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MAKING POLITICAL FILMS POLITICALLY ?
THE FILM-MAKING PRACTICE OF JEAN-LUC GODARD

STEPHEN CANNON

Doctor of Philosophy

THE UNIVERSITY OF ASTON IN BIRMINGHAM

October 1991

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This thesis attempts to re-examine the work of Jean-Luc Godard and in particular the claims which have been made for it as the starting-point for a revolutionary cinema.

This re-examination involves, firstly, a critical summary of the development of Structuralist thinking, from its origins in linguistics, with Saussure, through to its influence on Marxism, with Althusser. It is this 'Structural Marxism' which prepares the ground for a view of Godard as a revolutionary film-maker, so its influence on film theory in the decade after 1968 is traced in journals such as *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Screen* and in the work of their editors and contributors.

Godard's relationship with such theories was a complex one and some of the cross-breeding is revealed in a brief account of his own ideas about his film-making. More important, however is his practice as a committed 'political' film-maker between 1968 and 1972 which is analysed in terms of the responses it makes to the cultural opportunities offered in the period after the revolutionary situation of May 1968.

The severe problems revealed by that analysis may be partially resolved in Godard's greatest 'political' achievement *Tout va bien*, but a comparative analysis proves that in earlier 'a-political' films such as *Vivre sa vie*, he was creating more meaningful and perhaps even more revolutionary art, whose formal experimentation is more organically linked to its subject and whose ability to communicate ideas far outstrips the later work.

In conclusion some indications are suggested of a more fruitful basis for Marxist theories of art than Structural variants, seeking a non-formalist approach in the work of Marx, of Trotsky, of Brecht and Lukács.

FRENCH CINEMA GODARD NOUVELLE VAGUE/NEW WAVE

FILM THEORY MAY 1968

This work is dedicated to Lynne; to Austin, Ivan, and Martin: friends and comrades at Aston 1985-1988 and, as the struggle moves on, to Beccy Palmer in Durham prison as I write, shamefully imprisoned by Gateshead's Labour council for being too poor to pay the Poll Tax. As the events of the last few years in Eastern Europe have so amply demonstrated:

"The vengeance of history is more powerful than the vengeance of the most powerful General Secretary." (Leon Trotsky)

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INTRODUCTION

In the 30-or-so years of his film-making life a great deal of ink has been used up on Jean-Luc Godard, his films and writings; something like 20 books which deal wholly or in part with Godard, 5 American Doctoral Theses and hundreds of articles in film journals and periodicals. Clearly, then, a study of Godard does not of itself contribute to knowledge. Godard is however one of the most important directors in the history of the cinema, both in terms of the influence his work has had on his contemporaries and, crucially, in the role his work has played in the development of major currents in film theory (see discussion of *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Screen*, Chapter 2; others such as Bordwell and Thompson, Burch, Metz, Ropars-Wuilleumier, and Wollen have used Godard's work as a reference point in developing theories of film).

Furthermore, there are significant problems with the bulk of writing on Godard. Much of it can not really be seen as serious analysis - something which is true not only of review articles or potted histories but also of wider-ranging pieces and book-length studies which are often of a rather introductory nature or attempt to proselytise a 'difficult' artist (e.g. Roud, 1970). This is particularly the case with studies which appeared at the end of Godard's first 'wave', as the '60s became the '70s, and he was perhaps at the peak of his fame or notoriety as perceived figurehead of 'art cinema' (the anthologies edited by Brown, 1972, Cameron, 1977 and Mussman, 1968 for example; anthologies of essays appear to

have been thought the best way of approaching the complexity of Godard's work).

Perhaps surprisingly most of this work was appearing in English, demonstrating a marked Anglo-American interest in Godard, although perhaps the new Media and Film Studies departments in U.S. and British academic institutions help to explain how, at least in terms of publications, there seemed to be more interest there than in France.

In recent years this trend has been reversed, in that there has not been a study of Godard in English since the early 1980s (MacCabe and Mulvey 1980, perhaps Stam 1985) whereas the late '80s have seen a steady stream of work in French including special issues of journals (*Art Press*, *Revue Belge du Cinéma*, *Cinémaction*) and, quite astonishingly to someone who sees Godard's recent work as beginning to collapse into self-parody, 3 books in 1989 alone (Cerisuelo, Desbarats and Gorce, Douin).

This rate of production in the Godard industry is not in itself so astonishing - he clearly remains a significant and influential figure - it is rather the unanimity with which his latest films are praised and even more the tone in which that praise is written, a *faux-naïf* readiness to be impressed by the sound and image spectacle of the director's increasingly whimsical production. This process has perhaps been encouraged by what Jean-Paul Gorce, in a perceptive analysis of the status of Godard in contemporary French culture, calls "l'extrême médiatisation du personnage de

Godard" in the 1980s (Desbarats and Gorce, 1989, 156).

The writing on Godard which will concern us most is, however, of a more serious nature, much of it generated in and around French and British film journals in the 1970s, principally *Screen* and *Cahiers du Cinéma*, for whom Godard was a key figure, a film-maker around whom they spun a complex web of theoretical work which centred, in the rush of renewed interest in Marxism after 1968, on a desire to create a satisfactory Marxist theory of film, a theory which would offer a guide both to critics/analysts of film and to film-makers themselves.

In so doing those journals, and subsequently, outside of their pages some of their contributors, elevated Godard into a very restricted Pantheon of artists (Straub/Huillet and Oshima would be the main figures keeping him company there), in which he arguably figured most prominently of all, whose work was seen to combine a radical self-reflexive questioning of the forms and practices of their own art with a revolutionary critique of capitalist society.

It will be the contention of this thesis that this view of Godard as a revolutionary film-maker, and one offering a model for any revolutionary film-making, requires serious re-examination. In the first two chapters we will seek to demonstrate that the theoretical basis of that work is seriously flawed, particularly in its claim to represent a Marxist approach to film, by tracing the influence of Structuralist thinking on the kind of Marxism taken up by those journals.

The first Chapter will, therefore, provide a brief critical account of the development of Structuralist thinking and of what might be seen as a Marxist response to it in the work of Louis Althusser, which was a key influence on the theoretical reflection carried out in those film journals, whilst Chapter 2 will look more closely at the results of that theoretical reflection in *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Screen*, and again attempt to indicate the major drawbacks of 'Structural Marxism'.

We then move on to consider Godard himself (although as will become clear his name is inextricably linked with the journals' project, his films rarely far from their pages when worthwhile objects for their theoretical analysis are required); if he is implicated in the theoretical systems erected by *Cahiers* etc., which advance his work as being a major breakthrough, what were his own ideas about his work? What were his own claims for his practice as a film-maker? The third Chapter will attempt to cut a path through the thickets of Godard's pronouncements about his films, and about the cinema in general and in so doing hopefully illuminate the nature of his relationship to the theories being developed around his work by his contemporaries.

If one of our central contentions will be that Marxist theories which have proposed Godard as a "revolutionary" film-maker are extremely flawed, then of vital importance will be his activity with the 'Dziga Vertov Group' in the years immediately following 1968, when, radicalised by the experience of the social and political upheaval in May of that year he attempted precisely to make 'revolutionary' films or

rather "faire politiquement des films politiques" [make political films politically] (*Cinéma* 70, 82). Our analysis of Godard's work in that revolutionary period, in Chapter 4, will examine the ways in which he responded to the cultural opportunities offered in the aftermath of May. The conclusions reached in our critical assessment of that body of work and subsequent developments out of it might legitimately lead to the question of why Godard has been so highly valued and in order to explore this issue Chapter 5 will seek to compare two films, *Vivre sa vie* and *Tout va bien*, respectively pre-dating and representing the culmination of Godard's collective, 'political' film-making.

The conclusions reached, and in particular their political implications, may well be surprising in the context of a study basing itself on a Marxist approach to art and culture and by way of conclusion we will seek to explain the apparent contradiction of valuing more highly that of Godard's work which was perhaps "making a-political films a-politically" and in so doing attempt to indicate more fruitful grounds for a Marxist theory of film than those upon which the writers of *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Screen* based their work, seeing Godard's formal approach to 'revolutionary film-making' as the necessary starting point.

Note on the format of references

The Harvard system of references has normally been used in writing this thesis, i.e. a short mention of author, publication date and page number is indicated in brackets in the text, and a fuller reference can be found in the bibliography.

French language material

So that this thesis may be consulted by non-readers of French, all quotations have, where necessary, been translated. Source of translation is indicated in the notes at the end of the text and where none is indicated they are the present author's.

CHAPTER 1

"The gradual megalomania of the signifier": from Saussure to Althusser, a critical account.

Saussure's *Cours de linguistique général*, published posthumously from a set of his lecture notes in 1916 (Saussure, 1972) contains a number of key and original ideas. No-one, however, produces such significant work in a vacuum: both Jameson (1972) and Timpanaro (1975) refer to the context of the dominant tendency in linguistics at the end of the nineteenth century, the Neo-Grammarians, whose work tended to dissolve linguistics as an independent science, concentrating mainly on the history of languages, their evolution and on reconstructing proto-languages. A prominent Neo-Grammarian, Hermann Paul stated quite plainly that in linguistics "what is not historic is not scientific" (Jameson, 1972, 6).

Saussure, in attempting to defend the scientificity of linguistics, reacted in the opposite direction to this diachronic linguistics, in turn proscribing it any scientific basis. This emphasis on synchrony over diachrony is the primary Saussurean distinction in a quartet of binary oppositions which make up the antinomic framework of Saussurean linguistics.

The second of these, between *langue* and *parole* (usually translated as 'language' and 'speech' or 'utterance') again seems to perform a defensive function, in establishing a rigorously-defined scientific object for synchronic study -

Saussure claimed that the unsystematic nature of 'parole' meant that it fell outside of the domain of linguistics altogether:

...il faut se placer de prime abord sur le terrain de la langue et la prendre pour norme de toutes les autres manifestations du langage...nous introduisons un ordre naturel dans un ensemble qui ne se prête à aucune autre classification (Saussure, 1972, 25).

[...from the very outset we must take *langue* as our point of departure and use *langue* as the norm for all other manifestations of language...we introduce a natural order into a mass that lends itself to no other classification.]

Having centred his analysis firmly on *langue*, the general system of language, Saussure constructed a further set of oppositions, in the way *langue* is articulated: his notion of the linguistic sign, having two components and being the unity of *signifiant* (signifier) and *signifié* (signified). The relationship between the two was, he argued, essentially arbitrary, or unmotivated (the classic example being the varying signifiers in various languages for fundamentally the same signified) and, therefore, meaning is created purely differentially by opposition and difference between signifiers.

The final antinomy is between the two axes of organisation of signifiers - Saussure believed there were two kinds of oppositions or differences, two kinds of relations between linguistic terms: syntagmatic, or sequential, and paradigmatic, or substitutional.

There seems to be a general assumption that the shift in the application of Saussure's theory from linguistic object to

extra-linguistic is either totally unproblematic or indeed something inherent in the logic of the Saussurean system, but there are problems involved, as we shall see.

The first application of Saussure's ideas outside of their original sphere was that of Jakobson and the 'Prague School', who used Saussure in their analysis of literature in the inter-war years, in the process reversing his insistence on *langue* over *parole*, since particular utterances, individual texts, were their object rather than any general system. At least, it could be argued, literature is a linguistic phenomenon of sorts. It is only "with Lévi-Strauss' intrepid generalisation of [Saussurean linguistics] to his own anthropological domain that Structuralism...was born" (Anderson, 1983, 41).

"Kinship systems" stated Lévi-Strauss, boldly, were "a kind of language" (Lévi-Strauss, 1968, 60), one in which he claimed women circulated in place of words, operating in a system of communication. Once Lévi-Strauss, in the late 1950s, had made this analogy, the floodgates were open, to extend Saussure's system to any and all of the structures of society. Jacques Lacan echoed Lévi-Strauss in stating "the unconscious is structured like a language" (Lacan, 1977, 20) in his work on psychoanalysis, Roland Barthes prolifically applied Saussurean models to fashion, cookery, traffic signs and more (Barthes, 1974 etc.) and in the cinema Christian Metz struggled to find analogies for language but abandoned the search in favour of a psychoanalytical approach, perhaps recognising that a structural analysis of the cinema was not taken further

forward by adopting terms and concepts which obscured its specificity (Metz, 1971/1972 and 1976).

Saussure had, in fact, warned specifically against applying his structural linguistics to other areas of society, declaring his conviction that "whoever sets foot on the terrain of language is bereft of all the analogies of heaven and earth" (1) and the very analogies to be discovered by Lévi-Strauss, of kinship and the economy, are singled out as being inappropriate objects for semiotic analysis, chiefly because human or economic relations are far from arbitrary or unmotivated; economic value, for example, being rooted in things and their natural relations and therefore "jamais complètement arbitraire" [never entirely arbitrary] (Saussure, 1972, 116).

Clearly, then, the journey from structural linguistics to Structuralism involves a certain speculative leap. But it is not the case that Lévi-Strauss and his successors are merely guilty of using Saussurean analysis on unsuitable objects; they also, in fact, proceeded to turn one of Saussure's formulae, about the relationship of signifier to signified into something quite different. For Saussure, the relationship was one of unity-in-distinction ("cette unité à deux faces", *ibid.*, 145); in an oft-quoted passage he described the two components of the linguistic sign as being like the two sides of a piece of paper (*ibid.*, 146) but from Lévi-Strauss and Lacan through to Foucault and Derrida the signifier accrues a gradual primacy which concludes with the signified being seen in some cases as a theoretical impossibility, a process which

Anderson calls "a gradual megalomania of the signifier" (1983, 45).

Starting from the highly improbable notion that language was acquired or invented *en bloc*, Lévi-Strauss posits a permanent "superabundance of the signifier relative to the signified on which it can pose itself"; a "floating signifier" above a supposedly fixed signified (2). Lacan goes about things somewhat differently, seeing the signifier as being constitutive of *langue* in a complete departure from Saussure: no longer are signifier and signified parallel elements, dual components of the sign, the signifier now belongs to *langue* and the signified to *parole*. So for Lacan it is the latter which is in a state of flux - he talks of "the incessant sliding of the signified *under* the signifier" (Lacan, 1977, 154 - emphasis added).

Thus signification as such, or at least fixed, intentional referential meaning becomes effectively impossible. It was left to Derrida to draw out the logic of this shift, in his rejection of any possibility of a signified and championing of the positive qualities of an "endless play" of a chain of signifiers, a position towards which Lacan was already moving in his view of psychoanalysis as a potentially interminable process of unravelling meaning from the subconscious. Jameson points out that in mapping this progression we

watch what was initially a method [in Saussure] (the isolation of the signifier for the purposes of structural analysis) slowly turn about into what amounts to a metaphysical presupposition as to the priority of the signifier itself (1972, 131).

In so far as it is at all worthwhile to determine where Structuralism ends and Post-Structuralism begins, Derrida is a key figure. He not only indulged in critical remarks about Lévi-Strauss and Lacan but, more importantly, is explicitly anti-Saussurean, since he sees Saussure as being caught up in the "Western Metaphysics of Presence", from Descartes on, in which the human subject is assumed to have a direct and immediate access to reality.

One component of this metaphysics for Derrida is what is variously called "phonologism" or "logocentrism"; the prioritising of speech over writing, something which Saussure is clearly "guilty" of. Derrida's project is to "deconstruct" that metaphysics of presence, by first of all reversing that priority, a shift which enables him to develop Saussure's thesis that difference is the source of linguistic value. In Derrida's hands this becomes a view of language as a wholly self-referential process in which meaning is produced by the "play" of difference and in which each signified is also in the position of signifier and so to infinity.

Derrida's importance, then, is in following the logic of structuralist thinking through to its (anti-Saussurean) conclusion, subverting traditional notions of truth, science and knowledge in his ultimate proclamation: "Il n'y a pas de hors-texte" (3).

Michel Foucault echoes some of Derrida's preoccupations, agreeing that there is no possibility of 'truth' as a correspondence of particular statements with reality and

similarly adopting the Nietzschean-influenced perspective of a radical critique of Western metaphysics as a whole. Foucault, as a historian of ideas, argued that all ideas and theories are produced within a general self-contained historical framework, which he terms an "épistémè" and these two, Foucault and Derrida, provide the highpoint of what Jameson calls "the most scandalous aspect of Structuralism" (1972, 139) in their belief that humanism (the view that human beings can act in a progressive way upon their environment and that human needs should be placed at the centre of any system of values or ideas) was part of a predominantly 19th Century "épistémè" which was now being replaced by that of language. As Foucault puts it :

L'homme est une invention dont l'archéologie de notre pensée montre aisément la date récente. Et peut-être la fin prochaine (Foucault, 1966, 398).

[Man is an invention of recent date...nearing its end.]

Foucault follows Nietzsche in seeing human relations as constituted by Power (the "will to power" in straight Nietzschean terms) but for him, as well as omnipresent power, there is also always resistance; each power relation involves conflict, but it is a resistance which is necessarily localised and fragmented and as far as Foucault is concerned, as soon as global change or even resistance on a wide front is attempted, the result will merely be the creation of another "apparatus" of power-knowledge. Clearly he has organised political movements in mind here and although he was heavily involved in political activity, particularly in the years immediately following 1968, it was around the *Gauche*

Prolétarienne and in, for example, the prison reform movement, where spontaneity and generalised *contestation* were seen as the way forward.

The "implicit political ethic" (Jameson, 181) in Derrida's theory would seem to licence a similarly localised activity - a kind of subversion from within texts, deconstructing them and reading them against themselves. This diversion through the political implications and activity of various thinkers is by way of beginning an examination of the complex relationship between Marxism and Structuralism.

Lévi-Strauss, for example, paid initial homage to Marxism, seeing his work as designed to contribute to the theory of superstructures which Marx supposedly barely sketched out (4). Barthes *Mythologies* (Barthes, 1957/1985) works within apparently similar guidelines and all of the structuralist thinkers were "beneficiaries of a (French) Marxist culture in the sense that they were not free to ignore the theoretical problems raised by the Marxist tradition" (Jameson, *ibid.*, 102). Also the reaction of many Marxist intellectuals, at worst mute respect but more often rapturous applause, helped to establish some sort of relationship or common ground between the two "schools".

However, no matter that their work gained in some ways a Marxist colouration, the broad front of structuralism posed a major theoretical threat to Marxism, in three areas in particular. This is most obviously the case because its epistemological implications, most clearly enunciated in

Derrida, would seriously compromise Marxist materialism - for structuralists this is to subscribe to a "transcendental signified", and at its apogee structuralism would indeed question the possibility of knowledge itself. Secondly the whole notion of generative structure, and of heterogeneous levels refutes the Marxist conception of the social whole and finally there is structuralism's "anti-humanism", shared to a greater or lesser degree by all of the thinkers under discussion: Lévi-Strauss, Lacan, Barthes, Foucault, Derrida all 'demote' the subject, whether individual or collective, from the human sciences, which would ultimately call into question any project of changing society via human endeavour (5).

Given that it posed such a broad threat, what, we should ask, was the Marxist response, and why does structuralist thinking continue to enjoy support and influence among Marxists? To answer these questions we must look at the work of Louis Althusser.

Perry Anderson states quite bluntly:

When a Marxist reply finally came (to Lévi-Strauss in particular and the developing Structuralist thought in general) in 1965, it was no repudiation but a counter-signature of the Structuralist claims (1983, 37).

Althusser's work in the two books published that year, *Pour Marx* and *Lire le Capital*, was not initially posed in those terms, however. His project was to reread the classic texts of Marxism in order to establish its basic principles, in the process disengaging them from what he saw as their vulgarisation and distortion at the hands of "humanist"

Marxists such as Lukács, Korsch and Gramsci as well as "evolutionists" like Plekhanov, Kautsky and Stalin (6).

This is achieved by means of what Althusser called a "symptomatic reading" of Marx which "divulges the undivulged event in the text it reads" and is used to extract the "problématique" of a theory, the set of questions which provide a theory or discourse with its internal unity.

In the case of Marx, Althusser's 'reading' reveals a "coupure épistémologique", a 'break' which takes place in the texts around 1845, *The Theses on Feuerbach* and *The German Ideology*, from one 'problematic' to another, from a humanist Marx to a scientific, Marxist one (7). This puzzles many Marxists who find an overwhelming continuity in the ideas of pre- and post- '45 works, but it is nothing to the incredulity which must greet Althusser's later attempt to argue that the "coupure" in fact comes shortly before Marx's death, leaving only two marginal works on Wagner and The Gotha Programme intact as evidence of 'Marx the Marxist' (8).

If this seems an open rejection of much of Marx's thought, it is merely to confirm what Althusser carries out in his own theoretical work. If we look at two main areas of his theory, his view of the social totality and of ideology, this will become clear.

For Althusser, the social formation is constituted by a multiplicity of "practices" or "instances" within "social practice" in general, each with their own internal laws, their own "peculiar historical time", their own *relative autonomy*.

Although the term multiplicity is used, only four are in fact ever mentioned: economic, ideological, political and theoretical practices (Althusser, 1965, 166-7).

This description of discrete spheres suggests no notion of totality at all, but Althusser elaborates the idea of a "structure in dominance" which arranges the different practices into a hierarchy. As for determination by the economy, this in Althusser is an absent cause which exists only in its effects. In order, therefore, to prevent his "relative autonomy" from becoming total autonomy he takes the isolated phrase "determination in the last instance" from Engels but goes on to insist that "the lonely hour of the last instance never comes" (ibid.).

The problem is thus solved terminologically, something Althusser is consistently guilty of - his notion of 'theoretical practice', as a relatively autonomous practice, would see a theoretical solution to a problem of this kind as being perfectly valid, if not overwhelmingly important and the notion of 'theoretical practice' itself, central to Althusser's enterprise, neatly solves the Marxist insistence on a unity of theory and practice but, as Régis Debray who studied under Althusser, is reputed to have commented, this meant that to be good Marxists very little 'practice' was required at all.

How, in Althusser's view of the social world, does a revolution occur? For this he developed the notion of "overdetermination", a revolution being the result of an

overdetermination in one of the instances, a dis-function rather than any conscious action. If that appears to evacuate human beings from the stage of History, then his theory of ideology confirms it.

As Terry Lovell points out:

The individuals who people Althusser's social world are subject to it rather than constitutive of it. They do not make history. Subjects are merely the 'supports' for a world they had no hand in making - the social role of ideology is the construction of suitable subject-supports in a space allotted to them in a pre-given structure of social relations (Clarke (ed.), 1980, 238).

The functionalism of such a theory is unavoidable - it sees people as inescapably caught up in ideology; Althusser focusses on the notion in Lenin's *What Is To Be Done?* that without revolutionary theory there could be no revolutionary practice but takes it to mean that that theory must be imported from without, the working class being incapable of reaching scientific knowledge and thus Althusser's "theoretical practice", in the autonomous realm of ideas he has constructed, must come to their aid (9). As McDonnell and Robins point out, this is a "grotesque rationalisation of the division between mental and manual labour under Capitalism" (ibid., 223).

Althusser sees changes of consciousness as the work of ideas upon ideas, there is no role for experience: "both ideology and genuine philosophical investigation, theoretical practice, run their course in the sealed chamber of the mind" (Jameson 1972, 106).

This, then, is a 'Marxism' which sees no active role for the

working class in social change (although in his post-68 *autocritique, Lenin and Philosophy*, Althusser was constrained by a 10-million-strong general strike to concede *some* role to "the masses", as he called them) which allows no basis for knowledge, no conception of the relation between thought and reality, insisting on the (relative) autonomy of the realm of ideas thus dispensing with the idea of the world as a totality.

We avoided above a too-hasty agreement with Anderson's view of Althusser's project as a mere collaboration with the structuralist 'movement' but we must now examine the convergence of views between Althusser and structuralist thinkers.

This is perhaps clearest in relation to Lacan and Derrida. Firstly, the whole project of a 'return to Marx' seems to model itself on Lacan's 'return to Freud', but Althusser's theory of ideology also relies heavily on Lacan, particularly in the notion of ideology as an *imaginary* relation and of the "interpellation" of individuals as subjects.

The positive interest of Marxists in psychoanalysis pre-Althusser was not widespread, largely due to its complete suppression by Stalin, dutifully followed by the Party worldwide. This is in contrast to the attitude of Trotsky and other leading Bolsheviks who defended psychoanalysis, and to the Hungarian revolutionary government of 1919 who appointed the world's first professor of psychoanalysis (10). The renewed interest, however, takes Lacan's reading of Freud as its

starting point and Althusser's interest would not be unduly shocking were it not for his uncritical appropriation of the Lacanian analysis of the family, for example, from which any notion of class and class differences is entirely absent.

It is not difficult to see similarities with Derrida's "deconstruction" in his "symptomatic reading": the search for the problematic is described as

simultaneously a movement relating it (the text) to a different text, present as a necessary absence of the first

and there is mention of the contradictions in the problematic being represented as "gaps, lapses, silences, absences on the text's surface" (11). Althusser also shares with Derrida (and Foucault etc.) a critique of Western metaphysics, in particular a rejection of the Cartesian *cogito*: one of his major criticisms of the humanist interpretation of Marx is that it is founded on an empiricist view of knowledge, according to which the meaning of the text is immediately apparent.

Sebastiano Timpanaro (1975, 192) points out that the Althusserian project is littered with "terminological acquisitions" from psychoanalysis and structuralist writing, which have since taken on a life of their own, third or fourth hand, in cultural theory and points also to the influence on his style, outlining in humorous manner how Althusser uses diagrams and formulae to prove that "*Capital* is the product of Hegel working on English Political Economy and French Socialism" ending up with the "mathematical" formula " $H+R+FS$ ". (ibid.)

Of more general importance, though, are the shared theoretical assumptions; his concurrence with the attack on the *cogito*, and the anti-humanism in his theory of ideology, "displacing the subject from the centre of the human sciences" (Lovell, *ibid.*). As Anderson puts it:

The advance of structuralism, far from being deflected or halted by the new reading of marxism (now reinterpreted as a theoretical anti-humanism, a version in which subjects were abolished altogether) was, for all the latter's protestations of distance, accelerated by it (1983, 37).

Althusser played a key role, then, in opening up Marxism to the incorporation of theoretical supplements from potentially hostile sources. Despite this the Althusserian version of Marxism was widely adopted, becoming a kind of orthodoxy, particularly among academics and intellectuals, hungry for an alternative to the old Stalinist monolith in the late 1960s. "If you were 'for' theory and intellectual rigour, and 'for' Marxism you were therefore 'for' Althusserianism" (Clarke, *ibid.*, 232). Anderson points out the irony of the great upheavals of 1968 spreading such ideas of passivity and defeat - and spread they did, particularly to the Anglo-Saxon world and nowhere more so than in the realm of cultural studies, where, along with the post-war influx of funding, relatively large enclaves of Marxist academics grew, all too eager to pounce on Althusserian notions of "theoretical practice" and the autonomy of ideology which allowed them to take culture seriously and deal with its specificity.

Film journals in France and Britain were extremely influential in spreading those ideas and popularising them within academic and cultural milieux. In the next chapter we

will examine the ways in which Althusserian ideas were taken up by *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Screen* and the conclusions which they then reached for the analysis of films, including of course Godard's, and the cinema in general.

CHAPTER 2

Structural Marxism and Film Theory in France and Britain: *Cahiers du Cinéma* and Screen.

Colin MacCabe has described *Cahiers du Cinéma* as "probably the most influential post-war cultural magazine in the West" (1985, 4) and there was some truth in this even before 1968. *Cahiers* (thus abbreviated henceforth) had been instrumental in winning a place at Art's high table for the Hollywood film, including some of its supposedly 2nd Division, 'B' products (the work of Douglas Sirk or Vicente Minnelli, for example), through their development of the notion of the *auteur* around the work of Howard Hawks and John Ford for example. It was also the journal where many of the *Nouvelle Vague* film-makers cut their critical teeth and developed the perspective on film-making within which they went on to renovate the "language" of film (1).

It is only after 1968, however, that *Cahiers* was transformed from a magazine of fairly eclectic cinephile film criticism, albeit a very serious one, into a site for the development of 'rigorous' and groundbreaking film theory. It is chiefly to this period after 1968 to which MacCabe's tribute refers (2).

Why 1968? The answer should be obvious to anyone with a passing knowledge of recent French history (or perhaps to anyone over 35!). The social and political crisis which rocked de Gaulle's regime in May and June of that year has often been subsequently referred to as a "student revolt" (3). While this conveniently writes out of history probably the biggest

mass general strike ever seen involving some 9-10 million French workers, who initially struck in opposition to police repression of the student protests but subsequently occupied their factories, offices and shops and posed a more generalised threat to Gaullism, it also ignores the way in which French society was rocked from top to bottom by the struggles, with radical ideas spreading to unlikely quarters - lyceés, the medical profession, the church, the "cadres" (4) (engineers, researchers, technicians, middle managers etc., a new middle class layer previously the champions of de Gaulle's 'new France'), sport and entertainment (5), the mass media etc.

Those working in cinema could not fail to be affected and there was certainly an active "Mai '68 du cinéma" (6).

Just before May though, an issue arose which led to whole numbers of French film-makers organising themselves in ways which foreshadowed the revolutionary committees of May. This was the 'Langlois Affair', from February onwards, when the government intervened in the hitherto-independent 'Cinémathèque', a film archive, and removed Henri Langlois as its head, on the grounds of inefficiency.

This was unacceptable to a majority of directors particularly those of the *Nouvelle Vague* generation (including Godard) who felt a debt to Langlois for the education in film culture and history they had received at the Cinémathèque in the 1950s. They were in the forefront of the 'Committee for the Defence of the Cinémathèque', which rallied

intellectuals via petitions in *Le Monde* (Genet, de Beauvoir etc.) but, unlike the traditional causes of intellectual freedom, allied this with mobilisations of up to 1500 demonstrators who enforced a boycott of the two viewing theatres, not without violent confrontation with the police (7).

Their central demand, the reinstatement of Langlois, was conceded but the main point is that when May came the film industry had a headstart of sorts, a network of individuals interested in militant activity, and thus by 19th May the CGT technicians union had organised meetings of technicians, directors and actors, as well as critics from the journals, from which the *Etats Généraux du Cinéma* (Estates General of the Cinema, henceforth 'EGC') was built (8).

Over a thousand turned up to the first meeting in the occupied school of film and photography and there were 3 subsequent meetings up to June 5th.

What exactly did the *Etats Généraux* do? First of all it organised strikes throughout the industry, even attempting to pull out the weakest sections such as projectionists. Secondly it abolished and replaced the reactionary censorship and certification structures, taking over the sanctioning of only that work which supported the struggle, allowing it both to be made and seen. A major part of the meetings was taken up with the discussion of 19 separate 'projects' for the transformation of the cinema. As elsewhere in France at the time the debate crystallised around questions of 'reform

versus revolution'; it was unable, however, to reach any kind of conclusion before the May movement began to die.

Finally, and most visibly and provocatively on an international scale, it called for the shut-down of the Cannes Film Festival, annual jamboree of the fat cats of the film industry with its arty gloss of awarding prizes to worthwhile films.

These struggles were, obviously, echoed in the pages of *Cahiers*, given the central involvement of its editors and contributors both in the Langlois Committee and the establishment of the EGC.

The March (No.200) and April-May (201) issues of 1968 respectively documented and then celebrated the victory of, the Langlois protests and June-July's (202) gave a brief account of the May events and the EGC. August 1968 (203) marks the real response of the journal to May, taking on board its experiences in the struggles, and featured publication of the debates at the EGC and the various proposals for the transformation of the French Cinema. The lessons the journal initially drew from May are stated most clearly in the editorial *Revolution In/Through the Cinema* (9) and could perhaps best be summed up as a kind of militant, activist approach to work in the cinema; the victory of the Langlois protests and the sense of power experienced on the May demonstrations leading *Cahiers* to support "demanding in the street what cannot be obtained in the offices" and to link "making the revolution in the Cinema" explicitly with "making

it before or at the same time elsewhere" (10).

In this editorial *Cahiers* declared its support for those film groups working outside the mainstream, commercial cinema and discussed the need to develop alternative distribution networks to show their work. Again the afterglow of May can be detected in this turn away from the mainstream towards those films shown only in *Ciné-clubs* and *Cinémathèques* or, more urgently, those threatened with direct censorship.

Harvey points out however (1978, 34), that in practice in the months that followed *Cahiers* could not quite bring itself to turn its back on its habitual concerns; with Hollywood, with the *auteurs* - Dreyer, Warhol, Demy - or with the continuing round of film festivals.

The real break in the work of *Cahiers*, one which marks a decisive shift in its critical practice (11) and which had organisational implications (resignations from the editorial board and a change of ownership, from the publisher Filippacchi to the benevolent uncles Truffaut and Doniol-Valcroze) came the following Autumn in an influential editorial by Comolli and Narboni (216, Oct. 1969) entitled *Cinéma/Idéologie/Critique* (henceforth *C/I/C*) (12).

This text is an explicit reappraisal and refounding of the basic objectives of the journal, in its introductory paragraphs talking of the need to rigorously "délimite[r] son champ et ses moyens d'action" and of offering a "définition globale de notre position" [a rigorous analysis of the proposed field of study...and the special function it intends

to fulfil (13)] (C/I/C, 11). This position is now explicitly within a Marxist view of the world:

La seule direction possible pour la critique nous paraît être...l'élaboration et l'application d'une théorie critique du cinéma...en référence directe à la méthode du matérialisme dialectique (ibid., 15)

[the only possible line of advance seems to be...to elaborate and apply a critical theory of the cinema...in direct reference to the method of dialectical materialism (Screen Reader 1, 9)]

which perhaps explains the departure of Filippacchi and other previous supporters (subscriptions tumbled to an all-time low of less than 2000 in the period following the shift (Daney, 1983, 121)), although they would also have been less than happy about the treatment, from within this new perspective, of such previously-cherished notions as the 'independent' cinema ("l'utopie d'un 'parallélisme'", ibid., 11), the *auteur* ("le 'réalisateur' n'est qu'un 'travailleur du film'", ibid., 12) and the Godfather of *Cahiers*, André Bazin's, theory of realism ("le 'réalisme bourgeois',...l'arsenal de la sécurité,...la confiance aveugle en la vie", ibid., 13).

["Utopian ideas of working 'parallel' to the system" / "the director...is in the last analysis only a film worker" / "'bourgeois realism' and the whole conservative box of tricks: blind faith in life" ibid., 2,3,5 respectively.]

The first task the editorial attempts is a definition of the position of cinema within ideology, before outlining the practical critical work this then poses for the journal in differentiating films in their specific relation to that ideology.

The starting-point for *Cahiers* is that films are "englobés tous dans l'idéologie dominante...pièces du puzzle

idéologique", (ibid., 12) [every film is part of the ideological system..like pieces in a jigsaw - ibid., 4] and all films are thus ideological, all films are 'political'. If the already-cited remark about "parallélisme" had not been clear, the point is made forcefully that each and every film is "un produit déterminé par l'idéologie du système économique...même les films 'indépendants'...n'échappent pas à cette détermination économique" (ibid., 12). [an ideological product of the system ...a condition to which even 'independent' film makers are subject. ibid., 3].

As Browne (1990, 9) points out "the analysis of the social function of ideology for *Cahiers*...owes more to Althusser...than to Marx":

Les langages à travers lesquels le monde se parle (dont fait partie le cinéma) constituent son idéologie en ce que, se parlant, le monde se donne tel qu'il est vécu et appréhendé, en fait sur le mode de l'illusion idéologique...l'idéologie se re-présente ainsi elle-même par le cinéma. Elle se montre, se parle, s'enseigne dans cette représentation d'elle-même (ibid., 12-13).

[the languages through which the world communicates itself to itself..constitute its ideology for they reproduce the world as it is experienced when filtered through the ideology...The film is ideology presenting itself to itself, talking to itself, learning about itself. ibid., 4-5]

This notion of a closed monologue of ideology continually reproducing itself means that film, (and *Cahiers* suggest that this is so even more than for other art forms (ibid., 12)) is ultimately incapable of generating knowledge of the world.

The editorial takes this notion further in order to define the particular form that ideology takes in the cinema and it is precisely this role of "représentation" of ideology which

is seen as determinate:

on sait que le cinéma, 'tout naturellement', par ce que caméra et pellicule sont faits dans ce but (et dans l'idéologie qui impose ce but), 'reproduit' la réalité (ibid.)

[Clearly the cinema 'reproduces' reality: this is what a camera and film stock are for - so says the ideology. Ibid.]

but if this reality is itself entirely suffused with the dominant ideology then to represent it, to be "faithful" to it, as Bazin would have argued, is to collaborate in its work. "En ce sens, la théorie de la 'transparence' (le classicisme cinématographique) est éminemment réactionnaire " (ibid.) [Seen in this light, the classic theory ..that the camera is an impartial instrument..is eminently reactionary Ibid.]

If all films are, therefore, subsumed within the dominant ideology and if the 'transparent' representation of reality, cinematic realism, is the particular form determined by that ideology, then, for *Cahiers*:

La plus importante tâche du cinéma...est donc de mettre en question ce système de la représentation, de se mettre en question lui-même comme cinéma, pour provoquer un décalage ou une rupture avec sa fonction idéologique (ibid., 13).

[the film maker's first task is to show up the cinema's so-called 'depiction of reality'..to disrupt or even possibly sever the connection between cinema and its ideological function. Ibid., 5]

The practical conclusions for their own work of criticism and for that of film-makers are shaped therefore by the dividing line between films which carry out the above task, which unearth the dominant ideology, make it known in the process of producing meaning, and those which allow it to be channelled

through them unopposed:

Il s'agit de savoir, pour ces films...s'ils se contentent d'être traversés tels quels par cette idéologie... ou bien s'ils tentent d'opérer un retour...d'intervenir sur elle, de la rendre visible (ibid., 12).

[which films allow the ideology a free, unhampered passage, transmit it with crystal clarity...And which attempt to make it turn back and reflect itself,..make it visible by revealing its mechanisms. ibid., 3]

While the editorial goes on to propose seven categories of film, seven sub-groups each with a specific relation to the dominant ideology, it is this distinction which is at the root of them all. The seven groups are as follows (ibid., 13-14 / 5-8):

- a) the largest category, those films which "baignent dans l'idéologie, l'expriment, la véhiculent" [are imbued with the dominant ideology in pure and unadulterated form];
- b) films which "opèrent une double action sur leur insertion idéologique" [attack their ideological assimilation on two fronts];
- c) films "dont le signifié n'est pas explicitement politique, mais ,de quelque façon le 'devient'" [in which the content is not explicitly political, but in some way becomes so through its formal properties;
- d) films which *do* have an explicitly political content but which "adoptent sans question" [unquestioningly adopt] ideologically-conditioned forms;
- e) films which seem initially to be trapped within the dominant ideology but which reveal, on closer inspection, "un décalage, une distorsion, une rupture" [a noticeable gap, a dislocation] between that starting point and the end product
- f) films which use documentary forms and base themselves on contemporary political events, but which, like category d), "ne mettent pas en question le cinéma comme système de représentation idéologique" [do not challenge the cinema's traditional, ideologically-conditioned method of 'depiction']
- g) a second group of documentary films which also operate a critical reflection on those forms.

Hence a hierarchy is established, with those films which are "monologues de l'idéologie dominante se racontant elle-même" (ibid., 13) [a monologue in which the ideology talks to itself], by far the largest category, placed at the bottom, while, at the other end of the scale, there are those films which act 'on both fronts'- a directly political action, "au niveau des 'signifiés'" [at the level of the 'signified'], in its treatment of an explicitly political subject, which is "obligatoirement lié...à une déconstruction critique du système de la représentation" (ibid.) [only politically effective if it is linked with a breaking down of the traditional way of depicting reality. ibid., 6]

Only this double action, "économique-politique/formelle" has any chance of operating effectively against the dominant ideology. Somewhere in between these two poles are two groups of films which only carry out one half of this double action and *Cahiers'* description of them is instructive. On the one hand, films with an explicit political content but which are unable to carry out a real critique of the system because "ils en adoptent sans question le langage et les modes de figuration" (ibid.) [unquestioningly adopt its language and its imagery. ibid.] (Costa-Gavras' *Z* and Pontecorvo's *la Bataille d'Alger* were the most-discussed examples in France, see p.52-3 for Screen's discussion of Ken Loach, the best-known British example) and on the other those which are not explicitly 'about' politics but which *become* so "par le travail 'formel' critique" (ibid.) [through the criticism practised on it through its form, ibid.], that is that their

calling into question of their means of representation in and of itself opposes the dominant ideology.

Therefore, despite their stated support for films which work on "both fronts", it is clearly formal work which is prioritised, leaving the way open to a straightforward championing of Modernist and experimental film-making.

While this is never explicitly proposed in *Cahiers* it is clearly inherent in their formal approach to the question of ideology. There is clearly something of a reaction against Bazin as a sacred cow of the old *Cahiers* in their new view of realism, for there is certainly very little theorisation of realism or discussion of previous Marxist debates around it, particularly the work of Lukács and his 'debates' with Brecht (14).

If the relationship between a film and 'the real' is a purely formal one, then one need merely briefly state the conventions which make up that relationship and any departure from them is credited with a subversive value. Hence in *Cahiers* we have an unspoken but unquestioning acceptance of Modernism.

It is not simply their formalism which makes this inevitable; the view of art as being entirely enclosed within ideology leads directly to an equation between aesthetic practices and political practices. Sharing this view of ideology with Althusser means the *Cahiers* writers also share his view of the role of the intellectual, the theorist. This is brought out most clearly in one category of films from the

editorial which we have not yet mentioned, category 'e)', which seem to be caught within the dominant ideology at first glance but which on closer inspection reveal that

par le travail véritable à l'oeuvre par et dans le film s'installe un décalage, une distorsion, une rupture entre...le projet idéologique réconciliateur et le produit terminal (13-14)

[they have been worked upon, and work, in such a real way that there is a noticeable gap, a dislocation, between the starting point and the finished product. *ibid.*, 7]

the dominant ideology encountering obstacles, having to twist and turn, finding itself "exhibée, montrée, dénoncée" (*ibid.*, 14) [lets us see it, shows it up, denounces it. *Ibid.*]. This 'travail critique' within the film, however, is only discernable to the trained eye, to that of the analyst, a "travail qui sera à déceler par une lecture oblique, symptomale, saisissant...ses décalages, ses failles" (*ibid.*). [If one reads the film obliquely, looking for symptoms;..one can see that it is riddled with cracks...splitting under an internal tension. *Ibid.*]

This explicitly Althusserian notion of a symptomatic reading (a form of deep reading which uncovers the internal consistency, and any inconsistencies, in a given text - see Chapter 1, 19), which alone can explore and uncover these gaps, fissures in the surface of the text makes clear that, as with Althusser, knowledge is only available to the rigorous, scientific theorist; an opposition is established between ideology and science, films being enclosed by the former and only *Cahiers* reading of them capable of producing the latter.

This theoretical, textual focus contrasts significantly with

Cahiers' initial response to May '68. Clearly as the struggle in France ebbed back from the high watermark of activity in which cultural theorists could directly participate, they took refuge in a theoretical struggle against the dominant ideology in the cinema. That Althusser's theory of ideology creates a neo-Marxist space for such theorists to take themselves seriously both professionally and politically has already been mentioned. The notion that it somehow replaces or supersedes the 'crude' or 'determinist' theory of ideology to be found in Marx and provides a more 'sophisticated' version should, however, be severely questioned - it seems the most crude reductionism to categorise all art as being purely and simply ideological, all of the technology of film-making as having a pre-determined ideological role, all of art and culture as being a realm in which "l'idéologie se parle: elle a ses réponses prêtes, auxquelles elle fournit de fausses questions" (ibid., 13). [The ideology is talking to itself; it has all the answers ready before it asks the questions. Ibid., 5]

The subsequent work in *Cahiers* follows through some of the notions about the cinema which were raised in *C/I/C*, but also moves on from it in a number of significant ways.

The initial impulse, which is mentioned in the editorial is to "get back to Russia" (as most Socialists are, or were told to do at some stage!) and seek a way forward for a Marxist conception of the cinema in the work, both theoretical and practical, of Sergei Eisenstein as well as in the wider debates on culture which took place in post-revolutionary

Russia in the 1920s.

Thus as many as fifteen instalments of Eisenstein's writings on the cinema were published between 1969 and 1971 (209-226) plus a special issue on *Russie-années vingt* (220-1, Mai-Juin '70).

Alongside these forays into revolutionary Russia to find pointers for a correct political film-making practice, the work of differentiating contemporary political film-making, using the categories established in *C/I/C* plays a major role. The films of Jancso (*Cahiers* 219, April 1970) Costa-Gavras (224, October '70) Kozintsev and Trauberg (230, July 1971) are all analysed on the grounds of the effectiveness of their ideological critique and criticised for following incorrect roads to political film-making.

Also taken to task is Marin Karmitz, whose *Coup pour coup* is explicitly compared with Godard and Gorin's *Tout va bien*, since both deal with strike action and factory occupation but employ very different techniques in order to do so, and the *Cahiers* collective come down strongly in favour of the latter (15).

Another developing concern, which marked a step on from *C/I/C*, although elements of a similar approach had been present in Oudart's article on *Suture* (211, April '69) was the application of psychoanalytical theory to film and particularly Lacan's theory of the human subject (16). This was first notably achieved in the analysis of Ford's *Young Mr Lincoln*, an extremely influential article which Klinger

credits with launching a thousand textual analyses of Hollywood films (Klinger, 1982, 31).

Taking its lead from category e) of films in *C/I/C* generally known as the progressive (Hollywood) text (Klinger 1982, 30), the *Cahiers* analysis is intended to be a 'total' one exploring the historical and economic determinants of the film and potential readings of it as well as conducting a re-reading of it which attempts to illustrate the mechanisms of ideological production at work in this 'text' as an example of classic Hollywood production (17).

Subsequently the interest in subjectivity is also mapped on to 'deconstructive' film-making, covering films in categories b) and c) which carry out 'work' on the dominant ideological forms in film, and contributes to a further validation of this work which is now taken to constitute subjectivity differently.

The discussion of *Coup pour coup* and *Tout va bien* indicated that the parameters of *Cahiers'* analysis of film had become even more emphatically formal and indeed at the beginning of 1972 their editorial policy statements began to express an explicit preference for avant-garde films, clearly moving away from the notion in *C/I/C* of politically effective films operating on 'both fronts'.

This pro- avant-garde position is brought out in two texts from that year which also illustrate the sharp turn to the left in *Cahiers'* political affiliations, from a "flirt avec le PC [Parti Communiste]" to "la période pur-Mao" (Daney, 1983,

The first of these, *Politique et lutte idéologique de classe: Intervention 1* (*Cahiers* 234-5, Dec.1971-Jan./Feb. 1972) [Politics and Ideological Class Struggle, trans. Browne, 1990, 334-41] provides an account of their own work in the preceding two years which brings out the repressed criticisms of the French Communist Party which had been subjected to self-censorship by the *Cahiers* writers. They castigate themselves for accepting a compromise with the C.P. (a compromise which culminated in the collective analysis of *La Vie est à nous*, Renoir's 1936 election film for the PCF (18)) which was only possible because they erroneously treated culture as autonomous and were therefore prepared to accept the 'revisionism' of the *political* leadership as long as they had hopes for the development of a *cultural* faction favourable to the avant-garde.

The second text, a statement of the journal's position submitted to *Le Monde* (13/1/72) [trans. Harvey, 1978, 128-9] is also somewhat bewildering, this time in its display of the verbal excesses of Maoist dogmatism and their recent political shift seems to have been the prime motive for its publication, since it makes little reference to film. Instead *Le Monde's* readers were treated to attacks on 'economistic revisionism' (presumably referring to their ex-comrades in the PCF), praise for 'the Great Chinese Proletarian Cultural Revolution' and for the guiding role in their work of 'Marxism-Leninism' (clearly praise and capital letters go hand in hand) which will enable them to "analyse.../lay bare and denounce.."

(Harvey, 128) various aspects of the contemporary cinema.

The references to film which the statement does contain are instructive;

Mostly on the basis of the positions outlined above, but also using relevant concepts of psychoanalysis and semiotics, we therefore set out to:.. struggle in support of avant-garde films whose work is based on Marxism-Leninism. (Ibid.)

Quite why psychoanalysis and semiotics, developed by bourgeois thinkers, should be so readily acceptable while 'bourgeois' films, not to mention 'revisionist' forms of Marxism, are being spat upon is never explained but it is clearly their influence which leaves space for *Cahiers* to prioritise the championing of avant-garde films.

As Godard was to find, this kind of film-making was not at all championed by their new-found comrades in the Macist sects, all of whose energies were geared to "serving the people", and whose tastes in film therefore tended towards the 'proletcultist' products of the Cultural Revolution or to those "bourgeois" films which could be used for agitational purposes (far more likely, 'alas', to be *La Bataille d'Alger* or *Z* than *Vent d'est* or *Othon*).

This led to a contradiction within *Cahiers'* work as they began, perhaps, to feel guilty for ignoring the popular cinema and in 1972-73 there began to be references to the need to research into popular forms or to develop work which would be closer to the working class (19). These references are rarely acted upon though, except perhaps in the case of the project for a "Front Culturel Révolutionnaire" (*Pour un Front Culturel*

Révolutionnaire (Avignon '73), *Cahiers* 248, Sept. 1973)

which *Cahiers* tried to launch at Avignon in 1973 but "qui s'est vite effiloché au premier contact" [quickly fell apart at the first attempt] (Daney, 1983, 120).

These contradictions began to take their toll and as the journal began to appear even more sporadically, with less and less on current film production, with no photos and featuring increasingly lengthy transcriptions of discussions of the need for certain kinds of cultural work, Comolli and Narboni left, to become involved in practical film-making (20) and while the Maoist influence persisted until 1976 or 1977 the wind had gone out of its sails and there was very little left of the kind of general theoretical work carried out in the '69-'72 period for which *Cahiers* was renowned.

We will inevitably return to the Marxist film theory generated in *Cahiers* in considering Godard's work of the same period in Chapter 4 and in our conclusion. But let us now move on to consider the parallel British theoretical developments in the journal *Screen*, whose "golden age" (Easthope, 1983) lasted significantly longer, 1971-1979, and which developed certain of *Cahiers'* interests further, particularly the notion of the political avant-garde film, which it termed "Brechtian", and also that of subjectivity.

For those reasons *Screen* was arguably even more influential, its potent theoretical constructs casting an even longer shadow of Althusserian Marxism over cultural theory in Britain and America.

In the early 1970s, under the influence of developments in French film journals such as *Cahiers* and *Cinéthique*, the Society for Education in Film and Television undertook a clear shift in policy in its journal *Screen* away from a focus principally on 'media in education' to an avowed intention to produce aesthetic theory. This was undertaken in the context of a generalised acceptance of a realist aesthetic, particularly in the British cinema, and a dominant practice in film journals of "criticism" and at best "auteurism". The *Screen* approach was critical of these two 'targets' and was initially grounded in Russian formalism (21), Brechtian dramatic theory and the overwhelming influence of Althusserian Marxism.

The combination of Formalism and a certain reading of the Brecht-Lukács debate were used in a protracted critique of realism, their radical credentials being mobilised in the first stages of elaborating what Harvey (1982, 47) later called a "political modernism". The Brecht in *Screen* was an ideal one, a 'modernist' who also found a large popular audience; that his attitude to the world and its relation to art was professedly and profoundly 'realist' went unspoken and the common ground he shared with his polemical opponents in the debates of the 1920s and '30s was conveniently filtered off.

If Brecht and, to a lesser extent, the Formalists were used to provide radical credentials or 'left cover' for a 'modernist' project, then Althusser can be said to be the Marxist bedrock on which *Screen* then built a theoretical

structure which developed further and further away from Marxism. We have already noted the departure from Marxism which Althusser's own Marxism represents, and indicated some reasons why he was so eagerly taken up by cultural theorists. Let us now look at the positions *Screen* willingly shared with Althusserian Marxism before discussing how it developed through the 1970s and exactly what constitutes the "Screen Theory " as Hall (1982) titles it, which has cast such a shadow over contemporary film study.

We have already spoken of the Althusserian influence over early *Screen* theory; indeed its initial attempts at a theory of ideology were little more than summaries of Althusser (*Screen*, 1974, 23, 113-15) and just as there are few direct references to Marx (and where there are he is clearly read via Althusser) Althusser's presence is rarely by overt reference but more usually through the regurgitation of such Althusserian terminology as *problematic*, *practice*, *instance*, etc.

In looking at ideology, *Screen*, like Althusser, suspends "ideological practice" from any relation to other areas of the social formation, the "relative" autonomy becoming a *de facto* total autonomy. Thus to intervene in ideological struggle *Screen*, like Althusser, need merely wage the class struggle in Theory (Althusser's capital T), the now-familiar Theoretical Practice (22), involving a war of ideas upon ideas in the (relatively) autonomous 'instance' of ideology, which results from Althusser's rejection of the Marxist notion of totality.

For *Screen* film becomes autonomous; they even went so far as to append a "Fourth Practice" (though it should surely have been the fifth) to Althusser's theory, importing from *Tel Quel* the notion of "signifying practice", thus subscribing to the structuralist conception of a determinant language, and film is theorised as ideological practice, never, in *Screen*, as industrial production, creating an exclusive focus on 'the text'. This could be seen as a retreat into a ghetto-ised 'culture' and furthermore only certain kinds of texts were ever considered worthy of attention.

It has been pointed out how surprisingly few 'texts' *Screen* dealt with in this period, despite its prodigious output: there is nothing on contemporary popular entertainment films, there being an unwritten but clearly fairly prescriptive list of directors (dare we say *auteurs*?): principally Godard, Oshima, and Straub and Huillet supplemented by "classics" inherited from the *Cahiers* "auteur era": Hawks, Ford, Hitchcock, Welles etc.

This 'Mandarin' approach, ironic given the emphasis on Brecht, is part of a wider intellectual practice in *Screen*: Althusser's theory of Theoretical Practice obviously puts great emphasis on the work of intellectuals and their role in class struggle and *Screen* makes little attempt to explain its aims or its work and, ironically in a journal so concerned with "form" its own format was, until the 1980s, rigorously and conventionally academic and visually unexciting.

This academic tone and emphasis leads it to employ a semi-

digested vocabulary, imported terminology, often translated and, as with Althusser, the source often undisclosed: the work of Althusser, Lacan, Kristeva etc. is presented ill-preparedly and without explanation, and often not presented at all, a reference text with which the reader is already assumed to be familiar.

A number of critics have remarked upon the extent to which "Screen theory", despite its imports and shifts in emphasis, appears as a seamless edifice, demonstrated by the very fact that *Screen* is talked about rather than particular contributors. Antony Easthope (1983, 128) no critic he, concurs:

the separate pieces in it transcended their author to become part of an impersonal coherence, a collective discourse, a form of knowledge.

This might be explained by an amazing coincidence or a convergence of brilliant minds but one can well imagine the pile of rejected submissions which did not coincide with the "Screen problematic", or perhaps more accurately its house style.

This closure carries over into its reaction to criticism or intellectual challenge. Other than its imports, hot from the Parisian presses, in whose reflected glory it clearly basked, *Screen* almost never published articles which directly react to or assess developments outside of its own pages. This last point is crucial, since one key aspect of its intellectual regime was its obsessive *autocritique*, the only criticism it accepted (23). There is a continuous working and reworking of the same theories, on the same films:

honing and polishing its concepts to find ever-more satisfying ways of describing the ideological effect of film (Clarke, 1980, 213).

These reworkings and minor self-criticisms were often presented as major breakthroughs: slight shifts in emphasis or recognition of quite self-evident drawbacks appearing as fundamental new insights to those bound up in the *Screen* framework and often these self-critical remarks seem to operate merely as disclaimers to ward off criticism.

An example of this is a denunciation of "technical formalism" by MacCabe (*Screen* 17/3, 21) which calls the notion that the breaking of "the imaginary relation" between spectator and film could constitute a political aim in itself (which has clearly been a significant element of his own, and *Screen's* work) an "ultra-leftish fantasy" and tries to blame it all on *Tel Quel*.

Screen was clearly marked with the drawbacks of Althusserian Marxism and was only Marxist at all to the extent that it was Althusserian. It has only on one or two choice occasions explicitly stated a commitment to Marxism, more generally shielding its adherence behind references to "materialism".

In the late 1970s, Althusser came to be more and more the jumping-off point into theories of subjectivity, with Lacan (bearing excellent references from Althusser of course) being the new master theorist. Stuart Hall (1980) suggests that *Screen* moved on from Althusser to Lacan and from "Semiotics 1" (Barthes, Lévi-Strauss and early Metz) to "Semiotics 2", Lacan and to a certain extent Kristeva and Foucault's theories of

language and discourse because, whereas the former was "correct" in its dethroning of the subject and its anti-empiricism, it left the subject as an untheorised "empty space"; Lacanian theory was therefore deployed in order to fill that space.

The "Locus classicus" (Hall, 158) of this shift is Metz's *Le Signifiant Imaginaire* (Metz, 1977), translated and published in *Screen's* Summer 1975 issue (16/2, 91), marking Metz's own turn away from a concentration on texts and film as a language, to a concern with "text-reader" relationships.

The two principal Lacanian concepts which *Screen* mobilised are those of the "imaginary" and the "symbolic". For Lacan, these are both genetic and structural concepts: genetically they designate the stages of the journey of "*hommelettes*" or infants, into the human world, as fully formed human children. In this journey there are two important stages: the "mirror stage" and the stage of the Oedipal complex.

In the former, the child is obsessed purely with its alter-ego, the mother, a relationship which is terminated by the Oedipal phase, introducing a tertiary structure which intrudes on the 'imaginary satisfaction of dual fascination' and introduces the child to the 'symbolic', the order of Language which allows it to say you, he, she, it and situate itself as a human child in a world of adult third parties. The child is born to language in the Oedipal stage and its processes are also those whereby it is constituted as a subject: if the Oedipal phase is successfully resolved it leaves the child, by

its acceptance of the lack at the heart of its being, a lack symbolised by the phallus which it either does not possess or of which it can be deprived by the father, firmly lodged in the symbolic order.

Lacan takes these two stages as paradigms for all future imaginary and symbolic situations. The imaginary refers to the type of experience where the 'I' is felt to be a unified phenomenon, the origin of the word, and is characterised by plenitude - "the subject is seen as the founding source of all meanings" (Screen 1974, 17). The symbolic is the order of society, of culture and language and is the sphere, in contrast to the former, of (sexual and linguistic) *difference* and entails a subject which is not homogeneous and is able to accept that the world is Other, and accept the order of culture imposed upon it.

How, then, did Screen apply these somewhat unwieldy psychoanalytic concepts? As Hall points out (1980, 159) the whole Lacanian system is turned back on to the earlier concerns with realism. First of all Screen follows Lacan in believing that subjectivity is constituted as an effect of the discourse which includes it. It then goes on to characterise realist 'texts', in which there is an empiricist relation to knowledge, (the whole point of realist art being to (mis-) recognise "this is how things are"), as belonging to the realm of the imaginary. Realist 'texts' make us into subjects, give us a sense of ourselves as unified, homogeneous, they "replay the basic positions of the already fixed subject" (Hall, *ibid.*), and in doing so confirm them.

Colin MacCabe's work around "the classic realist text" (MacCabe, 1974) identified realism in the formal mechanisms which create the recognition effect. *The classic realist text* (singular) descends, according to MacCabe, in a direct line from the 19th century novel (he uses *Middlemarch* as his example) and, according to Heath, similarly from Quattrocento perspective in painting (Screen 17/3, 75-78). Although realism is not the only discourse in the text, the realist text contains a "hierarchy of discourses" and privileged, at the apex, is "adequacy to the real" (MacCabe, 1974, 8), all the other discourses are situated in relation to it.

This discussion of the 'classic realist text' in Lacanian terms of subjectivity, the imaginary and the symbolic, is supplemented by older, Brechtian concerns. It is argued that the alternative to the realist text, with its narrative resolution of contradictions, thereby placing the spectator outside the realm of contradiction, of action, is a text which *produces* contradiction, no longer "petrifying the spectator in a position of pseudo-dominance" (ibid., 14) but placing them in a critical and contradictory position, a position of action, production. As the realist text is closed, so the text which deconstructs that fixity must be opened up with gaps and fissures on the surface of the text, no longer disguising its processes of production but rather displaying them. The latter are theorised as belonging to the symbolic because they expose difference and heterogeneity, understanding language in terms of lack and absence and investigating the very movement of articulation and difference.

This conception leads *Screen* to construct a typology of films, following Comolli and Narboni (1969), in which their progressiveness or political effectiveness is judged entirely on formal considerations, thus creating the implicit pantheon of directors in *Screen*; Godard, Oshima, Straub and Huillet etc. - it is avant-garde film-making practice which is valued above all. Easy-to-read films or those tarred with the 'realist' brush receive short shrift.

Some of the contradictions of this position are drawn out in looking at the debate around the television plays *Days of Hope* (*Screen* 16/4 and 17/1, 1975-6). For, despite the occasional hat-tipping towards the idea of analysing films as specific interventions in a specific historical moment, *Screen's* overwhelming criterion is that of form. The makers of the plays, Ken Loach and Jim Allen, fail, according to *Screen*, to represent reality as contradictory and their use of costume drama is also criticised. It is difficult, however, to imagine at least a section of the audience in the context of the early 1970s, a period of heightened class struggles, around union rights and the miners' battle with the Heath government for example, failing to see parallels with the General Strike and the role in it of the Labour bureaucracy; nor is contradiction absent in presenting a series of plays which side explicitly with the working class in struggle in the context of a unanimously hostile media.

Although the *Screen* contributions to the debate do acknowledge the point about Loach and Allen's open support for the working class 'side' in the plays, they are nonetheless

criticised for presenting the working class as the fount of all knowledge. Yet this is no more than *Screen* itself does in its elevation of the spectator involved in contradiction, production; aesthetic awareness merely replaces the class-consciousness they decry in Loach and Allen's plays. Lovell (Clarke, 1980, 240) points out that the only 'recognition of the real' which *Screen* theory allows is that of recognising the process of production displayed in the deconstruction text.

Their belief in the value of deconstruction is influenced by Julia Kristeva's conception of textual subversion as political practice but later within *Screen*, Paul Willemen (19/3, 98; cited in Clarke, 1980, 186) recognised that Kristeva's romantic-anarchist notion of eternal and universal subversion or transgression of codes has no conception of *change*, thus ultimately accepting the status quo.

Again we find that if we judge *Screen*, as we judged Althusser, on the ground of Marxism, which is the ground upon which they claim to operate, then they are found wanting. We have noted the complete absence of any idea of class from Lacanian theory and its incompatibility with Marxism should be evident: one cannot accept his view of the subject then tack on the assertion that "of course there are no subjects outside the social formation" as *Screen* does since, as Britton (1979, 13) notes "the exclusion of the subject from the social formation is the major premise of the system". Time and again *Screen* attempts to remain within the Marxist 'problematic' by such last-minute additions or its incorporation of Marxist

terminology into its theories of subjectivity and realism on a purely metaphorical basis, e.g. "production".

The major interest from the Left in Lacanian theory has been from feminists, but although Lacan does provide some sort of theory of sexual identity and the processes by which it is acquired, his is a theory which takes an entirely phallogocentric view of sexuality and which is deeply misogynist in its allotment of a pre-given destiny to the feminine subject - sexual identity being acquired and over and done with before we are old enough to know anything about it - and in the absence of a subject, a "we" of the women's movement, (just as there can be no class subject) this identity becomes eternal and fixed, a deeply pessimistic position for feminist thinkers to adopt.

So again (as with Althusserian Marxism), although there were objective reasons why feminist and Marxist thinkers have taken an interest in such theories, it is clear that in doing so they have chosen a rocky road.

As the 1970s drew to a close, Easthope (1983, 122) writes of "the air being thick with epistemological anxiety" at *Screen*, precisely because of the Althusserian foundation of *Screen* theory. "Post-Althusserians" such as Hindess and Hirst began to draw out the logic of the Althusserian system and proscribed theoretical knowledge *per se* and outlined a theory of *total* autonomy, making explicit what we have seen to be an already-present tendency.

The whole *Screen* project was fundamentally flawed then, but

even its most influential individual texts, such as MacCabe (1974) and Mulvey (1975), laboured under an inadequate analysis of popular cinema. We have seen that for MacCabe the classic realist text was a category covering almost every film ever made, placing them under a single rubric which is so broad and undifferentiated as to be next-to-useless for defining the dominant modes of film. Similarly Mulvey's analysis of the pleasures experienced in the cinema reduced pleasure to a singular psychoanalytical dimension which excludes women spectators altogether.

Throughout the 1970s *Screen's* theory of the "dominant cinema", Hollywood etc. was merely sketched out: its insistence on a monolithic 'classic realist text', making no allowance for the frequent 'play' (in the modernist sense) which takes place within many traditional genre films (see Altman 1987, Polan 1978), meant it discarded the whole of the popular cinema and consequently over-valued avant-garde 'deconstruction' and its authors, Godard prominent amongst them.

We must reject the *Screen* project in general, then, as being neither a Marxist analysis of film nor an adequate means of theorising either the codes of dominant film-making or the practice of 'code-breakers' like Godard. We must attempt, therefore, to move towards an alternative Marxist approach and we will try to indicate the most productive areas from which that work can begin in our conclusion.

Firstly, though, we will begin our examination of Godard's

work with a survey of his own ideas about his film-making. Both there and in our analysis of certain of those films we will inevitably encounter the Althusserian, Structural Marxist writers whose journals were, as we have already indicated, "lieux de célébration du nom de Godard" [places where Godard's name was celebrated] (Gorce, 1989, 156) and will be able to examine in practice what those theories mean in their application.

CHAPTER 3

"Je mélange les images et les sons..." Godard's film-making: theory and Theory.

There are certain problems with which one is faced when attempting to outline Godard's own ideas about his films. His career has undergone some quite severe shifts of emphasis, Godard himself seeing it as comprising several "periods" (Godard, 1980, 290 - all future references are to Godard unless indicated). He is far from being a recluse in terms of being interviewed about or publicising his films but he rarely makes coherent or developed statements, preferring to discuss the star- or money- wrangles in which he is involved or indulging in word-play and abstractions, and, making it even more difficult to categorically state his position, he is certainly not averse to contradicting himself.

It is therefore necessary to sift through the contradictions and off-hand remarks, to distance oneself from the obsessions of particular periods in order to draw out the ideas which are constants in his talking and writing about his own output over the last thirty-odd years. In doing so we have to some extent mirrored the repetitive, overlapping or contradictory form of Godard's statements about his work.

"Un certain réalisme..."

In a *Le Monde* interview in 1960 (*le Monde* 18/3/60, 12) Godard modestly suggested that he thought he was "approaching a certain realism" in his films. This realism, a key facet of his film-making practice, seems to be a peculiar hybrid,

drawing either explicitly or implicitly from such disparate sources as *cinéma vérité*, Francis Ponge, André Bazin, Zola's Naturalism, Italian Neo-Realism and Bertholt Brecht.

"Aller voir un peu comme un scientifique..." (1)

In common with other directors of the *Nouvelle Vague* in the early '60's, Godard attempted to boldly take the cinema where no *scénariste* had gone before: "il faut quitter les endroits où il (le cinéma) est, et aller où il n'est pas" [we have to move from where it is to places where it is not] (1967, 69), he said as he endeavoured to cover subjects previously deemed unworthy of attention, as Zola had done in the novel and also in common with the prophet of Naturalism he took to these subjects a spirit of enquiry or research, both a "travail d'enquête" (among the *yéyés* for *masculin-féminin*, Maoist students for *La Chinoise* and in a clothing factory for *Passion*) usually prior to shooting, and a similar attitude during the process of production of the film: the attempt to document "un ensemble" in *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle* (*Le Monde*, 27/1/67, 25) and, later, film/video work where the technology of film-making itself was experimented upon.

Godard's participation with Beauviala on the Aaton camera neatly combined the two: 25% of the budget of the films from *Sauve Qui Peut... (La vie)* to *Prénom Carmen* (1980-83) went on its research, Godard used it in their production (e.g. opening shot of *Passion*) and their shared aim, or at least Godard's wish, was for a camera which could go where the film camera cannot (i.e. in the dashboard of his car) (Godard and Beauviala, 1982).

"Ne confronter avec la vraie réalité..." (2)

In common with several of the *Nouvelle Vague* directors, Godard's early reflection on the cinema was influenced by André Bazin, whose writings of the 1950s have continued to inform contemporary debates about realism in the cinema. Without the latter's moral zeal for 'the truth', Godard nevertheless felt a responsibility in all but one or two of his films to use only the given physical characteristics of the situation he was attempting to film, expressing the desire to study real objects, to confront reality, without necessarily using traditionally 'realistic' ways of film making.

2 ou 3 choses... is an obvious example of his desire "d'être plus proche de l'objet" [to be closer to the object] (3) (Cardinal, 1968, 11) but when Godard talks, for example, about his use of interviewing ("interviewer en vrai" [true interviewing]) (1980, 184) and especially the 'interviews' with 'real' people (Francis Jeanson, Samuel Fuller, Brice Parain, Roger Leenhardt etc., etc.) he couches it in the same terms, stressing that he uses them in the same way as objects, as a starting point *for himself*, not in a way oriented towards the spectator, a pole of "le réel" around which he can create "l'imaginaire".

Similarly much of the dialogue for *Numéro Deux*, according to Godard, came from his personal life with Anne-Marie Miéville and, as with Brice Parain or Jeanson, the document or object is a "pole" for Godard so that he can "osciller du documentaire à la fiction - de Brice Parain à Anna Karina"

[oscillate from documentary to fiction, from B.P. to A.K.] (ibid., 185).

"Capter l'instant..." (4)

Akin to getting closer to the object Godard has also talked of capturing the moment. Cinema, he says, via Malraux, is the only art to catch death at work and it also catches chance at work: all of his films have turned out the way they have due to unforeseen circumstances or fortuitous encounters and Godard's methods of scripting and shooting - no scenario, basic ideas to be filled out each day - allow him in a sense to "capter le définitif par hasard" [capture the definitive by chance] (1968, 306) and even his often stormy relationships with actors have become, as they must, part of the "finished" product e.g. *Détective*; Godard gave the actors little or no script or 'story' ("le film est devenu - 'pourquoi il n'y a pas d'histoire'") and, as they struggled, incorporated it into his film. "moi je fais le film là-dessus" [the film became - 'why there is no story'...me, I make the film out of that] (1985, 618).

"Ma vieille technique du direct..." (5)

In order to capture the moment without altering the given situation, Godard insists heavily on direct sound and natural lighting. Some of the most entertaining reading for the student of Godard are those articles written by his collaborators about the lengths to which they sometimes went in order to protect this ethos (e.g. Coutard, 1965-6). Godard sees this as part of a "retour à la simplicité" (1968, 308): the simplicity of the single microphone for all of the sound

in *Vivre sa vie*'s café scenes, of the refusal to have more than two soundtracks in the films from *Sauve Qui Peut...* onwards (he even originally wanted only one, where there are normally at least 6 or 7) (*Framework*, 1980, 11) the simplicity of daylight and of non-studio settings (streets, local cafés, Godard's own apartment in *La Chinoise*) and recently, of Dolby sound which although providing quite striking effects in *Détective*, through "la possibilité d'élargir ou de retrécir l'écran" [the possibility of enlarging or reducing the screen space] is used more for its benefits of noise reduction and "restitution avec une certaine fidélité" [a fairly faithful reproduction] (1985, 623).

"Un réalisme partant de la déréalisation..." (6)

Certain aspects of Godard's interest in realism might seem barely distinguishable from a "camera-never-lies", *cinéma-vérité* approach but Godard, particularly at certain junctures, denounced the latter explicitly, as well as liberalist Bazinian realism and from 1968 on extended this rejection to a use of realism in explicitly political domains.

Godard's Marxist-Leninist comrade Gorin argued that Godard's work was political "right from the first sequence of the first film", since, among other reasons, it never became spectacle for its own sake or enticed the audience into its fantasy but always attempted to say to the audience "this is a film"....It is this kind of film" (Walsh, 1981, 126). This distancing came not only from Godard's witty "asides" *Un film en train de se faire* [a film in the process of being made] or *15 fragments d'un film* etc. (examples from the credits of *la Chinoise*, *Une*

Femme Mariée), which clearly signified to the audience the plasticity of the product: "On sait que c'est du cinéma" [you know it's a film] said Godard of *Vivre sa Vie* (*le Monde*, 21/9/62, 13) but also in the direction of actors "seen to be acting" in the interviews of *2 ou 3 choses..* or *La Chinoise*, the winks at the camera from *A Bout de Souffle* on, the *faux-raccords* and repetition of lines in *Pierrot de fou*.

This develops into a neo-Brechtian ethic in *Tout va bien*, in particular, which was clearly a step on from his early films and their views on realism, despite the use of Brechtian techniques in *Vivre Sa Vie*, being a film which seeks a realism "partant de la déréalisation" in order to "démasquer" both the traditional narrative cinema and the ideology it represents and a film which "ne masque pas ces conditions de production", starting with the signing of cheques to the stars who feature in it [starting from de-realisation...unmasking...not hiding its conditions of production] (1980, 373).

"Montage mon beau souci" (7)

Godard's initial antipathies towards Bazinian theses concerned the latter's total rejection of montage as being dishonest, a falsification. As far as he was concerned montage was one of cinema's fundamental discoveries and some of his writings feature a reverential faith in the powers of the early, silent cinema: "Le muet était à la recherche du montage...quelque chose qui était spécifique au cinéma" (1980, 105) [The silents were involved in the discovery of montage...something specific to the cinema]. Godard sees the power of montage as lying in its visual nature, it "permettait

de voir et non plus de dire" [allowed you to see rather than say] (1975, 62) and the perfect simplicity of the construction of classical Eisensteinian montage has inspired his thought throughout his career: "cinema is not one image following another - it is one *plus* one, out of which is formed a third" (Afterimage, 1970), a construction enhanced by "sous-titres [qu'il] avaient une valeur de plan. Le plan après pouvait recommencer pleinement" [sub-titles which had the same value as a shot. The following shot could really begin again] (1980, 106).

Godard feels that the discoveries of the silent cinema have been lost, "perdu à cause du développement anarchique du parlant" [because of the anarchic development of the sound cinema] and he wants to "retrouver la respiration que le texte peut amener" [rediscover the breathing space that the text (of the inter-titles) can bring] (ibid., 121) and return to the simplicity of the silent cinema by creating a resurgence of montage in the "cinéma parlant": "repasser par le muet pour trouver mon propre parlant à moi" [go back via the silents to find my own kind of sound cinema] (ibid., 264).

Godard has applied classical montage to his work and created something of his own: talking of a "faux-raccord" in *Les Carabiniers* he calls it "moving, Eisensteinian" (1972, 199) in the way it cuts, against textbook conventions, for dramatic reasons, but his notions of montage are certainly a step on from the Russian's. He has, for example, explained the idea of montage *all through* the production of a film:

the idea has no meaning for me that the shooting is done

and the editing begins...shooting is continuation of the preparation and the editing should take place during the shooting (*Framework*, 1980, 9)... c'est ça le vrai montage, il se montait aussi à ce moment-là [that's real montage, it was also being edited then] (1980, 46).

Video has helped, he says, to practise this theory, that "you should edit before, during and after you shoot" (*ibid.*).

Godard sees the fundamental question of cinema as "comment passer d'un plan à un autre" [how to move from one shot to the next] (*ibid.*, 98), which led him to defend "découpage classique" against Bazin because " Une heure et demie du sublime est aussi con qu'une heure et demie de la merde. C'est une question de rythme" [1½ hours of the sublime is just the same as 1½ hours of crap. It's a question of rhythm] and he claims, in a rare 'boast' to have invented

comment passer souplement d'un plan à un autre à partir de deux mouvements différents ou même d'un mouvement à un plan immobile [how to cut in a supple way from one shot to another based on two different movements or even from a moving shot to a static one]. (1967, 16)

" Je mélange les images et les sons..."

Although Godard is inspired by the montage of the silent cinema, he himself works in "images et sons" so that his "parlant à moi" is one in which montage is applied to the relationship between sounds and to that between sound and image as well as to the "1 + 1" of images referred to earlier. He claims "je mélange les images et les sons exactement comme un savant fait une expérience" [I mix images and sounds exactly like a scientist does an experiment] but says there should be no set relationship: "il faut pas toujours déranger avec la voix et il faut pas toujours mélanger" [you shouldn't always mismatch the voice but nor should it always match] (*le*

Monde, 1967, op. cit.) . He gives an example from the film *One plus one* where "image de cul et texte de Hitler" are used to suggest a link between "le porno et le totalitaire" [image of sex and text by Hitler...porn and totalitarianism] (1980, 308).

It is interesting to see how Godard has applied the "1 + 1" relationship to the relationship between sounds. In *Sauve Qui Peut...* he tried to have only one soundtrack, in order to have sound and image in a one-to-one relationship but this left a problem to be resolved:

there is already one image, there can't be thousands of sounds - there is only one sound and if I wanted to have two sounds I would have to bring the orchestra on to the set. (*Framework*, 1980, 14)

Similarly, in *Détective* a montage relationship develops between two pieces of music: "A gauche j'avais Liszt et à droite Wagner, c'était intéressant de les changer en cours de route." [On the left I had Liszt and on the right Wagner, it was interesting to switch from one to the other] (1985, 625).

Logique mais pas cohérence...

This also suggests new ways of creating or imagining images "enregistrer un son. Il faut partir de là et peut-être ça te fait changer d'image...donne l'idée de découper." [record a sound. Start from that and maybe it makes you change the image...gives you an idea of how to edit]. In an interview on *Prénom Carmen* (*Avant Scène*, op. cit.) he tells how in one particular image sea and music suggested one another although the music initially accompanied two characters, and how music inspired him to make certain events part of the film. This

"montage of images which were suggested by sounds" is similar to *La Chinoise*, a film "exclusivement de montage. Tourné sans ordre et organisé ensuite" where the shots were ordered and constructed in the editing according to a certain "logique d'association" [exclusively of montage. Shot in any order and then organised afterwards...logic of association] (1967, 18). Godard's example is the "dialogue" with Henri: the latter quotes Bukharin - shot of Bukharin - shot of Stalin, his judge - shot of Oulyanov, who denounced Stalin to her husband (Lenin) very early on. A chain of association which might seem random but which has "logique mais pas cohérence" and "donne juste une idée" [logic but not coherence..., gives just an idea] (ibid., 21) rather than global comprehension.

Quand on n'est pas soi-même ouvrier.../seul comme un peintre

Godard would like to believe that this form of association as well as other aspects of his practice, involves an active participation on the part of the spectator in the films' signification process. This is, however, only part of a wider reflection on Godard's part on the relationship between film-maker, film and spectator. He has often talked of cinema as being a "mouvement" rather than a fixed "point d'arrivée", or as the "lieu de communication" between film-maker and spectator (*le Monde*, 25/9/75, 15). Never loathe to identify cinema with himself he frequently places himself in this intermediary position, "a loudspeaker" (MacCabe, 1980, 77) through which information flows; this is illustrated in *Scénario du film Passion* where his silhouette is constantly between the spectator and the video screen space. This

position is a lonely one and he refers to being "seul comme un peintre" [as lonely as a painter] but throughout his career, though particularly in its more political phases, he has attempted to overcome this loneliness or at least to understand it and ascertain who his audience is.

In the quotation in the sub-heading above, describing Lumière filming *La Sortie d'usine* [Leaving the factory] Godard concludes "...il me paraît presque impossible" [When you're not a worker yourself it seems almost impossible to me] (1980, 31) and during his period with the Dziga-Vertov Group Godard and Gorin constantly posed themselves questions of production, before those of distribution, with which the majority of Left film-makers concerned themselves. They fully realised that they would be "acculés à ne pas pouvoir diffuser, que seulement 2 ou 3 copains les verraient" [not in a position to distribute the films, that only 2 or 3 friends would see them] (1970, 84) but they were not concerned (he recently said "only dictators want a big audience" (1986, 54), seeing their films as one would a leaflet, directing it at a very particular audience, however small. This is extended in *Tout va Bien* which was consciously aimed at reaching a specific group of 100 000 people. They failed to do so but he feels the 15 000 or so who saw it were the "*communauté*" they sought (1980, 159) (8).

His films have rarely, of course, been so clearly aimed at a particular section of the populace. He claims to have 2-300 000 in France "qui ont les mêmes problèmes que moi" [who share my problems] (1980c, 11) and his meditations on the

relationship with his audience have been expressed in terms of television and video in recent years. Seeing his own programmes come out on T.V. has helped him "s'imaginer spectateur" [imagine himself as spectator] (1980, 158) and the feeling that the local people in Rolle, the Swiss town where he now lives, constitute his audience for a night-time "émission" gives him a certainty lacking in the cinema (the guarantee of several hundred thousand of an audience probably helps!).

As well as helping to "s'imaginer spectateur" the technology of video also aids him with its immediately available image and monitors, its mixture of production and consumption in the process of film making with video and the possibility "d'être plusieurs sur l'image" [to work together on the image] (ibid., 184) with the crew which helps democratise the film-making process.

J'ai toujours cherché à m'associer (9)

Yet another refrain in his work, this desire to democratise the process is not merely a feature of his political 'period', though his pronouncements about technicians and camera operators were certainly a great deal more tolerant in the 1968-72 period!

Once the initial burst of *Nouvelle Vague* euphoria was over, he denounced 'auteurism' as "une grosse connerie qu'on a fait" [a real mess we created] (ibid., 284) and preferred to emphasise the camaraderie of the New Wave directors "des gens qui devaient parler de cinéma entre eux, et se critiquer un

peu" [people who had to talk about cinema between themselves and criticise each other a bit] (ibid., 33) and although the non-hierarchical Dziga Vertov Group was clearly a more collective enterprise than the teams working on his pre-'68 films ("Jean-Luc says "AC" and I say "TION" - Gorin, Walsh, 1981, 126) he has continued in a similar vein with Anne-Marie Miéville and the Sonimage set-up with its technology which "oblige group working" (*Framework*, 1980, 13).

J'aime bien la vidéo... (10)

Godard's branching out into video and television is the most significant aspect of his later work and his most fruitful topic of conversation for ten years, 1975-85. He claims that 1968 opened him up to the fact that "l'information" encompassed the other electronic media as well as cinema and he began to accumulate equipment, which led him to receive offers from T.V. companies.

The advantages of television work as he sees it are as follows: it permits a sense of constant production, allowing the guilt-ridden Godard to feel he is "un travailleur de l'information" [an information worker] at least in theory; it also allows him to work from the provinces and to decentralise his production into a "form of handcraft industry" (MacCabe, 1980, 26); the format of television has given him a great deal of scope "on peut parler...en longueur" [you can talk at greater length] (1982, 62) and explore ideas more, "la notion de fragment est admise...un fragment par jour comme un feuilleton" and he can use "le journalisme audiovisuel pour faire du nouveau de la fiction" [the notion of the fragment is

allowed, a fragment a day, like a series...audio-visual journalism to renew fiction] (1980, 138, 109).

Many of the above, such as fragmentation, are aspects of his pre 1970s output but the technology facilitates, he feels, even more fruitful experiment: "le fait d'avoir un moniteur" [the fact of having a monitor] allows the director to "rethink the whole notion of editing"; video's convenience and cheapness helps to develop "la variation sur un thème" e.g. *Scénario du film Passion* and "des instruments qui permettent de dessiner sur l'écran...l'écriture pourrait jouer un vrai rôle" [instruments which allow drawing on the screen, writing could play a significant role] and video recorders and editing tables allow experimentation with colour and a more advanced notion of "caméra-stylé" than Astruc's pen (ibid., 158, 122).

The essence of my cinema contained in that notion... (11)

One aspect of his cinema which seems to tie up many of these threads from others is his interest in dialectical opposition.

The flow of life is caused by polarities - north, south, man, woman, hot, cold - its what makes everything run. Polarities are what make my movies move (1972, 181).

It is a constant which has continued beyond his withdrawal from political film-making and has had both an aesthetic and a political cutting edge in Godard's work.

Early in his career he became interested in the fiction /documentary dialectic, making *Une Femme est Une Femme*, a "neo-realist musical", *Une Femme Mariée* "un film ethnologue", *Vivre Sa Vie* "théâtre-vérité", *masculin-féminin* "grands événements politiques sous forme de faits divers" and *Made in*

USA / 2 ou 3 choses..., made together, which started from opposite poles and met in the middle (12). He always wanted to be "directeur des actualités à la télé" [director of the T.V. news], despite the predominance of fiction films in his work.

Un des grands tabous... le mélange des genres (13)

This documentary / fiction opposition can be seen as part of a wider "travail sur les codes" of the traditional cinema, which began with *A Bout de Souffle* where he attempted to "mettre une fin au vieux cinéma" and one only needs to skim through *Pour Une Véritable Histoire du Cinéma* (1980) to see how much his interest in the history of film and its cop, western, love etc. genres contributed to the creation of his films.

Although more important early on when Godard was trying to reshape the narrative cinema, it is still alive in the 1980s, with *Passion*, like *Alphaville* beginning with the Western-style arrival of a man: "on le fait arriver quelque part et puis on meuble, on invente, on joue" [you have him arrive somewhere and then build around it, invent, play] (*Scénario...*), and *Détective*, "un film de genre où tous les genres se rejoignent" [a genre film where all of the genres meet] (1985, 626). He has even, perhaps, invented a hybrid genre of his own, the visual scénario, in *Scénario du film Passion* with aspects of monologue, diary, writer's notes, painter's sketch etc. all of which are referred to in the film.

That film too makes great use of dialectical opposition: between love and labour, "réel et métaphore" etc. and its

concluding sequence where Godard whispers passionately "voici le cinéma...voici le travail... voici le document...voici la fiction...voici le réel...voici la métaphore...voici l'amour... ..voici le travail...et voici le cinéma...voici le cinéma..." over an image of a jet leaving the ground is like a *résumé* of his ideas which have gone into launching *Passion*. The fact that this section of the *Scénario* contains far more interest and emotion than *Passion* itself is perhaps indicative of Godard's cinema of the 1980s.

One aspect of Godard's film-making that comes across when surveying these expressions of his ideas is his eclecticism, which was particularly noticeable in his views on realism. He had a reputation in the 1960s as an intellectual and cultural magpie, seizing on extracts from seemingly irreconcilable sources and displaying his reading and his general grasp of the cultural moment through the visual and verbal quotations which littered his films: either through book covers, pages of text, posters etc. or, very originally, in the presence of thinkers in the films quoting from, or at least expressing the general concerns of, their own work.

His rapid consumption and assimilation of the fashionable intellectual furniture of any given moment which, it has been suggested (Vianey, 1967, 43), was achieved by reading the beginning and end of any book that passed through his hands, including those on the shelves at parties etc., inevitably brought him into contact with the kind of ideas described in Chapter 1.

An initial hostility to structuralism (described in *Cinémaction*, 1989, 192-198), seems to have been tempered by Godard's own interests in language and alienated communication so that he initially asked Barthes to be the guest 'talking head' for *Alphaville* and in *le Gai Savoir* employs post-structuralist terminology borrowed from Derrida (*écriture, différance...*) and seeks the support of his critique of Western thought in his own "retour à zéro" [return to zero] and desire to "contester radicalement les structures cartésiennes" [radically challenge Cartesian structures (of thought)] (1985, 335).

These are not the only parallels between Godard and those ideas: for example, the only issue of *Tel Quel* devoted to the cinema was Godard and Gorin's *Enquête sur une image* (Godard and Gorin, 1972) and Godard continued to contribute to *Cahiers* in the 1960s and 70s and edited the 300th issue (Godard, 1975).

In 1967, then, when his interest in Marxism reached a peak around *la Chinoise*, he was already well prepared for the structural Marxist ideas of Althusser which the kind of young Maoist students he based the film on were championing in the *Cahiers Marxistes-Léninistes*. Althusser, key architect, as we have seen, in building bridges between structuralism and Marxism, was seen at the time, certainly by those students, as revolutionising Marxist thought in opposition to the ossified P.C.F. bureaucracy.

Therefore, as with the thinkers around the various

journals, in the process of radicalisation which took place for Godard in early 1968 the link between his aesthetic concerns, his intellectual tastes and his new-found commitment was provided by an Althusserian Marxism, albeit coloured the brightest of Chinese reds, in which ideology was taken to be the central realm of political struggle, relatively autonomous of economic and social determination and in which the working class played a drastically-reduced role; hence intellectuals, and indeed artists, take up the baton, at the level of ideas.

We will now examine the products of that commitment in the period 1968-1972, which have made Godard probably one of the best-known Marxist film makers and attempt to evaluate those films as an attempt at putting Marxist cultural ideas into practice.

CHAPTER 4

Godard and the politics of post-'68: the Theory and Practice of the Dziga Vertov Group

Conducting any analysis of Godard's vast and ever-growing body of work inevitably involves selection, and while this is often shaped by the availability of certain films, in the case of Godard there is work readily available from any phase of his film-making of the last three decades or so, with the possible exception of his short films of the 1950s.

Employing the term 'phase' perhaps sidesteps the more contentious issue of whether or not one can, or should, delineate distinct 'periods' in Godard's film-making. Despite some attempts to do so, however, this question can not be avoided in deciding which films are to form the object of study.

For many this is simply a question of organising their material; the texts, interviews etc. in *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard* (1985) for example are sub-divided into "Les Années Karina", "Les Années Mao", "Les Années Vidéo" etc. Others detect different concerns within those sub-divisions e.g. Monaco (1976) who perceives three groups of films within the 'Karina Years' (1) and devotes a chapter to each, or Durgnat (1985) whose article describes *The Seven Ages of Godard*. For many commentators, however, this question of periods has an evaluatory character. Harcourt is a striking example; having detected a "conflict between love and politics" in the films of the 1960s (Harcourt 1974, 246) he

experiences the 'victory' of politics with great regret and hence ceases to write about Godard again until the 1980s (on *Sauve Qui Peut...* Harcourt, 1981) and a return to the 'mainstream' as well as to 'love' as a central concern.

Recent French work (e.g. Douin 1989, *Art Press* and *Cinémaction* specials) appears to avoid this tendency but produces in effect a similar result, adopting an 'auteurist' approach, eclectically and impressionistically quoting from Godard's oeuvre, positing an eternal, ever-playful Godard which in practice suppresses those aspects and those films which dissent. A further tendency, that of Wollen (1972) and MacCabe (1980) for example, which by no means neglects those politicised moments, nonetheless mirrors the *auteur* simplification since, in its form-driven analysis it traces back from them an ever-present tendency toward radical critique which at those points merely reaches new intensity.

Given the intention of this thesis to investigate the claims made for Godard's work as constituting at least the beginnings of a 'revolutionary cinema' then we must necessarily study precisely the 'period' which some suppress or ignore and which others have helped to erect as a model to be followed by any would-be left film-maker, i.e. those films in which Godard explicitly attempts to 'make political films politically'.

An interesting point at which to begin that consideration is Godard's section of the film *Loin du Vietnam* (2), entitled *Caméra-Oeil*, made in 1967, which along with *La Chinoise* and *Weekend* of that year, indicates the tensions Godard felt

working 'within the system', a system of film production and distribution which could apparently absorb and market even his most radical attempts to undermine it (3), and the concerns it voices clearly inform his subsequent *rupture* after May 1968, and the work that followed.

Unlike most of the other contributions to the film, which employ traditional documentary techniques in order to demonstrate the justness of Vietnamese resistance and of Western solidarity movements, Godard voices his concerns in a form of direct address from behind the controls of a large camera (4). The tone is one of self-conscious discomfort, "*honte*", about the difficulties of making a film on Vietnam from his position in France. This reflection was brought on, Godard reveals, by the North Vietnamese turning down his request to go and film there, a decision which, with a mixture of self-pity and self-sacrifice, he says was justified. Therefore, instead of, like Ivens or Lelouch, using footage of Vietnam, Godard films himself, his camera, his isolation and illustrates his soundtrack reflections with images others have shot in Vietnam or in France, or images from his films, e.g. *La Chinoise*, which dealt with Vietnam (this recurring reference to Vietnam in all of his films from 1965 on is a commitment which Godard retrospectively explains in the light of the Vietnamese refusal).

The major focus of what Godard has to say is a triple reflection on how to talk about Vietnam from afar. He firstly describes what he would have filmed in Vietnam had he been a U.S. or Soviet news camera man...but he is in Paris. He then

outlines what he thought of filming when approached to contribute to *Loin du Vietnam* (which would have been images of a naked woman accompanied by a soundtrack description of the effects of fragmentation bombs on such a body) but for which he feels unable to do the 'aesthetic research' necessary to unite its form and content. Finally he suggests what he, or any French film-maker *should* be filming; the struggle in France, the strikes of the workers at Rhodiacéta in Besançon.

This last point is indicative of the frustrations and contradictions in Godard's contribution, for while he can arrive at an extremely valid political insight; he alone in the film draws links between the struggle against Imperialism and the force in the West which can ultimately weaken and destroy it, it is as part of an extremely self-indulgent, navel-gazing reflection on his own problems as a film-maker which fails to participate in the informing and rallying of solidarity and support for the Vietnamese struggle which is the thrust of the film as a whole.

More significantly, in the context of Godard's post-1968 work, is that despite that insight, or perhaps that instinct, about the working class as the force for change, Godard can only see the divisions between himself and the Rhodia workers, his isolation as an artist from that audience, ironically given his use of images from Marker's film about the strikes and the fact that *Loin du Vietnam* was premièred in Besançon and introduced by strikers who drew precisely those links (5), between themselves and the artists and, more importantly, themselves and the struggle in Vietnam, which Godard sees as

impossible.

To a certain extent Godard managed to overcome this immobilising frustration and inability to communicate in the immediate period around May. He was a central figure in the "Mai du cinéma" described in Chapter 2 (27-9); in the Langlois committee, the *Etats Généraux*, the closure of the Cannes festival (reputedly leading the storming of the stage before the opening ceremony and hanging from the curtains to prevent the first screening (Labro et al., 1968, 150)). He was also, significantly, an enthusiastic participant in the making of *Cinétracts*, literally 'leaflet-films'; hastily made, often anonymous, collaborative films with titles like *Le Pouvoir est dans la rue*, *Ce n'est qu'un début...*, *Répression* etc. (recognisable as slogans of May) which were shot in the streets, on the demonstrations, in the occupations, sanctioned by the *Etats Généraux* and screened and discussed in those same factories, schools and *facultés*.

Precisely because of the nature of such films they are not widely available and only snippets of them were available for consultation in the preparation of this thesis (6). However Godard's description of them, especially in a *Tribune Socialiste* interview in early 1969 (Godard, 1985, 332-337), provides an interesting point of comparison both with *Loin du Vietnam* and his later work, particularly in the conception of the audience. Godard credits Marker with the idea of the *Cinétracts* and points out that their first task was a "travail de résistance à l'information Gaulliste" [resistance against the Gaullist news broadcasts], since the

state-run O.R.T.F. was not blacked out by strikes until June.

They were also, however,

un moyen simple et peu cher de faire du cinéma politique, pour une section d'entreprise ou un comité d'action...la diffusion peut se faire dans les appartements, les réunions. (ibid.)

[a cheap and easy way of making political cinema, for a group of workers or an action committee... screenings can take place in someone's flat, in meetings.]

but quite apart from this practical accessibility of the means of making and distributing a film (which must have reminded Godard of the euphoric 'anyone can make a film' attitude of the early days of the *Nouvelle Vague*), there is clearly a further value for Godard of this kind of film-making which "permet de repenser à un niveau très simple et très concret le cinéma" [facilitates a re-thinking of the cinema at a very simple and very concrete level] (ibid.) and especially allows the relationship with the audience to be re-thought, re-cast, leading Godard to declare "il faut faire les films avec ceux qui les voient" [films should be made with those who watch them] (ibid.).

The problem is, however, that this possibility of direct intervention with a massively politicised audience in this very immediate way was perhaps only possible while the May movement was at its height. The more order and 'normality' were restored, the more film-makers returned to their careers as if from a month's holiday, the less Godard finds it easy to envisage a continuation of that kind of film-making and the interview does contain statements reminiscent of the *Loi du Vietnam* impasse: "Mais c'est difficile de faire des films,

neuf ou six mois après Mai" [but it's difficult to make films six or nine months after May] (ibid.).

To his credit, however, Godard, like a significant minority of other French film-makers, technicians and critics (see Chapter Two on *Cahiers du Cinéma*) strove to continue to make films which would contribute to the struggle, which would be, in the Mao-tinged language influential after May, "au service du peuple" [serving the people].

The three films Godard released in 1968; *Le Gai Savoir*, *Un film Comme les Autres* and *One Plus One* are in many ways transitional, discovering some of the basic formal principles which Godard was to work on in subsequent years but without the political certainties. *Le Gai Savoir* was made before May but edited afterwards and picked up where the closing title of *Weekend*, "fin du cinéma", left off; Godard's first film for television, commissioned by the O.R.T.F. as an adaptation of Rousseau's *Emile*, it proposes a 'return to zero' (?), an explicit re-building of a film from its bare essentials of images and sounds, within a framing device of a conversation.

The 'Three-year Plan' which 'Patrice Lumumba' outlines in the film is obviously close to Godard's own approach after 1968: 1) collecting images and sounds 2) criticising, decomposing, substituting and recomposing those images and sounds 3) moving to the production of new images and sounds.

The other two films continue the minimalism of working with two or three images and two or three sounds; *Un film...* combines shots of an *al fresco* discussion between students and

workers, (who are deliberately obscured by the low-angle shots through vegetation) almost explicitly filming the 'divide' he talked about in *Loin du Vietnam* and representing an attempt at crossing it, with soundtrack extracts from historical writings about other revolts and revolutions since 1789 and a further set of images, shot by the workers and students themselves, showing the influence of the *Cinétracts*.

If *Un Film...* was "trois éléments: deux images visuelles et une sonore" [three elements: two visual images and one sound] (Godard, 1985, 364) then *one plus one* attempts to reduce and decompose the film to just that: the "sound" of the Rolling Stones and "image" of Black Power activists (there are images of the Rolling Stones in the studio however and the sound of texts read by the black militants as well as a range of other images). But the theoretical desire to reduce film to the *one plus one* of image and sound is not enough to create anything other than a confused film, unsure if it wants to be *Weekend II* (the "murder" of the white women in the scrapyard) or a candid-camera documentary about the Rolling Stones (8) both in the end recuperable; Godard and the Rolling Stones, two "rebellious" icons of the 1960s in one film.

This confusion is "solved" for Godard by returning to the anonymity the *Cinétracts* had offered him, by forming the Dziga Vertov film-making collective with (as listed in the *Cinéma 70* 'manifesto' of the Group, 1970, 82-88) Gérard Martin, Nathalie Billard, Armand Marco but especially Jean-Pierre Gorin. Especially the latter because he clearly convinced Godard about the political direction the Group

should take, provided a political perspective within which Godard's theoretical film making concerns could be validated. We will discuss later the severe problems this political perspective, a Maoism developed from Gorin's involvement in the Union des Jeunesses Communistes (Marxistes - Léninistes) before 1968, carries with it.

Before we look at *Pravda* (1969) as an example of the work of the collective, there are some general points to be made about the character of its work. The group named itself Dziga Vertov after the experimental Russian documentarist of the 1920s, whose notion of *Kino-Pravda* is seen to offer a correct analytical approach to the image but also a commitment to film "au nom de la dictature du prolétariat" [in the name of the dictatorship of the proletariat] (ibid., 82). Godard also pointed out however that they took his name

non pas pour appliquer son programme mais pour le
prendre comme porte-drapeau par rapport à
Eisenstein...déjà un cinéaste révisionniste (ibid.).

[not in order to apply his programme but to take him as
standard-bearer as opposed to Eisenstein, already a
revisionist film maker]

There is no evidence offered to sustain this view of Eisenstein but certainly the choice of Dziga Vertov would indicate they are opting for documentary over fiction. All of the Group's films (10) were indeed at least some form of documentary, employing the 16mm format and usually being 60-minute films. Most of them are also commissioned by television companies and, very strikingly, all are made abroad, with British, Italian and West German television finance or, in the case of the films made in the U.S.A. (*Vladimir and Rosa*, *One*

a.m.), money from the left-wing Grove Press. We will return to this point in our discussion of *Pravda*.

The *Groupe Dziga Vertov* was not the only collective formed after 1968 in France. Harvey (1978, 27-33) discusses three others: S.L.O.N., which was re-baptised *Le Groupe Medvedkine*, *Dynadia*, closely allied with the PCF, and *Les Cinéastes Révolutionnaires Prolétariens* [Revolutionary Proletarian Film makers] who, as their name might suggest, were a Maoist group close to the paper *La Cause du Peuple*.

Godard was keen to insist, however, that unlike those groups, whose main aim was "une tentative de diffuser les films autrement" [an attempt to distribute films differently] "pour nous, le plus important était de s'attacher aux tâches de production avant celles de la diffusion" [for us the most important thing was to apply ourselves to the tasks of production before those of distribution] (*Cinéma 70*, *ibid.*).

While this might sound like a self-evident truth, there is in fact a real difference in the approach of the groups. While others were attempting, roughly speaking, to continue the relationship with the audience which the *Cinétracts* had established, making films about certain struggles with their participants then screening and discussing those films with those participants, the Dziga Vertov Group refused to consider that as the natural way forward without first posing the questions: "Que produire? C'est-à-dire pour qui produire? Et: comment produire?" (Interview in *Politique Hebdo*, 1972, Godard, 1985, 369) [What should be produced?...for whom?...and

how?] (11).

This notion therefore returns us to the research on the images and sounds proposed in *Le Gai Savoir*, to the tentative approach which says that the new films for the new audience will only be possible after the decomposition and reconstruction from zero:

Pour donner des réponses de style nouveau correspondant à la situation française d'aujourd'hui, il faut commencer par apprendre à poser des questions autrement (*Le Monde* interview, 1972, Godard, 1985, 364).

[To offer a new kind of answer, corresponding to the situation in France today, means first of all beginning by learning to ask questions differently].

Pravda is the Group's third attempt at making some progress on these questions and while it is not necessarily illustrative of all of the features of the Group's work it is sufficiently exemplary to provide an object for discussion in a little more detail of the Group's film-making practice.

The film is basically a Maoist critique of Czechoslovak society, a year after the Russian invasion, but is also an interrogation of the documentary form and an attempt at moving forward on the question of how to make a political film.

These concerns are linked in its title, referring to the Russian Communist Party's daily paper, the main organ of the "revisionist" ideas which lead Maoists to oppose the USSR, and to the notion of truth (*pravda* in Russian) in the context of making a film.

The analysis is constructed in four stages, each, in theory, "successively more profound" (MacBean, 1975, 12), involving

the re-editing of many of the same images with a shift in the soundtrack critique. This repetition is a common feature of the Group's films: as the concluding remarks of *Pravda* would have it "C'est en tournant en rond que nous avançons" (12) [by going round in circles we advance].

Also common to the films is this dominance of the soundtrack, carrying most of the burden of meaning and itself being frequently overburdened with quotation, recitation and self-criticism. As with other films *Pravda*'s soundtrack is framed within a conversation between 'Vladimir and Rosa' (Lenin and Luxemburg, following Brecht) who offer critical analysis of one another's contributions.

The first part of the film is Vladimir's description of a series of supposedly random images as he wonders what kind of country we are in. The repeated use of "Il y a..." and "ça c'est..." [there are...that's...] are intended to indicate the non-analytical level, the 'listing' of images and the subsequent criticism of part one, both within the film and in a leaflet distributed at a screening of the film in 1970 (reproduced in Godard, 1985, 338-340) associates this kind of film-making with "traditional" left-wing documentary:

du "tourisme politique"...; des images et des sons enregistrés un peu au hasard...selon la bonne vieille classification de l'idéologie bourgeoise à laquelle on prétend pourtant s'opposer (ibid. 338)...des impressions de voyage...comme Chris Marker à Rhodiakéta...ça ne suffit pas (*Cahiers* 241, 21).

[..."political tourism". Images and sounds taken rather at random...according to the old classification of bourgeois ideology which one has the pretension of opposing (13).
a travelogue, like Chris Marker at Rhodiakéta - it's not enough.]

This critical opposition to what is seen as a traditional, bourgeois approach to documentary is carried further in a text by Godard from January 1970 entitled *What is to be done?* (Afterimage 1, 1970) which draws a line between two kinds of 'political' film-making: 1) making political films and 2) making films politically and then lists thirty points of difference between the two. 1) is defined as idealist, bourgeois, descriptive, explaining the world in the name of truth, merely observing, opening the eyes and ears, and distributing the film before producing it. 2) is Marxist and dialectical, takes up a proletarian class position, offers a concrete analysis of concrete situations which seeks to actively transform the world, through a study of contradictions with images and sounds, putting questions of production first. (ibid.).

The outrageously sectarian tone of this attack on people like Marker, who are arguably far less involved in political tourism than Godard, is confirmed in the desire stated in the text to "destroy 1) with the weapons of criticism and self-criticism". (ibid.).

The "concrete analysis" in *Pravda*, the would-be move away from mere random observation, is described as "passer de sentir à savoir" [moving from feeling to knowledge] (*Cahiers*, ibid.) and is posed in terms of 'beginning the film's editing' (wrongly suggesting that the images were previously un-edited, somehow natural):

ROSA: ça veut dire commencer le montage du film
VLADIMIR: Commencer le démontage des contradictions...
Il faut faire du montage; les images et les sons on va

les organiser autrement (ibid.).

[ROSA: That means beginning the editing of the film
VLADIMIR: Beginning to take apart the contradictions...
We must do some editing; organise the images and sounds
differently.]

The principle of organisation is to be according to an anti-revisionist political line "sur une ligne anti-révisionniste" (ibid., 22). However while the descriptions offered by the voice of Vladimir of the images are rather more elaborated than in the first section, and the repetition of "Il y a ..." is replaced by that of the headings "Révisionnisme Pratique... Occidentalisme Pratique" [Revisionism in practice, Westernism in practice], it is extremely doubtful that part two has really "fourni les preuves" [provided the proof] (ibid., 23). The soundtrack still asserts that a Hertz billboard or an Avis hirecar is proof of "le viol d'une démocratie populaire par l'idéologie occidentale" [the rape of a people's democracy by Western ideology] or conversely that a shot of a worker at a lathe can really illustrate that

Ici toutes les revendications de la CGT , des shop-stewards anglais...ont été satisfaites. Ici pas de cadences infernales.

[Here all of the demands of the CGT or the British shop-stewards movement...have been satisfied. No speed-ups here.]

The third stage is distinctly different but it is doubtful whether it is in reality any more "profound", representing any development of our understanding of the Czechoslovak situation. Having supposedly proved that Czechoslovakia is "un pays malade" [a sick country], the third part proposes to "mettre un son qui n'est pas malade" on this image which is

sick, "mettre un son juste avec une image fausse", [put a correct sound with a false image] using "la loi de l'unité des contraires", [the law of the unity of opposites].

This is reminiscent of a slogan from the Maoist students' apartment in *La Chinoise*: "il faut confronter les idées vagues avec des images claires" [we must confront vague ideas with clear images] but here the "clarity", the correctness is carried by the sound. The fact that the soundtrack has already been carrying the burden of meaning throughout the film rather invalidates the idea that this takes us any further forward and this is compounded by the nature of this "true" sound - a series of Maoist texts on Party cadres, intellectuals, the army, the peasantry etc. which have only the most tenuous of connections with what has gone before and are merely recited, their 'truth' asserted, with no attempt made to engage the audience with their content.

Preceding and following this section are shots of a cameraman filming with Mao's red book over the viewfinder, indicating the probable source of the texts (though they are absent from the English edition) but also indicating the purely formal solution to the problems raised in the film, both of Czech "revisionism" and of "making films politically", i.e. that the addition of the correct 'sound', the correct line from Mao, cures all political and aesthetic ills.

There is a brief fourth section, although the leaflet mentioned above spoke only of three, which tacks on the ritual

autocritique of part three;

Tu cites des textes justes mais avec quoi?...des images encore à moitié fausses. Tu agissais dogmatiquement...tu as adopté le style des affiches. Tu as fait un pas en avant. Résultat: on a fait deux pas en arrière" (ibid.).

[You quote correct texts but with what?...images still half false...you were acting dogmatically, adopting the style of slogans and posters. You have made a step forward. Result: two steps back.]

While this is undoubtedly so, it is not meant for serious discussion: it is merely the act of self-criticism which is being fore-grounded, fetishised and indeed the concluding remarks merely repeat the sloganeering, proposing Mao's thought as the key weapon in the struggle against revisionism and ending with the slogan "Vive la pensée Mao Tse Toung!", a rewrite of "l'Internationale" and a red flag.

Let us recap on the general character of the Dziga Vertov Group in the light of our discussion of *Pravda*. The film is the first product of Godard's commitment to collective, collaborative work and he pointed out in the texts released around the film that it was Gorin's contribution after the shooting in Czechoslovakia which had in a sense salvaged the film, providing the notion of editing as an organisation of images which the second part of the film attempted to carry out.

While the collaboration clearly bears certain fruits for Godard, it is doubtful whether it fulfils the grander function he occasionally sought, of genuine democratic discussion in the creation of the films extending to the whole cast and crew and indeed to the audience. Often, though, as with the related

notion of self-critical reflection mentioned in relation to *Pravda*, it too is fetishised, with very little to substantiate it. In *Vent d'Est*, for example, a whole section of the film features shots of cast and crew sitting discussing, we are told, whether an image of Stalin should be used to signify repression. A large minority of the film's audience might find this question genuinely important but we are prevented from participating by the disruption of the soundtrack and then the defacing of the image with scratches. Gorin (Walsh, 1981, 126), admitted that in practice in making the film, while the two directors took the process seriously, "the Italian anarchists went to the beach". It has to be said that the end result in this section of the film offers us little reason not to join them.

Partly for financial reasons, in that European television companies were quite keen to finance "a Godard" (although all of the films except one were refused transmission) the Group, as previously mentioned, concentrated on making television documentary films outside of France. Taking this latter point first, it seems to indicate an astonishing disinterest of French revolutionary film makers in the "concrete situation" of their own country. Godard left for London, to make *one plus one*, within weeks of May, as if the end of the general strike led him to turn his back on the struggle in France, to which he did not return in film until four years later and *Tout va bien*.

This seems to suggest a rejection of any possibility of continuing the *Cinétracts* experience of direct intervention in

a concrete situation with a specific, politicised audience (which the hostile remarks about Marker would confirm) and indeed intervention in the directly political sense no longer seems to be a key activity for the Group, who voluntarily limit their contribution to the struggle to combatting ideology *within* film.

It might legitimately be suggested that internationalism is one of the bedrocks of revolutionary socialism and that the analysis of, for example, the Eastern European regimes was a vital task for anyone seeking to revitalise the Marxist tradition. If the Group went even half way towards either aim in *Pravda* or the other films made on their 'grand tour', then this would refute our criticism, but the amount of real understanding of the situation in Czechoslovakia offered by *Pravda* is minimal, and any real socialist internationalism would align itself wholeheartedly with the Czechs against Russian Imperialism, rather than hardly discussing the invasion, equivocating about the nature of the regime, and denouncing the students who resisted Russian tanks unarmed because they were not brandishing the 'correct' ideological banner, as the Group do in *Pravda*. This is precisely the 'crime' they accuse Czech intellectuals of: "on critique les défauts du peuple, sans partir de la position du peuple." [criticising the people's shortcomings without starting from their point of view].

The critical use of documentary forms is the dominant mode of film making of the Group. Their critique of traditional left documentary, which provide the spectator with direct access to

"the truth" via a spurious unity between sound and image, paves the way instead for a dialectical montage of image and sound and the frequent repetition of a relatively small number of images with shifts in analysis on the soundtrack demonstrating its independence.

This 'political' documentary is seen in some ways as a new genre, of "theoretical film", or as political pamphlet ("brochure politique" *l'Express* interview, Godard, 1985, 340) or leaflet. Hence, despite the possible paradox in the light of their critique of access to 'truth' in left-wing documentary, the frequent inclusion of, conclusion with "correct sound" in Dziga Vertov Group films. We have indicated above some of the problems with this notion in *Pravda*, but the crucial point about a leaflet, a pamphlet, a theory, is not its form, but its coherence, its validity as theory. Therefore, although there are dangers in evaluating artistic products purely on political grounds it is unavoidable that the political theory from which the Group starts, 'Marxism-Leninism' (i.e. Maoism) be critically considered.

Despite a less than exemplary record in the first phase of the May events (14), Maoist political groups were the major beneficiaries of May in terms of increased membership and influence. Godard had been in touch with the Union des Jeunesses Communistes (Marxistes-Léninistes - UJCM-L) while making *La Chinoise*, meeting Gorin in the process.

The UJCM-L were a group of students at the prestigious Ecole Normale Supérieure who took their inspiration from one of

their teachers there, a certain Louis Althusser, but translated his theoretical enthusiasm for the Chinese "road to Socialism" into an activist support which saw them expelled from the PCF student organisation, the Union des Etudiants Communistes.

The contradictions of their practice in May provoked the fracturing of the group immediately afterwards but the range of Maoist groups which resulted from the split ('soft' Maoists like *La Cause du Peuple*, *Vive la Révolution* or 'les M - L durs' in the Parti Communiste Français (Marxiste-Léniniste) were rapidly able to catch up and overtake other *gauchiste* alternatives (principally Trotskyist or Anarchist) because their self-sacrificing activism and undoubted commitment, combined with their perspective that revolutionary change was just around the corner best fitted the desire among participants of May to prolong the euphoria they had experienced then, even though the political reality had altered.

This voluntarist approach to political struggles, taking your desires for reality and seeking by force of will to gain ground, is a major component of Western European Maoism after 1968 (15). Another factor in its appeal, and another major political flaw, is its championing of the Chinese 'model' as an alternative to the discredited Russian one. This stems largely from an acceptance of the rhetoric of the Cultural Revolution, which gave a picture of an eternal revolution far more colourful and sexy than anything on offer from the grey bureaucracy in the Kremlin.

That China was in fact the same kind of bureaucratised State Capitalist regime as Russia, with the same basic desires to industrialise, accumulate and maintain national security only began to dawn on the Western Maoists after Nixon's visit to Beijing in 1972 and especially after the demise of the Gang of Four, the Cultural Revolution now revealed as a battle between sections of the bureaucracy, some of whom were prepared to use mass mobilisations as a weapon in that battle.

This pro-Chinese stance was part of a wider "Third Worldism" in their politics which saw the centre of the struggle as having shifted away from the working class to a battle between 'progressive forces' in Asia, Africa and Latin America and Imperialism. While this did not mean strikes etc. in France were ignored, a populist approach was re-imported from these Nationalist struggles so that the vague entity 'le peuple' becomes the agent of change.

All three features substitute other forces, be they 'revolutionary' leaderships, peasant guerrilla armies or anyone prepared to fight, for the working class, thus departing from the authentic revolutionary tradition which has always taken as its starting point that 'the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves' (16).

The Dziga Vertov Group were situated at the 'harder' end of Maoism, more 'M - L' than 'Spontex', and this reinforces many of the above political drawbacks with a theoreticist approach drawn from the UJCM-L days, and hence from Althusser, which

celebrates "la pensée de Mao" ['Mao's thought'] as much as the feats of the Red Guards.

It is this brandishing of 'correct' ideas which is the clearest Maoist influence in the films. The whole project of research into "deux ou trois images" takes its inspiration from Mao's praise of 'scientific experimentation', quoted in *Pravda*. Furthermore, while the analysis of Czech society proposed in the film is completely inadequate (that a once 'Socialist' country has become sick, the illness being "revisionism") the solution proposed is not the Czech and Slovak working class fighting to restore 'their' regime or indeed any kind of struggle at all other than that between 'Marxism-Leninism' and revisionism, between the pale red of revisionism and the redder red of Mao, illustrated in the repeated shots of red trams moving left or right accordingly.

This is a crucial element of their film-making practice which makes it entirely legitimate to conduct a political critique of the films, because the notion that revolutionary politics is purely a question of correct theory is the starting point from which the Group approach film-making itself, leading to the hectoring, sectarian tone which blocks off any real communication with the un-converted, and to the wholesale importing of Marxist terminology into questions of film making *on a purely metaphorical basis* (17), rather than situating that film making within that Marxist analysis of society, within the class struggle, and rethinking the role of film making from there.

Hence the formal, 'textual' focus of 'the political' for Godard, Gorin and their collaborators at the origin of the slogan "making political films politically". This means fighting Imperialism *within* film, combatting the dominant ideology by isolating, deconstructing and destroying the cinematic forms which are seen as the supports of that ideology:

En un mot. La bourgeoisie crée un monde à son image
(Marx).

Mais alors camarades, détruisons cette image.
Mais elle crée aussi une image à son monde. Elle crée
l'image de ce monde qu'elle appelle reflet du réel
(Premiers "sons Anglais", Godard, 1985, 337).

[The bourgeoisie creates a world in its own image.
Comrades let us begin by destroying that image. But it
also creates an image for its world. It creates the
image of its world which it calls the reality effect.]

Critics and theoreticians have been particularly keen to take up this notion. There is a clear echo of the concerns of *Cahiers du Cinéma* and their theorisation of bourgeois ideology in film. Others praised Godard's discovery of a "non-bourgeois camera style" (Henderson, 1980) or his development of a "revolutionary materialist counter-cinema" (Wollen, 1972).

Wollen in fact compiles a list of the "deadly sins" of the bourgeois cinema (fiction, narrative, transparency...pleasure (!) etc.) and establishes an opposing list, of the "cardinal virtues" of the Dziga Vertov Group's films which would suggest, based on *Vent d'Est* that they have virtually succeeded in creating an ideal revolutionary film as we tick off each element included in the formal shopping-list.

As far as such writers are concerned, supported by other journals like *Cinématique* and *Screen*, it is not enough to make films about the struggle and screen them to its participants or potential sympathisers; that, they argued, leaves the audience in the same relation to the film as bourgeois cinema, i.e. passivity. The bourgeois cinema promotes consumption of films as commodities on an entertainment market therefore, following Brecht (although it is extremely questionable how closely) the aim is to alienate the viewer from identification with character, narrative etc. and in so doing attempt to engage them with the process of film-making, make them aware they are watching a film, signal the fact of its construction, its artifice, in order to elicit an active and participatory response to the questions the film raises.

The Dziga Vertov Group attempted to do this by breaking with the entertainment film and its fictional narrative altogether, making instead 'theoretical' films, using the film as a tract for political discussion and breaking too with the 'unitary world' of fictional narrative, using rupture or 'struggle' between elements such as sound and image and between arguments or sections within the film leading to a broken surface, an unfinished, open-ended film rather than the seamless, homogeneous object of mainstream (Hollywood) narrative cinema. In terms of character and identification forms of direct address were used, shots of the 'star' actors making up, getting into costume and playing multiple or divided roles making traditional empathy impossible (these examples from *Vent d'Est*).

The common thread of all these varied techniques and where it differs seriously from the Brechtian theory of distanciation is their complete isolation in form; the emphasis of the films' political critique falls entirely on the formal means of representation and what is represented is often treated as being of negligible importance. Right across the spread of the Dziga Vertov Group's output, political questions are rarely opened up for discussion and analysis, all too often being merely stated, those of an aesthetic nature proving to be so consuming of energy and ideas. Thus Colin MacCabe, in introducing *Pravda* to a late-night Channel 4 audience can easily "recuperate" it for their presumed depoliticised aesthetic tastes.

At its worst this kind of formalism would argue that a gardening film which foregrounded its own artifice, laid bare its own meaning-construction processes etc. would be judged more progressive, more useful for the development of a revolutionary cinema than a 'realist' narrative about, for example, a strike which raised questions about contemporary struggles .

Godard is by no means the 'worst' or most extreme case in terms of this formalist approach; the Straub/Huillet film *The Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach* features musicians in Baroque costume, quite beautifully shot and constructed but in no way fulfilling the film-makers' perception of it when they put it forward as their contribution to the struggle in Vietnam.

At the heart of such an analysis is a failure, inexcusable

in Marxists, to take account of the concrete situation in the world outside of one's own group of initiates. The theoretical speculation takes place at an extremely high level of abstraction; there is evidence of this failure to adequately conceptualise the audience in the somewhat elitist and certainly factually unsustainable notion that the working class is lulled into a dreamlike passivity by the entertainment products of 'consumer capitalism'. One might have thought that the theory of the 'consumer society', prevalent throughout the 1960s, with its notion of an integrated and 'bought-off' working class in the West would have been killed off by the evidence to the contrary of May 1968 in France, 1969 in Italy and the general massive increase in militancy throughout Europe, but the theory of the 'passive audience', which takes such political analyses as its starting point, seems to have continued blithely on as if nothing was happening.

The abstraction from the concrete situation outside the editing room or research institution characteristic of 'deconstruction' theories of revolutionary cinema leads to an insufficient, and mistaken, conception of the audience. In referring to their work as 'theoretical' or in making analogies between film and leaflet or tract, the Dziga Vertov Group implied that they had a clearly-defined notion of their audience.

There is little else however to suggest that that might be the case: on one occasion Godard made reference to a 'cadre' audience, again a political, Leninist term imported into

cinematic practice. Despite the heavy use of Leninist terminology in the films, it remains at the level of rhetoric, since in the key respect of the relationship between a revolutionary minority and a wider audience the Group in no way operated along Leninist lines.

According to classical Leninist political theory, in a pre-revolutionary situation the revolutionary minority must address its propaganda to those outside of their ranks, still a minority, who might be open to their ideas. This minority outside the party but open to revolutionary politics obviously varies in its composition: at times of low working-class militancy it might consist largely of students and intellectuals, while in periods of intense class struggle, such as France in 1968, large numbers of workers can potentially be broken from reformist, social-democratic ideas.

The Dziga Vertov Group, however, addressed their films *not* in any way to the working class as a whole, *not* to the large sections of it radicalised in 1968, questioning the electoral strategy of the PCF and the allied back-to-work machinations of the CGT union leaders and thus open as never before to political alternatives, *not* to the mass of students and intellectuals whose view of the world was similarly shifting massively to the left in the period and *not* even to those amongst it who had already reached revolutionary conclusions; the films of the Group required of its audience that it be both politically revolutionary and impassioned by the same aesthetic minutiae which enthused Godard and Gorin i.e. not at an audience interested in politics nor in political films but

in "making political films politically".

One can detect in this approach a marked *reduction* in Godard's horizons, despite the political and cultural opportunities of the post-1968 period, from attempting to learn *2 ou 3 choses* to researching *2 ou 3 images* for an audience of *2 ou 3 copains* (18).

Moreover, many of the 'textual' strategies adopted, in their attempt to subvert Hollywood entertainment forms, work not only against 'pleasure', thus simply alienating many spectators altogether, but also against any real involvement of the ideal 'cadre' audience spectator in discussion of the aesthetic or political questions the film makers would like to raise, there is either a token nod toward 'democratic' meaning-construction, or at worst a hectoring, pseudo-political monologue which closes off potential areas of discussion and debate, loudly asserting the 'correct' Mao-inspired slogans. It seems strange in such circumstances that the theoreticians should laud such films for their open-endedness and non-unitary 'voice' (Wollen, 1972, 18).

It is important to point out that criticism of the formalist analysis of the Dziga Vertov Group and its theoretical champions does not mean arguing against formal innovation per se. It is the privileging of that formal work on the means of representation, indeed its complete isolation from that which is being represented, which is the danger being signalled. Formal experimentation alone, with no consideration of the historical and political conjuncture, no notion of the film as

an intervention in its specific moment, leads to abstraction and abstention.

It can lead to the dangerous notion that certain forms, certain deconstructive mechanisms are of themselves revolutionary, in some trans-historical fashion; dangerous, and foolish, when watching television or glancing out of a bus window brings us into contact with building society adverts employing surrealist techniques, self-reflexive lager adverts or, ironically, a recent Pepsi advert edited and shot to resemble in many respects, the Godardian cinema of the 1960s. The forms developed by one, progressive, generation can be recycled, regurgitated and ultimately recuperated by apolitical or reactionary successors be it in the French cinema of the 1980s (Besson, Beineix etc and the *cinéma du look*) or even in the heart of the consumerist beast, the advertising industry.

This is not the place to discuss the pros and cons of Brechtian theory, but suffice it to say that such abstract isolation of form from the dramatic situation at the heart of the play or film; 'alienation' or 'distanciation' techniques which, even if successful, lead merely to a 'cool and dispassionate' analysis of aesthetic questions rather than of social contradictions; and abstract, outright rejection of popular forms and entertainment as bourgeois are distant both in detail and in spirit from the Brechtian project. In our next chapter we will examine a film which attempts to respond to the limitations of the Dziga Vertov Group's work and is also consciously Brechtian, *Tout va bien*.

Inevitably, as the Maoist left crumbled (Nixon visiting China, Kampuchean revelations plus the stubborn refusal of reality to fit with their analysis) Godard, like other French intellectuals of the time, became disillusioned with China and thus, as they saw it, with Marxism. Godard, like much of the movement, retreated more and more into 'lifestyle' politics, moving from Paris to Grenoble to rural Switzerland, escaping to nature and to environmental and personal concerns. He took up television and video production which at one level meant a continued interest, post-*Tout va bien* in popular forms, but at another it was seen by him as a handcraft industry (see Chapter 3, p.69), a personal ideal where he no longer had to rely on all of the nasty technicians and workers who didn't understand him.

In a number of later films there are statements of a "God-that-failed" - type in the mouths of characters; critical of Castro etc. (19) in many ways justifiably but from a cynical, individualist position. In a recent film *Soigne ta droite* even May 1968 itself is knocked, Godard adding his voice to those of all the ugly heads which popped up in the media coverage of the twentieth anniversary to say how young and foolish they'd been but wasn't their Public Relations firm doing well.

Godard's importance in the history of world cinema comes from neither of these periodic shifts in his work; the sectarian political formalist of 1968-1972 nor the world-weary and cynical ex-Maoist of the 1980s and 1990s, for whom almost every film has become a meditation on "why are we making this film?" (20).

The answer lies, although this may seem almost a cliché (21), in his earlier work. "The early Godard" flourished amongst the burst of energy and creativity that was *La Nouvelle vague* in the early 1960s when he, and others were making innovative and even experimental films. As the next chapter, which will analyse examples of pre-and post 1968 Godard will go on to demonstrate, however, the formal innovation in the best of them springs far more readily from a genuine engagement with the material than the rigorously formalist work we have just discussed.

CHAPTER 5

Producing Contradictions: a comparative analysis of *Tout va bien* and *Vivre sa vie*.

Tout va bien, made in 1972, is the product of a double defeat and is an attempt to learn the lessons of those defeats, to draw up a balance-sheet before thinking about the next move.

First of all it is very clearly a shift away from the films made since 1968 by Godard and the Dziga Vertov Group and while those films were always produced in a tentative, self-questioning and self-critical mode, *Tout va bien* is posed explicitly as a corrective to what Godard and Gorin had come to see as errors, as if the introspective *autocritique* conducted at the end of those films had merely provided them with a negative list of what *not* to do; with this film they attempt to lay the ground for a more positive step.

As if to mark this, the film is credited to Godard and Gorin, not to the more grandiose 'Dziga Vertov Group' (1), and, without yet discussing the film in detail, we can see a number of important shifts away from the Group's work, as they turn, or in Godard's case re-turn, to the narrative cinema, to a large-budget studio production and to employing international star actors, Jane Fonda and Yves Montand.

The return to these particular means of film-production are very much tied to the other 'defeat' which seems to lie at the origin of the film, the defeat of the *Mouvement de Mai* and the realisation that no amount of triumphalism on a film soundtrack could mask the fact that the revolutionary left in

France had stagnated in size and influence and that "continuations le combat" [keep on fighting] was no longer a sufficiently mobilising slogan.

The film therefore attempts to analyse the situation of the class struggle in France in May 1972, precisely four years on from the 'failed revolution' and to offer an assessment of the balance of forces, and of what was to be done. This is again a clear break with the recent past and its revolutionary tourism and leads the film makers to a far sharper conception of their potential audience and of their relationship to it. Godard said around that time

I passed through a time of disrespect for the public in order now to respect them better. To respect them better means to treat them no longer as the public but as men or women there where they are. It means to be able to make films in which one no longer speaks simply about the film itself. (cited in Monaco, 1976, 240)

Subsequently he spoke about the even greater precision with which that audience was conceptualised, following the funeral of Pierre Overney, a Maoist militant murdered by a factory security guard, a funeral which was

une des dernières grandes manifestations gauchistes...100 000 environ. Puis après il y a eu un creux. Et nous, on s'était dit: "eh bien, ce film qu'on fait, il est destiné aux 100 000." (Godard, 1980, 92) (3)

[one of the last big demonstrations of the far Left...about 100 000. Then there was a lull. We said to ourselves "this film we're making is aimed at that 100 000."]

Clearly, in the light of our criticisms of the Dziga Vertov Group films in the preceding chapter, this attempt to address the remnants of the May movement, a wider audience than for those films, and make an intervention in a concrete situation

at a specific historical moment is a very positive one, though there are those who denounced it, clinging to sectarian isolation, such as Brian Henderson who describes *Tout va bien* as "a bourgeois film, a pre-*Weekend* film" since it lacks "the Marxist-Leninist soundtrack discourse", though his disappointed assessment flies in the face of the evidence when he states that:

without...any explicit commitment, the film reverts to bourgeois objectivity - sounds and images presented for their own sake without criticism. (Henderson, 1972, 70)

That this view is clearly inaccurate should become clear in the course of our reading of the film which will focus on the notion of *Tout va bien* as a conscious intervention in a specific historical moment; in France, May 1972.

Godard and Gorin attempt to address their audience in that concrete political situation by means of a narrative which introduces us to a bourgeois intellectual couple Jacques (Yves Montand) and Susan (Jane Fonda) who both work in the media, the former in advertising films and the latter in radio news broadcasting. These two characters are then placed in a factory which has been occupied by a section of its striking workforce thus creating a situation out of which the film-makers can provoke a generalised reflection around two linked concerns; on the one hand the specific form of the class struggle in France at that time, an important element of which, from the point of view of Godard and Gorin, is the kind of militant strike action which involves occupation, sequestration of bosses (4), organising independently of the

trade unions etc.; and on the other the role that revolutionary intellectuals can play in it, a question which is obviously crucial to the film-makers' own social position but also to that of their intended or expected audience.

While the strike, which is ultimately defeated, occupies (no pun intended) just under half of the film, the contrasting reactions of the couple to their experience in the factory become the focus for the remainder of the film. Susan thinks through the implications of the strike for her work as a journalist and then also for her relationship with Jacques, their 'personal' life, but while she begins to act upon that reflection, in a movement from action to theoretical reflection and on to a renewed practical activity, Jacques remains stuck in his former mode, unable to adapt his position as an intellectual to fit a new situation.

The film-makers leave the narrative unresolved in a way which will be discussed later, the relationship in doubt but not finally settled either way, and conclude with an attempt to generalise the lessons Susan has learned for the audience to consider, to re-think themselves in their relation to the struggle.

This return to narrative cinema was celebrated by some as well as being denounced; Godard's 'return to the mainstream', to the fold as it were, being seen to vindicate the aesthetic tastes of certain critics. Both positions, however, would tend to gloss over the approach Godard and Gorin adopt in relation to this narrative. The conscious choice of a narrative form

for *Tout va bien* is accompanied by a very consciously-constructed pre-planned structure for the film which deliberately works against what they see as the traditional effects of narrative.

In an interview in 1974, Gorin highlighted this aspect of the film, which operated even at the level of the individual shots: "every shot of this film was totally drawn beforehand...it's a very composed movie, almost like stills" (Walsh, 1981, 119). This was certainly a new approach to film-making for Godard more used to shooting scriptless and creating meaning at the editing stage but it is very difficult to assess from the finished product and this composition comes across most clearly perhaps in the structuring of the film.

From the outset the film-makers signal to us that the narrative is not going to be permitted to seamlessly dominate the film. It is explicitly generated, invented by two male and female narrating voices. Their voice-over control of the beginning and end of the film and hence over the narrative's origin and resolution, in what we might call the 'prologue' and 'epilogue' of the film, explicitly brackets the narrative off from any perceived cinematic reality. This keeps it at one remove from the normally coherent, imagined 'world' of the film, which in *Tout va bien* is itself continually pointed out to us and punctured; by the mocking tone of the narrators, by the fact that the film's genesis is from a black screen, which recurs at each point where the narrators pause in progressively 'calling up' the elements of the plot (5) and even by the initial sequence of 'cheque-signing' which

overlaps with the credits and illustrates the relationship to international finance which determines artistic production in capitalist society. While this is a witty and novel way of introducing the stars of a film, it is a 'joke' which outstays its welcome but which has nonetheless led some commentators to exaggeratedly describe *Tout va Bien* as a film which "says everything about itself" (6).

Including these prologue and epilogue sections, the film is organised in a 'tableaux' construction, a series of fairly clearly self-contained episodes, blocks of material which resemble the chapters of a novel but are even more closely related to the acts of a play.

This form of structuring a film was not new for Godard, as we shall see in looking at the earlier *Vivre sa vie*, but here the film-makers turn to this theatrical dimension specifically to deal with the very 'realistic' nature of some of the events in the film (Gorin, op.cit., 122), in order to keep the audience back from a simple absorption so that a reflective distance is maintained. This episodic structure is one element of a clear Brechtian influence on the film, Brecht's ideas of didactic theatre offering vital support for film-makers still deeply concerned with form but who no longer want to talk "simply about the film itself."

There are eight sections or tableaux in the film and we should first of all consider the effects of such a structure on the process of narration and of meaning-construction.

If we accept that the usual role of narrative is to effect a

linear, cumulative reading (this is *usually* the case: while clearly there are wide variations e.g. films containing 'flashback' sequences which reverse straight line cause-and-effect structures, meaning is still created through a linear process of accumulation), then we can see that the tableau organisation at least attempts to establish relationships across and beyond that straight line.

These relationships, mainly involve similarities or parallels between different 'blocks'; similarities in the overall form - e.g. the first and last, prologue and epilogue, are both 'controlled' by the narrating voices; more fundamental structural parallels e.g. the six interview sequences spread across the second, third and fourth sections and most significantly of all, the tracking shot which accompanies the political activity in the strike and the hypermarket (the second and second-to-last, though *not* in the 'May '68' sequence) and is then isolated and highlighted by the removal of its earlier 'context' in the last shot of the film; and also in the repetition or echoing of certain phrases e.g. the title "Tout va bien", various phrases used in clarifying or qualifying various verbal statements - used by the narrators to reach a clearer outline of the historical situation- "précise encore" "c'est encore trop vague" etc., by the workers as they grapple for the words to express a new situation "Non, c'est plus compliqué", "ça va pas" etc., and by Fonda in *her* reflection on how to explain the strike.

We will return to certain elements of this incomplete list of various kinds of parallel and discuss their meaning more

fully, but, even without considering whether or not they 'work' effectively or not, these pointers should indicate the direction in which this tableau construction is attempting to move.

The episodic structure of Brechtian epic theatre frequently involved deliberate 'pauses' in the dramatic action, with plot summaries being provided in advance of each scene, either verbally or via slide projections or placards being carried across the stage. This was also aimed at creating distance from 'the tale', preventing the audience from being 'caught up' in the action, leading them rather to reflect upon it.

This technique is not explicitly reproduced in *Tout va bien* indeed MacCabe bemoans its lack of 'writing on the screen', but Godard and Gorin do seek a similar result in the prologue section, where the narrators not only point to the artifice of the narrative in introducing us to "lui" and "elle " but also provide a skeletal outline of the fairly traditional 'love ' plot which is a component of the film's narrative: "Il y aurait "lui", et il y aurait "elle". Et ils auraient des problèmes pour s'aimer" [There'll be a him and a her and they'll have problems in loving each other].

While it might be possible to overlook this signalling of the standard 'relationship-crisis-resolution' narrative of a love story as the film moves on beyond the narrators' control, steps are taken to remind us at the key point that this is an artificial construction, that it is employing a conventional 'love' plot. Firstly in the 'crisis' section of the film,

where the "problèmes pour s'aimer" become apparent and the couple have a row over breakfast; in both beginning and ending this section there are *faux raccords*, mis-matched cuts between shots, as Fonda sits down and then as Montand gets up to leave. These cuts remind us that the film is a construct, breaking with 'natural', continuity editing but more importantly serve to highlight and underline the 'set piece' nature of the row and hence attempt to distance the audience from any dramatic tension this emotional peak in the relationship might produce (7). Furthermore, at a key point in the argument Susan, in close-up, looks directly at the camera and talks of her need for an image of him at work, to accompany the black and white enlargement of a woman's hand holding a penis which she has just used to illustrate her husband's view of their relationship. While there are other moments of direct address in the film (the 'interview' monologues for example) this sequence most clearly resembles the isolated shots of her and Jacques separately and then together called up by the narrators at the beginning to represent "lui et elle" (the shot of them together is in fact "during" this breakfast). Hence her address to camera is like an appeal to the narrators for such illustrative images and, at a moment of dramatic tension, reminds us of the control exercised by the narrators (and by extension the film-makers for whom they act as surrogates and thus of the artificial, constructed nature of the film.

Secondly, the 'resolution' of the crisis is distanced, since the narrators resume control and leave us with two

inconclusive alternative images of each arriving to meet the other in a café, commenting that "In this film we leave them looking at each other, silently...".

It is this notion of 'distancing' with which Brecht is most closely associated, having developed the notion of the *Verfremdungs-effekt*, the alienation or distanciation-effect. There are further elements of a Brechtian approach in the acting, or perhaps more accurately the use of the actors; in the treatment of the most dramatic moments in the narrative and in the use of colour and other visual components of the shots.

Gorin (Walsh, 1981, 119) talks of the actors in the strike sequence rediscovering ways of acting from the 1930s, which is obviously a little odd for a modern cinema-goer and there is certainly an exaggerated or over-acted quality particularly in the scenes of action or conflict, almost a silent comedy, slapstick atmosphere (8).

While this non-naturalistic acting does not extend to the stars, Fonda and Montand, perhaps a contradiction in the film-makers approach, there is certainly a distancing from the traditional expectation of stars at work in the film. Having shown us the percentage of the film's budget devoted to them (23% each) the narrators then treat them like puppets in the introductory section, turning them round for mugshot-like profile shots, having them parrot the parody of a lovers' dialogue which Godard was forced by the producers to add to *Le Mépris*.

More importantly, in the second section devoted to the factory occupation, the stars, the "central characters", the reason some people will have chosen to see this film rather than another, are shut away with the boss for more than thirty minutes of the film and this marginalisation, this refusal to see them and their characters as the central concern, is emphasised again at the end of the film, as the narrators abandon them to whatever fate awaits their relationship.

This marginalisation, shoving aside, of the star actors is paralleled in the treatment in the film of the more dramatic moments; these too are decentred, bracketed off. The editing of the 'crisis' section is almost explicitly a bracket but even in the staging of the strike/occupation, which the early part of the film suggests is the 'real' concern of the film makers, the moments of dramatic development or 'action' e.g. the initial occupation, the assault on a foreman, the police repression which brings the occupation to an end exist as the 'before' or 'after' of the events we are shown.

This might be intended to focus our attention more on the conflicts *within* the strike, the tendencies and positions involved but even this aspect is distanced, de-dramatised, schematised. The 'interview', monologues where key participants answer silent questions direct to camera, explicitly avoid any direct confrontation of two points of view, as does the 'off-screen' treatment of the negotiations where a delegation of the militant strikers attempts to expose the bankruptcy of the union representatives and their line -

while the negotiations are in progress we are merely shown the remaining strikers idly amusing themselves or pacing around the room awaiting news, news which is then passed on to them, and us, in a very sketchy manner.

A further and very important distancing technique in the strike section is the slow tracking shot back and forward across the 'factory' now revealed as an open-fronted studio set as the camera is pulled back, explicitly distancing itself from the action.

This shot, which is repeated twice later in the film in a very similar form is part of a conscious manipulation of the visual space in the film. Gorin (ibid.) describes it as a "very minimal" film, working on only two kinds of shots - stationary shots, for the most part medium close-ups (the exceptions to this will be considered in a moment), and this lateral tracking shot. Both the former, which overwhelmingly predominate, and the latter flatten the screen space; the actors are usually shot frontally against flat walls which are parallel to the camera and even the tracking shot, which might have given us a 'better angle' on the strike situation, allowed us to develop a perspective, merely reproduces this flatness from a greater distance, not deviating at all from a straight line parallel to the front of the set. In the factory set in particular the walls are painted in bright contrasting colours, mainly red and blue which are an unlikely combination for factory offices but, even were we to accept them as realistic, the framing of the white-aproned workers against the walls and pillars of the set provide us with a series of

tricoloured compositions which, set alongside the red-white-and-blue titles of the early and latter part of the film, contextualise the strike in 'France, 1972', however abstractly. The aprons have mostly been daubed with bright red dye, again realistically motivated - this is a meat factory, but so bright, so widely splattered as to call attention to its own artifice, but also to come to stand for something else, to become a political reference.

Thus far then, we have outlined the circumstances surrounding, the motivation for, the making of this film, and briefly discussed the narrative around which the film is constructed and the significant steps taken by Godard and Gorin to create distance from it, to hamper its potential dominance of the film. There is however a close relationship between the two; the meaning of the film is not contained solely in either aspect but is produced in the complex process of interaction between the situations represented in the narrative and the means of representation. As Kristin Thompson (*Wide Angle*, 1976, 38-40) points out, it is not enough to merely list formal innovations, distancing techniques etc. without a consideration of their function in the narrative context in which they are employed, without looking at their specific *purpose* (as opposed to the more abstract "technique x is used to distance us from convention y" which we have carried out above).

During the factory occupation, at the moment when Jacques and Susan are finally released from the *patron's* office, a slogan is visible, painted in red on the white door of the

latter: "Il faut s'en tenir à la vérité, quand bien même il serait invraisemblable" [Hold on to the truth, even when it seems unlikely.

While this slogan, which we assume to have been painted by one of the strikers, makes an oblique comment on their feelings about the strike and its chances of success, it also clearly refers to the film-makers choice of the "invraisemblable" in the direction of the actors etc., mentioned above.

Read in this way such a statement explicitly lines Godard and Gorin up along side Brecht in his view of realism, "le réalisme, ce n'est pas comment sont les choses vraies, mais comment sont vraiment les choses " [realism is not about the way real things are , but the way things really are] (Godard, 1968, 306) .

This comment forms part of Brecht's reaction to Lukács' opposition to Modernist experimentation and championing of the nineteenth century bourgeois novel as having achieved the peak in terms of representing the complex social totality. It is part of his contribution to what is generally known as the 'Brecht-Lukács Debate'.

That no explicit 'debate', neither face-to face or in correspondence, ever took place, the juxtaposition of the two positions only taking place in the 1960s with the posthumous publication of Brecht's writings against Lukács (9), has contributed to the level of abstraction at which both 'sides' have been discussed in subsequent work.

As Terry Lovell (1980) brilliantly points out, there is much that is shared by Brecht and Lukács, particularly their realist approach to knowledge, a realist epistemology, i.e. a shared belief that there is a 'real world', a social totality, and that it is possible to generate and to gain knowledge of it, for example in art.

Hence it should not astonish us to see, in Godard and Gorin's treatment of the struggle in France, which is realist in the above sense, an artistic choice about the strike which is to stand for, to represent that struggle, which is actually rather more Lukácsian than Brechtian.

Both the nature of the strike (its militancy, the occupation, sequestration etc.), the workers involved in it and the moment in its progress at which the film-makers choose to join it are intended to be as representative, as *typical*, as possible of what they see as the crucial forms of struggle taking place in France in 1972 and of the forces in conflict at such moments.

The notion of 'typicality' in Lukács' view of realism was developed specifically in relation to characters (Lukács 1963, 1978 in particular): typical characters whose role is not that of an average person to whom things might happen, but who have a representative function which contributes to the spectator's understanding of the position of the social forces in the particular situation being represented. But just as Jacques and Susan, and at least some of the strikers, are presented as individuals in their own right and not *merely* as

representatives of particular social or political standpoints, so the strike itself is not typical in the sense of a statistical average or a norm but in that it embodies or crystallises all of the key elements of a particular historical moment. Whether we, or indeed Lukács, would agree with Godard and Gorin's perception of what the key elements in 1972 are is beside the point - we are indicating the implications of an aesthetic choice, not discussing its success or failure.

During the 'May 1968' sequence (Jacques' recollections of battles at the Renault plant at Flins) the male narrator's voice intones a list of struggles which have taken place in the years since 1968 over a shot of demonstrators being arrested and the Salumi occupation is clearly intended to stand among such strikes but also to stand *for* them.

We will return to this 'May' sequence in a moment, but just as Flins is chosen despite not being a great victory or a crucial turning point for the May movement (in fact the Flins conflict occurred in early June and was, rather, one of the last glowing embers), so the phase of the strike portrayed in the film is not the triumph of the initial occupation but the moment of inertia *afterwards*, a moment during which some reflection can occur, where quite clearly there is a certain lack of direction. As Britton (1976, 6) points out, the tracking shot, accompanied by the "song":

Salumi, si tu continue
La classe ouvrière te bottera le cul,

[Salumi, if you continue, the working class will kick
your arse]

while suggestive of the anger and militancy at the root of the occupation, progressively reveals the deadlocked nature of the situation, the inactivity of the strikers, their isolation in the pigeon-hole offices. Therefore the questions 'what next?', 'Why lock up the boss - what does it mean?', 'What will the reaction of the unions be?' etc. are raised for the strikers as well as for the audience, indeed the question about what direction the strike will take is explicitly put, by the boss when he has to smash the window of his office in order to urinate; "jusqu'ou vont-ils aller?" [how far will they go?] a question which is underlined by its repetition - the incident is 'shown' twice, from inside the office and from the reaction of the workers' faces as they watch from another window.

While realism had become one of the deadly sins amongst the people writing about Godard and *Tout va bien*, being a 'Brechtian' film, was therefore positioned, following that widely-accepted shorthand, at the opposite pole, there is clearly a strong realist impulse at work in the film, as in much of Godard's work (as we saw in Chapter 3).

That impulse, echoed in the quotation mentioned above, to seek truth by confronting fiction with reality and vice-versa, by juxtaposing documentary source material with a fictional narrative can be illustrated by considering the "interview" sequences.

Interviews are normally a documentary form, of course, though Godard had repeatedly constructed 'dialogues' in interview form in his films, sometimes involving 'real'

people, playing themselves.

While the figures 'interviewed' are clearly fictional in *Tout va bien*, this presence of 'real' ideas, source materials in a fictional context is repeated in that the lines spoken by the *patron* and the CGT *délégué* are in fact written texts from St.Géour's *Vive la Société de Consommation* and the CGT magazine *La Vie Ouvrière* respectively. The manner in which they speak these written texts and the direct address to camera creates a marked distance and while they follow certain elements of the 'interview' form, the questions are unheard, only occasionally able to be deduced from the answers.

Hence the conflicting forces in the strike are represented in the film by a series of monologues addressed to camera rather than in direct debate or dialogue. The three main forces in the film - the modern *patronat*, the leading trade union confederation, the communist CGT, and the militant workers, some of whom are clearly under the influence of the *gauchiste* groups and specifically *les Maos*, each address the audience, though they do so in very different ways.

While both the boss and the CGT representative speak from their prepared texts, exaggeratedly self-confident in the force of their opinions (and both address the camera alone, uninterrupted by other voices despite the presence of two 'goons' on either side of the union representative) the workers speak spontaneously, hesitantly so that although some writers claim that they too are 'quoting', from *La Cause du Peuple* (e.g. Stam, 1985, 218) it is not clear from

the manner in which they speak. While Bates (1985, 29) feels that the 'official statements have an aura of legitimacy', the delivery, and the editing of the workers 'speech' in fact gives it an air of authenticity which privileges it.

Furthermore their views are expressed by several speakers and on the first occasion where they are interviewed (since there are arguably three gauchiste monologues; the women workers, the men and then the whole group) the speaker is either off-screen while the others stare at the camera or is addressing the camera but with their mouth hidden, giving their ideas a sense of springing from a collective, being their shared spontaneous opinion and therefore further legitimising their view.

Clearly, then, this manner of representing the conflicting points of view is not fair and equitable - the film-makers clearly side with the workers but there is more to this aspect of the film than the commitment it demonstrates.

In a way which reflects back upon the formal concerns of the film and attempts to unite its formal and political critiques this treatment of the three viewpoints indicates the film-makers' view that it is not merely that the 'revisionists' in the PCF and the CGT have an incorrect view of the struggle but that the way their ideas are expressed is equally wrong and compounds their political bankruptcy. Thus the workers criticise the union for talking about the factory "à coup de chiffres" [in terms of facts and figures] and later the *gauchistes* in the hypermarket attack the Communist Party

for selling their manifesto *Changer de Cap*, another document quoted in the film (as is the communist paper *L'Humanité's* opposition to the Flins demonstrations), like any other consumer item.

This aspect of the film is brought out most clearly in the interesting sequence where Susan and Jacques discuss with the strikers after their release from the office. The strikers ask Susan if, as a journalist, she intends to write about the strike. She replies that she does and that "je crois que j'ai compris dans l'ensemble...J'ai vu ce qui s'est passé". "Mais c'est plus compliqué" comes the reply, a refrain that runs through the film, suggesting that seeing is not enough, that a deeper understanding is required.

The workers begin to explain various aspects of their work in the factory which Susan has not seen and while they talk of the smell, the physical arduousness, the repetitive gestures and the noise, images of Fonda and Montand carrying out various tasks on the production line are intercut with shots of them listening and the strikers around the office, eating and talking.

There is a little ambiguity about the status of these images; they are not directly signalled, by the usual close-up, as subjective illustrations by the intellectuals of the descriptions they are hearing and although there is such a close-up of Montand it comes after an image of him pushing carcasses along a rail. The other likely 'explanation' for such images is that the narrators are intervening, as we

suggested they do during the later argument between Susan and Jacques, to 'illustrate' the workers' ideas, positioning the intellectuals in those images in the same way that they were controlled in the prologue.

This might be borne out by the way the images operate, at one level, as a reflection on the use of the stars; to suggest how they *could* have been employed in the film, in the role of workers, how they would have been perhaps following a certain kind of Hollywood production logic (10) and thus to raise the question of why Godard and Gorin have chosen not to give them such roles (11).

The images and their subsequent treatment also provide a critique of the nature of documentary 'truth'. Shot in deep-focus, accompanied by loud directly-recorded sound they resemble the traditional form of *cinéma-vérité* (so the presence in such shots of two international film stars gives yet another confrontation between fiction and documentary). The calling into question of the nature of the knowledge to be gained from such 'truthful' images is made explicit, and given a further, political connotation, when one of the workers stops the discussion: "ça va pas...la manière dont vous racontez les trucs" ["it's no good...the way you're telling the story"].

It is pointed out that if Staquet (the CGT representative) had shown them round the factory, this is precisely how he would have described it; pointing out how disgusting the conditions are, seeking sympathy from the journalists. This is

the case for a reflection on what more can be said and the images of work are repeated in a different sequence along with this critical commentary, this *autocritique*. The phrase "Voyez comme c'est dégueulasse" ["see how disgusting it is"] is repeated over several of the images, representing Staquet's way of explaining work in the factory, its repetition provoking a critical reflection on it and on the notion, shared by Susan, that seeing is understanding, that visible surface coincides with reality.

The strikers have no fully worked-out 'way of explaining' of their own, just as they have no coherent strategy for the strike or political programme but the film champions their hesitant but inquiring and self-critical approach. Following the rejection of Staquet's form of narration, some of the strikers suggest more concrete details, such as hostility to the supervisors, which distinguish their approach from his, but more importantly Frédéric, who is beginning to draw the clearest lessons from the strike, is foregrounded again here as he suggests that what is crucial to a discussion of the factory is "les trucs qui se sont passés depuis hier, qui sont vachement nouveaux pour la boîte" [the things which have happened since yesterday, which are really new for this place].

He again makes an 'illustrated' contribution to the discussion referring to three things: the sequestration of the boss, their refusal to let him piss and the conflict between them and the union. The former is represented by a brief 'sketch' of the boss being told over the intercom that he is

fired but the latter two are 'illustrated' by images we have previously seen in the film, providing an example of one technique developed in the Dziga Vertov films which Godard and Gorin have been able to develop fairly successfully. In *Tout va bien*, however, this repetition of images in the light of new knowledge, this reinterpretation of the images, has been contextualised; we are aware of the conflicting forces and their conflicting 'ways of explaining' which are being compared through the arguments within the strike, the monologues etc. unlike the earlier films where we are assumed to know already about the evils of 'revisionism' and if not we can soon pick it up from the soundtrack's repeated denunciations.

What Frédéric is underlining in his reinterpretation is that seeing the surface, the everyday, picture of reality in the factory is not enough because reality is not static and that what is important are those moments of movement, of change, which indicate the potential for wholesale change.

Both the liberal journalist and the CGT seek sympathy from the viewer/reader; their accounts, full of detailed facts and figures are predicated on the passivity of the workforce and on the individual example of the factory, isolated from any connection with the wider society (which, for the CGT, is the realm where the party decides): "ils arrivent jamais à montrer la lutte et comment les trucs changent" [they never get round to showing the struggle and how things change].

This critical realisation represents the point of furthest

advance of the strike, brought into sharper relief by its juxtaposition with the radio report of the strike's end; the exterior shot of the factory, minus the strike banner suggesting that things are returning to 'normal' but Frédéric's argument remains, the potential for such struggles is still there, reminding us of the narrators' words in the introduction "mais le calme ne serait qu'apparent - tout ça bougerait énormément" [the calm would only be on the surface - underneath it would be bubbling].

As was suggested above, the other major political concern of the film is its reflection on the role of intellectuals in the class struggle. In this light, the choice of Jane Fonda and Yves Montand as stars was significant; both, in their respective countries, had signed manifestoes and petitions, appeared on public platforms and demonstrations in support of various left causes. The way in which we are introduced to them in the film as well as playing with them as 'stars' *per se*, also distances us from their media image as politicised, left-wing public figures and therefore suggests a critical attitude towards their political role as intellectuals.

As well as simply having our expectations challenged, as mentioned above, the 'prologue' leads us on very strongly in actively disliking the two characters. The bourgeoisie is characterised as a class by the narrators with an image of a news reader and various politicians: 'les bourgeois qui bourgeoisent' [practically untranslatable - the subtitled version has "the middle-class middle classing", but "the bourgeoisie going about its business" might be better] is the

bourgeoisie, in its position of control of information, disseminating bourgeois ideas about bourgeois politicians.

Therefore, shortly after this image, when the narrators relax their soundtrack control and the narrative-proper commences, the images of Jacques directing an exploitative shaver advertisement and Susan, relishing every word of a broadcast about the decline of the print media, are very clearly situated at the heart of that closed phrase, the sealed-off world of 'bourgeois qui bourgeoisent'.

They are shown very much at one with this world; sharply focussed, at the centre of the image, with dependent technical staff operating under their control and exude a smug self-confidence about themselves and their work.

Their immediate sequestration with the boss in the occupied factory wipes away that confidence, the intervention of the workers interrupts the circuit of the bourgeoisie's dialogue with itself; Susan's planned interview with 'a modern boss' becomes an absurd idea. While this impact on her work leaves her ill at ease, the discomfort experienced by her husband (whose presence with her is certainly one of the more 'invraisemblable' elements in the film) is even more apparent, as he initially seems to brandish his sympathy with the strikers and then, when that fails to achieve anything and despite his protestations that "ma situation est excellente" (a statement reeking of bad faith), sinks into an uneasy silence.

It is their contrasting reaction to this situation of

isolation, of marginalisation which becomes the focus for the second half of the film. The radio broadcast which announces the end of the strike refers to the 'prisoners' being "rendus à leurs occupations habituelles" [returned to their normal occupations] and the question of whether they will return to normal, continue to work in the same jobs in the same ways is explicitly posed in the following two tableaux.

The effect of the strike on them is brought out visually in a very effective manner. In a shot of Jacques in a studio which relates directly back to our previous image of him at work, he is no longer central to the image, so sharply in focus, figuring so largely in the frame. Following his wary, morose 'interview', he returns "to the coalface" and this loss of control, of certainty, of confidence is compounded in a shot of the stage area where his film (a *Dim tights* advertisement which was apparently often seen before *Tout va bien* on its first release! (12)) is being made, in which he is so out-of-focus, so peripheral to our field of vision as to be practically invisible, while the ultra-bright primary colours of the disembodied tights dance on in sharp focus in the foreground in the viewfinder of a camera.

This work/interview/work structure is repeated for Susan and thus brings out the contrast. Unlike Jacques, for whom, despite his discomfort, work can carry on in the old way (and indeed the last image might suggest it has taken control of him), Susan finds her article on the strike rejected. She too finds she is no longer central to the production of the broadcasts - blocked by the editors and, in the second shot of

her at work, in the background, out of focus beyond the technician and his banks of equipment. She, unlike the workers cannot, or is not allowed, to express her doubt, her hesitancy and is unable to fit the new material, the new subject which forced her to write in a new way, into the old forms demanded by the 'American Broadcasting System'. Her denunciation of her attempted compromise as 'crap' carries an implied criticism of Jacques which is brought into the open in the following tableau, of their row, where Susan refuses to deny the connections between the strike, her work and their 'private' life, refuses, like Jacques (and like the CGT according to the strikers) to see each aspect of her life in a vacuum, begins to question their lives as intellectuals in the light of her experience in the strike and thus begins to "se penser historiquement" [think of herself historically] as the narrators' conclusion demands.

We are also reminded of the narrators' earlier suggestion about the characters' relationship to the struggle, to the 'movement' of classes: "Et elle et lui, pris là-dedans, ils bougent aussi, vite ou lentement" [Him and her caught up in it will also be moving, slowly or quickly].

That Susan's thinking through of the implications for her life of the strike is both more immediate and deeper than Jacques' ("on roule pas à la même vitesse" - we travel at different speeds) is confirmed by the section titled 'Aujourd'hui 1' [Today 1] which follows and deals in an interesting but also ambiguous way with Jacques' attempt to rethink his position.

It is ambiguous in the first instance as we attempt to decide how much time has passed between the row and 'aujourd'hui'. His admission that "Elle avait raison" [she was right] seems to be a major shift from his passivity in the discussion and apparent desire to carry on working and forget the argument. This suggests a change in attitude in Jacques which seems to be borne out in the work he is carrying out while reflecting - the images of him are not now studio-bound and directly related to the trivia of advertising but rather outdoors, in an industrial environment (emphasised by the noise of construction machinery) and therefore more fully involved in the 'today' of the film. Are we to take from this that he has finally begun work on his 'film about France' which he mentioned in his interview?

The ambiguities of this section of the film have caused problems for some critics: Thompson (*Wide Angle*, 1976, 47) and Bates (1985, 29) argue that the 'self-consciousness' of the film is abandoned, that it offers a *cinéma-vérité* treatment of the battles at Flins without a critique. The first thing to be said about the images in question is that they are in one sense subjective 'illustrations' of Jacques' reflection on his role - for him re-thinking himself historically means precisely a return to May 1968 and the origins of the current situation. It also seems positively ludicrous, however, to suggest that the fairly schematic representation of Flins - single lines of demonstrators and CRS riot police confronting one another - and the continuing non-naturalistic, 'slapstick' air of some of the physical confrontations are 'quasi-

documentary' (Thompson, *ibid.*) not to mention the soundtrack; "interrupted" by unmotivated sounds of gas grenades exploding and even more blatantly by the narrators' ode to Gilles Tautin, a young *lycée* student drowned at Flins while escaping a police charge.

The problem would appear to be that some of the 'Brechtian' techniques begin to lose their effect, particularly outside of the more artificial studio setting and that seems to be the explanation for the introduction of the titles before each of the last three, non-studio, *tableaux* and also for the introduction of other writing on the screen in the Flins sequence, as if to emphasise, in the more naturalistic environment, that the film remains a construct.

It is the absence of the distance afforded by the tracking shot in these sequences which seems to trouble some viewers of the film but this, it is our contention, has a political, or a content-based motivation. Jacques' return to May in the light of his experience of the strike allows him, he says, to see more clearly the role played by the *gauchistes* and by the P.C.F., the '*volonté de lutte*' [will to fight] of the one and the attempts to demobilise that fight of the other.

This realisation, however, remains a static one, a retrospective settling of accounts, with no immediate implications for his activity in the present: he recognised his own passivity in the occupation, his inability to communicate with the workers but it is strongly suggested that he remains passive, despite reaching these conclusions, not

explicitly in his words (more bad faith?) nor by further criticism from Susan, but *formally*, by the noticeable absence of the formal means with which other shots of political action, other examples of struggle, in the factory and in the hypermarket, are highlighted, signalled as radically different: the tracking *movement* of the camera. Jacques has not moved on from 1968, is still living on "the honesty" of his break with his old *Nouvelle vague* film-making career.

This is not to dispel the ambiguity which we talked about: it is in some ways left open as to what lessons Jacques has drawn from this reflection. The political distance he now feels from the P.C.F. allows him to see that he had retained after 1968 "mon rôle d'intellectuel que j'avais appris au PC" [my role as intellectual that I learned in the CP] - the kind of activities outlined à propos of Montand above - and he reaches a new conclusion about his role: "mon rôle c'est de faire des films - trouver des formes nouvelles pour un contenu nouveau" [my role is to make films finding new forms for a new content]. This statement is followed immediately by the "Gilles" sequence, the juxtaposition suggesting that it is to stand for just such a new form and certainly the lyrical tone adopted by the narrators and the titles mentioned earlier (Mai 1968/1972/LUTTE/DE/CLASSE) mark it off from the rest of the film but the intervention of the narrating voices prevents any reading of the sequence as being Jacques' work.

Aujourd'hui 2 continues the alternating, comparative structure by indicating the greater achievement of Susan, the fact that she is travelling faster. She explicitly leaves him

behind as she goes to Lille to cover an 'action' in a hypermarket and his position on the telephone, recalling his earlier conversation with the actress about his shaver scenario, and his insistence to his secretary that "Tout va bien" indicate a probable return to his "occupation habituelle". Her interior monologue seems to represent a more successful discovery of the new form for the new content which she had been seeking after the strike. Its non-journalistic tone relates it to the "Gilles" poem as she finds a direct relationship in her work to the continuing struggle.

"En dehors de l'usine c'est l'usine" [outside the factory another factory], she says as the camera tracks slowly left and right along the aisles of the hypermarket making precisely that point and her suggestion that "on attend de nouveaux acteurs" [we await new developments] is the signal for the *gauchiste* demonstrators to invade the hypermarket and urge the shoppers to 'liberate' its goods.

This use of the tracking shot, as was pointed out above, to highlight the parallels between the factory, hypermarket and concluding sequences is a useful point from which to begin a discussion of some of the problems with the film. For on top of its structural importance, its role as a distancing device at dramatic moments and a secondary significance as a hat-tipping homage on the part of Gorin to Godard's use of the tracking shot (Walsh, *ibid*, 121), this shot establishes a relationship between production and consumption (between the food processing factory and its place of distribution, the hypermarket, quite rightly pointing out the scandalous irony

of workers paying for what they themselves have produced) but also equates the action, or rather the 'movement' in both, as if the disruption and theft inflicted on Carrefour by the young militants poses as much of a threat to them as does the strike and occupation to Salumi i.e. as if workers have as much power as consumers as they do as producers.

Thus the film provides an answer to Susan's question "par où commencer?" [where do we begin?] similar to her own; if not "par tous les bouts" [from all sides] at least 'at both ends'. That political 'line' in the film has come in for criticism: MacCabe (1980, 71) sees the hypermarket sequence, along with the beating of a riot policeman by two demonstrators in the 'Flins' sequence, as a celebration of "random violence" and describes it in an earlier piece as a "profoundly reactionary political position...very close to a fascist idealisation of violence" (1975, 56). That he can also describe the film as "exemplary" (ibid, 54) indicates the formalist approach he adopts but the political criticism raised, which openly demonstrates, for once, the Eurocommunist thrust behind much of *Screen's* work in the 1970s (13) should also be discounted. The shots of the two young demonstrators, realising they are no longer outnumbered and have nothing to fear, turning on the CRS man are hardly "random violence". In the context of the state's attempt to restore 'order' in France after May which caused the death of others as well as Gilles Tautin, their action is quite legitimate self-defence.

While recognising, as in our discussion of *Pravda*, the potential dangers of conducting a 'political' critique of a

work of art, there are further problems which we must point out. These concern, firstly, the role accorded to intellectuals in Godard and Gorin's view of revolutionary struggle. Quite apart from the token reference to Maoist 're-education of the intellectuals', which seems deliberately intended to damn Jacques by his 'bourgeois' reaction, the film ultimately suggests that the role of intellectuals is a) to react to social and political struggles by changing the forms of their own work and b) to be 'right on' in their personal relationships.

This reflects the drift in Maoist politics as the wild optimism of the immediate aftermath of May 1968 finally began to wane.

As the notion that revolution was imminent was increasingly undermined, a "crisis of militancy" (Harman, 1979, 60) began to set in. Having spent six, seven, eight years in practically full-time political activity, fine while the movement was still going forward, many of the 1968 generation (as documented in Hamon and Rotman, 1986/87) began to wonder what the point of such frantic work was when the momentum was checked. This questioning of what had been their lives was mapped back onto their political practice and yet another substitute was found to fill the absence of working class militancy: a radical version of what we know today as 'lifestyle politics', pursuing a certain kind of purity within existing society but ultimately accommodating to it, dressed up then as 'bridging the gap between the personal and the political' or, as an Italian Maoist document in 1976 put it,

that:

one's own existence and condition in society should be recognised as the basis for one's own participation in the construction of the revolutionary party. (*Lotta Continua* document, cited in Harman, 1979, 61)

For Godard this meant the return of the old *Loin du Vietnam* problem of the distance of committed intellectuals from the working class, which was obviously posed most sharply in terms of Jacques' inability to communicate during the strike, but even Susan's more successful 'learning process' takes her only to the kind of bridge-building mentioned above, between her politics and her personal life.

Thus the deep pessimism of *Loin du Vietnam* is not solved for Godard by his four year research programme and it is the specific lack of any notion of intellectuals playing a role within a revolutionary, working class party that ultimately leaves him stranded back where he was despite the sophisticated self-help routine of 'thinking yourself historically'. Such a party, as developed by the Bolsheviks, by the early Comintern and subsequently (less successfully in terms of a mass base) by the revolutionary left which has been able to move away from the Stalinist legacy, provides a different kind of bridge, uniting students and intellectuals with the most (politically) advanced sections of the working class. Even in parties where the latter are in short supply, the revolutionary party should maintain a consistent orientation towards those individuals.

Godard, who, as ever, raises such questions in the form of cinematic analogy, states:

je crois à une diffusion de masse lorsqu'il existe un parti de masse...nous nous trouvons dans des pays où le parti révolutionnaire est loin d'exister (Godard, 1985, 342)

[I believe in mass distribution where there is a mass party...we find ourselves in countries where the revolutionary party is far from existing]

but sees the building of those parties clearly as someone else's role, not that of the revolutionary intellectual who has new forms to discover.

By 1972 and *Tout va bien* Godard and Gorin appear to have gravitated towards the spontaneist politics of soft Maoism, which certainly lasted the course better than the hard-line *Marxistes-Léninistes* to whom they previously gave allegiance (but *not* membership) and in the process exchange the Stalinist organisational forms of the latter for the lack of coherent revolutionary organisation of the former.

This does not allow them to escape entirely the sectarianism of the Dziga Vertov films. The self-righteousness of the narrating voices and their control of the images is retained from earlier work and thus the tendency to hector rather than communicate is still present. The "we know, why don't you?" approach of the self-selecting sect may not be directly attributable to Godard and Gorin in this film but in the subsequent, appalling, *Letter to Jane* (1972), yet another reassessment of their work, comparing the role of Fonda in *Tout va bien* with a photo of her in Vietnam which is self-critical only to the extent that they criticise their decision to work with Fonda, it is the voices of the directors who conduct the same process of ideological dissection, rather

than the 'Vladimir and Rosa' proxies.

The ultra-left sectarianism is extended in the approach in the film to the CGT. While the union's communist leadership was clearly playing a role of dampening down struggles in the hope of the party signing a deal with the newly-formed Parti Socialiste, the suggestion that militant workers should therefore leave the unions and write off all of its membership without a fight for influence among the rank and file, let alone basic solidarity at factory level, is arrant nonsense.

More importantly though, the film shares with the previous work a dominant concern with form. The starting-point for all of the major elements of the film is a formal one, for example the tracking shots. Godard talked about "une utilisation sociale de la forme. Une utilisation sociale du travelling comme moyen spécifique du cinéma" [a social use of form. A social use of tracking shots as a specific cinematic technique] (Godard, 1985, 371).

This is a reference to the fact that these shots function both as part of a cinematic repertoire, where their usual signification might be 'elaboration on a theme', and as part of the films political purpose: distancing at the moments of heightened tension and action. Their accompanying those moments of action, of 'mouvement' might also give them a 'social connotation' as we pointed out above, but one of the motivations for selecting the tracking shots appears to have been the desire on Gorin's part to make a reverential reference to Godard's past and the length, the *longueur* of

especially the second major example, in the hypermarket, isolates the shot as a form rather than freezing, exposing a particular social contradiction for detached consideration by the audience.

This dominance of form is made even clearer in the last tracking shot, the "summing-up" of the film. Its almost total isolation as form is intended to leave open to the audience the completion of the film, the filling in of the political content; the task of 'putting yourself in the picture'. This is attempted by means of separating image and sound: while the camera tracks across a wasteground, a nondescript road and a brick wall supposed to signify visual neutrality, blankness, absence of visual content (other than as counterpoint, in its greyness to the ironically-deployed pop song "*il y a du soleil sur la France/et le reste n'a pas d'importance*" [the sun is shining on France/ and nothing else matters]) the soundtrack offers an 'illustrated' summary of the film's main forces: snatches of dialogue projected onto the brick wall - the *patron*, the CGT, and the *gauchistes*.

While *in theory* this does open the film up for completion by the audience, à la Brecht, with the movement of the camera indicating the need for action to solve the contradictions, in practice the final sequence becomes so cluttered with the attempt to 'say everything about itself': not only the elements mentioned above but the amplified sound of the camera's dolly wheels grinding as it tracks (reminding us of the film's own construction etc....etc.), the narrators' voices intoning "*Moi/Toi/Lui/Elle/France/1972*" (with accompanying

titles of the latter) attempting to graft on the concerns with subjectivity; so overburdened that it becomes almost impossible to engage with the basic question of where one stands in relation to the battle between the three forces. In the end the formal work of the film distances us to a standstill and into passivity.

Obviously, having dealt with the film at such length, it is one which is absolutely fascinating in its attempt to express those political concerns and engage with the audience in doing so. The fact that it fails in the end to advance very far down the road should not lead us to reject the attempt.

Tout va bien is Godard's greatest achievement in "making political films politically" and does provide anyone interested in the relationship between culture and politics with a stimulating object of study. Indeed working on the film with students has demonstrated that the questions in the strike ("should they have locked up the boss? What is the nature of Trade Union leaderships? Is the violence a necessary part of the struggle?" etc..etc.) are able to be posed, the distance in their treatment allowing them to be opened up for discussion.

Peter Wollen, writing pre-*Tout va bien*, (1972, 16) says that Godard's political films are the starting point for a revolutionary cinema and that they ask the right questions even if they provide no answers. We can partially agree with him that *Tout va bien* is a starting point and that it does pose questions (unlike the earlier films which posed some of

the right questions but in such a way that they were only of interest to those who knew the answers already) but that those questions are not the ones that Wollen had in mind.

The initial point of comparison between *Tout va bien* and *Vivre sa vie* is their shared use of Brechtian techniques. The fact that the latter film is "a-political" (Roud, 1970, 41), at least in the sense that it has no direct *didactic* political purpose, proves that such techniques have no inherent political or 'revolutionary' significance, other than that which might be attached to Brecht's own name (and he has now clearly been accepted into the theatrical canon), despite the arguments of a significant strand of thought on Godard and on Brechtianism in general (Lesage, 1976 and *Wide Angle* 1976, Stam, 1985 and to some extent the work on Brechtian cinema of MacCabe, 1974, 1975/6 and Heath, 1975/6).

The eclectic Godard picked up on the 'buzz' around Brecht in France which began in 1960 (see p.30, n.11) and mobilizes Brecht's dramatic ideas in the creation of another clash between dialectically-opposed genres, another variant on the document/fiction dialectic, describing the film as "théâtre-vérité" (*le Monde*, 21/9/62, 13).

Both films, therefore, are constructed in tableaux: "en tableaux, oui: cela accentue le côté théâtre, le côté Brecht." [in tableaux, yes: to accentuate the theatrical, Brechtian side] (Godard, 1968, 309). *Vivre sa vie*, perhaps ironically, is the more classically Brechtian in its use of the tableaux construction: there are twelve, numbered chronologically,

separated from one another by a slow fade to black and a title-card bearing the number and a brief indication of what the subsequent tableau contains.

This creates a discontinuous structure, a series of self-contained episodes emphasised by the sharp swings of mood from one to the next which reduce any cause-and-effect logic to a minimum: e.g. between numbers five and six in which Nana is apparently humiliated by her first experience of prostitution but then seems to be perfectly happy with it and a chance encounter with an old friend, also a prostitute, brings her great joy.

Indeed within those tableaux which contain more than one event or action, or which take place in more than one location, the individual segments are themselves separated by fades to black: these almost ponderous transitions, like the inter-titles between the tableaux, create visual, and for the most part aural, gaps or spaces between episodes, a "stopping-starting rhythm" (14) (Sontag *in* Mussman, 1968, 200) which is repeated in the use to which Godard puts Michel Legrand's lyrical music, chopped into short fragments.

To what end are such techniques, employed, then, since episodic construction and self-conscious indication of events in the forthcoming "chapter" are as much part of the picaresque novel (15) as didactic political theatre?

In the famous conversation between Nana and the philosopher Brice Parain, the latter makes a statement which seems emblematic of Godard's approach in the film: "On ne peut bien

parler que quand on regarde la vie avec détachement" [it is only possible to speak meaningfully when we look at life with detachment].

This distance, in more directly Brechtian terminology, is linked to Godard's desire to "rester dehors" [remain on the outside] (Godard, 1968, *ibid*) of the subject of the film. This refers obviously to the potentially salacious issue of prostitution which Godard treats very matter-of-factly for the most part in the film, especially in the 'question-and-answer session' between Nana and Raoul on the conditions of the prostitute's life-style where the latter's replies are taken from Marcel Sacotte's *Où en est la prostitution?* (Monaco, 1976, 122), making Laura Mulvey's (MacCabe and Mulvey, 1980, 93) claim that the film provides an "exotic perception of a woman's selling of her sexuality" somewhat unsustainable (see below).

This "côté extérieur des choses qui devait me permettre de mieux donner le sentiment du dedans" [external view of things which would best allow me convey the feeling of what was going on inside] (Godard, 1968, *ibid.* - trans. Milne, 1972, 187) applies equally to the character of Nana, treated throughout as an object to whom things happen rather than as a conscious subject, making ironic both the title of the film (especially as it is usually translated - "Living My own Life"!) and Nana's speech to her friend Yvette that "je lève la main: je suis responsable - je suis malheureuse: je suis responsable" [I raise my hand: I'm responsible - I'm unhappy: I'm responsible].

The character's name is a reference back to Zola's 19th century courtesan, condemned by her environment and her genetic inheritance from her drunken mother to a life of filth and degradation (16). This is certainly Godard's most 'Naturalist' film in this sense and also in its use of documentation as we noted but, as we found in Chapter 3 his relationship to 'the real' is a complex hybrid and he avoids the trap of Zola's most deterministic works (17), since Naturalist influences are only one element in the melting pot.

Probably more significant in the complex mixture in *Vivre sa vie* are his continual confrontation of document and fiction and the *cinéma-vérité* aspects, strongly present in its visual surface.

In creating a fiction film, which follows the dramatic adventures of a fictional character through a series of events some 'unrealistic' (the gun battle outside the café), some dealt with rather 'unrealistically' in cinematic terms (e.g. some of the café conversations - see below), and on to a melodramatic and somewhat unmotivated end, Godard nonetheless starts from an almost naive faith in respecting *real* locations (the cafés, streets and hotels of suburban Paris), using only the available light and the *real* sound from a single microphone which picks up dialogue, background conversations, clattering coffee cups, the jukebox and all (Collet, in Brown, 1972, 160-162 points out that this technical innovation on Godard's part was truly a "first").

As Theodore Braun points out, however,

Godard isn't so much positioning himself in an historical line with cinema-verite (*sic*) as he is *locating the film in the present tense*. This is a document about how things are now - in 1962 - these are contemporary images (Spectator, 1988, 79 - emphasis added).

This contrasts markedly with a fairly broad consensus on the film which holds that it is "not about prostitution" (Sontag, *op. cit.*, 199), that answers to questions about the social roots of prostitution must be sought elsewhere (Sorlin, *Cinémaction*, 201) or that "Godard does not even consider...social problems" (Campbell, *op.cit*, 36). While clearly, despite the quotes from Sacotte, *Vivre sa vie* is *not* a document, it would be nonsense to suggest that Godard is merely using such material for formal, improvisational purposes, or that the film provides us with no insight whatsoever into the motivations for prostituting oneself, the horrors involved or the day-to-day conditions within which it occurs.

Unlike many of Godard's protagonists, Nana is working class and the film demonstrates, however obliquely, that her options as a single woman (having left her husband) are few. Her desire to break into the theatre or the cinema is doomed to fail and she finds herself stuck in a low-paid job as a "vendeuse chez Pathé-Marconi" [shop assistant]. Her inability to borrow the 2000F she needs to settle her rent leads to her eviction and in each of the first four tableaux this lack of money is emphasised in her downward spiral into homelessness, police arrest and finally prostitution.

The tableau featuring Nana at work in the shop is extremely

important. The title card refers to it as "Nana vit sa vie" [Nana lives her life] emphasising her economic function and also establishing a parallel with the life she lives in the rest of the film, prostitution. This parallel is made even more explicit in the construction of the shots of her at work, suggesting that Nana is performing the same function for 'Philips-kodak-Decca' (the sign above the shop) as for Raoul her pimp, i.e. creating profit, accepting "n'importe quel client pourvu qu'il paie" [each and every customer as long as he pays].

Nana is behind the counter facing the 'client' whose back is always to us retaining his anonymity, respectfully serving him in exactly the same position as the later clients and, as in later encounters with men, her face is occasionally obscured, her identity obliterated, behind his head, or behind the pillars of the shop, as the camera tracks along the counter.

The idea of prostitution as some kind of defence against poverty (Nana: "comment ça va?" Yvette: "je me défends, tu sais?") is perhaps what provokes Mulvey's negative assessment above. What other motivation is there for prostitution, however? Recent reports that some students in Britain have begun turning to casual prostitution to cope with drastically-reduced grants and loans they might never be able to pay can clearly not be explained by 'permissiveness' or any other moral argument (18).

If anything the film *banalises* prostitution, rather than making it exotic, treating it as if it were a job like any

other, not only in the 'hours and conditions' dialogue between Raoul and Nana, but also in brief exchanges between prostitutes, complaining about the facilities in the hotel rooms or in Nana's letter to a provincial brothel which outlines her qualifications like any job application would.

More self-consciously, Godard also draws parallels between prostitution and the cinema. They are casually linked throughout the film: in Yvette's description of how she ended up in prostitution; in the shots of (actual) prostitutes outside the Maillot-Palace (!) cinema; Nana's being "picked up" in the cinema watching *Jeanne d'Arc* (19) , her sleeping with the photographer in order to get a composite-sheet to send to film directors and her being killed outside the 'restaurant des Studios'.

Certainly there is also a problem here to some extent, in that Godard is extending prostitution into metaphorical terrain, suggesting, not for the last time, that it represents the basic condition of labour under capitalism. This is balanced however by the strong sense of enclosure and imprisonment which is created in the visual surface of the film and in the use of the camera. Fieschi (in Mussman 1968, 64-76) talks of Nana's "imprisonment in the *mise-en-scène*" which, above and beyond any narrative motivation, conveys most clearly the severe limitations of Nana's social horizons.

The greyness and austerity of the interior images; the framing of Nana in the cramped corners of the record shop,

against walls and against windows which are more barrier than opening are matched by the limitations even in exterior space, the Paris streets representing slightly larger prisons, with their barred railings and grey pockmarked walls, but prisons nonetheless: "s'évader c'est de la blague" [escaping is just a joke], says Nana to Yvette.

The effacement, or even obliteration, of Nana's identity is also expressed visually as was pointed out above; now in a film which is concerned with identity, and indeed which seeks to understand that 'inside' from without, those shots which represent the point of view of Nana are clearly significant. The most important of those occurs during Nana's dance after she has met the young man who momentarily offers her some kind of escape, real love. This is one of the sharp shifts in mood of the film, a brief, almost ecstatic moment of liberation as she dances round the room to the jukebox, half enticing the young man but also rebelling against Raoul.

Within that liberating moment, however, we are offered a glimpse of the situation from Nana's point of view which ultimately undercuts her joy: indicating the limits, the enclosure of her situation as the camera passes around the walls and pillars of the room, swinging round to a window, black with the night sky and to the faces of Luigi (another pimp) and Raoul who gaze blankly at her, in the end still in control, because of his ownership.

The other point-of-view shots merely confirm this: shots of the streets, the walls the posters and the prostitutes who

line them. There is one further shot, repeated twice in the film which is arguably from Nana's point-of-view: the medium close-up of the groin of her first customer, his hand in his pocket ready to withdraw the money to pay her (which 'he' does in the second version of the shot, during the illustrative montage of images accompanying Raoul and Nana's conversation from Sacotte) perhaps expressing her anxiety about the realities of earning money this way and, at a metaphorical level, brilliantly linking sex and money in one frame and illustrating the alienated sexuality of capitalist society.

That the dance occurs in a café is significant since the tableaux set in cafés appear to offer Nana's only access to some kind of collective, social life; it is only there where there is communication. Godard's exploration of that communication, in the café conversations which feature in half of the twelve tableaux (and there are other forms of conversation in all of the remaining tableaux) provides a dazzling display of improvisation on "how to film a conversation".

Godard spoke of trying to capture something definitive by chance in the film, (1968, 306 see Chapter 3), linking up with Parain's assertion that truth is found partly through error, and despite the ridiculous assertion of Victor Perkins (Cameron, 1977, 33), repeated by Bordwell (1985), that the different methods employed in each conversation could be interchanged without altering the meaning of the film, it is clear that in each specific instance there is an interaction between our perception of Nana's situation and our reading of

the camera angles or movements which creates a 'truth', which 'speaks meaningfully' about her, about isolation and divisions between people, about communication across those divisions and about the ability of film to communicate about all of those things (20).

One example will suffice: Nana's conversation with the photographer at the counter of a café is in mid-shot with the two side-on to the camera. While they talk, going through the preliminaries which will lead to her accepting to sleep with him for the price of the photographs, the camera continually shifts its perspective, framing and reframing from only slightly different angles. While this is in one sense a direct contrast with the previous café scene, between Nana and Paul positioned in a similar way at a bar but shot from behind with their words only just audible, it serves more importantly to express the edgy hesitation on Nana's part about the situation she is about to enter, a nervousness the unsettling camera movements lead us to share as she pauses on the edge of a precipice (it also sets up a parallel with the composite sheet he shows her, featuring photos of an actress, *from all angles*, and hence implicates Godard in the predatory behaviour of the photographer). The static shot from behind in the first conversation, which indicates the separation taking place between Nana and Paul and also distances us from immediate identification with such emotion, would do neither of those things.

Godard is implicated in the sexist exploitation of women in the cinema. Not for the reasons Mulvey suggested but rather

because Anna Karina, like Nana, is objectified in the film, becomes merely another image to be juxtaposed with others: posed and explored from all angles (like the profile 'mugshots' of the credit sequence) and submitted to Godard's inquiring gaze. The fact that Godard self-consciously points to that personal aspect of the film in dubbing his own voice over 'le jeune homme's' reading Poe's *Oval Portrait*, about an artist who creates such a detailed and lifelike portrait of his wife that she dies when he completes it (21), by no means excuses or avoids it.

Apart from the remark on this film (which we have now mentioned four times!) Mulvey's analysis of Godard's treatment of sexuality is extremely useful and perceptive, pointing out that even in his most 'progressive' films about women (which, on the whole, should include *Vivre sa vie*) he cannot avoid the contradiction of reproducing exploitative images in the act of interrogating such representations (MacCabe and Mulvey, 1980, 79-101).

Clearly, though, there is a significant step on from *Vivre sa vie*'s ambiguities in *Tout va bien*'s positive portrayal of the possibilities of women not only breaking out of narrowly sexually-determined roles but of their direct participation, and indeed leading role, in smashing the system which creates such roles. This is only one of the ways in which *Tout va bien* is obviously more 'progressive' politically than the earlier film, which, to the extent that it is 'political' at all, or concerned with social problems let us say, is so within a liberal humanist perspective focussing on the effects on an

individual of such social problems, avoiding their causes, suggesting no possible solution.

If this were our over-riding consideration, then the discussion would be over: on the grounds of political soundness and even, with the reservations we voiced, political effectiveness, *Tout va bien* wins hands down. This has never been and should never be, however, the starting point for assessing a particular work of art within the authentic Marxist tradition. That it has been the starting point for both form and content-driven analysis in probably the vast majority of would-be Marxist approaches to films indicates the extent to which Stalinism dropped a heavy curtain between ourselves and a real Marxist theory of art; thus leading Marxist critics to either adopt its philistine 'Socialist Realist' norms or to seek more sophisticated approaches among bourgeois thinkers or false friends such as Althusser.

We will seek to indicate some useful pointers for a re-discovery of an authentic Marxist theory of art in our conclusion but let us conclude here by outlining why *Vivre sa vie* is, in fact, despite its political limitations and its sexism, the greater achievement, the better film.

In discussing the use of the tableau construction we noted that on this occasion Godard has no real didactic purpose in distancing us from the narrative, but that, inspired by the silent cinema, Godard was seeking to create a space between the images, a resting point, a point of reflection (which is where it does meet up with its Brechtian roots).

This gives the film a very organised and controlled feel but this is in contrast to the expressive and experimental use of the camera, not only in the variations on constructing a conversation but also in the streets, where the camera often moves restlessly in one direction before doubling back to pick up some other object of interest.

This free-spirited exploration of the screen space becomes at another level, and with markedly different effect, an exploration of *social* space: the space, the divisions between people and the space, or lack of it, around people and between people and the objects in their lives.

Thus in the inter-relation of Godard's restless and searching aesthetic sensibilities and the elements of contemporary social reality which make up one of the 'poles' of that search, Godard creates a film which is complex, fragmentary and ambiguous, like all Modernist art, but which ultimately achieves an organic unity, a meeting point of all of its concerns, which manages to 'bien parler', to speak meaningfully about certain aspects of France in 1962.

Ten years later Godard wanted to say more, to say *everything* about his subject and his film and had adopted conceptual tools which he thought could give him those answers. However, the placing of political theory in command of the process in the end deprives him of his greatest resource, his eclectic, enquiring mind, irritating, self-obsessed though it often was, which perhaps told us more about 1962 than the film which consciously, too consciously, tried to 'think itself

historically' in 1972.

CONCLUSION

Godard and Modernism within a Marxist theory of art

The lengthy and detailed nature of the analysis to which we have subjected the attempts by Godard and his collaborators to develop a revolutionary cinema should testify to the fact that their efforts remain genuinely interesting and indeed inspiring for anyone seeking to examine the relationship between culture and revolutionary social change (1).

Yet despite respecting and valuing that commitment, and sharing some of its political aims, we are led by that analysis to conclude that far from taking his experimental approach to film-making to new heights, Godard's politicisation after 1968 in fact impoverished his work and that, in directly comparing two products of these differing moments in his film-making, it is the earlier work, product of a spirit of pessimistic rebellion rather than a conscious revolutionary Marxism, which stands up as the more powerful work and the greater artistic achievement.

In attempting to explain why this conclusion is consistent with the theoretical and political starting point of this thesis, i.e. with a Marxist view of the world, it is necessary to establish some basic points about the place of art in society within Marxism. In so doing we will attempt to indicate alternative and more fruitful grounds for a Marxist understanding of contemporary culture than those offered by Althusserianism.

It is a commonplace to state that there is no specific

theory of art in Marx's writings, therefore no 'Marxist aesthetics' which can be simply read off or applied. Those interested in this question have reacted in two ways to this basic problem, each of which has its dangers.

Firstly there is the approach which seeks to create a Marxist theory of art by simply collecting together the fragmentary texts, references, letters etc. in which Marx and Engels wrote about artistic works or art in general (Lifshitz, 1983, Baxandall 1974 etc.). At its worst this even goes so far as to seek enlightenment from Marx's own aesthetic tastes (Prawer, 1976, Demetz, 1967), as if an approach to art in the twentieth century could somehow be gleaned from a list of Marx or Engels' bedside reading in the nineteenth.

The second approach, recognising the drawbacks of the latter, seeks therefore to *supplement* what can be learned from Marx and Engels with the work of later Marxist or non-Marxist thinkers. This definition would obviously encompass most approaches to the question (2) and is obviously absolutely correct in its starting-point. The danger arises, however, in the selection of suitable supplements.

The chief danger comes from the tradition of Stalinism, which has turned Marxism in art, as in other areas, into a grotesque parody of itself. There are other widely-varying conceptions of a Marxist understanding of the world, however, which also distort the real heart of a Marxist approach e.g., (yet again) Althusser, whose adoption in the 1970s meant opening the door to hostile structuralist and post-

structuralist thought.

In order to avoid the harmful 'assistance' of such possible sources of theoretical supplement, we will endeavour to indicate clear criteria why it should be in the work of Lukács and of Trotsky, among later Marxists, that the most fertile ground lies for developing an authentic Marxist theory of art.

First, however, let us return to Marx. Our starting-point in seeking to develop such a theory is to be found not by scouring Marx or Engels to find out what kind of poetry they read (or wrote), nor even first and foremost in their fragmentary writings on art, but in the integrated theory of the social totality, and of the process of historical development which has created the capitalist form of society, that is Marxism.

Where do we begin, then, in seeking to define the relationship between art and other forms of social activity, to define the place of art in our society? Crucially, with the central notion of *labour*.

In the *1848 Manuscripts* Marx describes the characteristics which distinguish human labour from that of animals, chief among which is the aesthetic quality present in all human labour. This is not because animals do not produce beautiful objects, indeed many animal products are more beautiful than humans', but because of the purposeful transformation involved in human labour, in the process between human beings and nature, which means that

the poorest architect is categorically distinguished

from the best of bees by the fact that before he builds a cell in wax, he has built it in his head (Marx, *Capital*, cited in Baxandall and Morawski, 1974, 54).

It is human labour, therefore, which makes culture possible and as a total, creative activity, labour not only had this aesthetic quality present in it, but in fact created it:

In this process [of labour] man mediates, regulates and controls his material interchange with nature by means of his own activity... Acting upon nature outside of him, and changing it, he changes his own nature also. The potentials that slumber within his nature are developed (ibid., 53).

Thus in ancient Greek society there was no division between art and labour, the one word *techne* ('craft' would be the closest approximation) standing for both, the basic act of transforming nature for human purposes was itself creative, artistic.

Art is progressively separated from labour in the movement towards capitalism. The division of labour in modern class society, between those who determine the purposes of labour and those who carry it out, between mental and physical forms, is at the origin of the separate realm of individual pursuit that is modern art and indeed the specialist individual artist is very much a recent invention, largely an eighteenth and nineteenth century one.

Art is therefore a product of the unnatural division between creative and uncreative labour and under capitalism, as a residual part of labour as a total activity, art now finds itself invested with all of the unrealised potential of human labour, indeed of humankind as a whole; art is creative in a

world where the dominant form of work is alienated. Art in this sense has a "fundamental human purpose...as a measure of the emptiness or fullness of human life" (Lunn, 1982, 13).

Marx wrote about the potential for a reuniting of art and labour at a higher level with the communist society's abolition of the division of labour: "in a communist society there are no painters but at most people who engage in painting among other activities" (*German Ideology*, Baxandall and Morawski, 71). This notion was taken up by the Constructivists in post-revolutionary Russia, who championed a "reconciliation of art and life".

More important, though, are the implications this analysis of the origin of art and its purposes has for art under capitalism. Here we will seek the theoretical assistance of Trotsky and of Lukács. Why?

Between Marx's time and the advent of our century of wars and revolutions, Marxist thought underwent a major distortion which had its own artistic corollary. The rigid economic determinism which passed for Marxism in the heyday of the Second International, under the 'Pope of Marxism', Kautsky, produced an artistic theory of reflection, chiefly the work of Plekhanov, which saw art as simply a passive holding up of a mirror to society.

The centrality of Lukács to Marxist theory is in his clear intent in making a break with this mechanical materialism, with its ideas of inevitable revolution and hence passivity in art as in politics.

In *History and class consciousness*, (Lukács, 1971) Lukács theorised self-emancipation and hence began a recovery of the authentic Marxist tradition (3).

In his early work on literature he subsumed it into epistemology, seeing it as one way in which we can comprehend the world and what distinguishes this realism from any mirror-image reflection aesthetic is Lukács' view of literature as a contribution to knowledge, and to the *self-knowledge* which will overcome reification ; the objectification of human beings and the fetishisation of those objects which surround us, those products of human labour, which are invested with fantastic powers.

This theory of reification is developed from Marx's idea of commodity fetishism and this notion of the class-conscious subject of history, the working class, as an active creative force, overcoming its alienation and exploitation, is linked to a view of art as an affirmation of human potential, of the other potential realities present in the social totality.

His main concern was to theorise the ways in which the novel could operate to this purpose. The view of the nineteenth century novel developed by Lukács has been subject to major misrepresentations. His view of realism, for example, is conflated with *Naturalism* by structural Marxists like MacCabe to create the all-encompassing notion of "illusionism".

He is also often represented as a theorist of reflection, merely a more sophisticated one than Plekhanov. This is certainly not the case: Lukács' notion of the 'complex social

totality' at the heart of great realist novels in the nineteenth century is not a reference to their length or any cataloging of social data, which he saw very much as part of Naturalism and its descriptive surface reflection of the objects in the world. It is, rather, the ability of such writers as Balzac to grasp the contradictions at the heart of the dynamic bourgeois society, to represent its complexities in the inter-action of individuals, typical of certain trends but not the average type of Flaubert and Zola, and wider social developments.

Its ability to demonstrate the basic relationships at the heart of this integrated totality means that, far from mere reflection of what is, the great bourgeois novel could also express what might be, the possibilities inherent in the present.

For Lukács, then, and for Trotsky, art is not a mirror but a creative *response* to the world, and both, while recognising that some artists in the end create a reconciliation with the capitalist world and art's place within it, always seek to underline the centrality of art as a life-affirming reassertion of the creativity of human beings.

While for Lukács that life-affirming quality, that indication of human potential, was best realised in one particular form of artistic response, Trotsky believed that it had no specific form and that the work of Marxists was not laying down decrees for 'progressive' forms but in explaining them:

it is quite true that a work of art should never be judged, accepted or rejected on the basis of Marxist principles. The products of artistic creation must be evaluated first and foremost on the basis of their own laws, that is to say the laws of art. But only Marxism is capable of explaining why and how a certain orientation of art came about at a certain period, that is to say the origin and the reason for such an orientation and not some other (Trotsky, 1991, 207).

The insight afforded by *History and Class consciousness* was never systematically developed by Lukács and from the 1930s on he himself began to underplay the revolutionary potential of the working class, tragically becoming himself a "specialist" in art as a refuge from, but in the end a capitulation to, Stalinism.

By the 1930s, under the impact of the Stalinist counter-revolution, the discussion had fallen back into the hands of the determinists and they did seek to lay down programmes and even command structures for art with the doctrine of 'Socialist Realism', in reality neither socialist nor realist, an art of ideological concealment with strong parallels in the Nazi art of the same period, sharing its glorifying images of the family, for example.

Trotsky was central to reestablishing the revolutionary tradition in the face of this threat but first let us consider his most important work for our purposes here, *Literature and Revolution* (Trotsky, 1991).

Having played a central role in the October Revolution and in its defence, particularly as creator and strategist of the Red Army during the Civil War, it is astonishing that Trotsky was able to find the time, in 1922 and 23, to read the poems

and novels he discusses, let alone produce such a brilliant analysis. This indicates the enormous gap between the isolated, strictly theoretical role of the revolutionary intellectual envisaged by Althusserians and the genuine 'theoretical practice', the combination of theoretical work with involvement in the struggle, with neither prioritised and no separation established between them, of the leading Bolsheviks. This is not the place to go into the particular nature of some of the literary debates in which Trotsky intervenes, instead we will attempt to suggest the general character of the book.

Perhaps the central point to bring out is his view of the specificity of art, as suggested in the above quotation, an activity with its own criteria. Trotsky polemicised, therefore, with those literary groups who sought to impose particular demands or particular forms on art especially the *Proletcult*, set up in 1918 by Bogdanov and seeking to develop the dictatorship of the proletariat in cultural form, and, more gently, with the Futurists who also were inclined to do away with the art of the past.

Trotsky rightly saw that, as Marx had outlined, bourgeois culture carried with it the whole history of human creative capacity and that therefore to talk of "smashing" it, particularly in a country predominantly illiterate and subject to famine, would be to deny the newly-emancipated workers access to that history, their own estranged history.

With hindsight the harsh words he has for the

Proletcultists, who might have been indulged for their over-enthusiastic revolutionary zeal, are all the more justified as their basic starting point, that there should be a narrow connection between politics and art, with the former very much in command, opened the door for the rising bureaucracy in the late '20s to use the 'left cover' of their theories to impose the ideological correctness of Socialist Realism.

The end result of that process was as inimical to artistic creation as Fascism and in the 1930s, despite his isolation, Trotsky made another enduring contribution to keeping alive the genuine approach to art of the revolutionary Marxist tradition. Even in the immediate post-revolutionary period Trotsky was in favour of complete freedom for the artist:

If, for the better development of *material* production the Revolution must build a *Socialist* regime with centralised control, to develop intellectual creation an *Anarchist* regime of individual liberty should from the first be established. No authority, no dictation, not the least trace of orders from above! (Trotsky, 1970, 119).

In the late 1930s, in the context of Stalinism and Fascism, his continued espousal of that artistic freedom shone like a lone beacon in the world Socialist movement. He ends a *Manifesto Towards Revolutionary Art* with the slogans:

The independence of art - for the revolution.
The revolution - for the complete liberation of art!
(with André Breton and Diego Rivera, *ibid.*, 121).

It is therefore within this theoretical perspective that our assessment of Godard as revolutionary film-maker is situated. Let us, then, reiterate some of the main elements of that assessment in order to conclude.

In the period after 1968, Godard and the Dziga Vertov Group can be seen to repeat some of the mistakes that leading Bolsheviks argued and warned against in the post-revolutionary situation in Russia. Godard certainly shared the 'smash and burn' approach to bourgeois culture that was characteristic of the *Proletcult* and other Russian avant-gardist cultural tendencies (4), mixed in his case with a self-hatred leading him to denounce his own previous work as 'bourgeois'.

This outright rejection of all preceding artistic developments and of any art which did not directly serve the Revolution was a product of their ultra-leftism, coupled with the isolation from the working class that they shared with most artists but from which, like Godard, they suffered acutely. In the late 1920s the *Proletcult* and its ideas were used by Stalin and the rising bureaucracy to impose uniformity on artists in Russia, a development which Trotsky commented upon:

The struggle for "proletarian culture"...had at the beginning...the character of utopian idealism, and it was precisely on that basis that it was rejected by Lenin and the author of these lines. In recent years it has become simply a system of bureaucratic command over art and a way of impoverishing it (Trotsky, 1970, 176).

The Maoist-influenced work after 1968 of Godard contains elements of both 'bureaucratic' impoverishment and utopian idealism: on the one hand curbing the playful, comic elements of his earlier work, (restricting himself to fairly arid documentary styles and restricting even the number of images) and censoring his interest in sexuality, for example, zealously enough to please a Zhdanov; and on the other seeking

by sheer force of will to revolutionise culture.

While it would be inadvisable to take too far these analogies between Godard and post-revolutionary Russian artists, given the vastly differing historical conjunctures in which they were working, Trotsky's central point retains its validity: that there can and should be no mechanical relationship between art and politics, no narrow connection and, above all, no authority of politics over art.

This general message would apply to the attempts of Godard, and others, to find parallels for their work in particular political analyses or worse, particular political slogans, creating the kind of metaphorical cultural Marxism we discussed in relation to the Dziga Vertov Group (Chapter 4, 96) and also mentioned in our discussion of *Cahiers* and *Screen* (Chapter 2, 53). But also, more importantly, to the kind of politics-driven work the Dziga Vertov Group was producing which, at its worst, with its hectoring, sloganeering style, fell into the same kind of category as the products of Socialist Realist propaganda-art.

At a meeting in 1924 on 'the policy of the Party in the field of imaginative literature', Trotsky, in attempting to discourage some of the participants from over-valuing the revolutionary poems of 'worker-poet' circles, describes them as "a political event, not a literary one" (Trotsky, 1970, 65). This, again, might seem a harsh judgement, even tending to deny these works the status of art, but the point should certainly be taken that no matter how enthusiastic one might

be about, say, the involvement of artists in a situation of political upheaval and their subsequent desire to commit themselves to a movement for social change in their work, that 'political event' should not determine our assessment of the subsequent artistic products.

Even in his most successful attempt after 1968 to make political cinema in a political way, *Tout va bien*, there remains for Godard the desire to find simple connections between art and politics, to make artistic creation fit political slogans.

Now it could be objected that, in our preference for his work of the 1960s over that of the politicised, post-'68 Godard, we have overlooked or glossed over the fact that in those films too we find radical attempts to work upon the forms of the cinema, that there too we are confronted with a cinema of *ideas*, often difficult ideas, and that, on occasion, those ideas determine the nature of the films themselves.

Certainly there is no question of presenting an unsustainable and simplistic view that Godard somehow moved from being a popular film-maker employing the form of the realist narrative in 1967, to becoming a sectarian Maoist automaton in 1968. It is undeniable that Godard's work of the 1960s contained those elements mentioned above. It is also the case that his work developed in a progressively more political direction, particularly after 1965, such that *la Chinoise* (1967), for example, is often screened to illustrate political film-making, Godard-style, or to exemplify "the cinema of '68"

{5}. But while we will now move on to discuss the qualities of Godard's early work, in the context of Marxist debates about Modernism, it is worth pointing out in response to that imagined criticism that there are crucial differences between the pre- and post-'68 periods of Godard's film-making which make it absurd, as both Structural Marxist and recent sub-*post-moderne* accounts of his career attempt, to impressionistically 'quote' from a seamless and ever-radical Godard *oeuvre*. This attempt, in the former, sets up an equivalence between artistic and political radicalism, as in the formalist approach of MacCabe (1980), Wollen (*passim*) etc., and in the latter collapses into relativism (*Art Press*, 1985 in particular {6}).

It is certainly true that Godard's cinema of the 1960s is a cinema of ideas, and that it produced 'difficult' films in which Godard's concern to carry out certain kinds of operations at the level of form, certain kinds of formal 'work', result in work required of the spectator and even in his greatest films of the period there are moments when Godard's desire to work his way through an idea or to represent ideas which fascinate him in cinematic form predominates, excluding all other concerns and excluding many in his audience. An example would be the Brice Parain/Nana conversation in *Vivre sa vie* which was discussed in Chapter 5, where Godard's apparent starting point, that it might be interesting to stage an encounter between a (fictional) prostitute and a (real) philosopher, for its irreverent novelty value, to prove it could be done, is then extended to

allow Parain's views on language and thought to shed some light on Nana's situation and Godard's studies of the art of (filming) conversation, and the 'discussion' in the end is prolonged by Godard, proving the point to himself that 'the cinema can (and should) do these things', way beyond our interest in either the 'gag' or Parain's initial relevance to the film's concerns.

It has become fashionable to see Godard as part of, or as a precursor of, "post-modernism" (most recent work in French on Godard does this, see *Art Press*, *Cinémaction* special issues (1985, 1989), Cérissuelo (1989) etc.) largely because, one suspects, of this obsessive interest of his in constantly 'quoting', both in image and sound, in his work. However his film-making practice of the 1960s and its development in an avant-garde, political direction clearly place him alongside Modernist movements of the early twentieth century (7).

The fact that one must talk of a variety of Modernist movements (Surrealism, Cubism, Futurism..) leads some to question the usefulness of the term:

Modernism as a notion is the emptiest of cultural categories...completely lacking in positive content (Anderson, 1988, 332).

'Modernism' is a portmanteau word...I cannot think of a meaningful category that could include, say, surrealism, *Ulysses*, and something by Brecht...The objects are too dissimilar (Franco Moretti, in Nelson and Grossberg, 1988, 346).

We will now attempt, therefore, to explain why it seems useful to situate Godard within Modernism, touching also upon the controversial place of Modernism within Marxist

aesthetics.

Lunn (1985, 34-37) provides an excellent definition of the distinctive features common to most Modernist art:

- 1 Aesthetic Self-Consciousness or Self-Reflexiveness
- 2 Simultaneity, Juxtaposition, or "Montage"
- 3 Paradox, Ambiguity and Uncertainty
- 4 "Dehumanization" and the Demise of the Integrated Individual Subject or Personality.

Vivre sa vie demonstrates all of these elements (though clearly it would not be necessary to find evidence of all four aesthetic categories in order to describe a particular work of art as Modernist). Self-conscious due to Godard's acute awareness of its place in film history (the extract from Dreyer's *Jeanne d'Arc* only the most obvious example), *Vivre sa vie* is also self-conscious, or self-reflexive, in the sense that Lunn directly describes, of the process of creating the work of art becoming the focus of the work of art itself, à la Proust, in Godard's interrogation of his own, or the cinema's objectification of women, made explicit in his reading of Poe's *Oval Portrait*.

Godard juxtaposes the different moods, the different kinds of conversation and camera styles of the twelve tableaux, but also ultimately creates a collage of fragments of other 'texts' and images (Dreyer's, Poe's, Parain's, Sacotte's, juke box songs etc.) (as discussed by Sontag, *ibid.*,) which could be compared to Lunn's example of surrealist and Cubist collages.

The film explores the gradual effacement of Nana's identity, her transformation into a commodity, which begins with her name, the French slang word for any young woman (8), and which is clearly expressed in her own statement to the police interrogator that (after Rimbaud) "JE...est une autre" [I...am another], which links it to Lunn's examples of Joyce and the Surrealists' exploration of the unconscious.

Finally, the world of *Vivre sa vie* is certainly not one with a coherent, rational structure or set of values, leading to the ambiguities of Nana's experience of prostitution, the absurdity of her death and so on.

Most notably as a result of Lukács' work, there has always been a great deal of debate around these kinds of Modernist aesthetic practices within Marxism. While Lukács' explanation of 'how a certain orientation of art came about at a certain period' in his tracing the development of the bourgeois novel, was one of the greatest achievements of Marxist analysis of art (Lukács, 1962), his analysis of the splintering of the total view available to those novelists, which, he argued, took place in the latter half of the nineteenth century, led him into a less convincing view of contemporary bourgeois culture.

Lukács rightly argues that after 1848 the bourgeoisie in the heart of Europe ceased to be a revolutionary class, having now more to lose in conflict with the growing proletariat than to gain in pursuing the struggle against the reactionary nobility, and that this had major implications for the

worldview of its intelligentsia. His belief that, in literature, the period of 'great realism' then began to decay, as the writers of the bourgeoisie no longer found themselves able to sustain its grasp of the complex social totality, is similarly plausible and is forcefully but sympathetically argued in discussing Zola and Naturalism, for example, (in the essay *Narrate or Describe?*, Lukács, 1978). Where his analysis becomes rather more mechanical and prescriptive, however, is in his transposing of this view of the bourgeoisie's ideological shift onto all subsequent artistic forms and hence he programmatically rejected Modernism as an art of despair and decadence which divorces the individual from the world of objective reality and hence is incapable, unlike the great realists of the nineteenth century, of expressing any sense of historical development or its social processes (Lukács, 1963).

Brecht, who has shadowed us all through this thesis, produced a devastating critique of that rejection (in Bloch et al, 1977) which serves as the perfect counterweight, since clearly while there is despair at the heart of many Modernist works there is also critique, rejection and, even if only negatively, the affirmation of the possibility of other imagined realities.

Let us examine that claim in looking at the example of Godard's films of the 1960s. As in the best of Modernist art, the innovation and experimentation, the rebellion against the existing cultural forms and ideas, the revolt which Trotsky said was at the root of all new artistic movements, are not ends in themselves but channel an image of the world, a

response to the world, which is able to communicate even without achieving the total view of Lukács' desires.

Even while dealing with their subjects in a fragmentary, ambiguous, *breathless* way, Godard's films such as *Vivre sa vie*, *Une femme mariée*, *masculin-féminin*, *Alphaville* employ the developing, increasingly more flexible technologies of film-making (hand-held cameras, faster film stock, portable sound equipment etc.) to explore Paris and its suburbs and the place within it of marginal sections of society, half in awe and half in disgust.

While his protagonists are marginals, isolated and alienated individuals, his films also chart the changing expectations of, for example, women and youth in the rapidly-changing society of the time, whose shifting surface of advertisements, cars, music, café culture etc. the films document; so well that Freddy Buache suggests young French people now watch old Godard films to see how their parents spent their youth (Buache, 1987, 47). The tension between the expectations of Godard's generation and the limitations they encountered is cogently expressed by Anderson's comment which offers some indications as to why this extraordinary burst of cinematic creativity should arise in France at that particular time:

As the Fourth Republic belatedly passed into the Fifth, and rural and provincial France was suddenly transformed by a Gaullist industrialization appropriating the newest technologies, something like a brief afterglow of the earlier conjuncture that produced the classical innovatory art of the century flared into life again. Godard's cinema was marked in its way by all three of the co-ordinates described earlier. Suffused with quotation and allusion to a high cultural past, Eliot-style; equivocal celebrant of the automobile and the airport, the camera and the carbine, Leger-style;

expectant of revolutionary tempests from the East,
Nizan-style (Anderson, 1988, 328-9).

In setting off in pursuit of those winds from the East after 1968 Godard seems to have cut himself off from his artistic moorings. His development exemplifies Trotsky's comments about artistic consciousness always lagging behind political consciousness (Trotsky, 1970, 66), being a process which is "more organic, slower, more difficult to subject to conscious influence". He returned to this point on a number of occasions when commenting directly on the work of particular writers, e.g. Jack London, and most memorably in his article on the occasion of Mayakovsky's suicide:

Mayakovsky...had the spark of genius. But this was not a harmonious talent...the summits stand side by side with abysmal lapses. Mayakovsky was first of all a poet...who rejected the old world [and a revolutionary only afterwards] ..not only the "singer", but also the victim, of the epoch of transformation (Trotsky, 1970, 174-5).

Godard's political film-making failures are perhaps just a footnote to the story of decline of the '68 *génération*, a by-product of the relatively less tragic failures of the post-1968 European revolutionary Left.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER 1

1. *Notes inédites de Ferdinand de Saussure*, 64. Cited in Anderson, 1983, 43.
2. *Introduction à l'oeuvre de Marcel Mauss*, x/xi. Ibid., 46.
3. Derrida *De la Grammatologie*, 1967, 157.
4. Lévi-Strauss, 1968, 333ff., 337 and *passim* and *La Pensée Sauvage*, 130 (Timpanaro, 1975, 182 n.108).
5. It should be pointed out, of course, that in the years following the defeat of the 'événements' of 1968, compounded by the blows of Solzhenitsyn's novels of the Gulag and later the revelations about Kampuchea and Pol Pot, there was a gradual (though sometimes rather sudden!) disillusion with Marxism on the part of whole sections of French intellectuals and structuralist thinkers found it very easy to extend their critique of the "transcendental signified" to denounce Marxism per se as a 'totalitarian discourse', the 'discourse of the Gulag'.
6. This transformation is most marked in Lévi-Strauss and Lacan, although the most horrendous example is that of the 'Nouveaux Philosophes' around *Tel Quel* who flipped from rabid Maoism and barricade-storming in Theory to a love-affair with the U.S.A. (and also the Nicaraguan Contras in the case of Glucksmann) and Christianity. See *Tel Quel* "Pourquoi les Etats-Unis?" Special issue. Callinicos (1982) Chapter 1, and both Anderson texts give interesting and informative accounts of this "Crise du Marxisme".
7. Althusser's project did not take place entirely within the Theoretical Instance: it can be read as an attempt to liberate intellectuals in the PCF from the need to justify their theoretical work to the needs of the Party leadership, in the aftermath of the 'Lysenko Affair' and de-Stalinisation. What "Theoretical Practice" amounts to, however, is 'autonomy' from the Central Committee in the theoretical sphere, but paying to Caesar what is his due in the political.
8. This recurring concept is dealt with in the essays "Sur le dialectique matérialiste", and "Marxisme et humanisme", in Althusser, 1965 and *Lire le Capital* respectively.
9. See Clarke, 1980, 184.
10. Again a justification for the right of the PCF leadership to lead political struggles.
11. Freud's colleague Sandor Ferenczi. Collier, 1979, 51.
12. Althusser, *Lire le Capital* cited in Callinicos, 1976, 35.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER 2

1. Anthologies of articles from this period have been published in English by the BFI and Routledge and Kegan Paul (London):
 Cahiers du cinéma 1: The 1950s, Neo-Realism, Hollywood, The New Wave (1985)
 " 2: 1960-1968 (1986)
 Both Jim HILLIER (ed.)
 'Auteurism' and other aspects of *Cahiers* work have been summarised and discussed in studies of film theory such as Andrew (1976).
2. It is certainly this period which has influenced his own work. See discussion of *Screen* pp 43-56.
3. The best account of May, situating it in the context of worldwide upheavals in the late 1960s and avoiding precisely that reduction is Harman, 1988.
4. e.g. at the Saclay nuclear research centre, see J. Pesquet *Des Soviets à Saclay?*, Paris, 1968.
5. Footballers occupied the HQ of the Fédération Française du Football on 22nd May, hoisting a red flag and the banner "le football aux footballeurs" while dancers and stagehands at the Folies Bergères struck and occupied the theatre. See *Le Monde* 23 May 1968.
6. There is a fairly full account in Harvey, 1978 and short chapters in Labro et al. and Zegel, both 1968, of the events in the cinema in May.
7. Truffaut, interviewed in Labro et al, 1968, 148, points out that Cohn-Bendit, subsequently notorious student activist from Nanterre, was present at some of the Langlois demonstrations and gave some tactical lessons to the newcomers to the streets.
8. The name refers back to the French Revolution of 1789. The *Etats Généraux* was the assembly of the three social orders or 'estates', from which the *Tiers Etat*, the lower orders led by the bourgeoisie, launched a democratic National Assembly which sparked off the Revolution.
9. I have only been able to consult Diana Matias' translation of this in *Screen* vol.13 no.4, Winter 1972-3.
10. Cited in Harvey, 1978, 18. Harvey seems to see this notion of mobilising in the street as being premised on a situation of 'dual power'. It would appear that in her fear of being tarred with the brush of *gauchisme* she adopts the Eurocommunist fashion of seeing any notion of 'struggle' as being irredeemably 'ultra-left'.
11. Lellis, 1982 argues that there is a continuity in the concerns of *Cahiers* right through from the early 1960s but

this is entirely due to his exclusive focus on Brecht; *Cahiers*, like many French cultural publications, having participated in the revived interest in Brecht around 1960.

12. Translated in *Screen* vol.12 no.1, Summer 1971 and reproduced in *Screen Reader* 1 (1977).

13. Translation *Screen Reader* 1, 1977, 2.

14. As we shall see when returning to this question as regards *Screen* (see p.44, p.51), there is an uncritical adoption of Brecht's 'side' of the debate which is never explained or discussed, there is only one reference to Lukács in *Cahiers* from 1968 onwards (a reference to his theory of "critical realism" in an article on Visconti, no.234-5, dec. 1971/jan.-feb. 1972) compared to significant discussion of comparatively marginal contributions to a Marxist aesthetics, such as the 'Proletcult' (220-1, May-June 1970). *Cahiers* and *Screen* seem to adopt without question Althusser's hostility to the "New Left" and their interest in Lukács, and particularly his early work.

15. There will be further discussion of this comparison between the two films in dealing with *Tout va bien*, Chapter 5.

16. For fuller discussion of the introduction of Lacanian concepts into the study of the relationship between film and spectator, see pp 49-50.

17. Though Sparks (1986, 104) points out that the economic and historical material is "slender and inaccurate", especially when compared with the textual analysis.

18. There is even a suggestion that they would otherwise not have bothered to discuss the film! There is, indeed, a neglect of the French cinema of the 1930s in *Cahiers* examination of models for a 'political' cinema.

19. Discussed more fully in Harvey, op.cit., 79-83 and 104-110.

20. Daney, 1983 mentions Comolli's work on his film *La Cecilia* and Narboni's participation in a collective project *L'Olivier*. The former is discussed in Wood, 1977 and compared, favourably, to Godard's *Numéro Deux*. As with McCabe's recent commissioning work at the BFI, it would seem that practical film-making work focusses the mind rather more on the audience than theorising and leads our analysts to opt for rather different conclusions.

21. *Screen* published various extracts from the journals *Lef* and *Novy Lef* in vol. 12 no.1, Spring 1971.

22. Ben Brewster, a key contributor to *Screen* in the early 1970s and editor from 1974-6 was also on the editorial board of a journal explicitly called *Theoretical Practice*.

23. The 'resignation debate' in 1976 involved a certain amount of 'stonewalling' on the part of those who remained; similarly in a debate on "Marxist Culture" the 'Cultural Studies' group's suggestion that *Screen* was departing from the concerns of historical materialism and that surely it should try to ascertain some 'limit positions' is rejected out of hand, Ros Coward replying "there are none" (Hall et al, 1977/78, 109).

Although the political affiliations of *Screen* contributors is never explicit (it is not hard to guess of course!) the obsession with "*autocritique*" suggests some degree of sympathy with Maoist political practice (cf. Althusser himself). Brewster (see n. 22) in fact resigned from *New Left Review* over criticism of Chinese economic policy. Coward and Ellis (1977) contains eulogies of the Cultural Revolution, surprisingly, given the late date.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER 3

1. "To search a little like a scientist." *Avant Scène du Cinéma - Prénom Carmen*, 5.
2. 1985, 288.
3. The phrase is from the poet Francis Ponge's *Le parti-pris des choses*.
4. *Le Monde* 20/12/63, 18.
5. 1982, 63.
6. 1985, 369.
7. Article in *Cahiers* in 1956, reproduced in Godard, 1968, 52-55.
8. There will be further discussion of this question in Chapter 5, 107.
9. 1982, 11.
10. 1980, 46. This influence can be seen in Godard's work from *Ici et ailleurs*, 1974 onwards, in works too numerous to list.
11. 1980b, 10.
12. "An ethnological film", "...major political events in the form of newspaper crime stories".
13. 1967, 68.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER 4

1. "Women and the outsider", "... language..." and "Towards a political cinema".

2. The idea for a film by various French film-makers on the struggle against U.S. Imperialism in Vietnam was Chris Marker's and the S.L.O.N. (*Société pour le lancement d'oeuvres nouvelles*) group's and it also featured sections by Agnès Varda, Alain Resnais, Joris Ivens, Claude Lelouch, William Klein and Michèle Ray.

3. *Weekend*, which attempted a vitriolic demolition of the bourgeoisie, in its modern and historical variants, and sought not only to distance but to horrify the bourgeois spectator, contained rather too much *épatant spectacle* in the end.

4. It is, Godard later revealed, a U.S.-made Mitchell camera and the shots of it and their montage draw parallels between it and the technology of war (bombers, anti-aircraft guns) reinforcing Godard's view that he is resisting U.S. cultural imperialism, of which the camera is a weapon.

5. See *Cinéma 68*, No.122, 37-55 for an account of the screening and the discussions which followed.

6. There are brief illustrative extracts in a documentary from the Channel 4 "68/88" season: *All power to the imagination* broadcast in May 1988. While the ideal of anonymous collective production might be put forward in Godard's remarks about the films, the Godard 'signature' is easily recognisable in those extracts, almost explicitly signed by his hand-written annotation of certain images (cf. *Le Gai Savoir*, 1968).

Since completing the research for this thesis, some *Cinétracts* have become more readily available, at the *Vidéothèque* in Paris.

7. This phrase is not without its chilling overtones in the context of Godard's Maoist influences: Pol Pot's murderous regime in Cambodia worked back to "Year Zero" and also around this time Godard spoke of the national revolutions in countries like Cuba, Mozambique and Cambodia creating the possibility of wiping the slate clean of western Cultural influences "on décrète plus d'alphabète..." [an end to the alphabet could be decreed].

8. Pity the poor Stones fan who stumbles across *one plus one* (renamed *Sympathy for the devil* by the producers for American release) who, after the *longueurs* of the recording sequences will never be able to listen to the song again!

9. Reproduced in Godard, 1985, 343-350.

10. *British Sounds* (1968), *One a.m. (American Movie)* (abandoned in 1969), *Pravda*, *Vent d'Est*, *Lotte in Italia* (all 1969) *Vladimir and Rosa* (1970) and *Jusqu'à la victoire* (abandoned in 1970).

11. This formulation explicitly follows that of the journal *Cinéthique* in its first issue in 1969.

12. Since the copies of the film distributed in this country are dubbed in a very stumbling and poorly-translated manner quotations have been taken from *Cahiers'* version of the soundtrack (240, Jul./Aug. 1972, 20-31). There are discrepancies between the two, not least the frequent repetitions of phrases in the American version which seem to be due to its 'one take' soundtrack - each time a mistake of intonation or pronunciation is made, the whole phrase is repeated. While it is possible that this is deliberate, part of the hesitant, stuttering nature of finding a new language (Godard often referred to the working class as "balbutiant", literally when it came to Isabelle Huppert in *Passion*) the *Cahiers* transcription does not reproduce it.

13. Translation by Godard (?), *Afterimage* 1, 1970, 13.

14. Along with one of the Trotskyist student federations (the FER - Fédération des étudiants révolutionnaires) they effectively abstained from the Latin Quarter demonstrations - leading a march away "aux quartiers populaires" which, understandably, was not a very popular one.

15. Italian Maoist groups experienced even greater growth, with three daily papers and organisations around them numbering up to 30 000. They suffered a similar fate, however, *Lotta Continua*, for, example, dissolving itself in despair and confusion in 1976 (See Harman, 1979).

16. Marx's opening words for the rulebook of the International Working Men's Association (also known as the 'First International'), *Selected Works* vol. 2, 19 (Moscow, 1983).

17. "Quelquefois la lutte de classe c'est la lutte d'une image contre une image et d'un son contre un son...Est-ce que le concept marxiste de plus-value n'est pas une bonne arme pour lutter contre le concept bourgeois de représentation?" (Godard, *Cinétique*, 5, 1969 in 1985, 338).

18. *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle* was the title of a Godard film from 1967.

The reference to the tiny audience "on savait, en réfléchissant sur les moyens de production, qu'on serait probablement acculés à ne pas pouvoir diffuser nos films, que deux ou trois copains seulement les verraient" is from *Cinéma 70* (ibid., 84) [we were aware, when thinking about the way we were making the films, that we'd probably be unable to distribute them, that only two or three friends would see them].

19. In *Sauve Qui Peut...la vie* the central character, a filmmaker called Godard (!), discusses Cuba with a football coach, who relates how Castro is in despair because 'his' workers are less productive than the yankees'!

20. A very cynical response to which might be - to play some of his favourite music and ogle naked young actresses: e.g. *Prénom Carmen*, *Je vous Salue Marie*, his section of the opera film *Aria* and even the much-vaunted *Passion*.

21. Or reminiscent of Woody Allen's *Stardust Memories* in which everyone, including aliens he meets in a "close encounter", tell him how much they prefer his early, funny films! Allen (under the name Woody Allen (!)) appears in Godard's version of *King Lear* (1986).

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER 5

1. There has been speculation about the respective roles of each in making the film but that cannot be our concern here.

2. MacCabe takes the deterministic view that narrative is required to attract stars (MacCabe 1980). This becomes the focus of much of the book e.g. the material on an abortive project, *The Story*, (ibid., 163-8). This view is deterministic in the light of the liberties Godard has taken with the producer Alain Sarde's money, and stars, in, for example *Déetective*.

3. Elsewhere in the book Godard mentions that their ad. for it "Un Grand Film Décevant" [A Major Disappointment of a Film] hardly helped to reach that figure but that the 10-15 000 who did see it "étaient ces gens-là" [were those people] (ibid., 154).

4. The locking up of bosses was an aspect of strikes in France which had first become prominent in May 1968 (e.g. Sud-aviation at Nantes) but had persisted in the period following. Another film of 1972 which attempted to typify contemporary strike action, *Coup pour coup* by Marin Karmitz, also chose to show sequestration, although the priority attached to this form of action by both films perhaps comes from the shared political influence of the Maoist paper *La cause du peuple*.

5. These schematic 'ingredients' include the principal classes and their respective social roles and "movements", struggles and the unnamed country where all this is to take place, illustrated by a map of a 'France' which is wittily fictionalised by placing Corsica to the north of Brittany!

6. *Cinéthique's* definition (cf *Cahiers'*) later taken up by Stam, 1985, 219.

7. It is doubtful whether this is entirely successful, however; Britton (1976, 8) interprets this use of faux-raccords, with some justification, as highlighting the centrality of the scene, representing the point at which Susan begins to 'think herself historically'. This reading clearly indicates that such formal manoeuvres can have quite contradictory effects.

8. Gorin also mentions that in order to be allowed to film in the hypermarket they had to tell the manager it was a Jerry Lewis-style scene! (op.cit., 121).

9. That Brecht suppressed these writings in his own lifetime indicates some of the ambiguity in his relationship to

Stalinism which latter-day champions of Brecht - the revolutionary artist - versus Lukács - the grey stalinist hack - would do well to think through.

10. In recent years Fonda has played a working class woman opposite Robert de Niro in *Stanley and Iris*, an adaptation of Pat Barker's feminist novel about working-class life in the North East of England, *Union Street*.

11. This issue of acting and class was given a great deal of consideration by Godard and Gorin in making the film and discussing it. See any of the interviews on the film, eg Walsh, 1981, where Gorin talks about using unemployed actors in the role of workers.

12. Jacqueline Doreen Levitin, 1975.

13. His wounded remarks about the film's treatment of the PCF in the 1980 text make it even clearer, while the plaintive regret expressed that Godard did not include any consideration of the Common Programme, signed by the PCF and the Socialist Party in 1972, shows a remarkable incomprehension of Godard's political concerns at the time.

14. Marilyn Campbell (*Wide Angle*, 1976, 36) points out that in the last two tableaux these fades to black occur *within* particular segments, "in one setting without a significant lapse of time" e.g. Nana with "le jeune homme" or during the car journey which ends in her death.

15. The poster advertising the film on its release in Paris stated "Elle Traverse Comme Des Apparences *Une série D'Aventures*" (Sontag, in Mussman, 1968, 204).

16. And also to Renoir's film of it *Nana* (1926) which, coincidentally starred *his* first wife, Catherine Hessling (Campbell, *Wide Angle*, 37).

17. As does Zola himself in his greatest novel, *Germinal* (1883) in which his profound sympathy for the miners and belief that class conflict would be the motor of change in the coming century (albeit occasionally couched in "social Darwinist" terms) lead him to break with his own determinism; the central character Etienne, Nana's brother, does eventually satisfy an inherited drunken bloodlust but it is not central to the novel, which foregrounds instead his ability to develop political consciousness and seek to change the 'environment'.

18. *Socialist Worker*, 21/9/91, 16.

19. Siuew Hwa Beh (1972, 73) suggests a further parallel in that Falconetti, the Brazilian actress who played Jeanne in Dreyer's film later became a prostitute.

20. Equally ridiculous, and evidence of the kind of overestimation of the 'revolutionary' potential of formal experiment which has dogged work on Godard, is Michel Cieutat's view that in exploring these different means of

filming conversation Godard is "annihilant le Champ/contre-champ classique" [annihilating classic shot/reverse shot] (*Cinémaction* 1989, 173). The fact that Godard uses shot/reverse-shot as one of the 12 variations (in the Parain conversation) appears to have escaped him.

21. In contrast, Karina "trouvait que je l'avais enlaidi"! [thought I'd made her ugly] (Godard, 1980).

22. Reprinted in Mulvey, 1989, 49-62.

FOOTNOTES TO CONCLUSION

1. He has certainly inspired other political or independent film-makers: "There was enough work there,...or there was a suggestion of what work was there to be done in the cinema, that would take all of us the rest of our lives." Sue Clayton, film maker (*Song of the Shirt*), talking about Godard's post-'68 films, quoted in *Visions* documentary on Godard, Channel 4, 1984. This unfortunate influence of the Godardian model of the political cinema, perhaps particularly in Britain, is clearly a product of the propagandising on its behalf by Screen and co., as another remark from the same broadcast suggests:

"Peter Wollen wrote an essay [Wollen, 1972]...which was an article I knew inside out...I was firmly committed to that and I thought that was the future...The ideas dominated all of us who began to be involved in independent cinema at that time. [It's] absolutely rooted in the way a lot of us still approach cinema." Lynda Myles, former director Edinburgh Film Festival.

2. And is therefore far too wide to footnote. In texts specifically on "Marxism and Art" this leads to Solomon, 1979 for example, attempting to anthologise practically everybody who could be described as Marxist, whereas Laing, 1978, nails his colours to the mast rather more clearly in devoting a whole chapter to "Socialist Realism in China".

In 'bourgeois' anthologies, there is often a very cavalier approach taken when it comes to filling a chapter on 'Marxism': one recent book which is often recommended to undergraduate students, Rice and Vaughn *An anthology of contemporary literary criticism* scandalously represents Marxism solely via Althusser and the Althusserian Macherey.

3. We have made clear throughout our opposition to Stalinism, even in its ultra-left Maoist, Eurocommunist, or Althusserian theoreticist versions, since all involve some form of 'Socialism from above'. Our starting point must be Marx's, that "the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves" (see Chapter 4, 96). This was at the heart of Lenin, Trotsky and Luxemburg's analyses and activities in the revolutionary upheavals from the turn of the century until the 1920s, and what led Trotsky to conduct his analysis of Stalinism as a bureaucratic counter-revolution, which laid the ground for a re-establishment of the revolutionary tradition.

For an interesting discussion of this question see J. Molyneux *What is the Real Marxist Tradition?*, in *International Socialism*, vol.2 no.20.

4. Quote from a delegate to the founding conference of the *Proletcult* in 1918: "Let us throw away bourgeois culture entirely as old rubbish", (German, 1991, 14). Cf. Godard (as quoted in Chapter 4, 98): "The bourgeoisie creates a world in its own image. Comrades, let us begin by destroying that image."

5. In the Channel 4 "68/88" season, for example. This is perhaps partly explained by the fact that Godard picked up on student *groupuscules* before the rest of the media. The prophetic nature of the film extends to the fact that he chose students from Nanterre, where the May events were to begin. Godard himself sourly remarked a year or so later, having denounced the film as "bourgeois, réformiste": "je ne vois pas l'intérêt d'avoir été prophétique" (Godard, 1985, 335).

6. "Pourquoi Godard?..Parce qu'il a, comme nous, traversé les grandes utopies de l'"avant-garde"...et qu'il en est sorti...en allant encore plus loin...

...Parce que chacun de ses films est une tempête, un tourbillon négatif. Une aventure intellectuelle et physique." D.Paini and G.Scarpetta, editorial, *Art Press*, 1985, 3.

7. As Callinicos (1989, Chapter 1, 9-28) demonstrates, Modernism's defining characteristics, such as the aesthetic self-consciousness this quoting reflects, are systematically appropriated in this way by theorists of 'the post-modern', in order to create the impression of a radical break in cultural experience.

8. Arguably less sexist in its usage and connotations than possible British or U.S. equivalents such as broad, bird, chick etc., as womens' organisations (e.g. *les Nanas Beurs*) seem content to use it.

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