

LE CINÉMA DE JEAN-LUC GODARD ET LA PHILOSOPHIE

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It is difficult to find anyone working in film or media studies who is unfamiliar with Jean-Luc Godard's films. In 2022, Godard passed away through assisted suicide, yet his work remains a vital source for cultural debate. His films bridge semantic fields and stimulate reflection from diverse perspectives, including philosophical ones. What Louis-Albert Serrut has done in the edited collective volume *Le cinéma de Jean-Luc Godard et la philosophie* is to tie them together under the umbrella term "philosophy" that serves as the reflexive vehicle to Godard's *œuvre* seen from a refreshing perspective raising many ideas that are worth reexamining.

Let us briefly discuss the most crucial ideas revealed in this book by stressing their inherent assumptions and insightful glimpses which do not repeat cliché-like concepts and highlight polemical tropes that shouldn't be overlooked. The quality of the book's content is also proven by the fact that the monograph has been published in one of the best French series specialized in the visual field, in L'Harmattan.

As the cover of the book illustrates, the juxtaposition of images derived from *Histoire(s) du Cinéma* superimposed on each other provides an insight into his intertextual reservoir of ideas included in Godard's films and in the collective volume itself. The monograph consists of the valuable preface prepared by Dominique Chateau, an introduction laid out by Louis Albert Serrut sharing the underlying ideas behind the work and four chapters written by Vincent Berne, Jacques Vincent, Stefan Kristensen and Serrut once again. In the first brief article, Dominique Chateau asks whether Godard is

a juggler and philosopher. Without answering this rhetorical question, the aesthete suggested that Godard mobilizes both registers of the image, communication and epistemology. This polyphonic relationship focuses on the double task of not only putting forward the ideas but also filming them. Regarding *Histoire de Cinéma (s)* and the *Book of Images* Chateau argued that Godard created a visual, textual and musical encyclopedia of film frescoes accompanied by words, citations, and commentaries. The relationship of the French-Swiss director with philosophy, in Chateau's view, is perceived in two ways: the fact that, on the one hand, the author of *Le Mépris* (1963) starts from philosophy in these works, and on the other, his films inspire philosophy and philosophers. Thus history comes full circle.

In the introduction, rather than assuming that Godard advances the ideas and registers them Louis-Albert Serrut seems to open the field reflection to mobilise separately and together the registers of image, communication and epistemology. His critical functions have been found in other media, television and communication opting for philosophical studies as a crucial way of understanding Godard's *oeuvre*. Following a famous article by Serge Daney, Serrut reiterates that the filmmaker develops a method of teaching, a pedagogy which is proper to his work, constant but sometimes invisible, as evidenced by *Six fois deux / Sur et sous la communication* (1976) or *France/Tour/Detour/Deux enfants* (1977), *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1998) and *The Book of Images* (2018). This, as he stressed makes him possible to philosophize. (p. 14). Particularly, he focuses his attention on the film *Nouvelle Vague* (1993) started by, as suggested, acousmatic prologue referring to Alain Delon. The editor concentrates on the political engagement of Godard's work depicting some notable examples found in *A bout de Souffle* (1960); *Le petit Soldat* (1962), *Alphaville* (1965), *Pierrot le fou* (1965), *Masculin feminine* (1965), *Made in USA* (1966), *Passion* (1982), and *Nouvelle Vague* (1993). In the case of *Made in USA* he mentions a gripping fact relating to the means and methods of the police and secret services providing an insight into political violence. On the other hand, Serrut discusses the topic of love as the leitmotif of such films as *À bout de souffle* (1960), *Éloge de l'amour* (2001), *Deux ou trois choses que je sais sur elle* (1967), *Je vous salue Marie* (1985), *Le mépris*, to *Prénom Carmen* (1983) or *Alphaville* (1965) exploring vast array of

motives, situations, rhetorical tropes, images and sounds both implicitly and explicitly connected to *ars amandi*.

But what is the philosophy in Godardian's *œuvre*? By addressing Gilles Deleuze and Stanley Cavell, Serrut endeavours to polemically reconsider the cinematic power to philosophize and not depend on storytelling, rather instead stress the possibility of cinema to produce the concepts. By mentioning Jacques Rancière's concept of „cinematographic idea” the philosopher underscores the artist's metaphysics. According to the editor, many contemporary philosophers discuss their concepts by suggesting the reflection that inspired their cinematographic work. Making explicit reference to Dominique Chateau's claims, the editor finds an analogy between cinematic form and discursivity which seems to manifest itself in philosophical discourse as one of the intrinsic traits of his work.

Let us now open a space for debate in discussing long essays prepared in this book. In the first long, complex essay prepared by Vincent Berne entitled *Partage de l'image et du verbe. Jean-Luc Godard et la question de la différence iconique*, the author touches on our schemes of perception and in this idealistic way our approach to images. (s. 24). By proposing a highly theoretical reading of Godard's work he examines the cinematic enunciation as the central element of the filmmaker's work. Against the backdrop of the debate devoted to „pictorial turn”, a term coined by W.J.T. Mitchell, Berne propagates his neologism, so-called „intersensory perspective” returning to the metzienne deconstruction, cinematic enunciation, readability of images, tabularity versus linearity. In this context, *Numéro deux* (1975) directed by Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville is considered as an exploration of critical grammar. Thus, the chains of images are treated as the strikers who are stopping the chain of production to experiment with other logic. The mentioned perspective indicates the discontinuity, interviews and the fabrication of what he calls the negative. In contrast to the common representations of toxic images, collective violence takes into consideration the images of mystification, disinformation, and counterinformation. As a fruit of decolonisation, this project demonstrates some parallels with Godardian pedagogy of vision in an inextricable relationship between language and image. Berne breaks down into prime factors visual thinking (*la pensée visuel*) which would not reduce the coexistence of the language and the image in parallel to the „iconic turn”

considered as the new paradigm of the image. In his final notes concerning *Comment ça va* (1976), Berne pointed out the importance of words such as „relay” or „linguistic anchorage” to describe the visual sign existing both at the iconic level. It covers both figural and plastic levels with its visual substance, to name Martine Joly’s term interacting between different levels of expression. According to him, there are various script visual relations such as anticipation, suspension, allusion, counterpoint, and intensification drawing extensively on, „expression through compression”. Making explicit reference to language by dividing language and parole Berne demonstrates the superposition of codes and supercodes resuscitating the metzian project of ‘filmolinguistic’. Such an attempt to theorize the constitutive invisibility of cinematographic image is considered „the pluricodal nature of film” given its essential impurity. With regards to Dominique Chateau’s ideas, the cinematic plan can be seen as not a word but the equivalence of statement in an equal way as there is no grammar of cinema, but the syntagmatic plane. The cinematic enunciation has to be both impersonal, textual and metadiscursive, as it can be seen as a communal construction of the image and the voice. Comprehended as an emblem of the film and its whole, the film may be seen as the construction of „enunciative dispositives” being close to the mental representation, and material dimension of the cinematic medium. By focusing on Godard’s *Notre Music* (2004) Berne evokes the redemptive value of the music in terms of dreaming. Its origins and horizons are anchored intentionally in the language. Similarly, in *Letter to Jane* (1972) the picture emerges as literally silent. The flux of images presented in this experiment has been described as „the true discourse making the sense and detextualizing the image”. In other words, to paraphrase the statement that the visual image is not a phonic one the film seems to be guided to enunciation. Reiterating the discussion between Nicole Brenez and Gérard Frommanger and Godard in 2004 in Fresnoy, Berne mentions the expression for Godard’s work in terms of the „constellation of signs” that supposedly reactivate both linear order and atabular order discussed by Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes. The coexistence of thoughts with his eyes can be seen, following *André Malraux*, as „the relative absolute” covering both compositional and discursive gestures to co-create entirely social film. However, one should ask whether this is true that Godard „revolutionizes stylistically the problem of determination of images viewed in critical perspective”.

While Jacques Vincent presents a much more socially engaged view in an essay entitled *Godard, les médias et la communication* where analyzes critically the televisual work of Godard returning to *Six fois deux. Sur et sous la communication* (1976). More specifically, he claims that people have to learn how to go out of the cinema. Thus, he took the position of resistance between the guerrilla and the occupation of enemy territory. It addresses the emission undertaken for 20 hours between July 25th and August 29th on the waves FR3. This was an action pursuing the engagement in the series collective Cine-Tracts in 1968 documenting social upheavals in Paris to share the communication with the public. It would also be worth mentioning, which I did not find in the article, that Godard is credited with the authorship of the works numbered 1, 4, 7, 9, 16, 18, 19, 23 and 40. Significantly, each of the producers had to take photos beforehand and assemble them in one day. Vincent addressing *Six fois deux* seems to divide this project, following Deleuze, into poles, one „theory of the image”, and the second „emergence of the parole”. By rejecting the cinema in favour of television, Berne finds some parallels between television and school compared to reality. In this context, following Deleuze, the images are in a pedagogical way recurrent, designed, redoubled, put in the abyss, and criticised as unfathomable riddles. By stating that the project aims to provide a counter-information through the juxtaposition of open so-called underground information and the watchword to create a mosaic of works. In particular, the focus is on the segment called *Photos et Cie 3A* (1976) showing a long freeze frame on the photograph entitled *Death in Dacca* (1971) by Horst Faas and Michel Laurent bought by all the world's press agencies were accused to collaborate Pakistani regime evidencing the killing. For Vincent this is intolerable, a sort of voyeurism with reference to Daney's article that this film is catching the eye, holds back the action, and fixes scopic regime by adding various prefixes such as „et” he suggests the word to „be”. That's a pity that Vincent omitted research by Michael Witt who devoted his PhD thesis on the problem of communication in this period of Godard's works, which is available online in open access form. The merit of Vincent's article is a reference to a little-known Godard interview, in which he repeats his words from 1981 that television is not for communication but to transmit orders and Deleuzian suggestion that information is the circulation of slogans. Drawing parallels to Pierre

Bourdieu's approach to the democratic debate conceived in the model of the struggle in terms of the democratic exchange model, Godard, accordingly, Godardian criticism concerns formal content, the game of words, and framing. Making explicit reference to the Cannes Festival in 2018 Vincent reiterates Godard's words such as tap, pipe, and intubation to describe what the internet is. In the case of television and the internet, as Vincent suggests not the content is criticized, but what he calls „formal dispositive makes it possible. The network transmitting the audiovisual message on the small screen has been found enough to oppose professionals of communication. This alternative solution has been examined in the oppositional distribution bypassing the cinemas of the film *Image Book* (2018) screened for the first time in Theaters and hotels, not to mention the singular film screening on TV in the Arte channel on 24th April 2019 at 22.15. Such alternative distribution has been seen as an element of further anti-system communication to find an innovative way of screening which would exceed the habits of contemporary art cinema.

Seen from a slightly different angle, Kristensen's work entitled *Jean-Luc Godard, une philosophie de l'amour*, consists of the analysis of four films from the '70s and '80s, namely, *Ici et Ailleurs* (1974) and *Numéro deux* (1975), *Passion* (1982), not to mention *Je vous Salue Marie* (1985) and *Éloge de l'amour* (2001) from phenomenological perspective of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Particularly, in discussing his *L'Œil et l'Esprit* (1960) as a form of sensibility, the capacity of perceiving as a political category, Kristensen discusses the space of relation, intersubjectivity, making visible the relationship in-between, between living beings, between the two to „see” them. Importantly, Kristensen emphasizes in the first analysis the aspect of silence in the work of Godard in terms of the „work of mourning”. In his analysis of *Numéro Two* (1975), particularly the dialogue between the man and the naked woman in *La fleuve* when the latter suggests to the man that “My mouth replaces your eyes” (*Mes yeux remplace tes yeux*). The man, seen from the point of view of the masculine gaze, stresses that the mouth cannot replace the eyes, that speech cannot be a substitute for vision, and that the two faculties remain heterogeneous. To support his argument, the male character draws parallels between the figure (the body in its companion as a river) and the background (the banks of the river), thus implementing the Merleau-Pontian suggestion of seeing as a

thing, inversely reinterpreting the situation and the relation in-between the figure (woman) and ground (the river). Among plenty of examples of intersubjective intervals, Kristensen draws a plane of comparison between the phrase said by the protagonist in *Je vous salue, Marie* (1985), namely „the shadow of god” (*hombre de Dieu*) and reiterated word in *Adieu de Langage* (2014). By the same token, the Swedish author suggests emphatically that the image is a more privileged form of expression than the language in his cinematic work. However, this does not contradict the fact that Godard in *Numéro deux* (1975), exposing sexual intimacies, contributes to the birth dialogue and the language finding its equivalence in the image and the word.

It may seem that not only the language has been examined in this volume but also the sound itself as an integral matter of the cinematic, audiovisual matter. In the last chapter entitled *Nouvelle Vague* (1990) ou *Jean-Luc Godard philosophe*, we return to the second contribution by Serrut, in describing the cinematic scene of the 60's and the rejection of classical cinema by „young Turks”. More precisely, he shifts an interest into the audiovisual dimension in *Nouvelle Vague* (1993) by suggesting that the words, and music, are acousmatic addressing to a well-known category introduced by Michel Chion to describe the interior and voice- thoughts subjectivising the people. It centres the main leitmotiv in the disappearance and the renaissance of the main male protagonist which emerges as a result of using rhetorical figures such as anacrostic, to reiterate the findings by Jean Cledere who repeated the word taken in a different sense to translate it to the Godardian cinema by derealization, presentation of the real in another light, the new perception of the element of the real, a form of renewal given the immediate consciousness.

In brief, it is not possible in this review to analyze and evaluate all the films discussed in the above book, nor to present the outlined theories. The polyphonic array of interpretations gathered in this collective volume has no intention of exhausting the topic of Godardian philosophy, but to name a few possible approaches that may shed new light on the experimental and existential overtones seen in his work given his semiotic „surplus of meaning”, as Paul Ricoeur would argue, bridging the gaps between sound and image and demonstrating the mutual interconnections between them. Not only does the book afford a better grasp of Godard's philosophical underpinnings, but it also allows us to

trace the well-known and unknown case studies in Godard's filmography. Unlimited semiosis of new interpretations, as Umberto Eco would argue, is bringing new humanist tools to open the eyes and ears of the audience to old, well-known movies, as not only classical and socially involved audiovisual essays but also semiotically complex treasures who discover their inner selves through careful analysis. The work of a philosopher is not easily deconstructed in its multiple meanings but requires a renewed reading every time.