ulysses shoots the husband in the backyard, Michelange threatens the wife and their son. But he is not satisfied simply by shooting them and therefore decides to torture them first, in order to gauge the power promised to him by the soldiers who visited his house. He does everything possible to humiliate the wife in front of her very young son. He asks her to undress and then kneel on the ground and start crawling around with her son on her back. All the while, he laughs at her, clearly enjoying her complete subordination to him. Just as he is doing this, Ulysses enters and asks him to hurry up. Before leaving, Michelange notices a painting on the wall. He looks at the work of art thoughtfully, then looks at the woman he has just humiliated and then, standing in front of the painting, announces: “Un soldat salue un artiste!” Just as the artist is
represented by his work of art, Michelange, the soldier, is represented by his work—that of torturing the powerless. And we have just witnessed this soldier’s work displayed before us in this film. The pride that Michelange takes in his power to torture is evident. Lynn Higgins explains:

If rape appears as a frequent metaphorical usage in the literature of resistance, this may be because, as Robin Morgan points out in another context, “the violation of an individual woman is the metaphor for man’s forcing himself on whole nations.” In wartime, rape has always been more than a rhetorical figure, but in its literal application it has also been one of the forms in which the concept of conquest is expressed. (108)

What Lynn Higgins says about rape is very much applicable to the act of the torture of a woman by a soldier. And the issue of torture is an essential one here for it was at the center of political and social debate surrounding the Franco-Algerian war, when Les Carabiniers was made. Godard’s Le Petit soldat discusses torture more explicitly but Les Carabiniers touches upon it several times as well. For example, in the scene previously discussed, when Michelange wonders if in addition to amassing wealth, it is alright to break old people glasses and children’s arms when at war; then in the scene just discussed; and later, in the forest scene that I will study next. In Le Petit soldat, torture is discussed in light of the question of blame and to bring out the other side of war and brutality. It is meant to show that what happens behind the scenes in a war, away from the battlefield, is every inch as brutal and violent as what happens on the battlefield. The act of torture is specifically situated in the context of the Franco-Algerian conflict. For this reason, Le Petit soldat suffered a ban for several years until its release in 1963. Les
Carabiniers, in its effort to demythologize war, aims to de-mythify torture as well. Instead of contextualizing torture by involving a victim and perpetrator from different political beliefs, Les Carabiniers focuses on the act of torture simply as an act of power between two individuals. By making Michelange completely disinterested in the war at hand, and merely interested in amassing wealth, Godard links wealth to power, and power to the desire to inflict pain upon another human being. As I have stated above in the discussion of the scene between the soldiers and Michelange and Ulysses just before they leave for war, Godard links the desire to torture to uncontrolled and unmindful consumption. In this scene, he once again brings out the severity of this kind of consumption that creates an insatiable desire in human beings. After a point, consuming goods of desire fails to satiate the desire to possess and consume. When material goods fail to satisfy this desire in people, they then turn to other people to satisfy that desire. And by inflicting pain and even death upon another human being, they attempt to possess them, if only by destroying what they possess. The following scene that I shall now discuss furthers this argument wherein torture is linked to boredom and frustration from consumption rather than to a political cause as is often done to ‘justify’ torture.

This scene, that I would like to discuss in some detail, takes place in a forest where the soldiers have orders to shoot at sight anyone opposing the King. As a postcard sent home explains: “One of the most urgent tasks waiting for us is to uncover all of the King’s enemies. To accomplish this task we are ready to spill not only our own blood, but also that of others.” By the time this sequence takes place, Michelange and Ulysses have killed and tortured several more innocent and powerless people, some of them mere bystanders to their actions. Two postcards reveal these events to us: “We saw death
among families, and fulfilled our gory mission.” And, “Sometimes we force people to lie on the bodies of those who just preceded them, and we shoot them in this position.”

This particular scene involves the killing of a woman from an anti-war action group. This woman and her companion overpower Ulysses as his group of soldiers is wandering in the forest. Ulysses calls out for help and his companions come and save him. They then take the activist couple captive and prepare for their execution. When they interrogate the woman, she explains her ideology and her anti-war position. Just before her execution, she asks them if she can recite a poem by Lenin. They let her do that and as she recites the poem, at some point, they just get bored and kill her, shooting at her several times, even after she is dead. The killing in this scene once again brings out the lack of any kind of commitment on the part of the soldiers. They are, in fact, ideologically opposed to the anti-war couple. Nonetheless, their reason for shooting them is not ideological. They do not counter the fact that the woman dares to recite a poem by Lenin to them and they do not stop her from doing so. It is simply out of boredom that they kill her. As long as her poem intrigues them, they listen to it, and when it loses its novelty, they start firing.

These powerful scenes emphasize the boredom of the soldiers at war and their increasing alienation from a war that they never believed in, to begin with. The only reason these two soldiers came to the war was to amass riches and experience power. Although they began with enjoying that power, as witnessed in the first sequence analyzed above, by the time of the forest sequence, they have started killing more out of boredom that out of the need for power. They have lost their own desire for power and have also realized the futility of the King’s desire for power. As one of the last postcards
explains, “There is no victory, only men and flags falling.” There is still no resolution to the war and therefore still no sight of the promised riches. The weary men are told to return home and they are assured that after that war is won, the King’s men will personally come and offer them the promised goods. With yet more empty promises in hand, the men begin their journey home.

**War Fails All**

We then see footage of corpses and the stormy sea, followed by the return of Michelange and Ulysses home. As they come home, they are not greeted for having returned home safely, but instead for the riches they were supposed to have brought with them upon their return. When Michelange explains that Ulysses lost his eye while at war, Cléopatre answers: “Mais qu’est-ce que ça fait, maintenant on est riche!” The sequence that follows is full of irony and only the beginning to the total let down and ultimate disappointment of Michelange and Ulysses. Up until now, although the war was failing, at least Michelange and Ulysses seemed to be getting the power to capture and possess that they had been promised. But as they return home, we see how hollow these promises turn out to be.

As Cléopatre and Vénus insist on seeing all the treasures that the men have supposedly brought home, they open their bags, only to reveal a huge collection of postcards. They start showing them one by one to the girls and the camera does an extreme close-up of the postcards as they are being shown. In the background, we hear Michelange and Ulysses repeating the list of things seen in the postcards in the same monotonous tone that the soldiers had earlier used to entice them into going to war: “(…)
des trains, des gares, des femmes, des palais, des machines à laver, (…)” And although the girls feel cheated in the beginning, they are slowly enticed into the magical world of images, where one only has to see to possess\textsuperscript{10}. Godard furthers the illusion of possession when he shows Michelange and Ulysses being drawn into the image of the washing machine and going to raid a shop selling the machines. A brawl ensues between them and the shopkeeper and it soon turns into a slapstick comedy of sorts with onlookers joining the brawl and people chasing each other and pushing over the machines without really knowing why. Although the sequence is comical, its irony does not fail to reach the audience. Here are the two men who were promised everything they could lay their hands on, from Maseratis to women, and all they have is a bunch of postcards that they use to fantasize owning the objects they see. Sadly, even in the fantasy sequence, they are not really owning the objects but only trying to possess them. The show and tell sequence ends with the two couples submerged in a deluge of postcards raining down on them as they dance to their fantasies.

Their fantasy-filled stupor is only broken when the King’s men knock on their door once again. Michelange and Ulysses open the door eagerly, but instead of riches, they are simply informed that the King has lost the war. Michelange and Ulysses refuse to accept this injustice and go into the city in search of their goods. They are sent from one person to another, from one street to the next, and even though the city is falling

\textsuperscript{10} Fredric Jameson points out that “The objects of the commodity world of capitalism also shed their independent ‘being’ and intrinsic qualities and come to be so many instruments of commodity satisfaction: the familiar example is that of tourism (…) This is the meaning of the great scene in Godard’s \textit{Les Carabiniers} (1962-63), when the new world conquerors exhibit their spoils: unlike Alexander, ‘Michel-Ange’ and ‘Ulysse’ merely own images of everything, and triumphantly display their postcards of the coliseum, the pyramids, Wall Street, Angkor Wat, like so many dirty pictures” (11).
apart all around them, they simply ignore all that is happening. They are not in the least bit curious about the future of their King or the effects of the defeat on their lives. All they keep asking for are their goods, and as they go in search of the person who can deliver these goods, they land up meeting the soldier who had made them this promise in the first place—when he came to see them with the King’s letter. Obviously elated that they will finally get their goods, they walk straight up to him and demand their goods. At first, the soldier tries to brush them off explaining that the war has been lost. But seeing that they continue to persist, he finally gives in and asks them to follow him into a rundown shack. As he follows them inside with his gun, we cannot but expect the worst. And as we wait to see what we expect, we hear two shots and see the soldier come out and drive off in an army van. The final intertitle explains: “Thereupon the two brothers went to sleep for eternity, believing that the brain, in decay, functions above and beyond death, and that its dreams are what make up Heaven.” This is the ultimate deception of Michelange and Ulysses and the film’s convincing verdict on war. War has failed the perpetrator of the war—the King, as well as the naïve participants—the soldiers, represented by Michelange and Ulysses. Dixon rightly summarizes:

Thus the film emerges as a triumphantly fraudulent construct, a metaphorical conceit that brazenly revels in the artificiality of its syntactical structure. *Les Carabiniers* is an ugly film about a world bereft of beauty, in which meaningless conquests are followed by equally arbitrary betrayals. Michel-Ange and Ulysses are strikingly banal characters, empty vessels waiting to be filled with bourgeois ambition and guided by external, unquestionable governance. (36)
Furthermore, as the postcard scene analyzed above has shown, this is also the deception of the image, particularly the image of war. Godard has often said that cinema has failed in its mission to make us learn from History. Keith Reader states:

Godard has famously denounced cinema— notably in *Histoire(s) du cinéma*— for its failure to bear visual witness to the horror of the Second World War and the Final Solution, much as Adorno asked himself from Californian exile how poetry was still possible after Auschwitz. (79)

And indeed, the war film has failed to keep us from creating more wars. We continue to watch these films and yet somehow the horrors evade us. We come back either feeling satisfied with an explanation of how a particular war is justified or else we come back feeling satisfied that we have paid tribute to the lives lost and the damage done, by sympathizing with the war victims depicted in the film.

However, *Les Carabiniers* attempts to let us do neither. First, there is no explanation or justification for the war; on the contrary, rather than masking and glorifying war as the quest for justice, it is laid bare as a consumerist opportunity to pillage and conquest. This opportunity is further put in the hands of two caricature-like buffoons and so the entire enterprise is almost set up for failure. *Les Carabiniers*’ stand is that war is an always already failed enterprise. The failure is not dependent on victory or defeat or the justifiability of a particular war but in its very nature. Secondly, the spectator’s sympathy is constantly displaced till it is finally directed towards himself. In the beginning, we feel sympathy for the war victims because of the torture being inflicted on them by soldiers like Michelange and Ulysses. However, as we witness the deception of Michelange and Ulysses, we see that there is a greater issue at work here. Our
sympathy is then displaced to Michelange and Ulysses. Still later, when we see how mindless they are, we wonder if they do not really deserve what they get. We wonder if they all but ask for the deception that they get, and this is when we realize that the deception of Michelange and Ulysses is the failure of the common man. Michelange and Ulysses may be caricaturized to disguise the lay person in them, but towards the end of the film, when they go from person to person asking for the goods they had been promised, we cannot but think of the many times when we have been deceived by ever postponed pleasure. And this is when our sympathy turns to anger and a feeling of being unsettled. Godard’s work here is complete, he has brought out the complete failure and deceit of the war enterprise.

Nonetheless, two elements seem to have bothered Godard, as is evident from the changes he made in his more recent war film, *For Ever Mozart*. First, although suspending the war in a timeless space, thereby exploring the myth of war, has the benefit of removing the discussion of justifiability from the table, it also has the disadvantage of distancing the spectator. This can push him to indulge in the fiction so much that he removes himself from having to make a judgment. If this happens, the powerful effect of the time-space suspension could be lost because it distances the spectator instead of actively involving him in the act of war and making him see the role he plays in it.

---

11 In *Eros and Civilization*, Herbert Marcuse argues: “The reality principle supersedes the pleasure principle: man learns to give up momentary, uncertain, and destructive pleasure for delayed, restrained, but “assured” pleasure. Because of this lasting gain through renunciation and restraint, according to Freud, the reality principle “safeguards” rather than “dethrones,” “modifies” rather than denies, the pleasure principle. However, the psychoanalytic interpretation reveals that the reality principle enforces a change not only in the form and timing of pleasure but in its very substance. The adjustment of pleasure to the reality principle implies the subjugation and diversion of the destructive force of instinctual gratification, of its incompatibility with the established societal norms and relations, and, by that token, implies the transubstantiation of pleasure itself.” (11-12)
Secondly, Michelange’s and Ulysses’ buffoonery, although it adds to our realization of
the failure of the war and helps to bring out, even more markedly, war’s deception of the
common man, also presents the danger of irking the spectator. And if the spectator feels
irked by their foolhardy nature, the film runs the risk of having the spectator feel that
Michelange and Ulysses deserve their death and deception. Again, this gives the spectator
the chance to not see himself in Michelange and Ulysses and in fact distances him from
them; he will then refuse to see their failure as his failure. Furthermore, even if the
spectator does sympathize with them, he will still not identify himself with their
buffoonery and the sympathy will simply be cathartic in that case. Recognizing these
possible pitfalls, Godard made two important narratological changes to *For Ever Mozart*:
he modified the war setting and also changed the characteristics of the protagonists
engaged in the war. In the second part of this chapter, I will analyze the effect of these
changes on Godard’s discussion of war and demonstrate that his contempt for war and the
failure of the image to counter it, reaches newer and more drastic heights in *For Ever
Mozart*.

*For Ever Mozart*

*For Ever Mozart* opens with a man sitting by a harbor, evidently waiting for
someone. A woman, Sabine, comes running into the frame, kisses him and starts running
away. He runs after her and the camera follows them through a series of what we later
realize to be markers of time. We see limousines driving by and people playing pétanque
in the woods as we finally reach a busy intersection with traffic lights and people on the
sidewalk reading the current news. The camera pauses for a while here as we hear that
the Euro has gone up whereas the Deutsch Marc has gone down. With these markers, Godard gives *For Ever Mozart* a real-time and real-space contemporary setting. This is the first of the notable narratological changes that Godard makes to *For Ever Mozart*, as compared to *Les Carabiniers*. By rooting the action in a real setting, he avoids the danger of spectator distantiation that was one of the possible pitfalls in the earlier film.

Wheeler Winston Dixon says in his article “For Ever Godard: Notes on Godard’s *For Ever Mozart*”: “In *For Ever Mozart*, Godard once again creates a deliberately fragmented narrative, a deeply self-reflexive film which simultaneously challenges and confronts his audience.” (82) It is possible, however, to reconstruct a master narrative— that of the making of Vicky Vitalis’ film *Le Boléro fatal* and of his trip to Sarajevo with Camille and Jérôme for the staging of Marivaux’s play *Le Jeu de l’amour et du hasard*. As I shall demonstrate, this master narrative of the film is of a circular nature. It is within this circular trajectory that it creates space for a discussion of war and an autocritique of his earlier discussion of war in *Les Carabiniers*.

**A Real War**

In *For Ever Mozart*, the discussion centers around a real conflict— the war in Sarajevo. The protagonists of the film, Camille and Jérôme, want to go to Sarajevo to experience the conflict first hand. They decide to perform *Le Jeu de l’amour et du hasard* in Sarajevo for the war victims. Camille is inspired by an article in the newspaper *Le Monde*, “Sarajevo et Marivaux”, written by Philippe Sollers. Godard emphasizes the “play” in theatre when Camille says that she has decided to act in and direct Marivaux’s play. The emphasis on the notion of play is better brought out in French since the word
jouer, can mean both play as well as act, so Camille’s statement could be interpreted as “I have decided to play with and make others play with (...) Marivaux’s play”.

Just as the game of love in Marivaux’s play upsets the social order and brings about chaos and confusion which is only restored towards the end, in Sarajevo too, the war has upset the social order and caused chaos and confusion. The substantial difference is that peace will take a much longer time to restore itself and will come at a price. Just as the whims of the noblesse force everyone to play along in Marivaux’s piece, the whims of the powerful nations force all others to play along in Sarajevo. And just as Marivaux’s play has not taught us that love cannot be harnessed by ‘playing’ it, past wars have not taught us that ‘playing’ out a conflict only deepens it and tears apart the underprivileged nations to the benefit of the more powerful nations. The most important problem for Godard is that we have refused to act upon the repetitive nature of war. As Vicky Vitalis says, several times during the film, the 1990s are nothing but a repetition of the cowardice and chaos of the 1930s, with slight symphonic variations. Junji Hori explains:

In For Ever Mozart, Godard practices a more dynamic montage of historical events. The essence of this film does not lie in the representation of Sarajevo caught in the whirlpool of war and ethnic cleansing, but in the attempt to consider the conflict in the former Yugoslavia as a repetition of the Algerian War as well as of the earlier Spanish Civil War. The reference to the latter appears under various signs throughout the film,

Douglas Morrey explains that “here Godard borrows from the Spanish writer Juan Goytisolo the idea that the ‘cowardice and confusion’ of the 1990s morrow that of the 1930s, with Europe’s failure to prevent war in the Balkan’s offering a depressing repetition of the twentieth-century’s worst mistakes” (201).
such as a poster of Malraux’s *Espoir*, a brief mention of *The Invention of Don Quixote* by Manuel Azaña (writer and President of the Republic expelled by Franco), and the number 36 on which the baron bets during roulette. The Algerian War is mentioned, notably through two characters: a Muslim maid Djamilla, and Camille who believed herself to be a “granddaughter of Albert Camus”. (339)

It is evident that there is something to be gained for interested parties from war. Already, in *Les Carabiniers*, war was depicted as the consumerist adventure of the wealthy and the consumerist dream of the poor; a chance for them to amass wealth and power that they could not yield under normal conditions of peace. And wars must be repeated to continue benefiting from them. In *For Ever Mozart*, Godard shows that the repetition of wars is not coincidental, but planned. It is not a natural consequence of unresolved conflicts but is well planned and thought out to appear as a natural consequence of an unavoidable conflict. As my larger hypothesis indicates, Godard has indeed become more radical here by bringing out the fictional nature of a real war rather than trying to bring out the real effects of a fictional war as he attempted to do in *Les Carabiniers*. The following analysis of a scene in Sarajevo, in the midst of the war, brings out the brutality of this play at war. It also brings out the role that the media plays in setting up and broadcasting this ‘play’.

This scene begins in a run down shack, which houses some war insurgents and their ammunition. Some of the men are sitting around a table and reporting the killings of the day. As they are doing this, they are informed of some visiting officials from the Red Cross and the UN. The camera focuses on the big fancy cars that the officials are getting
out of. The discomfort on their face shows that they have trouble walking on the war
torn ground in Sarajevo. Ironically, these officials are from the very First-World countries
that stood by and let the conflict in Sarajevo fester. And now they visit, in their chic suits
and make-up to make a note of their compassion. “Sarajevo: The Whore of the West”
shouts the slogan of the war rebels in Sarajevo. And indeed Sarajevo and many other
such conflict nations have become the whores of the First-World so that the First-World
can stand by and enjoy the show, and send their media in to make a spectacle of it. In *For
Ever Mozart*, the Red Cross representatives and the officials from the United Nations
bring to life this very semblance of help that economically powerful nations put forth
when they have let the situation in a warring Third World nation go far enough such that
it can very rarely regain the peace it originally had. It is evident that the officials are only
making a customary visit to the war affected area without any serious intentions to
resolve the conflict. Their talks with the rebels are superfluous at best and they seem to
be more in awe of the rebels and the war they are waging than anything else. They
mention that they saw one of them on CNN and the rebels too are proud of the publicity
that this first world TV channel is giving them. It is both ironic and pathetic that the very
imperialist nation that promoted the situation against which the rebels are fighting and
rebelling is the very one which still has their fascination for it intact.

While in *Les Carabiniers*, Godard hinted at the deception of the image during the
postcards sequence, in *For Ever Mozart*, he makes the connection more explicit. The
following sequence serves as another example of this connection. As talks with the US
officials continue, the camera pans to the landscape outside where we see some of the
insurgents on patrol. Most of them are holding guns, but one of them is taking pictures
with a camera. This is the same woman who, in the earlier scene, was avidly watching
the war on the TV screen and was fascinated that she was in some of the footage shown.
She is equally fascinated with the still camera and cannot stop taking pictures of the
insurgents, guns and shootings outside. But for someone who is fascinated by the media,
she is very irresponsible with its use. She takes pictures without so much as focusing on
anything in particular and seems to be clicking for the pure and simple fact that she has a
camera at hand. She is fascinated with the gadget more than she is with what she could do
with it. But she hardly seems aware of the potential of this tool that she handles so
carelessly.

The war has become a spectacle for her just as it has become a spectacle for the
rest of the world. She is part of the spectacle and yet enjoys it at her own expense. She
seems to be more of a war tourist than an insurgent, as she takes pictures of the war site,
and even of the rebels torturing and shooting their captives. In her ignorance, she even
asks her companions to shoot at random and even captures the shooting on her camera.
She seems to have no conviction or understanding of what is happening in Sarajevo, and
what the insurgents are rebelling against. She is happy enough to be around, share her
stories, show pictures of her family and get her share of the glamour and limelight on
television. The war has not only become a spectacle for those outside of it but also for
those participating in it and suffering from its violence. Godard has become even more
critical of the failure of the image here than he was in *Les Carabiniers*. By turning the
war into a spectacle, the image has not only discarded its responsibility to prevent future
wars, it shows no regrets in making a spectacle of the existing war. While *Les
Carabiniers* depicted the deception of the image, *For Ever Mozart* goes a step further to
demonstrate that deception as being willful and carefully constructed by its main players.

**Intellectual Interceptions**

In this next section, I would like to explore the interactions of *For Ever Mozart*’s protagonists with this war-spectacle. Through an analysis of some specific scenes, I will study these interactions as compared to those of Michelange and Ulysses in *Les Carabiniers*. To do that, I would like to first explain the changes that Godard makes to the protagonists in the film. In *Les Carabiniers* Michelange and Ulysses were portrayed not only as the common man, but also as naïve and foolish to a certain extent and I have explained above the pitfalls in portraying them in such a manner. In *For Ever Mozart*, the protagonists have an intellectual bend that is evident from the very beginning of the film. The following scene from the beginning of the film bears testimony to the same. This scene is set in the home of the filmmaker Vicky Vitalis where the family, comprised of Vitalis and his wife, their nephew Jérôme and his friend Camille who is Albert Camus’ granddaughter, are having dinner. The discussion amongst the members of this family around the dinner table, as they eat, is full of references to classics in literature, including Hugo, Musset, Hemingway and Camus. They discuss the war in Sarajevo and Camille insists that she and Jérôme should visit the war affected areas. Vitalis’ wife finds the idea outrageous but Camille argues that it is their duty to experience the war. It is clear that Camille and Jérôme are extremely aware of the war situation and have a deep understanding of it. While intellectuals are often accused of a passive understanding, Camille is out to change that because she wants to transform that understanding into
action. Camille and Jérôme are a far cry from Michelange and Ulysses who had little understanding of the gravity of their actions and were simply in the war for the promised material possessions.

Vicky Vitalis, the other protagonist of *For Ever Mozart*, is an aging filmmaker who has been commissioned to make the film *Le Boléro fatal*. While Camille feels that Vitalis should leave the film and instead join them in Sarajevo, Vitalis seems to be unconvinced that going to Sarajevo will make any difference in the situation there. When Camille accuses him of having become too old, he in turn accuses her of a false youthful idealism: “Et toi, rien que de la jeunesse à vendre!” On the one hand, Vitalis appears to be more cynical than Camille and Jérôme in that he is unwilling to believe that he can make a difference in the war situation. On the other hand, he seems to be committed to making his film *Le Boléro fatal*, which, from the production scenes, seems to be a film about some sort of conflict. Vitalis may not believe in the same kind of action against war as Camille and Jérôme, but he seems to have his own thoughts as to what he can do about the war situation. The moving image is his medium and he seems to be using it to take a stand on the issue of war and conflict. Even though Camille forces him to accompany them, we see that he escapes and returns home even before reaching Sarajevo to make *Le Boléro fatal*. One thing is amply clear then— *For Ever Mozart*’s protagonists are far more committed to their understanding and participation in the war situation than Michelange and Ulysses ever were in *Les Carabiniers*. What remains to be seen is what kind of action this commitment transfers into and how the interaction of these more intellectual protagonists differs from that of their foolish and naïve counterparts in *Les Carabiniers*. 
After some rehearsals of *Le Jeu de l’amour et du hasard*, Camille, Jérôme and Djamilla, their maid who they have recruited to play a role in the play, set out on their mission to Sarajevo. The journey is long and arduous; we see them driving for some distance, then taking a train, and finally walking through a deep forest with mushy ground. They are tired and beat by the time they reach Sarajevo, only to be taken captive by the insurgents, before they can perform their play even once. After they are captured and brought before their executor, Camille and Jérôme get into a conversation with him and Camille tells him that he looks like Danton, the French revolutionary. Upon hearing this, he asks Camille if she is a philosophy teacher. When she tells him that she is a history teacher, he says that it is one and the same thing. He is someone who is well aware of the power and politics of knowledge, someone who reflects upon what he sees and observes, not someone who is simply in the war for the sake of a mindless power trip. Unlike the soldiers in *Les Carabiniers*, who are fighting the war simply on the orders of the King and thus use it to play around with the power vested in them, “Danton” has his own thoughts and ideology, about history, about the war and the impossibility of objectivity. However, because of this very fact, his belief in violence and his execution of Camille and Jérôme becomes more shocking. The soldiers were ignorant and resolved to brutal and impulsive killing as they celebrated their newfound power. Danton, on the other hand comes as a shock to the viewer because his intellectualism, ideology and understanding do not have any effect on his violent rebellion. He does not see the anomaly in his understanding of the world and his reaction to it. He and the other insurgents have clearly lost track of what they started out to do. They rebelled against the government in power in their country because they believed it was incapable of saving
their nation in crisis. However, they are not doing any better. They are killing at random, they are taking captive people who are in fact there to show them solidarity and forward their cause through different means. Most evident here is the fact that intellectual understanding and intention does not necessarily play out more successfully in a war than buffoonery and ignorance. Michelange and Ulysses were deceived by the war and so are Camille, Jérôme and Danton.

Thus, not only does Godard condemn war as forwarded by imperialistic motivations, he goes further to bring out the imperialization of war itself. For example, the Bosnian revolution started out as a rebellion against unjust and incompetent governing power in Bosnia. However, through various scenes in *For Ever Mozart* Godard explains how once the rebels have pushed the government out of power and declared insurgency in the country, they promptly assume the position vacated by the ruling body and do not fail to take on their attitude and behavior as well. During the visit of the Red Cross officials, one of the rebels comes into the room and says that he is bored and needs something to do. As a solution to his boredom, Danton simply tells him: “Va tirer un coup!” The war that originally started off as a statement for the marginals has in its own right come to power and thus abandoned the cause of the marginals. The ideals that it set out with have been left behind, forgotten and are even being contradicted now. For the very same people who were to be protected and fought on behalf of are now being taken captive and even killed at random because the rebels do not have enough massacres to keep them busy. As seen before, Camille and Jérôme too do not escape from this irony, from this massacre of the intellectuals by the intellectuals in the name of war.
Musical Interludes: Possible Redemption

The main thrust of Godard’s argument here is that greater understanding and intellect alone cannot change the nature of war. Just as the stupidity of Michelange and Ulysses contributed to their death, the intellect of Camille and Jérôme did not serve them any better. They too were killed in a war that had no place for their solidarity, understanding and will to propel a change in the system. There has to be something other than this that can change the war situation, then. It is at this point, after witnessing the death of Camille and Jérôme, that Godard’s camera returns to its sole surviving protagonist, Vicky Vitalis, in search of an answer to conflict.

We thus return to Vicky Vitalis who, full of despair and hopelessness from the situation in Sarajevo, has come back to make *Le Boléro fatal*. It is perhaps in cinema that he hopes to find the power to resolve conflict. However, we see throughout the production sequences, a very disgruntled and disturbed Vitalis. It is as if he is trying hard to believe in the capabilities of the cinema, all the while knowing, deep down, that the cinema has failed long ago in its mission to prevent war. From the very beginning, Vitalis appears to be completely disinterested in the film. He postponed the search for actors, then let himself be convinced to go away to Sarajevo with Camille and Jérôme and then only came back because he is unconvinced and unsure about the Sarajevo project as well. When he comes back, his complete lack of interest is still evident. He is bogged down by the demands of an unrelenting producer who wants nothing better for the film that to have in it a battle scene and be called *Le Boléro fatal*. The director’s vision is a non-issue for the producer Baron Félix:
As Vitalis is strictly told: “Vous avez reçu l’argent, maintenant il faut travailler M. Vitalis.” And so Vitalis does complete the film, maybe only for the money after all. However, Vitalis does not fail to mark his protest; when the scriptwriter insists that he film a battle sequence because the script demands it, Vitalis simply tears off the pages indicating a battle sequence from the script. If the scriptwriter sees no other reason to film the battle sequence but that it says so in the script, if he is unable to explain it in terms of its necessity or furthermore its indispensability to the film, Vitalis too has his ways of showing this to him.

After much difficulty, the film is finally completed and sent to the cinema hall, but it fails to generate interest and the audience prefers to go watch *Terminator IV* instead. They are not interested in watching a film on war, which has no nude scenes and no guns. For too long, cinema has whetted their appetites with these elements and they have finally started to crave and demand it themselves. In achieving this, cinema has failed for good; the problem is that all else has failed as well. Theatre, going to Sarajevo, being in the midst of the conflict and trying to resolve it with direct action, Vitalis has tried it all himself or through Camille and Jérôme. And it has all failed. He has come full circle, without having found a solution to war. He started with trying to make a film, gave it up to follow Camille to Sarajevo, and came back to complete his film. The answer then,

---

13 Godard has, from his earliest days, been trying to fight the money nexus involved in filmmaking. Lynn Higgins notes that after closing down the Cannes film festival of 1968, “Godard subsequently organized a film collective with a goal of creating a new kind of cinema—a new relation between cinema and power—by reshaping its processes of production.” (8)
must lie outside of this circular trajectory that *For Ever Mozart* has followed so far in the film. The circle and the repetition has to be broken if there is to be a possibility of a solution. And it comes to VITALIS, just as he has given up, as he is ready to try anything for it seems that nothing matters any more. And that is another of *For Ever Mozart*’s lessons: sometimes, one has to stop looking and take a step back in order to find what one has been looking for. At times, you have to let things find you when you have little success finding them. And to do that, you have to stop trying and stop thinking to just exist, thus clearing the path so that thoughts find a way of reaching you. This is *For Ever Mozart*’s clear message to VITALIS, CAMILLE and JÉRÔME, who unlike MICHELANGE and ULYSSES, counter war with intellect and fail in their effort to stop it. As VITALIS’ daughter tells him: “Il faut apprendre à tourner la page.” Alain Bergala explains:

> Apprendre à tourner la page, c’est réapprendre la légèreté qui permet de vivre. Une légèreté gagnée sur la souffrance, le contraire de la légèreté sans effort de ceux pour qui aucune page n’a jamais été trop lourde à tourner. (71)

Bergala is right to insist upon the fact that although intellectuals must learn to take a step back, this is not possible without them having taken a step forward. In other words, it is not possible for Michelange and Ulysses to take a step back, because they never made the effort to take a step forward. The lightness of being that Bergala discusses above is only achievable through suffering. But it is precisely because Vitalis has suffered and already taken that first step, that he must make the effort to turn the page and to get a better perspective on the situation.

> And this is precisely what Vitalis does; in the emptiness that surrounds him after
the failure of his film, he lets himself be, without thinking through it. He lets himself wander aimlessly, maintaining the status quo without questioning or analyzing it. And during one of these aimless wanderings, Vitalis finds his way into a recital hall where a piano player, dressed up as Mozart, is in concert. One gets the impression that: “Les riches viennent là par habitude, on a le sentiment que les autres sont appelés dans ce lieu inconnu par la musique, comme les enfants dans le conte du Joueur de flûte” (Bergala 68). Vitalis doesn’t even have to enter the concert hall for it to strike him that this is precisely what he has been looking for. Struck by the notes he hears, Vitalis just sits on the steps of the hall, the exhaustion finally hitting him as he realizes that he has found a possibility for peace:

Vieux cinéaste Vitalis, lui non plus, n’a même pas besoin d’entrer dans la grande salle de la maison de cristal, il lui suffit de s’asseoir au pied d’un pilier, en haut de l’escalier monumental, et d’écouter ces quelques notes de Mozart pour oublier cette fatigue qui l’accompagnait depuis le début du film. (Bergala 73)

Music, in those brief moments, gives him what his film failed to give him through the many months of production. Music connects first to raw emotion before it pervades into thought and rationality. Film too, has the power to connect to emotion before thought but as Godard has said, film has abused that power; instead of preventing wars, film has used that power to distract people from war rather than bringing their attention to it. This was explicitly brought out in *Les Carabiniers* in the postcard sequence. War film, in particular, merely entertains emotions with its depiction of violence and brutality, but
fails to then transfer that emotion into any kind of action against war. Williams and Temple explain:

At the risk of gross oversimplification, Godard’s principal thesis is that cinema reneged on its duty to represent reality. (...) In Godard’s way of thinking, it is a short step from the moment of criminal neglect to the current tyranny of mass-communications and “culture,” where the freedom and artistic potential of cinema have all but been destroyed.

(“Jean-Luc Godard: Images, Words, Histories” 99)

Godard’s argument of film having distracted people away from reality even though seemingly portraying that very reality is in agreement with that of Baudrillard’s argument of reality having been superseded by the profusion of images representing it. In his essay “The Evil Demon of Images and the Precession of Simulacra”, Baudrillard explains how the signifier-signified equation has changed because of this profusion of images:

(...) the whole system becomes weightless, it is no longer anything but a gigantic simulacrum— not unreal, but a simulacrum, never again exchanging for what is real, but exchanging in itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference.

So it is with simulation, insofar as it is opposed to representation. The latter starts from the principle that the sign and the real are equivalent (even if this equivalence is utopian, it is a fundamental axiom). Conversely, simulation starts from the utopia of this principle of equivalence, from the radical negation of the sign as value, from the sign
as reversion and death sentence of every reference. Whereas representation tries to absorb simulation by interpreting it as false representation, simulation envelops the edifice of representation as itself a simulacrum. These would be the successive phases of the image: it is the reflection of a basic reality. it masks and perverts a basic reality. it masks the absence of a basic reality. it bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum.

(194)

According to Godard, the images of war have undergone this very degeneration, such that by deluging the spectator with a profusion of stimuli in the form of images, the spectator now sees the images as reality. Consequentially, he doesn’t feel the need to do anything about this reality; there is nothing to be done to images other than to watch and consume them. The feeling that action is needed will ensue only if the images lead to the spectator questioning the reality being portrayed, not if the images replace reality itself.

In effect then, the message of For Ever Mozart is that not only do we need another art form that can stand up to war, but that this art form must inspire in us a deep understanding and feeling for the war situation and its victims. To counter the terror of war, we need a medium of expression that will not paralyze our senses with an over influx of stimuli but rather first arouse our compassion to the perils of war and then make us think through the situation to counter it. For Ever Mozart has shown that images have failed to live up to this challenge, and thus, to counter war, one needs the pervasion of our emotions like that which music achieved in the case of Vitalis. Music is what Godard
turns to after his despair in the power of the image, because music has not lent itself to the kind of abuse that the image has been subjected to.

In light of the larger arc of this thesis, once again, this solution does not show a more mellow Godard, or even a more resigned one as might be interpreted from Vitalis’ solemn demeanor full of despair. His statement that the 1990s are nothing but a repetition of the cowardice and chaos of the 1930s, with slight symphonic variations could be interpreted as the complete loss of hope that leads to the belief that nothing new is now possible, that art as well as History have reached their end and we are now left with nothing but the same stories and events that we will recycle forever. And indeed we have witnessed these repetitions in History, where wars and genocides have repeated themselves constantly. Morrey insists: “At a time when the West had never been so powerful, prosperous or self-satisfied, Godard’s continual evocations of the 1930s imply that it may actually stand on the brink of disaster.” (201)

However, I believe that Vitalis’ visit to the concert hall shows definite traces of a will to break this cycle. In fact, I believe that the very fact that Godard chose to end the film at the concert hall and not at the movie hall where people are asking for their money back to go to Terminator IV instead, is a definite sign of his protest against despair. It shows perhaps that sometimes one has to reach despair to really be forced to look elsewhere for an answer, but it definitely does not give up in the face of that despair. As in the two films analyzed in the previous two chapters, this radicalism is certainly less explicit than in Godard’s earlier work, it is less visually and verbally expressed, but is in fact concealed and made subtle so as to make the spectator really look for it. As we have seen from the example of Weekend with its savagery in the earlier chapter or the suicide
of Pierrot in *Pierrot le fou*, Godard has often appeared to be impossibly radical in his earlier work. In *Les Carabiniers* as well, the death of Michelange and Ulysses could be interpreted as the only option in the face of war, since by the end of the film, no other solution has been found. This was of course, an extreme reaction, but music as a solution to war is, although at the other end of the spectrum, an equally extreme solution. It may appear, at first view, to be a giving up in its own way, and indulging oneself as a means to escape the situation at hand. However, tired as he is, Vitalis seems highly unlikely to give up because all throughout the film, even when we keep expecting him to give up, he goes on. There is a good chance then that he is not looking to music to escape but rather to find the answer that he has been looking for.

**Film Form**

Before concluding, I would like, as in earlier chapters, to analyze the form of the two films to see and compare differences and similarities in aesthetic choices and study their effects on Godard’s argument in the two films. The most significant and obvious difference between *Les Carabiniers* and *For Ever Mozart* is the use of war footage in the former. The use of footage gives a documentary like feel to *Les Carabiniers*, taking one directly to the actual war in action. Ironically, *Les Carabiniers* features a fictional war with no reference to real places or names, and yet it uses footage from World War II, evident from the use of airplanes. This makes for a very strong contrast between the fictionality emphasized by the other props in the film and the real-feel of the footage. This tension helps in part to create in the spectator a sense of conflict or tension, which is
the subject of discussion in the film. Additionally, it also helps to put face to face the documentary and feature film form that have traditionally been separate and distinct, with the documentary’s claim to reality being higher than that of the feature film. The documentary has also always claimed the higher moral ground for having fulfilled its responsibility as to creating an awareness of war by bringing to its audience the real shots in all their horror. However, many documentaries later, we have still not stopped the violence or wars. We have still not renounced genocides and atrocities. By juxtaposing the documentary with fiction, Godard shows that the two forms are not so distinct after all; and that documentary has its fictional moments as well. For after all, a documentary is a compilation of real footage by an individual or a group of individuals. The very fact that it has to be ‘put together’ implies an element of choice, in what to include, in what order, and what to exclude as well. This choice adds something to the footage that it previously did not have, and therein lies the fictional element of the documentary because it is an element created by the documentary maker. The intermingling of the documentary and the feature film form in Les Carabiniers shatters this reality-myth of the documentary because it shows an overarching failure of image without making a distinction between the different kinds of images.

Les Carabiniers then assumes the failure of the feature film to stop war and its atrocities and delves more on the failure of the documentary. For Ever Mozart, on the other hand, goes back a little and explains that assumption. Although it discusses a real war, it doesn’t use any footage throughout the film. It focuses entirely on the feature film and through the making and failure of the film within the film—Le Boléro fatal, shows how the feature film has failed to stop war, even though it has talked a lot about war,
because of its focus on money and profits. The massive amounts of money involved in the making of a film put pressure on the film to earn back that money. And to earn back the money, the film has to entertain its viewers according to their demands. In addition, as the viewers are busy being distracted by cinema, elsewhere, war is being waged so that more money can be made.

The action of *For Ever Mozart* is also much smoother than that of *Les Carabiniers*; it is not broken and interrupted by titles, or voiceovers as in the latter. As Susan Sontag explains:

> The action of *Les Carabiniers* is broken into short brutal sections introduced by long titles, most of which represent cards sent home by Ulysses and Michelangelo; the titles are handwritten, which makes them a little harder to read and brings home to the movie audience the fact that it is being asked to read. (164)

While discussing films like *Bande à part, Alphaville, Le Petit soldat* and *Les Carabiniers*, Douglas Morrey points out that although earlier films such as *A Bout de souffle* and *Pierrot le fou* “often had moments of sober reflection contained within their playful packages (…)” the latter, “on the contrary, have moments of playfulness that tend to be subordinated to the prevailing sense of darkness (…) (31). The broken narrative is a definite sign of *Les Carabiniers*’ refusal to reflect within an entertaining set up and its will to subordinate the playful moments to deeper reflection. It marks Godard’s transition to a phase of filmmaking that will reflect at the cost of entertaining. It will demand the audience’s attention, through techniques like the handwritten titles mentioned above although this again may be at the cost of entertaining.
There is a definite lack of beautifully composed and visually soothing shots in *Les Carabiniers*, such as can be found in abundance in *For Ever Mozart*. However, even though *For Ever Mozart* may not be jarring in the same manner as *Les Carabiniers* it doesn’t fail to discomfort the spectator with the connections it makes through the juxtaposition of shots, even though smoothly transitioned.\(^{14}\) For instance, after Camille and Jérôme are shot to death in Sarajevo, the next frame shows the seaside on which *Le Boléro fatal* is being filmed and as part of the filming, two dead bodies are laid out on the beach:

\[
(\ldots) l'\text{équipe du film tombe sur un charnier tout a fait improbable au bord du lac. On en extrait deux corps } « \text{ encore vivants } » , \text{ on les dépose nus sur la plage ou une main va les vêtir d'habit de théâtre. Ils vont se relever, comme dans un film de Buñuel ou de Cocteau pour devenir les acteurs du Boléro fatal. (Bergala 70)}
\]

Bergala also gives another example of this sort of juxtaposition:

Un rapport d’images établie par Godard sur l’affiche du film suggère même que le jeune pianiste est d’une certaine façon la résurrection de Camille sous la forme d’un nouveau Mozart. Que des figures meurent en cours de film n’a plus le même sens si la trame qui continue de se

\(^{14}\) While discussing Godard’s editing in *For Ever Mozart*, Alain Bergala states: “Pour Walter Benjamin, une saisie véritable de l'Histoire réclame ce court-circuit: « L'image authentique du passé n'apparaît que dans un éclair […] C'est une image unique, irremplaçable, du passé, qui s'évanouit avec chaque présent qui n'a pas pu se reconnaître visé par elle. » Cette opération de reconnaissance et d'attraction instantanée entre deux images, effectuant leur jonction sur le mode de la fulguration picturale, Godard l'agit en plasticien, depuis dix ans, au moins autant qu'il pense en historien” (240).
It is as if Godard doesn’t need to rough finish his raw stock any more to visually disturb his spectator. He doesn’t need to break the action with titles to capture his spectators’ attention. He has found a way to soothe his spectator with long pans of a tree (in *Nouvelle vague*) or the sea (in *For Ever Mozart*) and at the same time disturb him as he brings next to it a shot composed of disconnected images brought together. It is as if Godard is willfully subverting the very montage that Bazin derided, favoring over its use, the use of depth of focus:

(…) depth of focus brings the spectator into a relation with the image closer to that which he enjoys with reality, therefore it is correct to say that, independently of the contents of the image, its structure is more realistic; (…) it implies, consequently, both a more active mental attitude on the part of the spectator and a more positive contribution on his part to the action in progress. While analytical montage only calls for him to follow his guide, to let his attention follow along smoothly with that of the director who will choose what he should see, here he is called upon to exercise at least a minimum of personal choice. It is from his attention and his will that the meaning of the image in part derives. (…) montage, by its very nature rules out ambiguity of expression. (35-36)

It is true that films have traditionally used montage, as Bazin describes it, to lull the spectator into a willful suspension of disbelief. However, Godard has been critical of this use since his very first film *A Bout de souffle*, in which he used the jump cut, which again
was a subversion of the technique of montage. This subversion has now reached new heights wherein he doesn’t even have to use the jump cut to surprise the viewer. He now uses a sort of collage-montage, which actually creates ‘the ambiguity of reality’ by bringing together distant images. This use of the means of traditional editing to achieve more radical ends is in keeping with his move towards being more subtly radical in his newer films.

In conclusion then, *For Ever Mozart* is more subtly radical than *Les Carabiniers* in both its form as well as its argument for music as a possible solution to the failure of the image. Although *Les Carabiniers*’ criticism of the failure of the image was harsh, it did not give up on the image in the same way as *For Ever Mozart* did because it did not propose an alternate medium of expression to the image. In that sense, it stuck by the image even though it was disappointed by its unrealized potential and abuse. *For Ever Mozart* goes a step further in the criticism of the image because it actually looks beyond the image to another art form for expressing what it could not through the image, even at the cost of being considered too far-fetched and ridiculous. In this way, *For Ever Mozart* takes this criticism to a new height, all the while being “softer” in its form than *Les Carabiniers*. 
Chapter 4

A Responsible Cinema: Le Mépris and Éloge de l’amour

Le Mépris (1963) is amongst Godard’s most widely watched films, not only because it was a big budget French-Italian co-production, widely distributed all over the world, but also because it featured one of France’s most famous stars—Brigitte Bardot. Le Mépris is frequently referred to as Godard’s most ‘mainstream’ venture, mostly because it uses a star-studded cast and a huge amount of capital, two characteristics traditionally associated with the mainstream system of film production. However, Le Mépris constantly undercuts this “mainstream-ness”, by making several self-references (by now a typical Godardian aesthetic device) to consciously break the spectator’s illusion of reality. In doing so, it becomes a very non-mainstream film in that it does not revel in mesmerizing the viewer but rather takes pleasure in challenging his suspension of disbelief and making him aware of the filmic fact. Le Mépris may then be mainstream in its production values, but it is certainly not so in its structure, which is mostly non-linear although not non-narrative. That is to say that although Le Mépris seems to have a story, that of the fallout of the relationship between Paul Javal, a French writer invited to work on the script of a film in Italy, and his wife Camille, it does not follow this story with a cause and effect narrative. The story does not necessarily determine the choice of shots in the film; the shots equally determine what we can make of the story. The spectator is invited, with the juxtaposition of certain shots, to flesh out the story from the skeleton.

Le Mépris is one of Godard’s films that received a significant amount of attention from scholars and critics alike. Godard’s most expensive film (largely due to the presence of Brigitte Bardot in a starring role), and one of his most successful, has also been written
about more extensively than most (Morrey 15). Most studies on *Le Mépris* discuss it primarily as a site for the falling apart of a marriage, and on a separate count as filmic discourse. For instance, Morrey summarizes:

*Le Mépris*, adapted from a novel by Alberto Moravia, tells of Paul Javal (Michel Piccoli), a scriptwriter who is working on an adaptation of the *Odyssey* for the American producer Jeremy Prokosch (Jack Palance) and the German director Fritz Lang (playing himself). In the course of this project, his wife Camille (Bardot) falls out of love with him. (16)

He then proceeds to first analyze the development of contempt in Paul and Camille’s marriage and then to analyze Godard’s take on cinema through the making of *The Odyssey* within *Le Mépris*. My objection to this separation of the two analyses of the film lies in the fact that I see these two as intrinsically connected in *Le Mépris*. It is therefore impossible for me to see the development of Camille’s contempt for Paul as separate from her contempt for a cinema that refuses its responsibility as a medium of serious thought. *Le Mépris* first explains what it means by serious cinema, then goes on to document the struggle for such a cinema, and in the final instance shows how a compromise on Paul’s part leads to Camille’s contempt for him as well as the lengths she goes in order to save him from those compromises.

Godard’s more recent film, *Éloge de l’amour*, will be an obvious choice for discussion alongside *Le Mépris* as it focuses on much the same concern, that of making a film as mode of serious thought and cinema’s responsibility to do so. Much like *Le Mépris*, *Éloge de l’amour* also intertwines the search for love with the search for a responsible cinema, but more explicitly. *Éloge de l’amour* has received slightly more
attention from critics and scholars than the earlier films of Godard’s post 80s work. However, it is still a relatively new film and therefore the subject of only a handful of articles and a couple of book chapters. Although most seem to accord *Éloge de l’amour* the serious critique it deserves, a few critics inevitably dismiss it completely. Jon Jost says of the film:

> One senses in the cumulative piece a tiredness of the work, of the failed (and illogical) fight, and of life. Godard was lost in Plato's cave from the outset, so he should not be surprised when this illusory ersatz world of film proves unsatisfactory – as a replacement for life, it is indeed a very unsatisfactory substitute. One should not need 71 years to fathom that.

In one sweeping motion, Jost not only dismisses *Éloge de l’amour*, but most of Godard’s work and more importantly his faith in cinema as an inseparable aspect of life today. Needless to say, I find this dismissal exaggerated and ungrounded. Godard has never really insisted upon film as a replacement for life, but rather rooted for film as an inseparable part of our life and times. Such a complete dismissal is not surprising though; most of Godard’s work has always received polemical reviews and *Éloge de l’amour* continues the trend.

In this chapter, I will build upon the work started in some of the articles and chapters on this film and further develop their argument about the role of cinema in society as seen by Godard. In keeping with the central question of this thesis, my larger aim will be to trace the changes in Godard’s outlook and presentation of the question of cinema’s responsibility to its viewers through a comparative analysis of the older and
newer film. Although cinema has been an underlying subject of concern in much of Godard’s work, his treatment of this question differs in the two films to be discussed in this chapter, primarily because he deals exclusively with this question in these films, whereas in other films, it was in relation to other questions such as war, and violence. Additionally, in both of these films, the search for a better cinema is weaved in with the search for love and the two are in fact inseparable in these films. It is particularly this link that I wish to focus on in my analysis and I believe that it is this link that will prove particularly strong when looking to re-capture cinema’s lost sense of responsibility to itself, to its art and to its viewers.

**Le Mépris**

**Production**

The first shot that I would like to analyze in some detail in my treatment of *Le Mépris* is the opening shot itself— that of Raoul Coutard, Godard’s long-term friend and cameraman on a trolley, filming the actress who plays the role of the translator in the film. Alain J J Cohen provides an in-depth explanation of this shot:

Raoul Coutard, Godard's cameraman for *Contempt*, is seen manning another camera proceeding on tracks toward the filming camera. Reflexivity intensifies with the realization that Coutard, just as Godard, is simultaneously on-screen and off-screen. At the end of the shot, there is increased humor, as the filming camera |S^sub 1^| produces an image of Coutard |S^sub 3^| swiveling the filmed camera 90° toward the filming camera, in a very low angle CU. The enunciative apparatus thus calls
attention to itself, in an instantaneous viewerly convocation. \( \mathrm{S}^{2} \)
will only retroactively re-establish which was the object-camera, and
which was the meta-camera\(^{15}\). (119)

As Coutard films the tracking shot of the translator, the camera filming him in
turn moves closer and closer until the actress is out of frame and it is Coutard who is in
full frame. Coutard then turns his camera from the actress to point directly at the camera
that is filming him. In what can be seen as an adaptation of the classic Lacanian child-
mirror episode, it is the spectator here who sees the camera looking directly at him. In
this particular moment he realizes that what he has been seeing is in fact what a camera,
very much like the one that is right now pointing at him, has been showing him.
Coutard’s camera here becomes the Lacanian mirror and the recognition of the spectator
is not of himself as another but in fact of the camera as the other eye, besides his own. He
is at once extremely aware of the fact that he is not seeing what he wishes to see but in
fact only what the camera has chosen to show him. Furthermore, towards the end of this
shot, by choosing to close in on Coutard rather than on the actress, as the spectator
trained in watching traditional films may expect, Godard is obviously jolting him,

\(^{15}\) At the beginning of his article, Cohen explains: “Three systems are interwoven in the composition of
filmic discourse:

1. System I (\( \mathrm{S}^{1} \)): the filmic apparatus and its enunciative organization, as it synthesizes director,
screenwriting and mise-en-scène, the camera, photography and light, the "star" system, the music and the
soundtrack, the montage, etc., all of which is conventionally stenologized by the director's name,

2. System II (\( \mathrm{S}^{2} \)): represents the spectator position as punctually constructed by \( \mathrm{S}^{1} \). This
filmically-constituted spectator is endowed with a technically delayed apprehension and intelligence of
\( \mathrm{S}^{1} \), and the rules of filmic self-interpretation. At the end of a screening \( \mathrm{S}^{2} \) will, retroactively,
mirror \( \mathrm{S}^{1} \).

3. System III (\( \mathrm{S}^{3} \)): The actorial level, i.e., the circuit of the filmic protagonists in representational
cinema.” (117)
warning him that he is seeing, not a film, but the making of a film, the art of the process, not the final product per se. The spectator is thus to be involved in the decisions and choices made. He is to see how they are made and observe the motives behind them, rather than merely enjoy (or suffer) the effects of those choices. A self-referential film roots for the cause of cinema as a medium of serious thought as it makes explicit this thought process. Having showed us a glimpse of what he actually means by a serious and committed cinema, Godard now proceeds to explore the possibility of making such a film.

The film being made in Le Mépris is The Odyssey. It is being financed by an American producer Jerry Prokosch and being directed by the famous German director Fritz Lang. Paul Javal is the French writer who has been invited to rewrite a few scenes from the original script. Paul is thus invited as an expert of sorts, to rewrite and provide the finishing touches to an already ongoing project. The choice of director and expert screenwriter are important. Although this is an American production, the producer has chosen to work with primarily non-American artists. This choice in some ways reflects an awareness or recognition on Prokosch’s part that filming The Odyssey is going to require the seriousness and depth that is generally associated with European and particularly French and German cinema. Godard has created a larger-than-life character in Prokosch, who is in more than one instance, shown to be an ignorant and yet extremely arrogant. He is “a caricature, the cardboard cutout of ugly American cultural imperialism” (Paige 6). He represents film producers who try to interfere with the shooting of a film, despite their ignorance of the art of filmmaking.
Furthermore, Prokosch has chosen to film in Italy, in the old studios of Cinecittà, instead of filming in America. This ensures that the crew will be non-American too. However, lest we think that Godard is trying to establish the superiority of European film artists, we see in the third scene from the film, and one that I will analyze in detail as well, the compromising attitude of the French screenwriter Paul Javal. Prokosch is both arrogant as well as condescending towards Paul in their first meeting itself. He explains via his translator that he is sure that Paul will accept this work with all the terms and conditions that he sets forth. When Paul questions his confidence, he explains: “Because you need money and you have a beautiful wife.” Contrary to our expectations, Paul does not refute Prokocsh’s claims in the least. He stays on and thus proves Prokosch right.

Godard delves right into the issue of finances at the outset of the film production process itself. Film is one of the most expensive mediums of expression and given the huge amounts of capital invested in it, it undoubtedly experiences the most stringent pressure from investors to earn back its revenue. This is a kind of pressure that other mediums of expression do not experience in the same measure. During the period of the making of Le Mépris, Godard himself had been struggling with traditional forms of film production and distribution. So much so that towards the end of the sixties, he broke away from these means to find alternative ways to finance personal film and video projects and find ways

---

16 Yvonne Baby explains, “(…) the imaginary has completely flowed over into life.” The latter words came from Godard himself, who ran into unpleasant difficulties, both before and after the shooting of the film. (37) When asked to explain the additional nude scene with Bardot that the producers forced him to add: “Basically,” Godard added thoughtfully, “The Americans had realized that they had paid more for Brigitte Bardot than she was going to bring in for such an endeavor—a ‘art film’ based on a difficult novel. The problems did not come from Brigitte Bardot herself—from the very beginning, she assumed responsibility for all the risks she had taken, and she always backed me up. Rather, it arose from what she represents today in the cinema and in industry. So when I called up the Americans and told them they could have ‘their’ scene, they were quite happy; it was as if I had given them a Christmas present…” (Baby 38)
of privately distributing them. Paul Javal, unlike the later Godard, does not opt out of the money system, but rather chooses to partake of it. He doesn’t mind that Prokosch makes an obviously disrespectful reference to his wife and at the end of the scene even makes a move on her.

To further show the control of capitalistic functions over European filmmakers, Godard involves in this discussion Fritz Lang, a director he has always revered. When Prokosch mentions to Paul that Fritz Lang will not only direct *The Odyssey* but will do it according to his demands, Paul is unbelieving at first. He explains to Prokosch that Fritz Lang has always been a man of principles and that in fact he even left Germany in 1933 when Goebbels asked him to head the German film industry. However, as Prokosch very arrogantly points out: “This is not 1933, we are now in 1963.” And times have indeed changed; the very Lang who fled Nazi Germany even though he was offered such a powerful and lucrative post, is now directing a film on the producer’s terms. And that producer is not quite in agreement with Lang’s style and approach to making *The Odyssey* as is clearly brought out by the next part of this scene.

**The Struggle for a Responsible Cinema**

This next part continues in a projection room, where Lang is showing rushes from *The Odyssey* that he has filmed so far. Prokosch invites Paul to the projection room, and while Paul and Francesca (the translator) walk down the short distance, Prokosch speeds to the venue in his sporty red car without offering them a ride. This is another proof of his arrogance, as well as Godard’s continued engagement with cars (previously discussed in the chapter on *Week-end* and *Nouvelle vague*) as symbols of capitalism that crush the
very humans that create them. This car motif returns towards the end of *Le Mépris*, as we shall see below.

As soon as the camera enters the projection room, we see that on the wall space above the screen is a famous quote by André Bazin: “Le cinéma substitue à notre regard un monde qui correspond à nos désirs.” An important aspect of Bazin’s film theory is the importance of presenting objective reality through cinema. Although Bazin primarily emphasized the use of mise-en-scène, long shots and deep focus to achieve this objective, Godard himself used montage, which Bazin opposed because it led to the manipulation of reality. However, as explained in the previous chapter, Godard’s use of montage is one in which the juxtaposition of two images does not produce or reinforce pre-conditioned responses within the spectator, but in fact takes care not to do that. His idea is to bring totally unconnected images together in an attempt to invite the spectator to search for his own meaning in the reality created by that juxtaposition. David Sterritt explains this juxtaposition as:

> Godard’s effort to create what might be called a “subjunctive cinema,” in which every important gesture— each image, sound, cut, superimposition, and so on— is less a link in an expository chain than a suggestion as to what such a link might be, subject to immediate questioning and revising by the filmmaker and the film itself. (35)

Therefore, although Godard used a method different from that professed by Bazin, his idea of inviting the spectator to participate in creating meaning from the reality presented by the camera was much in agreement with that of Bazin. And it is in this sense that this quote is a warning against what could happen in the film that is to become *The Odyssey*. 
This commitment to make the spectator think and not merely consume, threatens to be broken under the pressure of the producer’s interference. Despite Bazin’s warning and Lang’s deep commitment to make films that are not just another consumer product, it is both sad and ironic that precisely such a film is being made in the very presence and in fact with the involvement of Lang. And while Bazin’s quote can do nothing but look on in silence, Lang’s hands are tied by the producer’s money.

However, as we see next, Lang’s hands may be tied but they have not given up trying to untie themselves. In what follows, we see shots from the rushes of *The Odyssey*:

In his original treatment or “scenario” for *Contempt*, Godard wrote that the frame story should be filmed with as much natural light as possible, and the characters in it only lightly made up. The cinematic representation of *The Odyssey*, on the other hand, should be full of colors of a much greater brilliance, contrast, and violence. The overall effect should be of a Matisse or Braque painting in the middle of a Fragonard composition, or and Eisenstein shot in a film by Rouch. (Silverman and Farocki 38)

It is evident that Godard makes an effort to make the images from *Le Mépris* significantly different from those in *The Odyssey* such that the spectator is aware of the film within the film. At the same time, the images from *The Odyssey* make it amply clear that Lang’s effort is to make a film that does not fall into the trap of creating a spectacle of *The Odyssey*. Lang’s juxtaposition of white statues (with brightly colored eyes and lips) and real actors creates the effect of Godard’s juxtaposition of contrasting images to create meaning. Jacques Aumont explains the use of this juxtaposition:
Avec cette forme, Godard (…) ne déguise pas l’émotion entièrement sous la fiction et les personnages, mais fait saillir une énergétique pure. Pure émotion parce que pur rythme ; pure forme parce que pur mouvement: non pas belle mais pure et énergique—telle est la belle forme que Godard invente pour le cinéma. (98)

At one point during the screening, as we are watching for the first time a real actress instead of the statues discussed above, Prokosch appreciates this contrast and its use to jolt the spectator. However, whereas Lang uses this technique with a belief in the capabilities of the spectator to appreciate this unusual choice, Prokosch, in his characteristically arrogant style, tells Lang that he really likes the shot, but wonders if the spectators will understand its significance. This appreciation, however, disappears by the end of the rushes:

Instead of seeing the Odyssey as a heroic story enacting a universal human struggle, Prokosch prefers to see it as a modern melodrama and imagines that a fickle Penelope has been unfaithful to a neurotic Odysseus. Save for the image of a naked woman posing as a mermaid, Prokosch dislikes what he sees, and, after verbally and physically expressing his disgust, he gets out his cheque book to write Paul an advance. (Hayes 34)

From Prokosch’s outburst, it is clear that Lang’s idea for the film is very different from his own. He accuses Lang of betraying him and not filming exactly according to the script. Prokosch also feels that the film should have more mermaids, representing the kinds of desires that Bazin’s quote refers to. When Francesca gets a copy of the script, Lang shows Prokosch that he has in fact filmed the battle that Prokosch claims has been
left out. Lang, evidently does not ‘see’ the script as Prokosch does. He is, however, very mild in his opposition even when Prokosch verbally abuses him and throws cans of film reels across the room at him like a discus thrower.

This is of special significance because Prokosch’s pose when he throws the cans strikingly resembles the famous statue of the Discobolus by the Greek sculptor Myron from the 5th century BC. Lang’s white marble statues in The Odyssey very much resemble this statue in style and Prokosch’s emulation of the Discobolus can be read as more than his appreciation of high culture. He not only appreciates and understands it, but will not hesitate to use it against Lang. Prokosch not only understands art, but is ready to use and manipulate it to reach his own goals. As Emily Brontë in Godard’s film Week-end says of Roland and Corinne: “They only want knowledge in so far as they can resell it.” And that is the fundamental difference between him and Lang. Whereas Lang wants to make a film that will challenge the spectator even if it means not making a popular film, Prokosch appreciates The Odyssey, only as far as it will help him make a film that will sell. After lashing out at Lang, Prokosch moves on to Paul and asks him if he would be able to rework the script from what he has just seen. Paul hesitates; he is clearly an admirer of Lang as is evident from his defense of Lang during his first conversation with Prokosch discussed above. In a long look that he and Lang exchange, it is clear that Paul likes Lang’s approach to the film and not Prokosch’s. However, as Prokosch takes out his checkbook and writes a check of ten thousand dollars and holds it up to Paul, he just quietly takes it and puts it in his pocket. Paul’s initial silence signifies his opposition to Prokosch’s attitude and approach to filmmaking and the producer’s complete control over

---

17 More on this scene from Week-end in Chapter 1.
the shooting of the film. However, his subsequent acceptance of the check signifies his incapability of rejecting the money; the money that will allow him to buy the apartment that his wife loves. As Lang watches Prokosch take out his checkbook, he says to Francesca: “In my days, the Nazis would take out revolvers, now they take out checkbooks.”

Paul’s silence and Lang’s comments both register their protest against Prokosch’s complete control over the making of the film. At the same time, Paul’s acceptance of the check, as well as Lang’s continued involvement with the film as its director, register their helplessness in the face of the money factor. Lang, at least for now, seems to have found a way of having his cake and eating it too. He bears Prokosch’s outburst and says nothing to oppose him, but he says nothing to indicate that he will do anything to change what he has filmed either. As we shall see from further scenes of the shooting of The Odyssey and particularly from the one at the end of Le Mépris, Lang continues to use a combination of marble statues and actors as described above. The outcome of Paul’s struggle, however, remains to be seen. It is not clear if he will find a way to make a film he believes in or will succumb to Prokosch’s demands and compromise.

**Love and the Love of Cinema**

As I pointed out in the introduction to this chapter, Le Mépris is most intriguing in its interweaving of the search for love and the search for a better cinema. In effect, what is at stake in Le Mépris is commitment, in life and in one’s work. It is the inseparability of Paul’s lack of commitment to both, that makes the case for Camille’s contempt for him and her death in the film. This section of the chapter will explore the connection between
Paul’s compromise in accepting to work on *The Odyssey* and Camille’s interpretation of this as his lack of commitment to cinema as well as to his love for her.

At the end of the projection, Camille meets Paul outside the studio where he introduces her to Jeremy Prokosch. He invites Paul and Camille to have a drink at his place and asks Camille to get into his car. He tells Paul that there isn’t enough space for him, and that he should take a cab and meet them directly at the villa. Critics have seen this as the first step in the deterioration of Paul and Camille’s relationship, the development of contempt and their eventual fallout:

Once Camille appears at the studio, Prokosch invites both her and Paul to his home, expressing his hope that she will ride in his sports car while Paul takes a taxi. Camille hesitates, yet Paul insists, making her suspect he is trying to pass her off on to the producer to advance his professional career. Paul’s insistence provokes her contempt, and his belated arrival at Prokosch’s home helps confirm her suspicions. Since she does not vocalize them, Paul remains unaware of the reason for her sudden coldness. (Hayes 35)

I would like to add to this observation, that this is also the first instance where Camille learns of Paul’s acceptance of Prokosch’s offer. I would thus like to see Paul’s acceptance of Prokosch’s offer to drive Camille alone in his car to his villa more symbolically as an acceptance of Prokosch’s dominance in general—in his personal life, as well as in his work as we have previously discussed. The development of mistrust and contempt in their relationship can thus be seen as Camille’s contempt for Paul’s professional choices as well. As Camille gets into Prokosch’s car, there seems to be a
fleeting moment when Paul realizes what he has done. Camille calls out to him as Prokosch drives the car away, and Paul calls out her name too, but in vain, as the car is almost out of sight.

This moment as I see it, is the crucial moment of choice for Paul. Paul’s decision to accept Prokosch’s complete dominance over the film has no doubt been a difficult one. The obvious expression of guilt on his face as he accepts the check in the previous scene is proof of this hesitation and difficulty. Even after having made the decision, it is but natural for him to reconsider it. In this scene as well, the split second shot of Paul’s face as Prokosch and Camille drive away shows that moment of self-doubt, realization, and choice that he can still seize, to change his decision. But Paul makes a rather lame attempt to reverse his decision. If he really wanted to, he could have run after the car longer, found a way of stopping Prokosch or at least followed his car closely. If he really wanted to, he could have returned the check and made his way out, especially after having seen how Prokosch behaved with Lang, his total disrespect for the director’s vision, and his autocratic and tyrannical method of production. Instead, as we see in the next scene, Paul arrives about half an hour later at Prokosch’s villa, and with no evident intentions of making his way out, either of Prokosch’s villa or his film.

Critics have seen in Camille’s ensuing contempt, a loathing for Paul’s inability to protect her as she expects him to. Again, I would like to further this observation in the direction of Paul’s inability to defend his aesthetics as well. Lest the very first scene of the film where there is a full length nude shot of Camille lulls us into thinking of her as the ‘blond’ of the film, Godard, in a move that is again very typical of his films, nuances her character and shows her reading books on art as well as on films. In the very next
scene, we see Camille reading out aloud a quote by Fritz Lang, from a book she is reading. Even as Paul is continuously asking her about the sudden change in her behavior and attitude towards him, she is looking at photographs of sculptures, of the kind that we see in the rushes of the film. If he wanted to, Paul could have perhaps read in Camille’s silence a strong opposition to his acceptance of Prokosch’s oppression. In the photographs she was looking at, Paul could have seen her commitment to a serious study of art and an understanding and respect for it. Instead, Paul chose to see in Camille’s silence an inexplicable, sudden and therefore irrational change in attitude towards him, a fact that he does not fail to constantly mention in this scene as well as the next one.

Having said this, I must add that, in a very dramatic manner, Godard inserts into this scene a shot of Paul flirting with Francesca the translator. Francesca is upset over the demeaning manner in which Prokosch treats her and is in tears over this. Paul tries to comfort her with a story and later, as he is heading upstairs, touches her inappropriately. Camille, who is entering through the door at that very moment, witnesses this gesture. However, instead of a scène de ménage, what we witness is Camille’s silence. Later on, in the next scene in their apartment Paul asks Camille if she is upset because he was flirting with Francesca, and again his question is answered with silence. This insertion blurs the line then, between whether Camille’s contempt for Paul stems from an intellectual or emotional point of view. My understanding is that it is a little of both, it is perhaps impossible for it to be either one or the other, for if Camille were not in love with Paul to begin with, she would not have been this upset over his professional choices. On the other hand, if Paul had not started making compromises in his professional career and loathing himself for it, he would have probably not felt the need to demean a woman
either. Camille is perhaps upset at Paul’s self-loathing from which his demeaning of Francesca stems. His professional and personal lives are inextricably intertwined; it is impossible for him to be committed in one and uncommitted in the other. If there is a lack of commitment in one, it is bound to spill over into the other. It is in this sense that I argue then that it is not perhaps the impossibility of cinema that Godard is lamenting here or in Éloge de l’amour as we will see below, but more the impossibility of cinema without love or love without cinema in these two films.

I will further illustrate this in an in-depth analysis of Le Mépris’ most famous scene and one that has been most discussed in almost all the studies of this film. This scene is of a long dialogue between Camille and Paul, a dialogue in which their relationship oscillates between falling out of love, falling in love again and finally falling out of love. Thus, most studies analyze this scene in terms of the precise development of contempt in Paul and Camille’s relationship and Godard’s unconventional treatment of the scene. I will analyze this scene to see how it reflects Paul and Camille’s differing aesthetics and particularly film aesthetics.

After leaving Prokosch’s villa, Camille and Paul come back to their apartment and as they are walking towards it, Paul explains to Camille that accepting to work on The Odyssey will make it possible for them to keep the apartment that they both like so much. As they enter the apartment we see that it is decorated with bright colors, enhanced by the abundance of light entering through the large windows. There is a mid-size statue

---

18 Royal S. Brown explains: “In this long shot in Le Mépris, on the other hand, the camera pans hypnotically back and forth in a totally arbitrary fashion that is obviously divorced from what is taking place within the narrative. By filming the entirety of a banal marital argument in a single shot, Godard seems to be daring the audience to be bored. He thus uses a balletlike camera rhythm where other directors would have edited together logical series of shots.” (115-116)
of a woman near the door leading to the bedroom passage and there is another door leading to the kitchen, which Camille enters straightaway. This door is an interesting one as it has a frame but no glass. This means that one can step into the kitchen without having to open the door. The apartment, in all its beauty looks more like a set than like a real apartment. One purpose here is obviously Godard’s need to make the spectator aware of the filmic fact. Yet another could be to demonstrate Camille’s interest and study of films and film sets, as I have previously discussed.

In fact, the entire scene can be seen as an understanding of the process of making a film and the demonstration of that understanding by Camille and Paul. For instance, after Camille sets the table, she goes inside to take a bath and afterwards we see her putting on a bathrobe and then changing into an evening dress. This could be a typical scene from the life of Camille and Paul; however, I would justify my seeing it as a definite and purposeful act of cinema because of the wig that Camille puts on here. A wig is a clear symbol and marker of the fact of assumed personalities, of fiction, and generally of cinema. In the case of Le Mépris, it is further proof of Camille’s love for cinema. The wig is notably and interestingly black, thereby playing with the notion of the ‘blond’ and breaking that image by its exaggerated and literal use.

Camille and Paul’s play with the frame-door is intriguing too. Sometimes they enter it by opening it, whereas sometimes they just step through the frame because there is no glass in it. This simultaneous dual awareness of the door as an element of the diegesis and extra-diegesis furthers the play involved in Camille and Paul’s movements and gives another dimension to their fallout if we see it through the lens of this play. We see that just as Camille plays with the wig, changes clothes and walks around the
apartment exploring its elements, Paul too follows her cues and himself changes 
clothes, puts on a robe like a Greek cloak, and plays with his hat and cigar— both evident 
genre motifs. As he is doing this, it seems that the argument between Camille and Paul 
starts to clear up a little bit. If Paul can follow her cues and therefore appreciate her 
understanding and play with cinematic elements, it shows Camille that he agrees with her 
that cinema is a medium of serious thought. By following Camille around, picking up her 
cues and following up on her dialogue, he shows that he understands the play involved in 
cinema, he understands that this play can be used to involve the spectator in the 
construction of meaning and understanding of the reality that is being presented to him. 
And yet, at the end of this ‘play’ Paul goes back to his typewriter and starts writing a 
piece for Prokosch’s script. This is the breaking point for Camille as she walks into the 
room and sees him typing the story that he is also reading out aloud to himself. Having 
realized the futility of her effort, Camille goes back to being cold and distant, as she has 
made the final break. After this point in the film, there is no trace of love left between her 
and Paul until her escape with Prokosch and their violent death in the car crash. Morrey’s 
stand is such:

(…) we should point out that the end of Le Mépris, in which Camille and 
Prokosch die together in a car crash, tends to appear as distinctly arbitrary 
and, as such, it is difficult not to conclude that Camille is being punished 
for her actions, and punished indeed for her gender which appears solely 
responsible for those actions. The sudden death at the end of Le Mépris 
has no generic or narrative motivation like Michel’s death in À bout de
However, I would like to argue that not only is Camille’s death not arbitrary, but quite to the contrary, it is essential to the link between cinema and love, and the defense of one’s aesthetic in the one and in the other, as I have tried to explain above. Therefore, I read in Camille’s escape with Prokosch, a last attempt to save *The Odyssey* from making itself into a product for consumption. I see in Camille a martyr for the cause of a better cinema, and perhaps the shooting we see at the end of *Le Mépris* will benefit from her death, which has eliminated Prokosch with it. Lang and Paul can finally move beyond the mermaids and portray in *The Odyssey* a struggle of man against his circumstances, of the director against the producer and most of all, of the spectator against a tyrannical cinema.

It is especially Camille’s death that confirms my reading of her love for a better cinema and the inseparability of that love from her love for Paul, which explains her desire to save him from making another film to be sold and consumed. Camille’s contempt is not only for Paul letting Prokosch make advances towards her, it is equally for Paul letting Prokosch make of *The Odyssey* yet another product to entertain the spectator and lull him away from thinking for himself.

If Godard had avoided Camille’s death in the film and simply shown her eloping with Prokosch, this would have undermined Camille’s commitment to a better cinema. Camille never was in love with Prokosch or the kind of cinema he made. If she flirted with Prokosch during the filming of *The Odyssey*, it was only to make Paul jealous, and therefore facilitate his break with Prokosch. This is evident from the fact that Camille is never intimate with Prokosch when Paul is not watching. Whenever she flirts with him,
she makes sure that Paul can watch them. So it is not that she did not try other, less severe ways than suicide in a car crash to save Paul from himself. But Paul ignored her warnings, her pleading and even her threats. In the end, she had no choice but to die and take Prokosch with her. Her death also suggests a contempt for herself, for being unable to show Paul the value of being committed. Her death was her last effort to restore some dignity to *The Odyssey* and in that she succeeded, as seen in the last scene of the film discussed above.

As we will see in the second part of this chapter, this search for love and for a better cinema is a connection that has only begun in *Le Mépris*. Whereas Camille’s death was inevitable to saving Paul’s soul in *Le Mépris*, in *Éloge de l’amour*, Paul returns as Edgar to find his commitment to both love and cinema. Whereas he had to be rescued by Camille’s death in *Le Mépris*, in *Éloge de l’amour* he learns to save himself by constantly reflecting on the image as well as on love and, in turn, on life itself.

*Éloge de l’amour*

**The Business of Cinema: Buying a Story**

*Le Mépris* began by demonstrating the kind of cinema that it considered responsible— one that makes the spectator aware of its making, thereby inviting him to participate in the construction of meaning from the images shown. *Éloge de l’amour* begins by defining the kind of cinema it is rallying against, the kind of cinema that has led to the downfall of the image, according to Godard. The first scene from *Éloge de l’amour* that I will analyze in this context is actually the last scene in the film. However, as a subtitle announces, it actually takes place two years before the rest of the film that
we have watched so far since the beginning. This scene revolves around the selling of
the story of M. and Mme Bayard to Spielberg and Associates. M. and Mme Bayard have
been a part of the French Resistance and now live in Bretagne where they run a small
restaurant. However, the restaurant has not been running too well and M. Bayard needs
money to keep it from closing down. At this time, Edgar is a student and he is there to see
the couple in connection with his thesis on Catholics in the French Resistance. The film
deal is being discussed as he is sitting with M. Bayard upstairs in the house. Mme Bayard
and her niece, Berthe, are downstairs with the representatives from Spielberg and
Associates.

The film company has offered to pay M. and Mme Bayard 50,000 francs for their
story. As the representative starts reading out the contract, he mentions that the film will
be shot in America. Berthe interrupts to ask him which America he means when he says
that, since America can mean both North as well as South America. He answers that he
means, of course, the United States of America. To which, she counters, that the States of
Mexico are also united as are the states of Canada, both of which also fall in North
America. The residents of the former are called Mexicans and those of the latter are
called Canadians. She asks him what the residents of the country he is mentioning are
called. Upon his silence, she explains that it is no wonder that these residents have to buy
the stories of others—since they don’t even have a name for themselves, it follows that
they have no stories of their own.

Although this part of Éloge de l’amour can be interpreted as a case for personal
vendetta against Spielberg and American cinema, knowing Godard’s deep commitment
to and respect for cinema, I see this more as an agenda against the kind of cinema that
Spielberg makes. It is the kind of cinema that Godard has wholeheartedly argued against since the beginning and definitely more aggressively since the 70s, particularly in his mega video project *Histoire(s) du cinéma*. One of the main concerns of *Histoire(s) du cinéma* is to demonstrate one of cinema’s greatest failures according to Godard: the failure to record and notify the world of the horrors of the concentration camps. Later on, even after cinema had tried to redeem the situation with films such as Alain Resnais’ *Nuit et Brouillard*, it failed to prevent more such horrors from happening. In effect then, cinema’s greatest failure has been its failure to remember and make the world efficiently remember. Jacques Aumont explains Godard’s raw pain over this failure:

> Si le cinéma—et lui seul—avait la capacité de préserver la réalité, d’atteindre à une connaissance de l’évènement, mais surtout, de réorganiser en permanence toute l’histoire et toute la politique de manière qui fût véritablement compréhensible, pourquoi n’a-t-il pas œuvré en ce sens, et en ce sens exclusivement— ce qui peut-être aurait sauvé le siècle de la barbarie ? « Seul le cinéma » avait le pouvoir de lier voir et mémoire, et on sent bien que dans cette assertion de Godard, il y a le plus violent reproche: que ne l’a-t-il fait ? (166)

Godard has very controversially claimed personal responsibility for standing by and letting Spielberg make a film about the holocaust that in no way served to remember, but in fact served to lull the audience into believing that the situation had been restored, and that the horror was over. In reality, the horror was far from over, as was evident from the ethnic violence in Kosovo shortly afterwards.
Given this commitment to a responsible cinema, I will treat references in *Éloge de l’amour* to American cinema and Spielberg as references to a kind of cinema, very close to the ‘cinéma de papa’, but even more dangerous. This was the kind of cinema that Godard and his fellow *Cahiers* members had rallied against at the birth of the New Wave. Notable in this rally was, of course, François Truffaut’s “Une certaine tendance du cinéma français”, wherein Truffaut rallies for a more personal cinema, a cinema that tells its own stories, the stories of its life and times, rather than the stories of great novels. As we shall see below, even today, reflecting upon and telling its own story is cinema’s only hope to save itself.

And it is this very own story that Edgar sets out to find, when he starts making his own film two years later. This is now the first scene of *Éloge de l’amour* —Edgar is discussing the making of his new film, which talks about love in its four stages—meeting, physical attraction, separation, and reunion. He insists that the film must explore these stages through the stories of three couples, one young, the other adult and the last, an old couple. And it is not so much to express what he has already found, that he wants to make the film. Quite to the contrary, as he explains to an actress who is auditioning for the film, he is in search of something through this story of love: “Ce quelque chose, c’est un des moments, un des quatre moments de l’amour; à savoir: la rencontre, la passion physique, et puis, la séparation, et puis les retrouvailles.” In other words, his film is not about the story of his principal character Églantine, but about “un moment de l’Histoire, la grande Histoire qui passé à travers Églantine, le moment de la jeunesse. On peut dire que c’est une étude sociologique.”
It is not so much a story then that Edgar seeks, but something that his film would have found as it is being made. The story of the film will be the story of that journey. It will be a story of the search for love, which the film wants to seek, and a search for film as a medium through which that love will express itself. This intertwining of love as a basic force of life and cinema is what I will explore in the next part of this chapter. It is this intertwined search that began in *Le Mépris* and continues in *Éloge de l’amour*. As will be evident through my discussion, the search for love leads Edgar to a search for life; to seek what it means to live through the journey from youth to old age.

**In Search of Something**

As Edgar continues his search for actors for his film, he remembers meeting Berthe, Mme Bayard’s niece, two years earlier and remembers that she had some very interesting ideas about cinema, that she had expressed during the sale of Mme Bayard’s story to Spielberg and Associates. Edgar finds out that she now works at the SNCF rail yard and he drives there one night to meet her. He asks her how it went with the Americans and she answers “Quels Américains?” just as she had two years earlier. Later on, during another conversation, as he mentions “Les Américains” again, she insists that Mexicans and Brazilians are also Americans, because they too live in the continent of America. So if he means Americans from the United States, he should specify that. Edgar agrees and continues to explain his project to her, but she refuses to be a part of it. She feels that she is not right for the role and that she has nothing to bring to the film. Edgar is evidently very attracted to her and pursues her as she leaves work and starts walking home.
The following long scene, which I shall proceed to analyze in this section, concentrates on the intense discussion between Edgar and Berthe. What starts out as a pursuit of love continues as a pursuit of life, as Edgar and Berthe start talking and end up walking around the city all night long and into the morning. Their discussion is not centered on the project per se or on Edgar’s interest in her, but touches upon several issues that arise from the idea of the project and his interest in her.

For instance, Edgar mentions that his project is getting off track all the time. When Berthe asks him what its track is, he mentions that it is the route from youth to old age. And on this route, the quest is that of adulthood, because as Edgar has explained earlier in the film, an adult is the only person who is not immediately defined by the sole fact of being an adult. For example, when one looks at a young person, one says, here’s a young person, and the same for an old person. However, we never look at someone and say, here is an adult. This means that adults have no specific quality that makes them immediately and simply defined as such. Edgar feels that this is because no one really knows what it means to be an adult. Morrey elaborates:

Young people project themselves into the future in an effort to define an identity; old people reminisce about the past in an attempt to interpret who they have been. Adults live in the present, that is to say a point in time that does not exist, since it is continually slipping away to be replaced by another present. It is in this invisible present that a life exhausts itself.

(237)

However, it is precisely because adults are the only ones living in the present that they are the only ones that can change this present, which will be the youth’s future and their
own past once they reach old age. From his quest to be an adult and find out what it means, it seems that the single most important quality that Edgar is seeking is this responsibility to make a change in the present, to assume the past and see it through the present so as to avoid recreating the errors of the past in the present. For time and again, the discussion comes back to a lack of responsibility.

Several times in the film, we hear bits of dialogue about young Jewish girls rounded up in Nazi Germany or the violence of the Kosovo Albanians in face of the atrocities they suffered. And each time, the focus is not on a global and therefore detached, objective perspective of these events, but, on the contrary, always through the story of one person (as in the case of the Jewish girl being rounded up) or a group of persons (a Kosovo Albanian recounting with horror how they retaliated with the same atrocities as those they suffered). Morrey opines:

The main difference, it seems to me, from the 1990s films, is the extent to which history, in Éloge de l’amour, has become cumbersome. There was already a sense, in the earlier work, that the responsibility of history was a considerable burden, but it was a burden Godard seemed only too willing to assume. Éloge, on the other hand, appears marked by a degree of doubt as to the ultimate utility of so much historical reflection. Éloge de l’amour is a film weighed down by the presence of history. (230-231)

He further elaborates:

Éloge de l’amour seems painfully aware of the extent to which our obsession with the past threatens to block our progress in the future. This
is suggested by the film’s brief evocation of a stop on Paris’s suburban
tramway that has been named Drancy-Avenir. Ironically, the evocation of
a ‘future’ in Drancy serves only to recall its shameful past, as the site of a
Nazi holding camp for prisoners awaiting deportation. Similarly, a
discussion of the crisis in Kosovo focuses on our apparent inability to
learn from the lessons of the past. (…)

If the weight of the past can hinder action in the present, then it
also hinders creation, and Éloge de l’amour at times appears so
preoccupied with images of the past that the creation of new images comes
to seem a virtual impossibility. This may be the sense of the blank pages
of a book through which Edgar leafs at intervals throughout the film: the
difficulty of creating new works of art when one is all too aware of those
that have gone before. (232)

Although I agree that Éloge de l’amour is ‘weighed down’ by the presence of history, I
disagree with Morrey on the count that the film questions the utility of historical
reflection. In fact, it becomes more and more evident as the film progresses, that a
historical reflection is inevitable if we are ever to unburden ourselves of the guilt for our
lack of taking responsibility throughout history. It is not by avoiding this reflection that
we are going to be able to move past it. Quite to the contrary, it is by assuming this
daunting task that we have a chance to redeem ourselves from its burden. The burden is
not of history itself, but of our lack of taking responsibility and apathy to its repetition.
And in this context, the blank pages of Edgar’s book represent a new beginning, a new
assumption of responsibility and the creation of new works of art that, unlike the earlier
ones, don’t ‘sell’ history, but rather remember it to learn from it. It may be a while before those blank pages are filled, but the very fact that Edgar has taken the initiative and found the courage to go back to a blank page, rather than try and rework an older written page, is a sign of his commitment. In effect, responsibility and adulthood lie in seeing and reflecting upon this passage of history through each individual story and experience, just as Edgar wants to see in his film: the passage of a particular moment of history through the story of Églantine. And it is also this history which passes through us that cinema needs to recognize and depict. It is in the everyday and everyone that we must learn to recognize history, only then will we truly learn from it. As Godard explains in an interview:

Take concentration camps, for instance. The only real film to be made about them— which has never been made because it would be intolerable— would be if a camp were filmed from the point of view of the torturers and their daily routine. How to get a human body measuring two metres into a coffin measuring fifty centimeters? How to load ten tons of arms and legs on to a three-ton lorry? How to burn a hundred women with petrol enough for ten? One would also have secretaries making lists of everything on their typewriters. The really horrible thing about such scenes would not be their horror but their very ordinary everydayness.

(Godard on Godard 197)

And it is because cinema has refused to show these atrocities that exist in the ordinary, that it has failed to bring justice. As a voice over narrator in the film admits: “The judgment of war crimes, of crimes against humanity, remains to be done.” It is because,
as Edgar points out, we have merely been “watching impotently, as part of the profession.” Watching is not enough; it is necessary to be able to see that which is masked by ordinariness or the everyday. As the constant intertitles ‘de l’amour’ and ‘de quelque chose’ remind us, the search must be constant and persistent. And this search will not be possible without love. For if there is no love for one’s partner, for one’s spouse, for one’s children and by extension for humankind, there is no need for anything else. If there is no love for humankind, there is no need to prevent atrocities, no need to remember and no need for a cinema that remembers. And so they intertwine—the search for love and the search for a better cinema.

And unlike Morrey’s interpretation, Éloge de l’amour is far from giving up on this search. In fact, it shows a certain renewed hope in the redemption of the image on Godard’s part. Whereas towards the end of For Ever Mozart it seemed as if Godard seemed hopeless about the failure of the image and of cinema, it is as if he cannot let go of the image, no matter how convinced he is of its failure. He comes back to it again and again, to dig at it and see if there is any chance to redeem it, even in its most abject failure. And it seems as if in Éloge de l’amour, he sees a certain possibility of redemption. It is by depicting, as Edgar explains to Berthe: “pas votre histoire, ni la mienne, mais la nôtre. Même si on ne se connaissait pas. L’Histoire” that cinema can redeem itself. It is by seeking history in a particular moment of an ordinary life that cinema can bring history in all its glory and horror into the everyday. It is by doing this that we shall be forced to face it as our present, without merely expressing grief over it as our past. When we see the horror as being very much rooted in our present, we can no longer lull ourselves into believing that the chaos is over and peace has been restored. For
peace has not and will never be restored as long as we refuse to see in the present what we have so far pushed away into the past.

But the problem arises in nations like the U.S. where there is a lack of the past or of a significant history. Edgar says in *Éloge de l’amour*:


The more critical problem at hand here, is not the buying of other people’s memories, but rather the abuse of those memories once they are bought:

> (...) by treating these memories as a market commodity, Spielberg would wrest them from both individual resisters and their national community of memory. That the quintessential voice of American culture, Steven Spielberg, would move from the story of Schindler to that of the Bayards is simply an illustration for Godard of the fact that Americans have to buy the memory of others (a raw material which it processes and sells back as mass culture). (Reid 80)

It is true that a nation without a past of its own does not have the opportunity to see the horrors of its present in light of the past; it does not have a history to learn from. In that case, it is natural, important even, that it learn from the history of other nations. Godard has always been one to consider the connections in the history of the world, from the concentration camps, to Palestine to Kosovo. He is the first to hold everyone responsible for these repeated mistakes, not just the people who witnessed these atrocities first hand.
What he strongly resents though, is the mere act of possessing these memories and using them to sell images that not only do nothing to connect the past to the present, but, quite to the contrary, lull the spectator into thinking that the past is the past, that the horrors of the past have been neatly resolved and even that justice has been brought to the victims of these crimes against humanity. When what has really happened is that justice is not even close to being brought, violence still runs amok in society and crimes like these are repeated time and again, each time with a severity that is alarming, to say the least. What is even worse is that the more these crimes are repeated and the more our images show us these crimes without making us question them, the more we are lulled into accepting these as an unavoidable part of our lives. It is truly as Edgar says— after a point these images don’t say anything. They merely act as tranquilizers to keep us from fully experiencing the pain of our lives, the pain of the injustice and of the immense task of confronting it. And this in turn only further perpetuates the mentality that created the violence in the first place.

Having said this, it is equally important to note that Godard does not fail to see the immensity of the task of creating such images as will counter the trend of the images currently being made and sold. As is evident from Edgar’s experience, sometimes it becomes necessary to abandon a project if one cannot find a way to not make it yet another consumable product. But Godard seems to say that in that case, it is better not to make a film than make one that will, in any way, undermine the responsibility that cinema must now shoulder. Until then, it is enough to continue the search for this better cinema and persist on that quest. Above all, it is essential to do what Edgar is doing. As his assistant Philippe says: “C’est la seule personne qui essaie d’être adulte.”
As in previous chapters, it is my conclusion that the newer film—*Éloge de l’amour*—moves Godard’s agenda to a more radical place than the older film—*Le Mépris*. Whereas *Le Mépris* made a case for the inseparability of commitment in cinema and in the love that Paul and Camille shared, *Éloge de l’amour* extends that love to the love for humanity. And as I have explained above, the inseparability of the search for a better cinema and this love lies in the fact that if we fail to find this love, there won’t be a need for a better cinema. If we don’t love, we don’t find the need to stop crimes against humanity and if we don’t find the need to stop crimes against humanity, we don’t need cinema to assume this responsibility.

**Film Form**

As has been the norm of this thesis, before concluding this chapter, I will discuss some of the formal aspects of the two films at hand, to see how Godard’s aesthetic choices contribute to his message in these two films. The most obvious difference between *Le Mépris* and *Éloge de l’amour* is that while the former is shot in color, the latter is shot almost entirely in black and white. The only scenes that are shot in color in *Éloge de l’amour* are the last few scenes of the selling of M. and Mme Bayard’s story to Spielberg and Associates. The colors in *Le Mépris* are mainly bright warm colors: a lot of blue from the sea in Capri, and plenty of red, especially in the apartment that Paul and Camille live in. These colors return in the last part of *Éloge de l’amour* (which actually takes place two years prior to the first part of the film) which is also set on the seaside, so we see plenty of blues and sunset reds. Interestingly, we see a lot of more sunset reds in *Éloge de l’amour* than the high sun yellows as we see in *Le Mépris*—the sun has already
begun setting on cinematic compromises made during the making of *The Odyssey* (in *Le Mépris*) and during the sale of the story of M. and Mme Bayard (in *Éloge de l’amour*). And a return to black and white in the first part of *Éloge de l’amour* signifies a sort of return to the basics, to the beginning, where cinema must go back now to reinvent itself, in order to redeem itself.

*Le Mépris* and this last part of *Éloge de l’amour* also have one more thing in common: they have a more linear narrative than the first part of *Éloge de l’amour*, which is more of a series of thoughts and ideas expressed through snapshots of conversations (such as the long conversation between Edgar and Berthe discussed above). There is a basic storyline: that of the making of Edgar’s film, but there are no ‘events’ as such taking place:

In *Éloge de l’amour*, Godard moves from one scene to the next by means of a reference to something that occurred earlier, either in the film or chronologically, rather than progressing through a narrative. (Reid 78)

Chris Norris agrees:

As befits its title, *In Praise* is less a linear argument than an ode, a poetic meditation, a tone poem-- yes, a musical composition. In this conception, all of film's traditional narrative devices are freed to perform the more abstract duties of musical gestures. Brief black screens, sometimes with intertitles like "Something" and "Two Years Earlier" become rests, cadenzas, tension, and resolution. (14)

This first part of *Éloge de l’amour* is the part that is in black and white. The choice to lose color in favor of black and white adds a certain bleakness to the situation. If color is
usually associated with celebration, black and white is associated with mourning\(^{19}\),
and by the time of \textit{Éloge de l’amour}, Godard is definitely in mourning over the abuse of
the image and over cinema’s failure to fulfill its mission. But through mourning comes
new thought, because when all is lost, one cannot but start afresh, find new beginnings
and grow from there.

And this is precisely what cinema needs according to Godard. He feels that we
have let cinema compromise for far too long and it seems impossible to save it by
working from within the system, as Paul Javal and Fritz Lang try to do in \textit{Le Mépris}. We
need to return to the very beginning as Edgar does in \textit{Éloge de l’amour}, to rethink our
lives as they are today, in order to rethink cinema, which is, today, an integral part of that
life. One can no longer only rethink cinema, because the lack of commitment in cinema
today is a lack of commitment in life as well. Gilles Jacob explains:

> Under the Fifth Republic, the bourgeoisie no longer represents a simple
> question of class; it has become an entire mentality. A search for a “better
> way of life” has bit by bit numbed the life of the man in the street who,
> within the concrete verticality of soulless metropolises, rarely gets excited
> about anything beyond the love affairs of a princess, gastronomic
> pleasures, and the amount of horsepower for a certain car. Listen to the
> speech by Michel-Ange that Godard wanted to use (but later cut) to end
> \textit{Les Carabiniers}: “You haven’t understood anything, you haven’t seen
> anything, or heard anything; go home in your compact cars, swallow your
> tranquilizers and sleep well.” And what indeed can the artist do when he is

\(^{19}\) “The first part of the film, taking place in Paris in the present, is filmed in black and white, which Godard
in the \textit{Histoire(s)} repeatedly referred to as the colours of memory and mourning.” (Morrey 231)
faced with this resigned torpor, if not to try to instigate the hope of a violent reaction? If not to react against the proliferation of the symbols of this civilization from free key rings advertising a product to the latest hair style, all studies by specialists in the mechanism of mass psychology (the badge saying “Kiss Me, I’m Italian” worn by Jean-Pierre Léaud). As Godard himself has said, “It is always easy to manipulate a crowd: you begin like Audiard and it all ends up in the Nuremberg speeches.” (151)

It is this manipulation of the crowd, in cinema and in life, that Godard is trying to avoid in Éloge de l’amour, even if it means not making films for a while (as Edgar does) and instead thinking about life as it is today and trying to find the love that seems to be lost in favor of a better life that Gilles Jacob mentions in the quote above. However, unlike Jacob, Godard no longer intends to instigate a violent reaction in the crowd (à la Weekend); instead he has found that simply stopping them in their tracks, making them halt, like Edgar, will force them to think. It is when they are not preoccupied with a search for a better life that they may be able to rethink their lives and question this assumed ‘better life’. And this is where cinema enters the picture. Instead of numbing the audience, if it simply makes them pause a while, slow down and question the images they see, it will necessarily begin to accomplish its mission.

In effect then, Éloge de l’amour makes a case for the search for love as essential for the redemption of cinema. Without love for humanity, one cannot see where cinema has failed and where we have lacked commitment and not done anything to stop history from repeating itself. As long as we separate love from cinema, we will continue to see a cinema that ignores human life as it truly is and makes a spectacle of it. However, if we
start to see our lack of responsibility in both love and cinema as being connected, we
will necessarily redeem cinema as our tool to restore justice to humanity. Whereas
Godard had already begun to emphasize this connection in Le Mépris, it remained at the
level of a personal love in that film. In Éloge de l’amour, Godard finds the conviction to
broaden the scope of that love and therefore realize its full potential— its responsibility
and capacity to save cinema and the world as it is today.
Conclusion

It is evident from the discussion of these eight films that it proves to be especially fruitful in Godard’s case to see his films in relation to one another, rather than study them as isolated cinematic instances. As stated in the introduction, I aimed at three things in this thesis. The first was to contribute to bringing more attention to Godard’s newer, post-90s work. The second was to study Godard’s more recent work in light of his older work so as to see the continuum of his thought process. The third aim, arising naturally out of the second, was to argue for my observation that contrary to popular opinion, of Godard having mellowed down or being more resigned in his later work, he has, in fact, become a more committed radical in these newer films.

I would like to add that film scholars who have claimed that Godard seems to have given up or mellowed down in his later work are not entirely wrong, because at first view these films do seem to give that appearance. This is due, in part, to the slower pace of the films—Godard spends a longer time on each of the frames in his newer films. This creates the effect of taking a step back, reflecting, and thinking before communicating. The pace of these films contributes to their impression of being slower, softer, and therefore less radical. However, on subsequent viewings, it becomes clear that this is but an impression. The pause and reflection leads to a thought that goes more deeply to the heart of the issue rather than reacting to it in the heat of the moment. The result is that whereas Godard reacts to certain phenomena of modern life in his earlier films, he responds to them more thoughtfully in his newer films. This in turn leads to questions and suggestions that have us rethink a lot of fundamental reactions and procedures that we have been following in society today. It makes us question some of our most basic
assumptions and suggests changing them. And this is precisely what makes this newer thought in the post 90s films more radical than the seemingly more violent and brutal reactions of the earlier films.

In *Nouvelle vague*, for instance, Godard concludes that what is lacking in modernity is a place for love and compassion. Whereas we have successfully created machines for ease and comfort, we have failed to create a place for love and compassion in our lives. That love and compassion must come from within us, and until we fulfill this most basic of human needs, we will continue to experience a constant sense of conflict. This in turn will give rise to aggression and violence in everyday life. Although it may not be the first time we have heard this, we have perhaps not gone back to this thought in a long while. Giving compassion a serious place in cinema and in our lives is a radical thought, especially today, when there is no more time and mental space left for long term solutions. We are in an age of instant gratification and even proposing a solution that will take a long while to work through the system is considered to be too slow and outdated. It is this going back to the basics which has become revolutionary and new in the present age. This is particularly so, because this is the age of one-minute solutions to everything—from anxiety and aggression to machine repairs.

In *JLG/JLG*, Godard’s steadfastly staying amidst the very society that has always kept him at the fringes, brings the same kind of quiet revolution as *Nouvelle vague* aims to bring about. While waiting for death to arrive, as JLG claims to be doing in the film, he is living his exceptional life to the fullest. He refuses to be quiet and to give in to the tyranny of culture; instead, he takes every opportunity to communicate with the people around him, patiently accepting his failures and successes as they come. While in *Pierrot*
le fou he saw the failure of communication as a reason for the artist to escape into isolation, in JLG/JLG, he strongly feels the need to take back the power to communicate. Artists and cineastes, in particular, have the privilege of having mastered an extremely powerful medium of communication. Therefore, instead of giving up on their art because of its misuse by some, JLG feels the need to correct the situation and prevent that misuse. He recommends doing this by using that very medium of communication— cinema—to make people aware of its misuse and their deception. Although Ferdinand/Pierrot’s escape was definitely an expression of a radical will, JLG’s return is a significantly more difficult but determined registration of protest and of that radical will itself.

In For Ever Mozart, Godard is very critical of war and the failure of cinema to make us remember the history of war and destruction. Although Les Carabiniers was highly critical of war and our ignorance towards its manipulations, it stopped at that criticism. It also criticized the image for having done nothing better than to delude and distract us away from war. But again, it stopped at that criticism without endeavoring to propose a change to that situation. In For Ever Mozart, Godard’s criticism of war is stronger, as is his solution to the failure of cinema. He goes far enough to propose abandoning cinema in favor of other art forms such as music. We could then explore what these other art forms offer in terms of possibilities of communicating real issues and bringing to the forefront the misuse of communicative media.

In Éloge de l’amour, Godard comes back to the question of cinema’s responsibility, something that he has struggled with since the very early films, as seen in this dissertation. Although Éloge de l’amour focuses exclusively on this concern, almost all of Godard’s films have either discussed or at least made a passing remark on cinema’s
having failed to live up to its responsibility of remembering and making us remember. Evidently, this a concern that has consumed Godard for the entire span of his career. Although he experimented with making and distributing videos privately in the 70s and 80s, he is still looking for a better way to communicate his deep and raw pain over the misuse of cinema and the image in general. His video work was meant to evade the traditional means of production and distribution and thereby gain independence from producer or distributor interference. However, although Godard succeeded in privately distributing these films to a fair extent, his films failed to reach a significant percentage of the film going audience, because they were not released in theatres. The only people who went out of their way to procure and watch this body of work were probably Godard scholars and fans who closely followed his work. Even these faithful followers were deterred by the frequent unavailability of his work on video or DVD. By missing out on mainstream distribution, Godard failed to communicate with the very audience that also contributed (along with filmmakers) to the abuse of cinema. And Godard was obviously not unaware of this shortcoming because he returned to mainstream distribution and productions methods in the late 70s.

With *Éloge de l’amour*, Godard has come to an almost stubborn albeit quiet revolutionary point where he refuses to budge from what he has to say, until it is conveyed and until cineastes and film audiences take notice of it. From *Éloge de l’amour* and *Notre musique* (2004), it seems that Godard will not hesitate to make as many films as it takes to drive home the unacceptability of the abuse of cinema and ensure that we start to do something about it. Godard has come to a point where he can no longer allude to cinema’s lack of responsibility or merely express cynicism towards it. He is now
convinced that unless we accept responsibility and own up to having let one of the
most capable and compelling of our arts be toyed around with, we cannot hope to redeem
the situation. Godard further connects our lack of responsibility to cinema to a greater
lack of responsibility towards humanity. It is not surprising that we have failed to prevent
the downfall of cinema. We, who have even failed to prevent the downfall of humanity,
have obviously failed to make the connection between this downfall and the downfall of
the powerful medium that could have prevented us from squandering the dignity and
value of human life. It is therefore imperative that we first re-learn how to recognize that
value, and to feel love and compassion for humanity. Without this, we will fail to see
how much cinema can contribute to that mission, how much it can help us learn from the
past as well as how much it can show us the beauty of a life without tyranny and
violence. As Godard says towards the end of JLG/JLG, and that I quote above in chapter
2: it is this love that will first turn us back into the human beings we set out to be, and
that, in turn, will let us merit this name that we have given ourselves. This is the first
thing we have to achieve before we can do or create anything beautiful. We have to first
find that love and beauty in ourselves before we can make a cinema that salutes that
beauty and stands up in its defense.

This is undoubtedly a thought that requires a lot of patience and perseverance to
bring into practice. It is more of a long-term solution that can seem too tedious and hard
to achieve, and therefore much too revolutionary. But, if we don’t go back and try to
remedy the situation from within ourselves, we will fall prey to the constant trappings of
temporary and superficial solutions. And Godard has tried such solutions— his private
distribution of video works was one such way out, but it proved to be temporary and
transient. His complete rejection of society was another such solution, but again, it
proved to be only partially successful. Godard has made that journey—from temporary
and intensely radical to more accepting, understanding and intensely reflective, and
therefore more permanent and long term. And it seems to be his endeavor to share that
journey through much of his later work.

The importance of love and compassion, of being a human being before anything
else, is the overarching message in his later work and we can see the culmination of this
message in Éloge de l’amour. In Nouvelle vague, the first of the films discussed in this
dissertation, compassion was already a solution to bringing together and resolving
differences. In JLG/JLG and in For Ever Mozart as well, it is clear that an intellectual
rejection of society or a mere criticism of its ways is not enough for Godard. He has spent
the greater part of his early work doing that and it is in his later work that he has come to
the realization that he needs to do more than that. He needs to first accept and love
people, things, and situations as they are and it is only through this acceptance and love
that he will find the conviction to change what he sees. Love is then the thread that
connects his solutions to everyday violence (Week-end and Nouvelle vague: compassion),
to the marginalization of art and artists by mass culture (Pierrot le fou and JLG/JLG:
acceptance of society and resilience in the face of marginalization), to war (Les
Carabiniers and For Ever Mozart: accepting responsibility for the failure of cinema and a
desire to change the situation) and to the abuse of the image (Le Mépris and Éloge de
l’amour: commitment to humanity). Love is the solution that Godard has reached through
his other solutions. It is a desire to effect a change rather than just see shortcomings that
has propelled Godard in this direction. From being an observer of society and protecting
and shielding himself and his work from it, he has gone towards finding a way of remedying the very things from which he was trying to shield himself. He has become less reactive but more responsive by trying to fulfill his promise to love and his promise to deserve the name he has given himself: human being (JLG/JLG).
Bibliography


<http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/01/14/godard_mozart.html>.


Paige, Nicholas. “Bardot and Godard in 1963 (Historicizing the Postmodern Image)”


VITA

Amruta Satish Kulkarni

EDUCATION

December 2007 Pennsylvania State University, State College, PA.
Ph.D., French.

July 2000 Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India.
M.A., French (Translation and Interpretation.)

July 1998 University of Pune, Pune, India.
B.A., French.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS


FELLOWSHIPS, HONORS AND AWARDS

April 2002 Pi Sigma Iota, Foreign Language Honor Society.

February 2000 University Grants Commission, New Delhi, India.
Junior Research Fellowship and National Eligibility Test.

July 1998 Shashilekha Gopal Memorial Prize, Pune, India.
Awarded for achieving the first rank in B.A. (French) in the University of Pune.

June-July, 1998 Embassy of France, New Delhi, India.
Selected as student ambassador from India to attend the football World Cup France 98 Coupe du monde.