Godard's Film

Jean-Luc Godard was born in Paris in 1930, the second of four children. His father was a doctor, and his mother was from a prominent family of Swiss bankers. They divorced when Jean-Luc was 18. During the war he went to school in Nyon, Switzerland, and became a Swiss citizen. After the war he returned to France, attending school in Paris and Grenoble before entering the Sorbonne in 1949. He apparently spent more time viewing and discussing movies than he did studying ethnology. Film clubs, which had started during the occupation as a means of seeing films not available commercially, had become the rage during the post-war years. American and British films from the war years were finally being seen, and the French Cinematheque under the direction of Henri Langlois provided a sweeping, if somewhat eccentric, overview of the history of the cinema. Godard became friends with François Truffaut, Jacques Rivette and Eric Rohmer and began writing film criticism.

Any approach to understanding a film by Godard has to begin by acknowledging the extent to which his misspent youth [1] was consumed by a passion for movies. It is also necessary to acknowledge the intellectual component of this passion. Godard has said that reading film criticism and theory was what originally turned him on to movies.[2] His passion was nurtured not just by the experience of larger than life images in the dark, but by a conviction that movies were an art form on a par with literature or painting and were in fact the preeminent art form of his times.

There were several intellectual streams which merged in the aftermath of the Second World War to create the whitewater turmoil on which Godard's enthusiasm for the cinema was borne. Marxism was of course alive and well. The communist party had been very active in the resistance in France and was a dominant influence in politics. Many artists and intellectuals were Marxists, and one of the ways in which the New Wave of French filmmakers rebelled was by not accepting the prevailing Marxist views on art and culture. Existentialism, primarily as espoused by Sartre, was the surely the most influential new philosophical movement in France. It penetrated all phases of culture with its ability to question any and every traditional idea and expanded the urgency of the resistance into an inescapable call for political engagement. Even though the Germans had been defeated, France remained at war for twenty years, first in Algeria and then in Indochina, and the French government was subject to periods of instability and repressiveness. There was also the legacy of Surrealism, which continued to pull the rug out from under traditional notions of art and culture. And finally there were the stirrings of Structuralism, which grew out of the

1 After Godard dropped out of university and his parents essentially disowned him, he often resorted to theft in order to fund his activities. He even stole valuable first editions of Valéry and a painting by Renoir that belonged to his grandfather.

2 Brody 6f

linguistic theories of Saussure and were being applied to anthropology by Claude Levi-Strauss.

Godard's early education had been typically French, and he grew up in an atmosphere that assumed the importance of literature and art. His maternal grandfather, Julien Monod, was a close friend of Paul Valéry and his literary executor after his death. Jean-Luc's older sister was an artist who became an art teacher. From an early age Godard had artistic ambitions, either as a writer or a painter. It was inevitable that if he fell in love with movies it would have to be as an art form worthy of all the philosophical or cultural scrutiny that could be brought to bear on it. He could not view movies without thinking about them and of course ultimately to think about movies was to imagine making them.

It is, I think, probably impossible for an American to grasp completely the way in which the young Godard saw movies. We certainly know what it is like for a filmmaker to devote his career to recreating the excitement he felt at the movies when he was an adolescent, but the excitement felt by Lucas or Spielberg or even Tarantino is obviously something very different from what moved Godard. Perhaps the closest American parallel are the seminal essays on film by Robert Warshow with their focus on "the actual, immediate experience of seeing and responding to the movies as most of us see them and respond to them."[3] I suspect, however, that there was enough of a difference in "who" was watching that it amounted to seeing something different when each viewed *The Best Years of Our Lives* or *Monsieur Verdoux*.

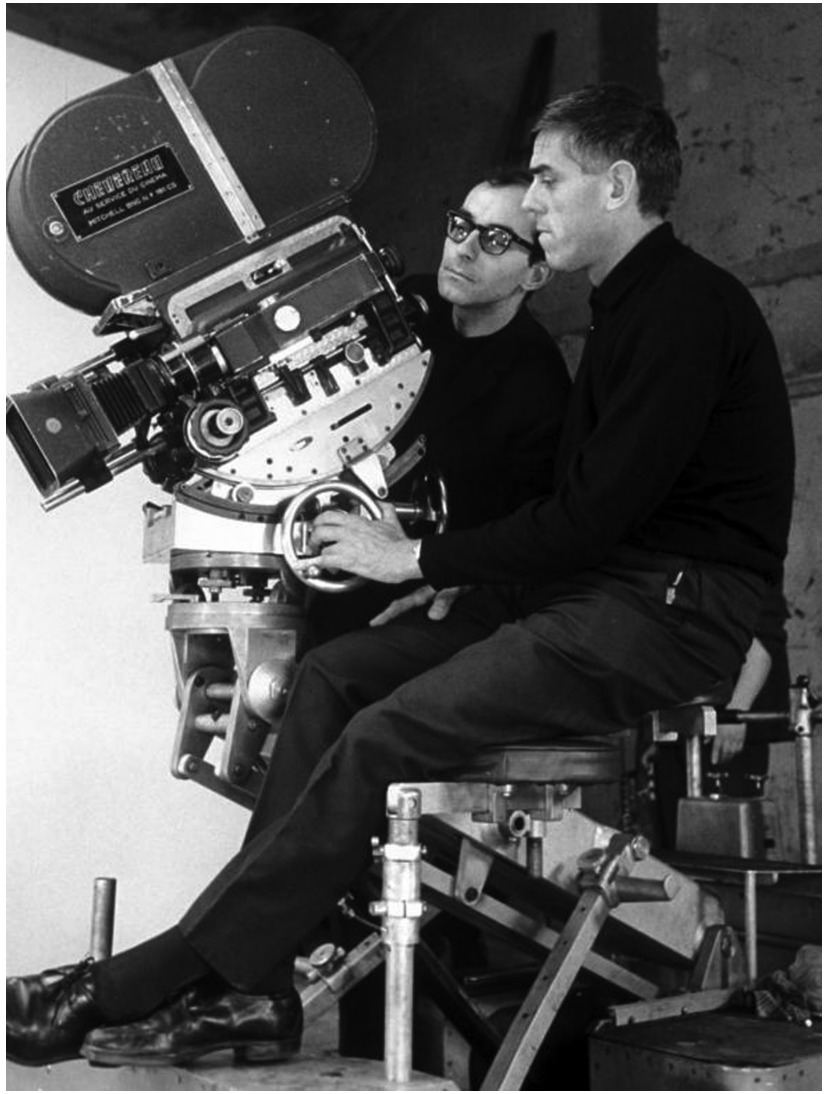
It is not hard to imagine a precocious French teenager in the late 40's being bowled over by the free wheeling energy or anarchy of some Hollywood movies or being completely seduced by the atmosphere and mannerisms of film noir. It is also possible to imagine how the flame of such an enthusiasm would respond to being doused with gallons of literary, philosophical and cultural ideas. Nonetheless it is impossible for me to imagine exactly what Godard saw when he watched *Johnny Guitar*. The best I can do is speculate that what Godard saw was not a film as it was intended to be seen by its makers but a film in a context that had multiple dimensions, including the history of cinema, various theories of cinema, other films by the same director, contemporary culture (both "high" and popular), the current political situation, the entire sweep of Western civilization and perhaps Godard's own ambitions.

In his look back at the cinephile culture of post-war Paris and how it nurtured Godard, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith offered the following description of Godard's early critical writings:

> Two obvious features mark Godard's criticism in the 50s. One is the incessant name dropping. He can hardly write a paragraph without referring to some extraneous poet,

3 Warshow p.xxv

Godard and Raoul Coutard during the filming of Pierrot le fou *in 1965.*



painter or playwright. This is on the one hand somewhat puerile. Rather than a proof of the depth of his reading, it tends to show up the superficial nature of his culture, which is that of a typical above-average French schoolboy studying for the fearsome Second Baccalaureate in order to get a place at the Sorbonne. On the other hand, it does have a purpose. References to poets, painters and playwrights function for Godard as ways of anchoring the cinema and giving it a place in the wider world of art. And references to Griffith, Murnau, Eisenstein and other founding fathers represent an attempt at a genealogy, tracing the broad trends back to some real or mythical origin. Given the random nature of his and his friends' viewing, dictated by erratic release patterns and the inspired but unpredictable programming of the Cinémathèque, this mapping of the history of the cinema is at times nothing short of heroic.

The second outstanding feature is a love of pun and paradox. This doesn't always come across well in English, though the translation by Tom Milne of Godard's critical writings in *Godard on Godard* is exceptionally good. A lot of the puns are merely jokey and can be exasperating in the same way as the name dropping. But their function is to create a kind of semiotic field in which disparate ideas are yoked together and unlikely similarities prospected, rather as James Joyce does in *Ulysses* or *Finnegans Wake*. The spirit is one of 'why not?' Since we don't know why the world is the way it is, why not imagine different ways in which the bits of it might connect? Neither art nor life appears to have any fixed rules, but patterns can be given to them by the imagination, out of which truth may emerge.[4]

4 Nowell-Smith

Nowell-Smith does concede that over the next decade Godard became a "very interesting writer…and as original a writer and thinker about cinema as he is a film-maker." I personally am inclined to give the young Godard the benefit of the doubt and to combat stereotyping with more stereotyping by suggesting that Nowell-Smith's judgment of Godard's early essays as "puerile" reflects a typically English disdain for (and fear of) intellectual passion. He does, however, put his finger on an issue which is relevant to Godard's films as well as his critical writings. "Name dropping" can be viewed as "puerile" or it can be interpreted as a form of shorthand for fleshing out the meaning of what is being said.

Godard's films like his criticism are filled with literary, artistic and philosophical references made in a variety of ways. They are also filled with very personal or autobiographical references. The issue is whether a viewer needs to get all the references in order to comprehend the film – whether they are essential to its meaning or supplemental footnotes elaborating on or amplifying the meaning. A viewer approaching a Godard film with a traditional Hollywood aesthetic may dismiss references of this sort as self-indulgent and extraneous, but at some point he clearly is going to miss the intent of the film. This is one of the reasons so many have judged Godard's films to be simply "bad" movies.

For my own part I confess I have not been able to resolve this issue. For example, the central characters in *Bande á part* are named Franz, Arthur and Odile. Apparently "Franz" and "Arthur" are references to Franz Kafka and Arthur Rimbaud, two of Godard's favorite writers. Odile's full name in the film is Odile Monod, which happens to be Godard's mother's maiden name, as well as the name of a character in a novel by Raymond Queneau. Would knowing this have affected the way I experienced the movie when I saw it? How much would I have to know about Godard's mother or about Queneau and his novel in order to get the reference? What exactly is the relevance of Rimbaud or Kafka to this movie?

Viewing a film by Godard is a complex experience. When I saw *Bande á part* 40 years ago, the projector lamp went out in the middle of the film. The projectionist did not notice right away, and the audience was treated to perhaps 30 seconds of dark screen accompanied by the sound track from the movie. This may have been the first Godard film I had ever seen, but I was already sufficiently exhilarated by the freedom of his style that I assumed the black screen was simply another stylistic device. Only when the projectionist stopped the projector, and the house lights came up while he replaced the bulb; did I realize I had read something into the experience that Godard had not intended. I am not going to venture a guess about whether he would have approved of my reading.

Richard Brody may go overboard in his interest in the references in Godard's films. His explication of Godard's use of the Mozart clarinet

concerto in a scene in *Breathless* is indicative of his take on Godard:

> The poplular and commercial recognition of *Breathless,* and the intriguing stories surrounding its production, created a demand for Godard's presence in interviews. He was interviewed in *Le Monde* and in *Arts* as the time of he film's release, as well as in Swiss journals shortly thereafter. These interviews were themselves a sort of virtuoso performance in which the director both illustrated and extended the methods of his film into the press. In *Le Monde*, Godard explained how he had worked:
>
> > Based on this theme by Truffaut, I told the story of an American woman and a Frenchman. Things can't work out between them because he thinks about death and she doesn't. I said to myself that if I didn't add this idea to the screnplay the film would not be interesting. For a long time the boy has been obsessed by death, he has forebodings. That's the reason why I shot that scene of the accident where he sees a guy die in the street. I quoted that sentence from Lenin, "We are all dead people on leave," and I chose the Clarinet Concerto that Mozart wrote shortly before dying.
>
> In fact, Michel sees a "guy" (played by Jacques Rivette) lying dead in the street after a motor scooter accident (reminiscent of Godard's mother's death) and walks on impassively, but remarks to Patricia later that day, "I saw a guy die." The next day, in bed with Patricia, he tells her: "Do you think of death, sometimes? I think about it endlessly." Thus the "subject" of the film is indeed stated as baldly as possible – a boy who thinks about death – but the cultural artifacts that reinforce the subject and weave it into the fabric of the film are present as a sort of code, and Godard made use of the press to publish the decoder.
>
> Godard's proposed interpretive method – and its difficult subtleties – did not go unnoticed. After seeing the film and reading the interviews, André Bessèges wrote in *France Catholique*:
>
> > They are show a "guy dying in the street," they are made to hear the clarinet concerto that Mozart wrote just before dying. The auteur assures us that it is to make us understand that his hero is obsessed with death. But one must have, to say the least, an acute sense of symbols, and also be an alert connoisseur of music, to catch onto those intentionss.
>
> "To catch onto those intentions" required an initiation, an engagement on the part of the viewer. It also required the active role of the press in transmitting Godard's remarks in the context of reports on the celebrity's life.[5]

Later Brody says of a song that Godard had originally thought about using in *Pierrot le fou*:

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5 74f

> …Godard, finding the allusion to his private life too direct, supressed the song from the film, and yet leaves in the film just enough of it for those in the know to know that Godard too was in the know.[6]

As is probably apparent by now I am old fashioned enough to still subscribe to an aesthetics which regards the work of art as an free standing object offering the viewer a portal to a world other than his own. Obviously the significance of any element in a work of art is a function of the cultural tradition in which it is produced, but excessive concern with references (either in the creation or the appreciation of a work) seems to me to be misguided. If Paul Schrader uses Mozart's clarinet concerto in *American Gigolo,* I think it is sufficient to focus on the immediate impact of the music with some sense of the cultural tradition it represents without having to wonder if its use is also a reference to *Breathless* and an obsession with death. Brody seems to regard Godard's "work" as a cultural phenomenon in which the film is only one element and which is ultimately about Godard. It is the creation of Godard in both senses. He is the creator, and he is created by or through the work. I think this is why "reflexivity" becomes such an important category in his evaluation of the films. I find something off-putting about this way of viewing a film and about the image of Jean-Luc Godard that it implies.

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6 Brody 651

Even when I do not "get" a Godard film, I invariably sense an incredible intensity and passion informing it. This is why I am inclined to believe that he was a passionate and precocious student and that the "name dropping" in his early writing is not just "puerile." I know how to take Godard with a grain of salt, but I am never going to pretend that I see what he is doing well enough to dismiss it. To my mind he suffers the fate of all thinkers and writers who take themselves so seriously that they must re-invent language to express themselves. Even at their most obscure or infuriating they are entitled to respect because their commitment and passion shines through the clouds. One of the great virtues of *Contempt* is the fact that Godard made it when he was poised on the cusp of the wave. It is largely considered an atypical film because it has so many traditional elements which make it "accessible," and yet it is also filled with the kind of references and concerns which make his other films "inaccessible."

Godard's fondness for word play and puns apparently stems from his early childhood, when it was probably regarded both as a sign of a precocious intellect and as an annoying eccentricity. Nowell-Smith is generous in his attempt to fathom this compulsion, and I believe there is merit in his interpretation. It is as though all of experience has to be interrelated and any means for making connections is valid. There is, perhaps, an underlying desperation in this stemming from a need to feel that one's self is a unified field. Part of Godard's precociousness was surely a sense of the ex-

tent to which the content of his consciousness and the nature of his experience were determined by the culture in which he was trying to individualize or differentiate himself. The most obvious component of this is the effect of advertising on desire, but it applies equally to all other aspects of culture. The distinction between the "authentic" individual and the alienated, "other-directed," anonymous "one" was a common theme in existentialism and in sociology as well as Marxist critiques.

I am not sure what the cinematic equivalent of a pun would be, but many viewers see a witty playfulness in Godard's films. I think I see the same thing, but the term "witty playfulness" does not connote the kind of passion and even romantic yearning I sense behind it. I get an exhilarating sense of liberation, but it seems to me to be reaching for some form of transcendence other than an Olympian amusement or detachment which is able to play contentedly. Clearly Godard suffers from an hyperactive intellect. In a slightly different configuration that kind of wiring in the brain produces the entertainment offered by Robin Williams or the exhilarating depth charges of Norman O. Brown. In Godard's case it seems symptomatic of a mind burning racing fuel in an attempt to gain the upper hand on chaos.

One of Godard's earliest published pieces was a brief comparison of two short films, a documentary on the sculpture of Calder and a short film called, *L'Histoire d'Agnès* which used paintings by Henri Goetz:

> A young boy gazes at the sea, flowers and sand. Then he enters Calder's studio like Ali Baba discovering the thieves' treasure-trove. Childhood is the open sesame to the bouquet of mobiles.
>
> Burgess Meredith's film[7] not only bears the prestige of the most beautiful of beauties, but in passing defines the cinema, which consists simply of putting things in front of the camera. At the cinema we do not think, we are thought. A poet calls this the things' view of it. Not man's view of things, but the view of things themselves. Works of Calder is a propaganda film on behalf of objects. (Few films come so close to this view as the comedies of Preston Sturges.)
>
> Roger Livet's effort is a failure in so far as it betrays the paintings of Goetz, and in so far as these objects are merely the expression of Agnès's imagination (she being unable to communicate with her mathematician). This supposed objectivity is pure artifice, and it is no accident that it bears the taint of third-rate literature (that of Sartre). The cinema represents reality. But if reality were so beautiful (and bore as pretty a name as Agnes), there would be no cinema.[8]

Other than learning that Godard liked the film about Calder but not the other, what exactly

7 The documentary was actually directed by Herbert Matter, although it was produced and narrated by Meredith

8 Godard p.19

does the reader get from this review? Somehow the film on Calder "defines the cinema." Godard sees even a short documentary on Calder's mobiles as an example of self-defining modern art. The definition he extracts from it is typically and perversely reductionist: cinema consists of putting things in front of a camera or cinema represents reality. At the same time apparently cinema exists because reality is not beautiful enough.

Godard explicates his definition of cinema with a statement that Brody sees as axiomatic for all of Godard's work: "At the cinema we do not think, we are thought." The actual French for this was apparently "Au cinéma, nous ne pensons pas, nous sommes pensés." In other words "thought" in this case is a passive verb and not a noun.

For those who have trouble grasping the sense of this, Godard offers a reference to a poet and what Milne translates (with some discomfort) as "the things view of it." Milne explains that this is a reference to the collection of prose poems by Francis Ponge entitled *Le parti pris des choses*. This title is itself a play on the expression "parti pris," (literally parti = decision or side, pris = taken) which can mean prejudice, bias, foregone conclusion or prepossession. One English translation of the work renders the title as *Taking the Side of Things* while another simply resorts to calling it *The Nature of Things*. Milne suggests "The Things View of It" as a rough translation of the title so that Godard is using the title of the volume of prose poems. "View" seems to involve a visual metaphor, which may be lacking in the French. Another commentator says it could be translated as "On the Side of Things" or "The Bias of Things." The best I can make of all this is that Ponge's project sounds like a literary first cousin of the rallying cry of phenomenology: "To the things themselves!" and I gather some have seen Ponge's prose poems as an exercise in pure phenomenology, an attempt to break way from all preconceptions and describe or articulate an object without any reference to human interests.

Once Godard has clarified things with this reference, it is a short trip via the unique circuits in his brain to the films of Preston Sturges. I, myself, managed to miss that turn. Brody makes a valiant effort to interpret "At the cinema, we do not think, we are thought":

> This observation was less an avowal of passivity than of the will to self-transformation through movies. It indicates Godard's consuming submission to cinema and the extent to which he experienced it as a personal epiphany, indeed a transfiguration. Godard had reached the essence of the experience at once, and conveyed it in an unabashed confession. In a single aphorism, he broke down the barriers of aesthetic distance and contemplation that separate the cinema, its viewers, and its makers. At the earliest stage of his work,

> Godard's existence and that of the cinema were already fused.[9]

Brody's response of some of Godard's films leaves me with the feeling that he is more interested in his own ideas about Godard than he is in Godard's movies, and I confess I think he has been swept up in his own rhetoric a bit in this attempt to make sense of how "we are thought." Not that I have a more cogent interpretation to offer. I do think that Godard is grappling with the sense that the experience of being absorbed in a movie is analogous to the way in which ones subjectivity or identity is formed by the culture into which one is born. One of the emerging debates of his time was the challenge presented to Sartrean existentialism with its radical notions of individual freedom and choice by the structuralism emerging from the anthropology of Claude Levi-Strauss.

The initial sense I get reading the criticism Godard wrote is that of eavesdropping on one side of a conversation between fanatics who share a vast frame of reference and have seen every movie made by man. These fanatics clearly love movies. The term "cinephile" sounds much too academic or esoteric to convey the overwhelming enthusiasm and passion with which these people view and talk about movies. Even when Godard's mind seems to be running ahead via all manner of short circuits so that what he says makes absolutely no sense to the uninitiated reader, there is still the undeniable impression of an unbounded love for cinema. It is not, however, an unconditional love for all movies. Godard makes no bones about it when he feels a movie fails to realize the potential of "cinema." Although like most of the New Wave critics he tended to write only about films he liked and simply ignore the unworthy releases, he could be quite harsh when he felt the need to comment on someone's lapses:

> Jules Dassin wasn't at all bad when he was shooting semi-documentary style among the Italian fruit-workers of San Francisco, in the old wooden subway of New York, or on the dreamy docks of that charming city which, as Sacha Guitry said, the English insist on calling London. But one day, alas, our Jules began to take himself seriously and came to France with a martyr's passport. At the time, *Rififi* fooled some people. Today it can't hold a candle to *Touchez pas au Grisbi,* which paved the way for it, let alone *Bob le flambeur,* which it paved the way for. The rest is an old, old story. If Billy Graham were a film-maker, he would doubtless be called Jules Dassin. Letting our apprentice philosopher preach from European studios is rather like letting a fairground strong-man think he is capable of explaining Aristotle. [10]

9 Brody p.3

10 Godard p.127

His review of *Woman in a Dressing Gown* directed by J. Lee Thompson's sees it as epitomizing the incompetence of British films:

> So lunatic is the direction that the insipidity – Mr. Thompson's only original touch – is at least rather different from the sort which has characterized Her Gracious Majesty's films since the departure of the film-maker who knew too much, the man of The Thirty Nine Steps. Actually, the way in which J. Lee Thomson seasons his revolting stew should be called pretentious rather than lunatic. It is putting it mildly to say that his style is as maddening as his heroine's behaviour. From beginning to end the film is an incredible debauch of camera movements as complex as they are silly and meaningless, and of cuts and changes in rhythm on cupboards closing and doors opening such as even Bardem.[11] would be ashamed of nowadays. But tact never bothers J. Lee Thompson. Impossible as it may seem, in *Woman in a Dressing-gown* he yields even further than Juan Antonio to the temptations of the sort of virtuosity one finds in France nowadays only among ex-pupils of I.D.H.E.C. making their debut on television. In other words, multiply the ugliness of *Death of a Cyclist* by the unfunniness of *Passport to Pimlico*, raise to the power of the worst of bad taste from Carol Reed or David Lean, and you will get *Woman in a Dressing-gown*.[12]

I recall thinking *Passport to Pimlico* was delightful, and I was unaware that Carol Reed and David Lean were prone to lapses in taste. Godard's passionately held opinions can be intimidating, but the more I read his criticism, the more I am struck by how impossible it is for him, despite all his verbal dexterity, to communicate exactly what it is that excites him so as he watches a film. Consider some excerpts from his response to *A Time to Love and a Time to Die,* directed by Douglas Sirk, which reads almost like self-parody*:*

> So you can see that I am going to write a madly enthusiastic review of Douglas Sirk's latest film, simply because it set my cheeks afire. And enthusiastic I shall be. In the first place I shall refer constantly to everything Radiquet's novel[13] makes me think of, to Griffith's *True-Heart Susie,* because I think one should mention Griffith in all articles about the cinema: everyone agrees, but everyone forgets nonetheless. Griffith, therefore, and André Bazin too, for the same reasons; and now that is done. I can get back to my

11 Juan Antonio Bardem, a prominent Spanish writer and director, was the uncle of the actor Javier Bardem. His film, *Death of a Cyclist*, was the first film produced by Georges de Beauregard.

12 Godard p.86

13 Raymond Radiquet wrote the novel *Le Diable au corps* from which Claude Autant-Lara made his film *Devil in the Flesh* (1947). Godard's review begins by contrasting Sirk's film with Autant-Lara's film and the novel on which it was based.

> comparisons for *A Time to Love and a Time to Die*. […]
>
> This, anyhow, is what enchants me about Sirk: this delirious mixture of medieval and modern, sentimentality and subtlety, tame compositions and frenzied CinemaScope. Obviously one must talk about all this as Aragon talks about Elsa's eyes, raving a little, a lot, passionately, no matter, the only logic which concerns Sirk is delerium.

He does not say anything more about Griffith or Bazin in this review. He does comment on the themes of the narrative, but his real focus seems to be on the visual style, particularly the camera movement:

> It is fashionable to say that the wide screen is all window-dressing. Personally, my answer to all those René's who can't see clearly[14] is a polite 'My eye!' One need only have seen the last two Sirk films to be finally convinced that CinemaScope adds as much again to the normal format. One should add here that our old film-maker has regained his young legs and beats the young at their own game, panning happily all round, tracking back or forwards likewise. And the astonishingly beautiful thing about these camera movements, which tear away like racing-cars and where the blurring is masked by the speed with which they are executed, is that they give the impression of having been done by hand instead of with a crane, rather as if the mercurial brushwork of a Fragonard were the work of a complex machine. Conclusion: those who have not seen or loved Liselotte Pulver running along the bank of the Rhine or Danube or something, suddenly bending to pass under a barrier, then straightening up hop! with a thrust of the haunches – those who have not seen Douglas Sirk's big Mitchell camera bend at the same moment, the hop! straighten up with the same supple movement of the thighs, well, they haven't seen anything, or else they don't know beauty when they see it.[15]

Godard's paean to Nicholas Ray's *Bitter Victory* leaves no doubt about his enthusiasm but may not make it obvious to the reader why he is so enthusiastic:

> Magnificently edited, *Bitter Victory,* is exceptionally well acted by Curt Jurgens and Richard Burton. With *Ét Dieu…créa la femme*, this makes twice one can believe in a character created by Jurgens. As for Richard Burton, who has acquitted himself well enough in all his previous films, good or bad, when directed by Nicholas Ray he is absolutely sensational. A kind of Wilhelm Meister 1958? No matter. It would mean little enough to say that *Bitter Victory* is the most Goethian of films. What is the point of redoing Goethe, or

14 This is a punning reference to Rene Clair

15 Godard p. 139

of doing anything again – *Don Quixote* or *Bouvard et Pécuchet, J'accuse* or *Voyage au bout de la nuit* – since it has already been done. What is love, fear, contempt, danger, adventure, despair, bitterness, victory? What does it matter compared to the stars?

Never before have the characters in a film seemed so close and yet so far away. Faced by the deserted streets of Benghazi or the sand-dunes, we suddenly think for the space of a second of something else – the snack-bars on the Champs-Elysées, a girl one liked, everything and anything, lies, the treachery of women, the shallowness of men, playing the slot-machines. For *Bitter Victory* is not a reflection of life, it is life itself turned into film, seen from behind the mirror where the cinema intercepts it. It is at once the more direct and the most secret of films, the most subtle and the crudest. It is not cinema, it is more than cinema.

How can one talk of such a film? What is the point of saying that the meeting between Richard Burton and Ruth Roman while Curt Jurgens watches is edited with fantastic brio? Maybe this was a scene during which we had closed our eyes. For *Bitter Victory*, like the sun makes you close your eyes. Truth is blinding.[16]

Bitter Victory was at the top of Godard's list of the Ten Best Films of 1957, a typical selection of films which reveal the eclecticism of his taste and his admiration for so many Hollywood films that seem the complete opposite of the films he went on to make:

1) *Bitter Victory* (Nicholas Ray)
2) *The Wrong Man* (Alfred Hitchcock)
3) *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter*? (Frank Tashlin)
4) *Hollywood or Bust* (Frank Tashlin)
5) *Les Trois font la paire* (Sacha Guitry)
6) *A King in New York* (Charlie Chaplin)
7) *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* (Fritz Lang)
8) *The Criminal Life of Archibaldo de la Cruz* (Luis Bunuel)
9) *Sawdust and Tinsel* (Ingmar Bergman)
10) *Saint Joan* (Otto Preminger)[17]

Another of his favorite works by Frank Tashlin is *The Girl Can't Help It,* which he was confident would come to be seen "as a fountain of youth from which the cinema…has drawn fresh inspiration."[18] Most Americans probably consider that movie's only redeeming features Jayne Mansfield's figure and performances by Little Richard, Fats Domino, Eddie Cochran, Gene Vincent, and The Platters. French critics are notorious for their ability to see virtues in Hollywood films which most Americans regard as silly entertainment, and Godard was right there at the head of the

16 Godard p.65f

17 Godard p.66

18 Godard p.58

pack. At the same time, of course, he was championing Bergman and Mizoguchi.

Andre Bazin was a film theorist and critic who functioned as a kind of father figure for the New Wave. One of his most influential essays, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" focused on the fact that a photographic image, unlike a painted image, implies by its very nature the reality of its subject matter. The logic of this led Bazin to a theoretical preference for long takes, deep focus and camera movement as opposed to the conventional method for constructing a scene from shorter takes and various angles. It is difficult to do justice to the sophistication of Bazin's analysis of "the language of cinema" especially since digital image manipulation has fundamentally altered the nature of the "photographic" image we see on a movie screen. Perhaps the best sample of his theoretical writing is the following from "The Evolution of Film Language." After describing the way Orson Welles and William Wyler use deep focus and giving a fairly detailed analysis of a scene in *The Best Years of Our Lives*, Bazin attempts to summarize his idea of the importance of composition in depth:

> The modern director, in using the sequence-shot with composition in depth, is not rejecting editing – how could he do so without reverting to a kind of rudimentary gibberish? He is integrating it into his visual style. The narrative of Welles and Wyler is no less explicit than that of John Ford, but it has the advantage of not having to forfeit the special effects that can be obtained from the unity of the image in time and space. It matters a great deal (at least in a work that has some style) whether an event is analysed fragment by fragment or shown in its physical unity. It would of course be absurd to deny the marked progress in film language that has been brought about by the use of editing, but it has been gained at the expense of other qualities that are no less specifically cinematic.
>
> The is why composition in depth is not just another cameraman's device like the use of filters or a certain type of lighting; it is a vital contribution to direction: a dialectical advance in the history of film language.
>
> And this advance is not merely a formal one. Composition in depth, well used, is not just a more economic, subtle, and simple way of heightening an event; it affects not only the structure of film language but also the intellectual relationship between the spectator and the image, thus actually modifying the meaning of the film.
>
> It would be beyond the scope of this article to analyse the psychological repercussions of this relationship, let alone its aesthetic consequences, but perhaps it will suffice to make the following general remarks:
>
> 1. Composition in depth means that the spectator's relationship with the image is nearer to that which he has to reality. It is then true to say that quite independently of

the actual content of the image its structure is more realistic.

2. Consequently, composition in depth demands a more active mental attitude on the part of the spectator and even a positive contribution to the direction. Whereas with analytical editing he has only to follow his guide and let his attention focus on whatever the director has chosen for him to see, a certain minimum of personal choice is required here. The fact that the image has a meaning depends partly on his attention and will.

3. From the preceding propositions, which are of a psychological nature, there follows a third one which might be defined as metaphysical.

By analysing reality, the very nature of editng assumes the dramatic event to have a unity of meaning. Another analytical process might be possible, but the result would be a different film. In short, the nature and essence of editing is such that it stands in the way of the expression of ambiguity. And it was precisely this that was proved by Kuleshov's *reductio ad absurdum:* each time, an exact meaning was given to the face whose ambiguity made possible these three alternately exclusive interpretations.[19]

Composition in depth, on the other hand, brings ambiguity back into the structure of the image; this is not automatic (Wyler's films are hardly ambiguous at all), but it is certainly a possibility. That is why it is no exaggeration to say that *Citizen Kane* is conceived entirely in terms of composition in depth. One's uncertainty about the spiritual key or interpretation of the film hangs on the very composition of the image.[20]

In retrospect some of Bazin's theory may seem arbitrary, but the importance of his writing is still obvious. He set the stage for a new level of awareness in criticism and filmmaking by delineating issues of style and content and by attempting to articulate the essence of cinema as an art form unlike any other. It is easy to see why Jean Renoir said of him, "He made us feel that our trade was a noble one much in the same way that the saints of old persuaded the slave of the value of his humanity."[21] Even when his protégés took exception to his theories, as Godard did, it was within the context of a discourse he had established and with the shared conviction that the cinema was an art form whose potential was only beginning to be realized.

The critics in *Cahiers du Cinéma* are most famous, of course, for having formulated the "auteur" theory of film making or film criticsm. In

19 Lev Kuleshov was the Russian filmmaker and theorist who assembled the classic exercise in montage theory in which the same shot of an actor was cut together with a variety of images to demonstrate how the viewer's interpretation of the expression on the actor's face depending on the context in which it was viewed.

20 Graham 46f Hugh Gray's translation of this essay is included in *What is Cinema* by Bazin

21 Bazin p. vi

the attempt to elevate all film to the status of "art" or perhaps in an attempt to obliterate the distincion between "pop culture" and "high culture," the *Cahiers* critics insisted that the director's vision informing a film is the thing that makes it art and that the way in which the director actually made the film was more significant than the subject matter or even the script for the film. The films that were taken seriously in France at the time tended to be very polished productions based on literary works, the meaning of which could be analyzed in social or political terms. The *Cahiers* critics rebelled against this point of view, partially just because they were rebellious teenagers, but also because it excluded films they loved. Sometimes I get the impression that they simply loved Hollywood movies in the same way as most people but lived in a world in which it was not acceptable to love pop culture without an intellectual justification for doing so. Even though Bazin disagreed with some of their theory and felt a need to rein in the virulence of their rebellion, he obviously admired their passion and their commitment to film as an art form worthy of sophisticated analysis.

One way in which Godard disagreed with Bazin was an insistence that the classic method of constructing a scene from different angles was just as valid as a style of filmmaking as the approach Bazin advocated. He argued that the choice of style or technique should be a creative choice based on the content or meaning of the scene rather than an abstract theory or absolute rules.

> If direction is a look, montage is a heartbeat. To foresee is the characteristic of both: but what one seeks to foresee in space, the other seeks in time. Suppose you notice a young girl in the street who attracts you. You hesitate to follow her. A quarter of a second. How to convey this hesitation? *Mise en scène* will answer the question 'How shall I approach her?' But in order to render explicit the other question, 'Am I going to love her?', you are forced to bestow importance on the quarter of a second during which the two questions are born. It may be, therefore, that it will be for the montage rather than the *mise en scène* to express both exactly and clearly the life of an idea or its sudden emergence in the course of the story. When? Without playing on words, each time the situation requires it, each time within a shot when a shock effect demands to take the place of an arabesque, each time between one scene and another when the inner continuity of the film enjoins with a change of shot the superimposition of the description of a character on that of the plot. This example shows that talking of *mise en scène* automatically implies montage. When montage effects surpass those of *mise en scène* in efficacity, the beauty of the latter is doubled, the unforeseen unveiling secrets by its charm in an operation analogous to using unknown quantities in mathematics.[22]

22 Godard p. 59

Godard's analysis of Roger Vadim's direction of *Sait-on jamais?* reads like a classic lecture for Filmmaking 101:

> Unlike so many beginners with five years of Cinématheque viewing behind them, Vadim does not say to himself, 'I'm going to move the camera thus, and frame the characters so. Now, what are they going to do and say?' Instead, more sensibly, he reasons this way: Michel pulls the curtain and hides Sophie as she lies on the bed, increasing his pleasure at knowing she is there by his displeasure at being unable to see her. How to film this scene? Nothing easier. A shot of Michel pulling the curtain: Sophie can no longer be seen. Change of shot with the camera now in Sophie's place, no longer able to see Michel. Michel opens the curtain. They are together again. It is easy to see from this example that once the characters' motivations are clearly established, *mise en scène* becomes a simple matter of logic. Vadim will become a great director because his scenes are never occasioned by a purely abstract or theoretical idea for a shot; rather is the idea of the scene, in other words the dramatic idea, which occasions the idea of a sh*ot*.

Two masters of the "classical" style of directing that Godard celebrated were Howard Hawks and Alfred Hitchcock, and he and some of his colleagues became known as "Hitchcocko-Hawksians." One of his earliest reviews was a piece on Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train* at a point where Hitchcock had only a handful of ardent admirers in France. Again I think it tells the reader more about how Godard viewed films than it does about why the film is so worthy of admiration:

> Here is the subject of *Strangers on a Train*: a young tennis champion, already well known, in love with a Senator's daughter and wanting a divorce, meets a stranger on a train who offers to get rid of his wife – she refuses to divorce him – on condition that the tennis champion does away with his hated father. As soon as the tennis-player leaves the train he forgets his strange companion. But the latter, believing himself pledged, strangles the more than flighty wife and insists that the tennis-player fulfil his side of the bargain he believes was made in the train. Now free, but terrified by the stranger's audacity, the tennis-player eventually manages to convince the police of his innoncence and marries the girl he loves.
>
> This subject owes so little to anecdote or the picturesque, but is instead imbued with such lofty ambition, that probably only the cinema could handle it with so much dignity. I know no other recent film, in fact, which better conveys the condition of modern man, who must escape his fate without the help of the gods. Probably, too, the cinema is particularly suited to recording the drama, to make the best not so much of the myth of the death of God (with which the contemporary novel, alas, is by no means backward in taking liberties, as witness Graham Greene) as the baleful

quality it suggests. However, it was necessary that in the sign – in other words, that which indicates something in whose place it appears; in this case, a conflict of wills – the *mise en scene* should respect the arabesque which underlines its effect, and like Dreyer and Gance, should use it with delicate virtuosity; for it cannot shock through mere empty exaggeration. The significant and the signified are here set so high (if the idea is involved in the form, it becomes more incisive, but is also imprisoned like water in ice) that in the exploits of this criminal, Hitchcock's art cannot but show us the promethean image of his murderous little hand, the terror in face of unbearable brilliance of the fire it steals.

(Let me make myself plain: it is not in terms of liberty and destiny that cinematographic *mise en scene* is measured, but in the ability of genius to batten on objects with constant invention, to take nature as a model, to be infallibly driven to embellish things which are insufficient – for instance, to give a late afternoon that Sunday air of lassitude and well-being. Its goal is not to express but to represent. In order that the great effort at representation engulfed in the Baroque should continue, it was necessary to achieve an inseparability of camera, director and cameraman in relation to the scene represented; and so the problem was not – contrary to André Malraux – in the way one shot succeeded another, but in the movement of the actor within the frame.)[23]

As much as I love movies I have to confess I was never able to worship at the altar of Hitchcock. To my mind his movies are certainly well made; but they always seem like manipulative thrillers, and even at their most blatantly symbolic they never achieve for me the kind of metaphorical resonance that enables movies to illuminate the human condition or touch me deeply. I can see existential profundities in the way Laurel and Hardy attempt to deliver a piano or Buster Keaton copes with recalcitrant reality, but it would never occur to me to think about *Strangers on a Train* in terms of the "condition of modern man." Apparently Hitchcock was broadcasting on a frequency to which I am not attuned and for which reception is much better in France. In any case Godard seems to have viewed all films as works of modern art to be appreciated in terms of technique and cultural context rather than simply enjoyed as entertainment.

Another way Godard expanded on Bazin's theories was in his ideas about the "reality" which is captured by the photographic image in a film. What is real is not just simple physicality but all the layers of meaning that objects and people have. The images on the screen are not just characters in a setting; they are actors or even "stars" in "sets" or real locations which have significance be-

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23 Godard p. 23f

yond the story. Every viewer of a film knows this, but in Godard there seems to be a Brechtian desire to deal with this explicitly as part of what the film is "about." There is also an appreciation for "real" or spontaneous reactions by the actors rather than "acting," and yet at the same time there is an appreciation of the iconic status of "stars" and a sense of the extent to which a character in one movie may be playing a composite of characters in other movies just as individual in "real life" may adopt an identity based on cultural icons. It is as though reality itself is composed of "images" – so much so that eventually Godard seems to have concluded that the history of the 20th century and the history of the cinema are virtually the same thing

There is, it seems to me, a tension in Godard's thought and work, at least in the earlier work with which I am more familiar, between the exhilaration he experienced watching movies and a suspicion of the way in which the audience at a movie is "hypnotized" by the images on the screen. An interpretation of Plato's myth of the cave in terms of contemporary Marxist critiques of culture and the need for art to evoke critical thinking rather than just emotional catharsis in some way undermines his innocent love of movies and forces him to seek a new definition of cinema.

By the time he was 35 Godard felt his attitude towards the cinema had evolved enough for him to look back on its origins.

> I knew nothing of life, and it's the cinema that made me discover life...with people, men, women, houses, cars, work, workers. I discovered it as if I were in Plato's cave and then there was a little window in it and a film being projected. So one day I said: "Look, there is life; so I'm going to do cinema too in order to discover life." Now, I have the impression of having passed to the other side of the window, and to be looking and filming behind the screen. At the time of *Breathless*, I had the sense, basically, of being in front of the screen, and now I have the sense of being behind it, of seeing life more head-on.[24]

Sometimes I have the impression that once Godard saw that "reality" consisted of projected images, once he got "behind the screen", he found himself in a house of mirrors from which the only exit was political action. The point here, however, is that during the early years of his career he was making movies about movies because movies were both the ultimate metaphor for reality and very much a part of the reality in which he lived. *Contempt* is, among other things, literally a movie about making a movie.

Regardless of what one makes of Godard's critical writings or what connections one sees between his theories about film and the movies he made, one thing is undeniable: in his youth Godard was incredibly hip. Even if he did not re-

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24 Brody p. 208

ally read all the books he alluded to or quoted as some have suggested, he was obviously tuned in to the intellectual currents swirling around him just as he was unbelievably tuned into fashion and seemingly every aspect of pop culture. If he issued scathing critiques of consumerism, he was able to do so because he knew the allure of a red Alfa Romeo. It is as though the tensions within him made him a lightning rod for all the currents in the air around him. He combined a solid bourgeois upbringing with the life of a rebellious outsider and petty thief. He was an incurable romantic and an alienated existentialist. He was a modernist with a passionate nostalgia for a lost world of meaning and beauty. He had a politically conservative streak in his youth but did not hesitate to challenge the repressive policies of the government. He knew how the system worked. He was hyper-aware and hyper-aware of being aware.

The years that Godard spent writing criticism with his friends were, of course, the gestation period of the French New Wave. Michel Marie has done an admirable job of pinning down the meaning of "New Wave" and chronicling its history, but in the simplest terms its emergence can be tied to the release in 1959 of two films by Claude Chabrol (*Le Beau Serge* and *Les Cousins*) and one by François Truffaut (*The 400 Blows*). Godard made three short films between 1957 and 1959, and then made *Breathless*, which was released in 1960. For all of these directors, making films was the natural progression from writing criticism just as writing criticism had been the natural outcome from viewing films.

> As a critic, I thought of myself as a filmmaker. Today I still think of myself as a critic, and in a sense I am, more than ever before. Instead of writing criticism, I make a film, but the critical dimension is subsumed. I think of myself as an essayist, producing essays in novel form or novels in essay form: only instead of writing, I film them. Were the cinema to disappear, I would simply accept the inevitable and turn to television; were television to disappear, I would revert to pencil and paper. For there is a clear continuity between all forms of expression. It's all one. The important thing is to approach it from the side that suits you best.[25]

This is from an interview with Godard by *Cahiers du Cinema* published in December 1962 when he had made four films. Of all his interviews this seems to have caught him at a moment when he was most inclined to be straightforward and open about his attitudes. Normally I would also advise anyone to take what Godard says in an interview with a grain of salt. Some have suggested that the interview was a genre of fiction at which Godard excelled, and any attempt to formulate a coherent philosophy of life or theory of film or political position from a collection of Godard's interviews will surely end in frustration.

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25 Godard p. 171

He worked for two years in the publicity department of Twentieth Century-Fox, and he clearly understood the value of creating and maintaining a public persona even if it entailed always wearing sunglasses when he was on camera and often coming up with the deliberately perverse responses to questions. His description of shooting *Breathless*, however, seems to provide as clear an indication as anything of what he was doing when he started making films.

> Our first films were all *films du cinéphile* – the work of film enthusiasts. One can make use of what one has already seen in the cinema to make deliberate references. This was true of me in particular. I thought in terms of purely cinematographic attitudes. For some shots I referred to scenes I remembered from Perminger, Cukor, etc. And the character played by Jean Seberg was a continuation of her role in *Bonjour Tristesse*. I could have taken the last shot of Preminger's film and started after dissolving to a title, 'Three Years Later'. This is much the same sort of thing as my taste for quotation, which I still retain. Why should we be reproached for it? People in life quote as they please, so we have the right to quote as we please. Therefore I show people quoting, merely making sure that they quote what pleases me. In the notes I make of anything that might be of use for a film, I will add a quote from Dostoievsky if I like it. Why not? If you want to say something, there is only one solution: say it.

Moreover, *A Bout de Souffle* was the sort of film where anything goes: that was what it was all about. Anything people did could be integrated in the film. As a matter of fact, this was my starting point. I said to myself: we have already had Bresson, we have just had *Hiroshima*, a certain kind of cinema has just drawn to a close, maybe ended, so let's add the finishing touch, let's show that anything goes. What I wanted was to take a conventional story and remake, but differently, everything the cinema had done. I also wanted to give the feeling that the techniques of film-making had just been discovered or experienced for the first time. The iris-in showed that one could return to cinema's sources; the dissolve appeared, just once, as though it had just been invented. If I used no other processes, this was in reaction against a certain kind of film-making; but it should not be made a rule. There are films in which they are necessary; and sometimes they should be used more frequently. There is a story about Decoin going to see his editor at Billancourt and saying: 'I have just seen *A Bout de Souffle*; from now on continuity shots are out.'

If we used a hand-held camera, it was simply for speed. I couldn't afford to use the usual equipment, which would have added three weeks to the schedule. But this shouldn't be made a rule either; the method of shooting should match the subject.[26]

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26 Godard p. 173

Breathless was of course both a commercial and a critical success. It established Godard at the cutting edge of the New Wave, and he proceeded to make 15 more features in the next nine years, each one seemingly completely different from the one that had preceded it. *Contempt (Le Mépris*) in 1963 was his sixth film.

Godard's first published article, a piece on Joseph Mankiewicz in the June 1950 issue of *La Gazette du Cinema*, which he founded with Rohmer and Rivette, contains three references to Alberto Moravia:

> In France we have not yet seen *The Late George Appleby* or *Escape*. But after *Somewhere in the Night*, the recent release in Paris of *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir, A Letter to Three Wives*, and *House of Strangers* suffices to establish Joseph Mankiewicz as one of the most brilliant American directors. I have no hesitation in placing him on the same level of importance as that held by Alberto Moravia in European literature.
>
> It is no accident, moreover, that this 'house of strangers' should house Italians. There is more than analogy here, even on the level of plot, *with Conjugal Love* and *Ambitions Deceived*.[27] [Two novels by Moravia] One can feel the same breath, the same infiltration of that magical sensibility which Jean Grenier called 'mediterranean.' [28]
>
> *With House of Strangers*, Mankiewicz's garden fills with brutal strangers who force him to a strict narrative objectivity. Unlike Moravia's characters for whom success is always sealed by deception, Mankiewicz's characters are ambitious people who, through deception, end up by succeeding, and lovers who through divorce end up by marrying.[29]
>
> Mankiewicz's marital chronicles offer romantic perspectives which are the exact opposite of Moravia's. But their characters reveal the same lack of 'grip on life,' and one has the same sense of 'expected surprise' (Colette Audry). Whereas with Moravia the success of the work depends on the failure of the characters, with Mankiewicz like acts on like, and the final success of the hero is attended by that of the film.[30]

Godard's ten best list for 1958 was topped by Mankiewicz's *The Quiet American* staring Michael Redgrave, Audie Murphy and Georgia Moll, an Italian actress playing the Vietnamese mistress

27 Two novels by Moravia

28 Godard p.13

29 Godard p.14

30 Godard p. 15

of the English reporter (Redgrave).[31] While his review ultimately concludes that the film "has everything – brilliant actors, sparkling dialogue – but no cinema,"[32] it includes a prescient comment on the dialogue:

> Each character, each line of dialogue is of a poetic subtlety rare on the screen. Each sequence is of such dramatic ingenuity (cf. the marriage proposal) that one wonders how the distributor, if he is honest, will go about dubbing a film whose main feature is a constant play on words and the difference between languages.[33]

The casting of Georgia Moll in *Contempt* as the translator, Francesca is obviously connected to this association with *The Quiet American*. Ironically both the Italian distributor and an American distributor of *Contempt* insisted on dubbing the dialogue into a single language, even though it made nonsense out of the role of Francesca.

The producer of *Breathless* and of most of Godard's early films as well as the films of many other New Wave directors was Georges de Beauregard. Beauregard was ten years older than Godard, and he began his career as an exporter of French films in Spain. In 1956 he produced the first two films by the Spanish director Juan Antonio Bardem, and then he returned to France where he teamed up with Joseph Kessel to produce *Devil's Pass*, the first film shot by Raoul Coutard. When he was looking for a distributor for *Devil's Pass* in 1958, Beauregard screened it for some people at Twentieth Century-Fox in Paris, including Godard whom Claude Chabrol had brought in to take over the publicity department when he left to start making films. Godard apparently told Beauregard in no uncertain terms that he thought his film was awful, but it was the beginning of a real friendship. The success of Breathless enabled Beauregard to produce an amazing string of New Wave classics directed by Jacques Demy, Jacques Rozier, Claude Chabrol, Jean-Pierre Melville, Agnés Varda, Pierre Schoendoerffer, Jacuques Rivette, and Eric Rohmer as well as Godard. His partner in several of these productions including Godard's *Une Femme est une Femme* (*A Woman is a Woman*) in 1961 and *Les Carabiniers* in 1963 was Carlo Ponti.

Carlo Ponti was born in 1912, studied law at the University of Milan, and began producing films in 1941. From 1950 to 1957 he teamed up with Dino De Laurentis to produce some of the best films of the post-war era in Italy, including *La Strada* in 1954. They also produced numerous pot-boilers including an adaptation of the *Odyssey* in 1955 starring Kirk Douglas. In 1954 they produced an adaptation of Moravia's novel *La romana* (*The Woman of Rome*) starring Gina Lollobrigida. In 1957 Ponti married Sophia Loren, and one of his first American productions after he

31 Godard p. 104

32 Godard 84

33 Godard p. 83

parted company with De Laurentis was *The Black Orchid* with Loren and Anthony Quinn. In 1960 he produced (apparently with some uncredited assistance from Joe Levine) another adaptation of a Moravia novel, *La Ciociara* (*Two Women*) directed by Vittoria De Sica and starring Sophia Loren and Jean-Paul Belmondo.

Ponti acquired the rights to *Il disprezzo* shortly after it was published in Italy in 1954. Obviously Moravia knew Ponti, and he may very well have known that Ponti was preparing a production of the *Odyssey* while he writing *Il disprezzo.* Certainly Ponti is a likely a candidate as a model for Battista. A French translation of *Il disprezzo* was published in 1955, and it is reasonable to assume that Godard read the novel well before there was any discussion of his directing a movie based on it. There are interviews in which Godard talked about the novel. One was an interview by Yvonne Baby for *Le Monde* coinciding with the premiere of the film on December 20, 1963, in which he said, "I had read the book a long time ago. I liked the subject very much and as I had to make a film for Carlo Ponti, I proposed doing an adaptation of *Le Mépris* and following it chapter by chapter. He said yes, then no – out of fear– and when I suggested casting Kim Novak and Frank Sinatra, he refused. He preferred Sophia Loren and Marcello Mastroianni."[34]

During the filming in June of 1963 Godard was interviewed by Robert F. Hawkins for an article in the *New York Times*:

> During a brief luncheon break, which he spent nervously puffing on a miniature pale brown cigar, Godard unburdened himself of a few thoughts on his film and films in general. Straight off, he admitted tampering somewhat with Moravia's novel. "But with full permission," the director – a Moravia admirer from way back – quickly added.
>
> "Moravia never tries to influence a director in his work," he declared. "Instead, he rightly feels that the printed page and film are two completely different means of expression, each valid until itself. The director is given full responsibility." (Moravia himself has said: "One cannot ask a film director to respect a book – even one's own; but one can ask him to make a good film.")
>
> Godard's principal changes have been to telescope the action into a few days and to make the writer a stronger more positive character than he was in the book. "In the novel, Godard explained, "he was silly and soft. I've made him more American – something like a Humphrey Bogart type, " the director added. He is a great admirer of American films.[35]

In his interview by Jean-André Fieschi for the August 1963 issue of *Cahiers du Cinema about*

34 Marie *Le Mépris* p. 17

35 N.Y.Tmes 6/16/63

Contempt Godard presents a slightly different version of his attitude towards the book. Since this is his most sustained published commentary on the film, it is worth quoting at length, even though some of it may need to be read with skepticism.

> Moravia's novel is a nice, vulgar one for a train journey, full of classical, old fashioned sentiments in spite of the modernity of the situations. But it is with this kind of novel that one can often make the best films.
>
> I have stuck to the main theme, simply altering a few details, on the principle that something filmed is automatically different from something written, and therefore original. There was no need to try to make it different, to adapt it to the screen. All I had to do was film it as it is: just film what was written, apart from a few details, for if the cinema were not first and foremost film, it wouldn't exist. Méliès is the greatest, but without Lumière he would have languished in obscurity.
>
> Apart from a few details. For instance, the transformation of the hero who, in passing from book to screen, moves from false adventure to real, from Antonioni inertia to *Laramiesque* dignity. For instance also, the nationality of the characters: Brigitte Bardot is no longer called Emilia but Camille, and as you will see she trifles none the less with Musset. Each of the characters, moreover, speaks his own language which, as in *The Quiet American*, contributes to the feeling of people lost in a strange country. In another town, wrote Rimbaud; two weeks, adds Minnelli, several tones lower. Here, though, two days only: an afternoon in Rome, a morning on Capri. Rome is the modern world, the West; Capri, the ancient world, nature before civilization and its neuroses. *Le Mépris,* in other words, might have been called *In Search of Homer,* but it means lost time trying to discover the language of Proust beneath that of Moravia, and anyway that isn't the point.
>
> The point of *Le Mépris* is that these are people who look at each other and judge each other, and then are in turn looked at and judged by the cinema – represented by Fritz Lang, who plays himself, or in effect the conscience of the film, its honesty. (I filmed the scenes of the *Odyssey* which he was supposed to be directing in *Le Mépris*, but as I play the role of his assistant, Lang will say that these are scenes made by his second unit.)
>
> When I think about it, Le Mépris seems to me, beyond its psychological study of a woman who despises her husband, the story of castaways of the Western world, survivors of the shipwreck of modernity who, like the heroes of Verne and Stevenson, one day reach a mysterious deserted island, whose mystery is the inexorable lack of mystery, of truth that is to say. Whereas the *Odyssey* of Ulysses was a physical phenomenon, I filmed a spiritual odyssey: the eye of the camera watching these characters in search of Homer replaces that of the gods watching over Ulysses and his companions.

> A simple film without mystery, an Aristotelean film, stripped of appearances, *Le Mépris* proves in 149 shots that in the cinema as in life there is no secret, nothing to elucidate, merely the need to live – and to make films.[36]

Milne provides several footnotes to his translation of this to clarify some of the wordplay which does not survive the trip across the ocean. Saying that Méliès would have languished in obscurity without Lumière is a bit wittier in a language where lumière means light. Laramiesque is coined to refer to *The Man From Laramie,* a western by Anthony Mann about a stranger who comes to town seeking revenge on the gun runners he holds responsible for his brother's death. The reference to Musset involves a connection to one of his plays literally entitled "One does not trifle with love" in which the central character is named Camille. The connection between Rimbaud and Vincent Minnelli results from the French translation of the title of Minnelli's film *Two Weeks in Another Town* as *Quinze Jours Ailleurs*. Unfortunately Milne assumes everyone will be familiar with the connection between Rimbaud and the word ailleurs (elsewhere). I am not. The title *In Search of Homer* in French was *A la recherche d'Homère* and is an allusion to Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* as is the phrase *"lost time"*. Had I not seen *Contempt* I might be inclined to join Nowell-Smith in his evaluation of Godard's namedropping and wordplay.

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36 Godard p. 200f

Moravia has provided his perspective on Godard in his conversations with Alain Elkann:

> As I said before, I consider the writer and the director as two distinct artists, unrelated to each other. In the case of *Il disprezzo* no connection is possible thanks to the indisputable originality of Godard. If he had been less original, perhaps he would have been faithful; but he was very original and therefore completely unfaithful. Godard said once that *Il Disprezzo* was a novel to read en chemin de fer. This rather disagreeable definition indicaates the typical attitude of directors who make use of a novel as if it were a fait divers.
>
> *You don't consider* Il disprezzo *a novel to be read on the train?*
>
> Absolutely not. I consider it one of my best novels, because it is at once deeply felt and completely invented, which I consider the best combination for writing a good novel.
>
> *How did you get on with Godard?*
>
> I didn't. Godard is a man of genius who has revolutionized cinema, but he is a person with whom it is difficult, or rather virtually impossible, to communicate. I have written critical articles on almost all the films of Godard, but on the very day I first met him, in a Roman hotel, I gave up any idea of getting to know him. Curiously, the extremely literary character of Godard's films, a cineast's literature, that is, prevented me from explaining

myself to him, the few times we met. I think it's easier to get along with less literary directors.

Were you fascinated by Godard?

By his film expression, yes. By his literature, no so much.[37]

It is very difficult for me to imagine Kim Novak and Frank Sinatra playing Emilia and Riccardo Molteni. Godard said that it was Novak's performance in *Vertigo* (1958) that made him want her to play the wife in *Contempt*.[38] Kim Novak, had also been in *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1955) with Frank Sinatra, but there is no indication that this had any bearing on Godard's choice of Sinatra as the screenwriter. I am not really familiar with Sinatra's portrayal of a failed writer in *Some Came Running,* but I have enough trouble buying him as a medical student in *Not as a Stranger.* I can't imagine him as an intellectual screenwriter reciting Dante from memory and debating the meaning of the *Odyssey.* I think it is safe to say *Contempt* would have been a very different movie with Novak and Sinatra. If I had been Ponti, I probably would have passed as well. The casting of Sophia Loren and Marcello Mastroianni makes sense to me, and I have to hand it to Godard for sticking to his guns rather than accepting the opportunity to make the movie with them. According to Brody there was a point at which Moravia sought to have Godard replaced by Truffaut as director of *Contempt*, and Truffaut refused to have anything to do with it out of loyalty to Godard.[39] I have found no more information about this incident, but I wonder if Moravia might not have sought to intervene when he learned that Godard wanted to cast Novak and Sinatra and refused to make the film with Loren and Mastroianni.

After Godard and Ponti reached a stalemate regarding casting, the project languished until Brigitte Bardot let it be known that she was interested in the role and in working with Godard. Bardot was, of course, a huge international star at this point and perhaps the most photographed woman in the world. Her involvement enabled Ponti and Beauregard to enlist financial support from Joseph E. Levine. Joe Levine was an American producer and distributor of the old showman school who had hit it big with his participation in the American distribution of *Two Women,* for which Sophia Loren won an Oscar. He was persuaded that Bardot's participation would insure that *Contempt* would be a "commercial" film. The budget for the film was to be $1,000,000 of which $500,000 went to Bardot.[40] Most of the New Wave films prior to this had budgets in the $50,000 to $100,000 range, and the news that Godard was going to do a "big budget" international film in color and Cinemascope with Brigitte Bardot caused something of a stir, but it should be remembered

37 Moravia & Elkann 216f

38 Interviews p. 44 (Youngblood)

39 Brody p. 371

40 Marie, *New Wave* p. 57

that Godard shared with some of the other New Wave critic/filmmakers a dream of doing a large Hollywood style production. He had also already made a scope picture in color shot in a studio no less *(Une Femme est une femme* 1961). The difference now of course was a star of the magnitude of Bardot. When Michel Piccoli and Jack Palance were added the amount left over for the actual production was perhaps twice what Godard was accustomed to working with.

In addition to Moravia's novel there is another source, at least in terms of inspiration, for Godard's film: Roberto Rossellini's 1954 film *Viaggio in Italia (Voyage to Italy)* in which George Sanders and Ingrid Berman play a couple whose marriage is brought to the brink of a divorce during a trip to Italy. Michel Marie even says that the film, which was released the year Moravia began writing *Il disprezzo* and which he surely saw, was an influence on the novel. He further relates the truly bizarre coincidence uncovered by Jean-Michel Gardair. The screenwriter for *Viaggio in Italia*, Vitaliano Brancati, told Moravia that he saw his own story in Moravia's novel. He himself was an aspiring playwright who took screenwriting jobs in order to buy a house that his wife wanted and that once he did his wife left him.[41]

It may be a bit of a stretch to suggest that Moravia was influenced by Rossellini's movie, but there is no doubt that Godard was. *Voyage to Italy* is the movie on the marquee at the Silver Cine where singer performs and a poster for the film figures prominently in the background of the shot when everyone exits the theater. His admiration for the film is clear in this reference to it in a piece for *Cahiers du Cinéma* in 1958:

> There are five or six films in the history of the cinema, which one wants to review simply by saying, 'It is the most beautiful of films.' Because there can be no higher praise. Why say more, in effect, abut *Tabu*, *Voyage to Italy*, or *Le Carrosse d'or*? Like the starfish that opens and closes, they can reveal or conceal the secret of a world of which they are the sole repository and also the fascinating reflection. Truth is their truth. They secrete it deep within themselves, and yet with each shot the screen in rent to scatter it to the winds. To say of them, 'It is the most beautiful of films', is to say everything. Why? Because it just is. Only the cinema can permit this sort of childish reasoning without pretending shame. Why? Because it is the cinema. And because the cinema is sufficient unto itself.[42]

The most obvious influence is in the shots of the statues, which are part of the dailies for the film of the *Odyssey* Fritz Lang is directing. There is a sequence in *Viaggio in Italia* in which Ingrid Bergman's character visits the Naples National Archeological Museum. The focus of her visit is

41 Marie p. 26

42 Godard p. 75f

the sculpture and, as her guide drones on in the background, there is a series of carefully composed moving camera close-ups of some of the statues. Discovering this reference in the course of my research was both a revelation and a disappointment. I had always marveled at the audacity and strange beauty of the shots of the statues in *Contempt*. When I saw that the script made only a passing reference to statues and monuments in its description of the dailies for *The Odyssey*, I was even more impressed by the audacity of the conception. Learning that the inspiration came from Rossellini's film altered my perception of the shots. I can easily imagine Godard's mind at work, thinking about how to stylize the scenes for the *Odyssey* so that they create an analogy about the relationship of movies to life; and I can all too easily imagine how his mind leapt to the statues shot by Rossellini and realized that they offered the perfect solution. I still admire the ability to see the potential of the shots in the new context, but the choice seems a bit less audacious when it is viewed as an homage to Rossellini. This is a case in my mind where making a reference reduces the impact of what is being said rather than enhancing it. Some of the mystery has evaporated.

There are other less obvious ways in which *Voyage to Italy* influenced Godard in making *Contempt*. It is not surprising that he would think of Rossellini's film as he started to work on a film about a couple whose relationship is disintegrating while they are in Italy, and Rossellini was an inspiration to all the French New Wave filmmakers in his use of documentary style photography, his staging of scenes in sustained takes and his political commitments. One of the most striking scenes in *Voyage to Italy* is constructed from what appears to be documentary footage of excavation work at Pompei. The couple visits the site with a friend and witness workers using a technique to restore the forms of people who were completely encased in lava. It seems clear that the documentary footage and the footage of the actors were shot on separate occasions as though the existence of the documentary footage was the inspiration for the scene. The climax of the film in which the couple are caught up in a religious procession as much the same feel, and the sequence in which Ingrid Bergman takes a cab to the museum is edited with documentary footage of street scenes she sees. There are descriptions in the script for *Contempt* of sequences in which Paul takes a taxi or in which Paul and Camille take the bus through Rome, and there is some indication that the idea was to film the passengers' point of view of ancient statues and monuments of Rome. (The address given in the script for Prokosch's villa in Rome is on the Appian Way.)

The first thing that must be acknowledged in considering how Godard adapted Moravia's novel is the fact that the basic conception of the novel as a completely subjective narrative is not something easily translated into cinema. A case can be made for the possibility of a first-person voice

Sample frames from the museum sequence in Viaggio in Italia. *In most of these shots the camera is moving towards, around or across the statues. Roberto Rossellini had a tremendous influence on all of the New Wave directors, and Colin MacCabe goes so far as to say that* Contempt *may be viewed as a remake of Viaggio in Italia.*

Shots from the film within the film, Lang's adaptation of the Odyssey. *The shots of Minerva and Neptune are reprised as punctuation in* Contempt.

in cinematic grammar,[43] but clearly Godard did not attempt to make the entire film a presentation inside the mind of Paul, the name he has given the character represented in the book by the narrator, Riccardo Molteni. If anything his visual style is designed to heighten the viewer's awareness of the camera as an observer of the characters in the story. Paul may be in virtually every scene in the movie except for the title sequence and the depiction of the fatal car accident, but the film is not solely from his point of view.

As indicated in the interview quoted above Godard viewed the core of the book as a combination of a psychological study of a relationship and a metaphor for what he calls "the shipwreck of modernity." Telling the story of a deterioration of a marriage is obviously something for which traditional film grammar is well suited. Depicting the shipwreck of modernity on a theater screen is a different matter.

The Script

There are two versions of the script for *Contempt* in the archives at USC. I gather there are two other versions extant as well. The scripts at USC are part of the Fritz Lang material and have Lang's handwritten notes on them. One script is 104 pages and is a mimeograph copy. The other is 69 pages and most of it appears to be a carbon of a typed copy. The 104-page script is surely the

43 See for example, *Mindscreen: Bergman, Godard, and First-Person Film* by Bruce F. Kawin

earlier version, since the first 30 pages of it are descriptive material of a type normally found in a preliminary treatment. It says the film will consist of about 15 sequences. There are 7 sequences which contain dialogue, and the last 6 sequences are simply described in the sketchiest form. The 69-page script appears to be the shooting script since it contains dialogue for all the scenes and corresponds more closely to the film as it was shot. My guess is that the 104 page mimeographed script is what Godard provided to the producers to satisfy their demands for a screenplay before the money was committed. It was written after the casting of Bardot, Piccoli, Lang, Palance and Moll. (Each is referenced in the sections describing the characters.)

Godard was notorious for writing the scripts for his films as he shot them and for giving his producers whatever he thought would satisfy them without worrying about its relationship to what he would eventually shoot. *Contempt*, however, was a different game because of the involvement of Bardot and the amount of money at stake. It was also an adaptation of a well-known novel by one of the most prestigious writers in Italy, and part of the treatment is devoted to a discussion of how the novel will be adapted. The descriptions of the film in the 104-page script are probably an accurate indication of what Godard had in mind when he started the production. He did say, though, afterwards that the film he had in mind at the outset and the film he actually made were two different things:

> When I first made *Contempt* I had a certain movie in mind and tried to make it. But *Contempt* came out completely different than I intended, and I forgot the kind of film I had wanted to make in the first place. Then when I saw *Red Desert* at the Venice Film Festival, I said to myself: this is the kind of movie I wanted to make of *Contempt*.[44]

The treatment begins with a description of the principal characters. It then has a brief comment on the settings, the photography, the direction and the ways in which the novel has been altered.

Camille is described as a French woman about 27 or 28 who has moved to Rome as a result of her marriage. She is said to have met her husband while on vacation in Rome. Even though Bardot will play the role the treatment says her hair should be brown or a dark auburn like Carmen. She is said to resemble Eve in the painting by Piero della Francesca, a fact which was probably as helpful to Joe Levine as it is to me. I can find no indication of which painting by Piero della Francesca features Eve.

His psychological description of her may be more to the point although I am not sure my translation does it justice:

> In general she is solemn, serious, very reserved, even withdrawn sometimes, with childlike or innocent sudden changes of mood.

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44 *Interviews* Youngblood p. 46

The cinema could not be satisfied with metaphors, but it would know that Camille would be represented by a big flower, simple, with plain dark petals and in the middle of them a little bright petal shocking in its aggressiveness inside the pure and serene overall effect.

Calm like an ocean of oil most of the time, absent even, Camille all of a sudden becomes ill-tempered by inexplicable nervous twitches.

One wonders during the film what Camille is thinking and when she abandons her kind of passive torpor and acts, it is always unpredictable and inexplicable like a car driving in a straight line which suddenly goes off the road and crashes into a tree.

In fact Camille only acts three or four times in the film. And her actions provoke the three or four real reversals in the film, at the same time constitute its driving force.

As opposed to her husband who always acts after a complicated process of reasoning, Camille acts "non-psychologically" so to speak, by instinct, a sort of vital instinct like a plant needs water to stay alive.

The drama between her and Paul, her husband, stems from the fact that she exists on a purely vegetative level while he lives on an animal level.

If others question her, as Paul does, she never questions herself. She lives from feelings pure and simple, and it does not occur to her to analyze them. Once contempt for Paul has taken hold of her, it will never leave, because this contempt, once again, is not a psychological feeling born of thought but a physical feeling like cold or heat, nothing more, and against which the wind and tide can change nothing. This is why, in fact, *Contempt* is a tragedy.

Paul is described as about 35, a little unsympathetic but with the appeal of a movie gangster. His unpleasantness conceals a tormented soul and a dreamer. Godard describes Paul and Camille's marriage something in which each is going upstream or a circuit which has both direct current and alternating current simulatneously.

In the first treatement Paul's work in film prior to the job with Prokosch is said to have been limited to dialogue translation or narrations for industrial films. He hopes that the money from Prokosch will enable him to devote himself to writing for the theater, but he worries that may not have it in him. He wants to prove himself to Camille although Camille has given no indication that he needs to prove anything to her. His ego and his anxiety lead him to push ahead even when he knows he is wrong rather than admit his mistakes and to argue a view he does not really believe just for the sake of asserting himself. Paul is forever asking question that do not need to be asked. One example given is that if Camille said she was tired and wanted to go home, Paul would ask why she is tired rather than just agreeing that they should go home.

The contrast between Fritz Lang and Paul is described in terms of the opposition of truth versus falsehood, wisdom versus confusion, and "a certain Greek smile based on intelligence and irony" versus "an uncertain modern smile based on illusion and contempt."

Godard, of course, says that Paul must almost always wear a hat like Dean Martin in *Some Came Running*, and he attempts to sum up his description of Paul with the following: "One could say also, in trying to explain Paul, that he is a character from *Marienbad* who wants to play the role of a character in *Rio Bravo*." Michel Piccoli said in an interview in 1970 that when he read this sentence in the treatment he understood immediately, and there was no need for Godard to say anything more about the character.[45]

Jeremy Prokosch is described as about 37 and born in Tulsa. His great-grandfather is said to have ridden with Quantrill's Raiders during the Civil war, and he carries with him always a photo of his mother who, not surprisingly, resembles Ava Gardner in *Showboat*. His tastes are a mixed bag, but Godard lets us know that they are more sophisticated than one might expect and helpfully cites two examples: Prokosch likes *Mardi*, a little known novel by Herman Melville, and the films of Gordon Scott, which I have been unable to identify.

45 Marie p. 74

Godard says that like most producers he is motivated by ego or pride rather than an interest in movies. The source of his money is a divorce settlement with the wealthy heiress he had married, a fact that he likes to brag about without giving any details.

He behaves like the producer in *The Barefoot Contessa* but is a bit more colorful and sarcastic in his verbal abuse. He likes to humiliate and insult his employees and friends and acts like a little roman emperor all the time with his entourage.

The first thing the treatment tells us about the character of Fritz Lang to be played by Fritz Lang is that "the creator of Mabuse may be accompanied by his little dog, Douchenka." Godard tells of the meeting between Lang and Goebbels, which will be mentioned in the dialogue in the film, and he compares Lang today with a wise old Indian chief who has achieved serenity and left the ways of war to the young and the wild poets. The lucidity and serenity with which he views the world will make him "the conscience of the film, the moral hyphen which connects the *Odyssey* of Ulysses with that of Camille and Paul."

Lang represents the humility and kindness Godard says is characteristic of a great director in contrast to the pride which characterizes a big producer.

Francesca Vanini is described as a 25 or 26 year old Italian woman with black hair and slightly Eurasian features, lively and pretty. Her role

as the translator is explained. (The screenplays are written almost entirely in French except for occasional phrases or quotations, so Francesca's dialogue is often indicated indirectly or explained as a translation of someone else's remarks.) She is described as Prokosch's press secretary and personal assistant, but we are also told that she is more his slave than his secretary and that Prokosch rescued her from a German concentration camp at the end of the war and does not hesitate to remind her of this fact. There is a suggestion that the relationship between Francesca and Prokosch is a kind of inverse of the relationship between Paul and Camille.

Secondly the treatment describes briefly the locations or settings for the film, all of which are to be real locations rather than studio sets. Most importantly the Villa de Malaparte has already been set as the location for the scenes on Capri. Curzio Malaparte's villa was designed by Adalberto Libera in 1938, and Malaparte had willed it to the government of the China for use as a retreat for writers. He had died in 1957, but the villa was still vacant because the family was contesting the will. The production managed to secure the use of it for a few days.

In the treatment Godard describes its location on the rocky cliffs overlooking the ocean in terms of the realm of Poseidon, who alone among the gods did not like or protect Ulysses. He says the second half of the film set on Capri will have a color scheme dominated by the blue of the ocean, the red of the villa and the yellow of the sun and compares it to the colors found on ancient statues.

The studio in the film is that of Titanus, which was in fact slated to be demolished soon after the scenes were shot there. Prokosch's villa in Rome is the villa rented by the production for Bardot and used to house the crew when Bardot decided to stay in a more centrally located apartment instead. The apartment of Paul and Camille was a new apartment which had not been sold yet.

The section in the treatment describing the settings for the film concludes by saying that they will convey a sense of another world beside the modern one of Camille, Paul and Prokosch.

The third topic addressed briefly in the first part of the treatment is the photography, which will be like newsreels shot in color and scope. Godard said he intended to use no lights or reflectors outside and only the miminum number of flood lamps required to expose the film in the interiors. The use of reflectors or lights to provide fill light on actors or parts of the scene when shooting outdoors in daylight was a conventional technique in feature films in Europe as well as Hollywood. It was justified by a desire to avoid harsh shadows which were considered unattractive or unnatural in terms of a subjective idea of how things appear in daylight since the eye adjusts more gracefully to

extreme contrast between light and dark than film can. Compared to documentary photography, however, the result is unnatural and glamorized. For the same reason Godard insists that there will be very little make up used on the actors.

Godard mentions also the use of high-speed color films to facilitate shooting some interiors as well as scenes to be shot at night or twilight even if it alters the color somewhat.

The scenes for the film within the film which Fritz Lang is directing are to be shot so that they look very different from the rest of the film. The color is to be brighter, more vivid or saturated and with higher contrast. He compares the difference in the two photographic styles to the effect of a painting by Matisse or Braque in the middle of a composition by Fragonard or a shot by Eisenstein in a film by Jean Rouch. In addition the actors in the film within the film will be heavily made up.

Godard is obviously hoping that a difference in light can become a metaphor for the difference between the ancient world of Ulysses and the modern world of Paul and Camille. The ancient world is filled with a bright clear light while light in the modern world is soft, diffuse and dull by comparison.

The remaining two sections of the introduction to the treatment deal with the directing style to be employed and the changes that have been made in adapting the Moravia novel. He mentions the compression of the time frame of the story and his intention to use fewer, but much longer scenes to tell the story. He also says that the film will be about both Camille and Paul rather than exclusively about Paul and that the choice of shots will be determined by the selection of which point of view is appropriate at each point in the story. In addition to the focus on Paul and Camille, the character of Lang will provide an exterior or objective point of view. He indicates that the direction will create a certain tension between empathizing with one character or the other and observing objectively. The method to achieve this will be primarily using conventional reverse angles for scenes involving Paul and Camille while using long shots composed in depth for the other characters. He summarizes his approach as making an Antonioni film in the style of Hitchcock or Hawks.

Godard also emphasizes the fact that his adaptation has made the film for which Paul is being hired one that is already in production where the producer is unhappy with the results. This is part of what enables him to compress the time frame of the story but it also appeals to him for other reasons, since Paul is put in the position of re-writing the script for a film being made by a genuine "auteur" director. It permits him to make a film about making a film and include not only scenes of the crew at work but also some of the footage that has been shot. It offers him a visual basis for contrasting both the ancient world with the modern and the world as presented by cinema with the world in which the characters actually live.

The main thing that emerges from reading the introductory portion of Godard's treatment for *Contempt* is the schematic approach he is taking in adapting the novel. His focus is on several things in addition to the characters and their "story" or the psychology of their behavior and the consequences of their actions. There is first of all the parallel of this story with the *Odyssey* and the fundamental contrast between the ancient world of Homer or Ulysses and the modern world. Secondly there are the realities of making films and the difference between reality as presented by cinema and reality as it is experienced every day. There is a comparison between filmmakers and gods. In the context of *Contempt* the council of the gods at the beginning of the Odyssey becomes a script conference in which writer, director and producer debate the fate of the mortals they are creating and observing with the camera. (The scene of the council of the gods is a scene Lang says he wants to shoot.) Godard describes Prokosch as a "demi-god" who is attempting to create men in his own image. Everything about the film is conceived with an eye towards weaving together all these elements. The relationship between Paul and Camille is defined not only by the relationship between Ulysses and Penelope but also by the relationship between Prokosch and Francesca as well as Paul and Francesca. The contrast between Rome and Capri is viewed in terms of the contrast between modernity and the antiquity. The current state of the cinema is contrasted with its classical heritage. In the first scene of the script the studio is described almost as a ruin; the stages are deserted and sets half-demolished.

The character of Francesca is also used to introduce a theme of language and communication, which is connected not only to the misunderstandings between Paul and Camille but also to Paul's identity as a writer, the cinema as a language and the numerous references to poetry.

The 104 page treatment/screenplay is clearly a work in progress. Commentators like to quote the parenthetical passage in the description of the long scene at the apartment as an indication of how Godard worked:

> (This sequence will be about 25 or 30 minutes long. It is difficult to say exactly what will happen and in what order it will take place.
>
> In effect unlike directors who receive Oscars in Hollywood, I am completely incapable of imagining beforehand the staging of actors on the set, even if they are already cast, of describing the staging on paper and then during the shooting laboriously reproducing on film exactly what was written on paper.
>
> It is essential for me, dear Producers, to be aware of the actors knocking up against a chair in order for me to get the idea of having them sit, to walk in front of a window to have the idea of them looking through it, to have a glass of water before it occurs to me to have them say, "I'm thristy" etc...

> On the whole, if you wish, dear Producers, if you give me a sheet of paper, a bath tub and Brigitte Bardo, I would write nothing for you of this star except that she took a bath, period, that's all. But I would not be able to describe for you in advance the way in which she stepped into the tub nor the colors of the towel in which she wrapped herself. I could only describe them for you after having found them, i.e. after having shot them.
>
> Briefly, you know perfectly well, dear Producers, that I have an awful need for the presence of the characters in the setting in order to imagine all the details of this Sequence 5, that I can describe for you now only the broad strokes, since you know as well as I, an uninterrupted sequence of twenty minutes comes together only thanks to details which make the characters live; and details of this sort are not invented a priori on paper, or at least, almost never.)

This plea is, I am afraid, a little disingenuous even for Godard, who was famous for feeding actors dialogue as a scene was shot or scribbling it on a napkin for them right before the camera rolled. Sequence 5 in the 69 page version of the script contains almost all the dialogue for the scene and maps out the staging sufficiently for preliminary production purposes. It obviously changed as it was shot, but it is a great deal more fleshed out than the broad strokes Godard was able to put in the script for the producers. I suspect that he simply had not been able to think it through yet when he had to deliver some kind of script to the producers. He is smart enough, however, to conjure up for them an image of Brigitte Bardot taking a bath, perhaps suspecting that this will more than satisfy their need to know what the long scene in the apartment will entail.

The reference to Hollywood directors who win Oscars is a telling bit of irony and ambiguity. Godard knew perfectly well that his idols Fritz Lang and Alfred Hitchcock were obsessed with working out everything on paper before starting to shoot a scene. The remark can be taken straight as an apology for his inability to work this way, but there is also perhaps a hint of self-justifying dismissiveness in the implication that big Hollywood directors are too abstracted to be creative when they shoot.

There are a few significant differences between the 104 page treatment/screenplay and the 69-page screenplay which may be worth noting, but for the most part the 69-page script simply continues what was started in the 104-page version. (There are apparently two other versions of the script extant as well, but I have not seen them and am assuming they are earlier versions than either of these since these were versions given to Lang. Michel Marie lists four scripts, the first two being treatments of only a dozen pages or so. He seems, however, to regard the 69 page script as less developed than the 104 page version.) The script is not formatted in the conventional Hollywood format, and it occasionally indicates dia-

logue indirectly rather than directly. It makes occasional references to how things will be shot, but most of it is simply general descriptions of the action and the settings with reasonably complete dialogue.

The screenplay is divided into 13 sequences, the second of which is a transition sequence that was either not shot or eliminated during the editing:

1) Studio
2) Paul takes taxi
3) Prokosch Roman villa
4) Paul & Camille return home
5) Apartment
6) Taxi ride
7) Cinema audition
8) Capri shoot
9) Paul and Lang walk to villa
10) Camille and Prokosch Paul resigns
11) Camille sunbathing Paul dreams, finds letter
12) Accident
13) Ending

This structure corresponds to the structure of the finished film except for the prologue which was added later and for the elimination of the sequence in which Paul takes a taxi from the studio to Prokosch's Roman villa. It also does not indicate the flashbacks and the use of the shots of statues for punctuation.

In the script Sequence 4 consists simply of Paul and Camille on the bus returning home and sequence five begins as they walk from the bus stop to their apartment. In the film it is replaced by a shot of the statue of Minerva.

In terms of the story of Paul and Camille (Riccardo and Emilia) *Contempt* can be viewed as a classic problem in adapting a novel for the screen; and Godard's solution, while bold, is fairly conventional. He had originally claimed that the novel would be the screenplay, that he would literal film it as written. He condenses the timespan and thins out the list of characters. He adds the character of Francesca for purposes of his own and lets her assume the function of the typist with whom Molteni flirted. With the exception occasional bits of cinematic punctuation, the story is presented in a completely linear manner and encompasses two or three days – one in Rome, then one on Capri with an unspecified jump between and a second day on Capri for the final scene. More than one day may have passed between the two days on Capri.

In addition to the prologue under the opening credit sequence, there are four other bits of punctuation which do not fit into the above time line:

1) A reprise of the shot of Neptune at 0:24:18 between the departure from the studio and Paul's arrival at Prokosch's villa in Rome.

Underlying Story Timeline

Screen Time	Story Time	Scene
0:02:10	Day 1 Morning	Bedroom (Not in screenplay)
0:05:26	Day 1 Mid-afternoon	Ext Studio: Paul meets Francesca and Prokosch
0:10:38	Immediately after above	Screening Room: Viewing Dailies with Lang, Paul accepts check
0:20:58	Immediately after above (~4:00 PM)	Ext Studio: Camille meets Prokosch and Lang , Leave to have drink at Prokosch's
0:24:36	Half hour later	Ext. Prokosch Villa: Paul arrives late, explains
0:29:25	Immediately after	Int. Prokosch Villa: Paul flirts with Francesca
0:32:09	Immediately after	Ext. Prokosch Villa: Paul and Camille leave to go home
0:36:21	Probably half hour later	Ext. Street Paul and Camille walk to their apartment (from bus stop?)
0:37:14	Immediately after	Int. Apartment. Paul & Camille bathe and argue and leave
1:08:10	Immediately after	Ext. Street: Paul runs after Camille to get into cab with her
1:09:01	Day 1 Evening	Ext & Int. Theater: Paul, Camille, Prokosch, Lang and Francesca watch singer who will play Nausicaa
1:15:28	Day 2 (unspecified jump in time)	Ext. Capri: Location filming. Camille returns to villa in boat with Prokosch
1:20:58	Late afternoon	Ext. Capri: Paul and Lang walk back to villa discussing Odyssey
1:22:55	Few minutes later	Ext. & Int. Villa: Paul reacts to seeing Camille kiss Prokosch, explains his decision not to write script
1:29:54	Few minutes later	Ext Villa & Capri: Paul pursues Camille, dozes off as she swims
1:36:44	Perhaps an hour later	Ext. Capri: Paul wakes to find note
1:37:08	Unspecified (may be simultaneous with above)	Ext. Highway: Camille and Prokosch stop for gas, have accident
1:39:43	Day 3 (Maybe the very next day)	Paul says farewell to Francesca and Lang. Crew continues filming.

2) A montage of flashbacks of Paul and Camille at 0:27:04 when Camille is reacting to Paul's late arrival at Prokosch's villa.

3) A reprise of the shot of Minerva at 0:36:00 between the departure from Prokosch's villa and their arrival in the neighborhood of their apartment.

4) The montage during the argument at the apartment at 0:56:15.

5) A reprise of the shot of Neptune at 1:19:27 after Camille leaves in the boat with Prokosch.

Obviously for this kind of condensation of the timespan of the story to work, the viewer needs some sense of the context for the events being witnessed. This is achieved mainly through the dialogue between Paul and Camille. For example, she makes references to the time before Paul became involved in screenwriting and was just writing detective novels. She expresses surprise when she sees his Communist party membership card. The argument between them is filled with enough references to the decision to buy the apartment to enable one to feel that what has erupted is something that had been brewing for some time.

Insuring that the backstory was appropriately fleshed out was surely one of the things motivat-

ing changes between the script and the dialogue as shot. For example in the finished film Paul makes a reference to how Camille has changed her appraisal of Prokosch since the previous Monday. This line is not in the script. The dialogue in the script also contains no references to Paul's previous screenwriting experience. The treatment had explicitly said his experience was very meager. In the finished film the dialogue refers to his script for a successful sword and sandal epic as well as a film directed by Nicholas Ray for which he wrote either the script or the detective novel from which it was adapted.

Most of the changes in the characters as well as storyline are based on something other than the need to condense the story into a movie. To some extent it is possible to view *Contempt* as a classic example of making virtue of necessity in film production. Bardot was cast in order to permit the film to be made, and Godard chose to make the ensemble of characters even more international than they are in the book. The Italian screenwriter and his wife become French, and the producer becomes American. This enabled Godard to develop a theme of language and communication by having everyone speak his native tongue and by introducing the character of Francesca as a translator. A perfectly realistic situation in which people have difficulty communicating provides an immediate metaphor for a larger cultural issue. The only slightly loose thread in this fabric is the presence of Camille's mother in Rome. It is really unclear how long Paul has been working in Italy, but it is certainly possible to imagine reasons why Camille's mother might also be in Rome. In any event it seems natural enough for Camille's mother to be a background character and her role is incidental enough that a viewer will most likely accept it without question.

The master stroke in the condensation of the time line of the story is the use of the argument in the apartment. The dynamic which Moravia developed through the first half of the novel is presented through a continuous scene which occupies the entire middle third of the film. Although it has stylistic touches which give it a self-conscious edge, it is for the most part an astutely observed, realistic slice of life which feels like the tip of an iceberg. We are able to witness the ebb and flow of affection and resentment which seems both petty and portentous. We sense moments where everything seems to hang in the balance, and one character or the other acts in a way that may destroy all hope of reconciliation. Each character is both sympathetic and infuriating.

The physical action of the scene is completely mundane except for the fact that Paul takes a pistol with him at the end of the scene. Paul and Camille come into the apartment. She goes into the kitchen to get a coke, and he reviews a page of a manuscript before he starts to undress so that he can take a bath. She looks at the book Prokosch gave Paul and then goes to the bedroom to put on a wig. He finishes undressing and start the water for his bath. She looks at the manuscript page and

then looks at herself in the mirror before showing him the wig while he is in the tub. She sets places at the table, and he comes out of the bath with a towel wrapped around him. She comes back from the bedroom with a towel wrapped around her. He slaps Camille. They kiss. She separates herself from him and goes into the bathroom where she lights a cigareet. He follows her. They go into the bedroom where he starts to dress and she removes the wig. She goes to take a bath and he answers the telephone. She comes into the bedroom to talk on the phone. He tries to listen from the hall and then re-enters the bedroom. She kicks him. She takes the sheets and blanket out to the couch in the living room. She gets the pillow. They argue on the couch. She goes back to her bath. He looks at the book from Prokosch. He takes the sheets and blanket back into the bedroom. He goes to talk to her in the bathroom where she reads passages from a book to him. She gets out of the tub and goes to get dressed. He finishes getting dressed. She lies naked on the couch. She goes to the bedroom to get dressed while he goes to his study to work on the manuscript page at his typewriter. She comes in and kisses him. She answers the phone while looking at the book again and then gives the phone to Paul. She starts removing the place settings from the table. She takes some dishes into the kitchen and drops them as she tries to put them on the counter. She goes into Paul's study and comes out reading the page of manuscript, which she crumples up and throws on the floor. Paul grabs her arm in an effort to make her stop and talk to him. She pulls away from him. They sit to talk. She puts on her sweater to get ready to go. He grabs her. She hits him to get away from him and starts to leave. He goes to get a pistol from behind some books and follows her.

Although the two telephone calls play a role in the structure of the scene, clearly its spine is the dialogue and the ebb and flow of the emotions expressed. Most of the action and probably 80% or 90% of the dialogue is contained in the 69-page script. The dialogue is completely naturalistic except for the interior monologues and probably the greatest difficulty for the translator is the amount of slang and profanity for which there may not be a direct English equivalent. For example the subtitles translate "con" as "jerk," a rendering that conveys the sense perhaps but certainly not the force of the vulgarity. Also in the story Camille tells the subtitles translate "l'ane Martin" as Martin's Ass. It seems to me that "the jackass Martin" may be a more suitable translation. Apparently in French Martin is a name often associated with a fool, and the "ane" means both donkey literally and fool figuratively.

The flashbacks and the interior monologues associated with them are not contained in the script, but there is an indication of dialogue in which each character would express directly what he or she is feeling. The example given in the script is the description of how Paul is aware of the changes in the symmetry of Camille's features when she is forced to make a decision. This is a passage straight from Moravia's novel which ends

up in the film as a passage that Paul types for his own novel.

Similarly there is a description of Camille in the script which becomes a line of dialogue for Paul. It says "She looks at him, as though to calculate from his expression what attitude would be appropriate to take." When he says the line, he gestures ironically in a way that seems to indicate he is reading it from his own manuscript page.

Two other significant changes in the dialogue between the script and the final scene are connected to the addition of the two books from which Paul and Camille read. The first is the coffee table book of erotic Roman art from which Paul reads a passage about a kind of erotic beauty contest. (The book appears to be *Roma Amor: Essay on Erotic Elements in Etruscan and Roman Art* by Jean Marcadé published in Geneva by Nagel in 1961.) The second is a monograph on Fritz Lang by Luc Moullet, which had just been published and from which Camille reads passages about the Greek conception of the world and about how murder is never a solution.

It is perhaps worth emphasizing that the reference to Dean Martin in *Some Came Running* and the story Camille tells about Martin and the flying carpet are both in the script exactly as they are in the finished film. One film reference that was dropped concerns Jean Renoir and his film *Eléna et les hommes*. When Camille asks Paul why he has to take ideas from other movies rather than thinking up his own, he responds by justifying it by saying it is no different from taking ideas from life and by citing Renoir's remark that plagiarists should be decorated. She responds by dismissing Renoir and saying she did not like *Eléna et les hommes* at all. Paul says the film is sublime and adds that Ingrid Bergman was also great in Rosellini's films. Godard's own opinion of *Eléna et les hommes* was expressed in am article about Renoir for *Cahiers du Cinéma* in 1957:

> To say that Renoir is the most intelligent of directors comes to the same thing as saying that he is French to his fingertips. And if *Eléna et les hommes* is 'the' French film *par excellence*, it is because it is the most intelligent of films. Art and theory of art, at one and the same time; beauty and the secret of beauty; cinema and apologia for cinema.

Since this mini-homage to Renoir comes at a climactic moment in the conflict between Paul and Camille, Godard probably concluded it would be too much of a distraction from the emotional momentum of the scene. Rather than justify lifting ideas from other movies Paul simply responds emotionally to the hostility expressed by Camille as she crumples up the page of his manuscript and tosses it on the floor (a bit of action that was not in the script).

The rest of the dialogue changes from the script are normal types of tweaking that occur at the last minute or even as a scene is rehearsed.

One of the first is Camille's response to the question of what they have to eat. The script does not specify what Paul asks about. The line is incomplete ("Do we still have any...?") Her response is simply "I believe so; I haven't looked." In other words it is completely throw-away dialogue indicating a conventional household arrangement regarding meals. In the finished film Paul seems to just be asking if there are any string beans left over as though he would like to have them, but Camille responds defensively or aggresively saying it is just too bad if he doesn't like them. The point of this is presumably to adjust the balance between Camille and Paul's behavior and to indicate that something Camille is upset at the very outset of the scene.

Another more significant change occurs towards the end of the scene when Camille challenges the idea that she is motivated simply by a desire to hold on to the apartment. The exchange in which she claims she said how much she liked the apartment only to make Paul happy has been added. Also the exchange about whether she has lied and the line in which she says, "What's the use of knowing the truth?"

The initial point here is that this scene was every bit as scripted as most scenes for movies are. Godard, in fact, bristled when it was suggested that he improvised or let actors improvise when he shot a film. Later in his career he may have had very different ideas about the ideal form of collaboration in filmmaking or the conventional master-servant relationship between a director and his cast or crew, but in 1962 Godard had this to say about his reputation for improvisation:

> I improvise, certainly, but with material which goes a long way back. Over the years you accumulate things and then suddenly you use them in what you're doing. My first shorts were prepared very carefully and shot very quickly. *A Bout de Souffle* began this way. I had written the first scene (Jean Seberg on the Champs-Elysées), and for the rest I had a pile of notes for each scene. I said to myself, this is terrible. I stopped everything. Then I thought: in a single day, if one knows how to go about it, one should be able to complete a dozen takes. Only instead of planning ahead, I shall invent at the last minute. If you know where you're going it ought to be possible. This isn't improvisation but last-minute focusing. Obviously, you must have an over-all plan and stick to it; you can modify up to a point, but when shooting begins it should change as little as possible, otherwise it's catastrophic.
>
> I read in *Sight and Sound* that I improvised Actors' Studio fashion, with actors to whom one says, 'You are so-and-so; take it from there.' But Belmondo never invented his own dialogue. It was written. But the actors didn't learn it: the film was shot silent, and I cued the lines.[46]

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46 Godard 172f

The scene in the apartment is just under 25 minutes long and consists of 43 shots, six of which are over a minute long. Except for the flashbacks and perhaps one cut, it plays as continuous time. The cut in question is one from Paul typing to Camille talking to Prokosch on the phone. There may or may not be a slight jump in time here. Camille has been off camera long enough for her to have answered the phone, but the shot of Paul at work ends with a move into the print of a theater on the wall behind him, a bit of visual punctuation that could be read as an indication of a break in temporal continuity.

There are several critcal moments in the scene which are either climaxes in the tension between the couple or moments of seeming stasis or equilibrium. The first is the moment when Camille shows Paul the wig she has bought. There have been small ripples of tension during the first part of the scene (Camille's impatience regarding the curtains, the potential conflict over who will bathe first, her response about the leftover beans and the way in which she puts the book of erotic art down on the coffee table in front of Paul) but the first real clue that something is wrong occurs when Paul presses Camille for an answer about whether she wants to go to Capri. Her initial response ("I'm not saying no, but I'm not saying yes either.") seems to be addressed more to herself than to Paul, and there is no indication he hears it. Her claim that only Paul was invited seems to be an attempt to evade the issue. The way in which Bardot reacts and the use of the music cue at this

1

"When will you call your friend about the curtains? I've about had it."

"Once he's back from Spain. Roberto said he'd be back Friday."

"Red velvet. It's that or nothing."
"Okay

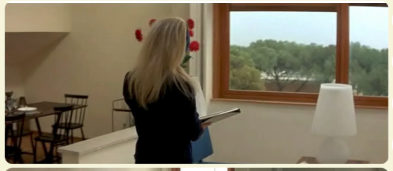
"Set the table while I take a bath?"

"I wanted to take a bath, too."

"You go first. I can do some work."

"No. I'll go later, while it's cooking."
"Is there any faggiolini left?"

"Yes, Don't like it? That's tough."
"I can set the table."
" I was just doing it."



"I bought something today. You'll tell me what you think."

2

"What thing?"

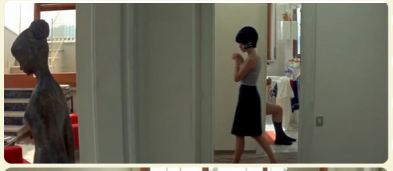
"What thing?"

"Don't look yet."
"You want to go to Capri?"

"Camille?"
"What?"
"You want us to go to Capri?"

"I won't say no, but I won't say yes either."
"It would be a vacation."
"Besides he didn't invite me."

3



"What?"
"He invited you. Not me."

"Where'd we put the mirror?"

"Not at all. We were both invited."

"Look."

"Doesn't it suit me?"
"No, I prefer you as a blonde."
"And I prefer you without a hat and cigar."

4

"It's just to look like Dean Martin in Some Came Running*."*
"What a laugh."
"What is?"

moment both imply that a raw nerve has been touched. This is the point at which Camille looks at herself in the mirror and then goes to show Paul the wig.

Paul seems to respond honestly without any thought of what may be at stake for Camille. Camille reacts with mild hostility which seems to indicate she is disappointed and hurt by the fact that Paul does not like her in the wig. There is a sense of something playful and even affectionate in her desire to wear the wig for Paul, and he seems completely oblivious to this as well as any vulnerability she may feel regarding the idea of going to Capri with Prokosch.

Camille uses Paul's infatuation with the image of a movie tough guy to mock him with the story about Martin and how his mind prevented him from making his magic carpet fly. This makes Paul start questioning her about her mood and her behavior, and their interaction rapidly spirals downward to the second critical moment when Paul slaps Camille.

When Camille tells the story and Paul says he does not get what it has to do with him, Camille laughs and says, "Exactly what I was saying." There is a sense that she feels she has restored the balance by proving at least to her own satisfaction that Paul is a bit clueless, and she seems willing to drop both the point of her story and the hurt of his rejection of her in the wig. Paul persists in saying he doesn't get the point of her story, but she

"You may want to look like Dean Martin, but it's more like Martin's Ass."
"Who's that?"
"Never read the adventures of Martin's Ass?"

"One day he goes to Baghdad to buy a flying carpet.

"He finds this really pretty one…"

5

"…so he sits on it, but it doesn't fly."

"…The merchant says: 'Not surprising.'…Are you listening?"

"'Not surprising. If you want it to fly, you mustn't think of an ass.'"

"So Martin says: 'Okay. I won't think of an ass.'"

"But automatically he thinks of one, so the carpet doesn't fly."

"What's that got to do with me?"

"Exactly what I was saying."

"Well. I don't get it."

"That's enough. Are you finished?"

"No need to change the water. I didn't use soap."

"You've been acting weird today. What's wrong?"
"Nothing at all. I knew you's say that.""

"There is something. Is it that girl?"
"It's nothing. I tell you. I simply said you were an ass."

"Not the same sound all over."

"Why don't you want us to go to Capri?"

"Because you're an ass."

"You frighten me, Paul. It's not the first time."
"Why didn't you answer instead of standing there? Why'd I marry a 28-year -old typist?"
"It's true. I'm sorry."

"So am I."

says “Enough” and occupies herself with setting the table in an attempt to move on. Unfortunately Paul is unwilling to let go of his obsession with the seeming change in her behavior, and he persists in questioning her about it and about why she does not want to go to Capri. Clearly Paul is making matters worse, probing a wound for reasons he does not really understand; and she responds predictably by mocking his inability to understand and to let things go.

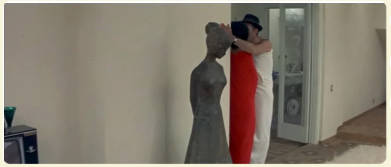
A large part of the underlying dynamic of the relationship has been revealed by this interaction. The depth of Paul’s frustrations is exposed by the fact that he can erupt so violently and so suddenly. One senses immediately that what happened with Prokosch is simply one more instance of something that has been fermenting in the basement for a long time. Camille’s response includes the comment that this is not the first time that he has frightened her. Her vents more of his frustration verbally, and she makes the gesture of acknowledging some degree of validity to his complaints and apologizing. This immediately brings Paul back and he apologizes as well. They kiss and it seems as though the conflict has dissipated.

One of the things Paul expresses as he vents his frustration is the very revealing question of why he married a “28-year-old typist.” This little piece of “backstory” reveals a great deal more about Paul than it does about Camille. On some level he does not regard her as his equal or even as a suitable mate. This is obviously an expression of his insecurity about his own identity, which needs to be bolstered by some sense of superiority based on his intellectuality. It is, of course, this very intellectuality, the need to “understand”, that causes him to provoke and alienate Camille with his ceaseless questioning. He is completely oblivious to the fact that this questioning is driven by his own sense of guilt and inadequacy. He cannot let go because he is in the grip of something he does not comprehend.

Camille does understand in some intuitive way, and she realizes it is up to her to make the carpet fly. She can do this by telling Paul he is right, by apologizing and by kissing him. She is not ready, however, to completely forget that he has just hit her, and she pulls away from him. She offers an explanation of why she does not want to go to Capri, and, if only Paul could accept it, things might settle down. Needless to say he persists with his questions. He says he wants her to come to Capri with him because he does not want to go alone, but he seems to connect her agreeing to go to Capri with getting an answer to his questions about what has changed and why they are “fighting over nothing.”

As Paul keeps pushing her with questions, she pulls back more and more. When she says she does not like Prokosch, Paul asks if he did something to her. He is clearly circling the issue of his having sent her ahead with Prokosch while he followed in a taxi, but he never actually confronts it. It seems reasonable to assume that on some level

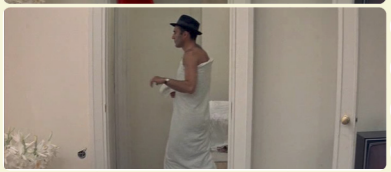
7



8

"Go to Capri if you want. I don't feel like it."

"Beside, I don't like that Jeremy Prokosch. I told you."



"Why?"

9

"He do something to you?"
"Absolutely not."

"Why the thoughtful air?"
"Maybe because I'm thinking of something. That surprise you?"
"No, why."
"An idea."
"Come with me. I don't want to go alone."

"You've been acting funny since we met that guy."

"No, I'm not funny. … I wonder why you say that."
"Just because. We were fine this morning.

"And now we're fighting over nothing. … What's going on, sweetie?"

"I want to have fun. Nothing's going on, Paul."

"I'm afraid I'll get bored there. …I'm not going. I'm not going."

I'm not going….I'm not going.¬"

"…I'm not going. "

10

11

12

13

he feels guilty about having "offered" Camille to Prokosch, but he is refusing to admit even to himself that he did anything wrong.

When Camille asks if Paul is surprised that she might be thinking, we get a glimpse of her perspective on Paul's feelings about her as just a typist. After Paul has said she has been acting funny, Bardot glares at him in a way that makes it clear that Camille is not just a "simple" person. She may not "think" like Paul, but she is at least as self-aware as he is and responds in complex ways.

Some critics seem to feel there is a misogynist streak in Godard and his films. I confess this strikes me as an amazingly obtuse misreading of the way in which he regards and presents women, at least based on the films with which I am familiar. One scholar says

> What governs Godard's vision of relationships between the sexes is not so much misogyny as a fear of women, and of their supposedly instinctive understanding, and through this knowledge, control of sexual and emotional commerce. In *Le Mépris* Godard presents Camille as the controlling force in a doomed relationship, and Paul as a confused, conflicted pawn in the game, unable to shape or influence his desitny which is about to engulf them both. Most of all Paul lacks knowledge of self, an appreciation of his true motives for his actions.[47]

47 Dixon p. 45

This still seems to me to miss the point although much of it is apt. First of all I do not see that Camille is any more in control of anything than Paul, and Paul is not a pawn of anything except his own unconcious desires. More importantly I do not see how the film expresses a fear of women. I see more adoration than fear, but the remarkable thing to me about *Contempt* is its ability to present both sides of the marriage with equal force. She may be bitchy at times just as he can be an asshole, but ultimately I sympathize with both.

An interpretation of the nature of their relationship and of its meaning in the context of the film is something that will only develop as every aspect of the film is examined, but I shall say up front that I tend to view Camille as a force of nature and that Paul's inability to relate to her is analogous in some way with modern man's inability to establish a harmonious and satisfying relationship with the natural world. What I see in Godard is a romantic streak, and one aspect of it is a passionate desire to love and be loved by a woman. Brody tends to interpret everything in the film in terms of Godard's relationship with his wife, Anna Karina, citing details or lines of dialogue in the scene in the apartment which are taken directly from his life with Karina. While it is obvious that much of the material in the film is taken from Godard's personal life, I do not think that he was attempting, as Brody says of an earlier film, "to make home movies in the guise of a

fictional feature film, and to make a feature film that would fulfill the intimate function of a home movie."[48]

There is a wonderful moment in the scene after Camille has tried to explain twice that she does not want to go to Capri because she thinks she will be bored when she says "I'm not going" and repeats it seven more times as she walks back to the bedroom. This seems perfect to me, but I find it almost impossible to articulate why or to analyze exactly what she is doing. I came across one analysis of the scene which described this moment as childish or childlike, but that hardly seems to do the moment justice. A child might obstinately keep repeating a refusal to do something, but it would more likely be an aggressively self-assertive "tantrum." Camille's behavior seems self-absorbed. It is a performance for Paul to some extent, just as the later recitation of profanities and obscenities is a performance for him; but it is also a kind of natural bubbling of her self. She has pulled back into herself in the face of Paul's relentless probing. She is speaking to him, but refusing to speak to him on his terms. By making herself present to him in this way she is emphasizing how inaccessible she is to him. It is somehow both consciously deliberate and unconsciously instinctive.

For once Paul seems to realize that further probing is futile, and he changes the subject to

48 Brody p. 111

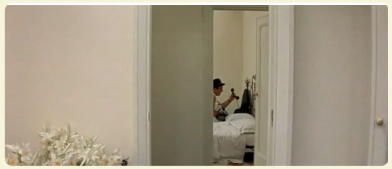
comment on the house being built across the street. (This line was not in the script. It is a detail taken from Moravia, but it is not developed. In the novel the house across the street is a villa with a walled garden from which Ricardo feels excluded. It is not clear why Paul dislikes the house being built across the street. Presumably he considers it ostentatious or in bad taste in some other way.) Camille has no interest in the house across the street, but she accepts Paul's retreat and offers him some very sound advice: "Now, it you love me, shut up." This seems to me to be another point in the scene where everyting hangs in the balance. All Paul has to do is shut-up and let the storm abate.

Needless to say he cannot let go and feels a need to assert his "right" as a husband to know "why his wife is sulking." He also mentions Francesca again as the probable cause. The subtitles render Camille's response as "Drop dead!" but, since the phrase she uses is derived from the French word for "shit", it is probably safe to assume that the response is a bit more vulgar and forceful than "Drop dead."

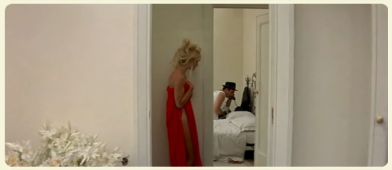
At this point the first telephone call intervenes. Paul anwsers the call from Camille's mother and procedes to reveal another underlying thread in the conflict. He does not trust her. His fear that she does not love him involves also the suspicion that she may be lying to him to cover up an infidelity. Nothing in the film up to this point has prepared us for this. Camille immediately understands why Paul lied to her mother. She kicks him and threatens him with divorce if he "starts that again." The implication is clearly that their relationship has been plagued by unfounded jealousy and fear on Paul's part.

Camille announces her intention to sleep on the couch and Paul begins another round of frutiless questions and challenges. He apologizes for having lied to her mother, and Camille agrees that is why she was upset. She says she is no longer upset, even though she continues to make her bed on the couch. Paul sits on the couch with her caressing her leg, and Camille comments on how things were better before he got involved with movie people. She seems sincere, and they are physically closer again. She sits up so that they are sitting side by side, and it seems again as though things may be settling down.

What disturbs the peace this time is the Communist party membership card which has fallen out of Paul's pocket. In the Moravia novel Ricardo's decision to joing the Communist party is tangled up with a variety of threads of self-loathing and insecurity in him. It is presented to some extent as a result of marital stress rather than a cause of it. In the film Paul is obviously defensive about having joined the party, and he starts to get violent in his attempts to take back the card from Camille. One assumes that Camille would think joining the communist party is simply a stupid career move. The fight over the card ends with mutual accusations and separation, although they

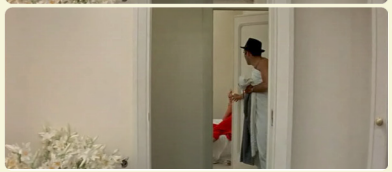


"No, Camille isn't here...."



"I thought you'd lunched out and gone shopping....."

"...She just walked in the door! Your mom."



"I'll call you tommorrow."

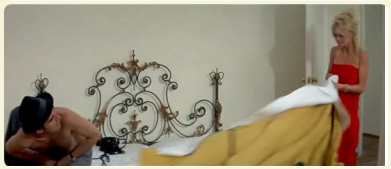
15

"You're out of your mind, old man!"

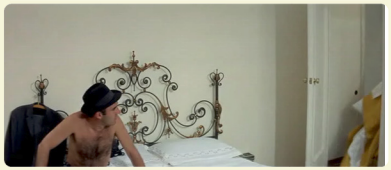
"Why tell Mom I was out?"
"I don't know why."
"I know."

"To find out if we really went out to lunch. and if I wasn't lying earlier."
"That's it."
"Try that again and I'll divorce you."

"Get up!"
"What are you doing?"



"I'm sleeping on the couch."
"When, tonight?"
"Everynight, starting tonight."



16

both say they don't want to argue. Camille leaves the room and Paul starts perusing the book of erotic art. He announces that he does not want to go to Capri.

When they seem completely separated and Paul is distracted by the book, Camille calls to him from the other room: "Paul, come here." He just says "What?" the first time she calls to him and continues to announce that he is not going to take the job with Prokosch. Camiile calls to him again, and he seems to ignore her. It is unclear whether Camille has gone back to the bathroom to resume her bath or whether she is in the bedroom, but the way she calls to him suggests that she wants him to come to her so that they can make love. This is, of course, the supreme missed opportunity which condemns Paul to his fate. It is highlighted ironically by the fact that Paul is distracted by the book of erotic art.

In the script Camille is taking a bath when this exchanage takes place. He goes into the bathroom to tell her he does not want to go to Capri and is not going to take the job. He then goes to his study to work at his typewriter. She calls him, and he goes back into the bathroom where she asks him why he does not want to work on the film. I am convinced that the meaning of this moment changed substantially during the filming, partially in order to use the book of erotic art and perhaps because Godard realized that giving Camille's call sexual overtones added another dimension to the scene.

"Don't be angry. I just can't sleep with the window open."

"We'll close the window."
You always say you can't breathe. No, we'll speep apart. Thousands of couples do it. They still get along fine."
"What did I do wrong? Tell me. I'm sorry I said you were out. Is that it? Forgive me."
"Let me by."

"Is that why you're in a bad mood?"
"Yes, but I'm not anymore."

"T'll be just fine here."
"I really wonder what I did."

"You're so mean all of a sudden!"
"Me? I'm the same as always. You're the one who's changed. Ever since you've been with movie people. You used to write crime novels. We didnt" have much money, but everything was fine."
"What's this?"
"Give me that."
"Partito Comunisto Italiano. You never said you joined."
"That was two months agon in Paris."

"Give me that."
"Let go! You'll bruise me."

"Don't talk to me like that!"
"And don't you either!"

"I'm working for you. This place is for you, not just for me!"
"Pkeae, Paul, I don't want o argue."
Cut #

17

"I don't want to go to Capri, either."
"Why not? Don't be stupid. Go…. Paul, come here."

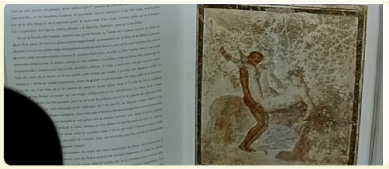
18

"What?…"

"No, I've lost interest. Tell Prokosch when he calls. I won't talk to him."

"Paul, come here."

"Why won't you do t he script now?"



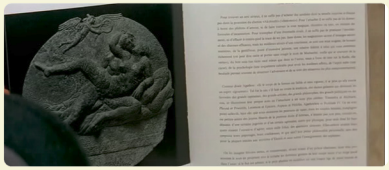
"i'd have done it out of love for you."

19

"But you don't love me anymore."
"That's news!"
"I hosted a skin contest […]

20

"We'll just mortgage the flat when we run out of money."
"Something makes you think I've stopped loving you?"
"Yes."



21

"What?"
"Everything."
"But what, for instance?"

"First tell me if it's true."

"No, you tell me first."
"What makes me think you've stopped loving me?"

"The way you've begun to talk to me."

"You weren't like that this morning."

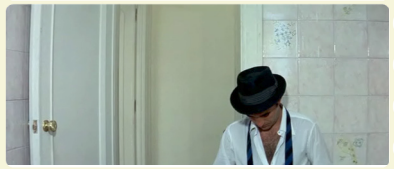
"Or yesterday. It's the way you look at me, too."

"The problem, in my opinion, is our conception of the world. […]"
"Why'd you say it was the open window? There's something else."
"I think so. 'Man can rebel […]"

Look, Camille…"
"I'm telling you. I give you my word. I can't sleep wiht the window open. I need peace and quiet and darkness. I swear it's true."

"And you move around too much. You keep waking me. I want to sleep alone from now on."

"You don't want to make love?"



"Listen to the jerk."

"Is that amocking smile or a tender smile?"

"A tender smile."

"So, answer me!"
"If it were true, I'd tell you. A woman call always find an excuse not to make love."

"But you're really a jerk."
"Vulgar language doesn't suit you."
"It doesn't suit me?"

"Listen to this…

"Asshole. Cunt. Shit. Christ Almighty. Craphole.Son of a bitch. Goddamn.

"So, still think it doesn't suit me?"

24

"Why don't you want to make love anymore?

"All right. Let's do it, but fast."

Given the fact that Paul reads a passage from the book out loud and over 30 seconds of screen time are devoted to pages in the book, it is safe to assume that Godard assigns more meaning to the moment than simply an ironic comment on Paul's obliviousness. At this point I can only suggest that it has to do with the function of imagery in modern society. There is obviously the implication that the voyeurism involved in a fascination with pornography introduces a breach in actual sexual intimacy, but I think the metaphor is intended to extend beyond sexual relationships. This may be an example of how Godard's films do require a shared frame of reference in order to be properly interpreted and fully appreciated. Here I would imagine the frames of reference that need to be explored are Semiotics and Structural Marxism, neither of which is my strong suit.

At this point Paul has made it clear that the only reason he would take the job would be for Camille. As he insisted earlier all the work he does is for her; the apartment is for her. Since he is now convinced she no longer loves him, he has no interest in the job. The subject now shifts to why he think she no longer loves him, and procedes with all the fruitlessness as the previous discussions. Camille hides behind the book on Lang; she smiles mockingly and mocks his inability to assess her mood; she recites a litany of profanities; and finally she offers to make love on the couch provided they do it quickly.

Each round of the fight seems to dig the hole deeper and Camille's sarcastic offer to make love precipitates the sequence of flashbacks with interior monologues from each. Portions of the monologues are taken almost verbatim from Moravia, except that in the novel they are all thought by Ricardo.

Camille (Film)	*Riccardo (Novel)*
We used to live in a cloud of unconsciousness, in delicious complicity. Things happened with a sudden, wild, enchanted recklessness. I'd end up in Paul's arms hardly aware of what had happened.	Formerly everything, on the contrary, had happened in a cloud of inspired haste, of intoxicated unconsciousness, of ravished complicity.…Everything had always run its course in a mood of swift, feverish, enchanted absorption, and I had always come to myself again in Emilia's arms almost without being able to recollect how it had all happened… [p.34]
I've noticed that the more we doubt, the more we cling to a false lucidity in the hope of rationalizing what feelings have made murky.	I have noticed that the more doubtful one feels the more one clings to a false lucidity of mind, as though hoping to clarify by reason that which is darkened and obscured by feeling. [p.76]

"I'd been thinking Camille could leave me. I thought of it as a possible disaster. Now the disaster had happened."

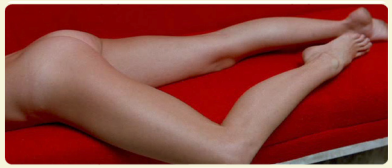
"We used to live in a cloud of unawareness…."

"…in delicious complicity. Things happened with a sudden, wild, enchanated recklessness."

"I'd end up in Paul's arms, hardly aware of what had happened.

"This recklessness was now absent in Camille, and thus in me. Coule I now, prey to my excited senses, observe her coldly, as she could undoubtedly observe me?

"I deliberately made that remark with a secret feeling of revenge." "She seemed aware that a lie could settle things. For a while, at least. She was clearely tempted to lie. But on second thought, she decided not to." "Paul hurt me so much. It was my turn now by referring to what I'd seen without being really specific.



31 *"At heart, I was wrong. She wasn't unfaithful, or she only seemed to be. …"*

32 *"…The truth remained to be proven despite appearances."*

33 *"I've noticed that the more we doubt. the more we cling to a false lucidity…"*

34 *"…in the hope of rationalizing what feelings have made murky."*

"I thought Camille could leave me. […]"
"We used to live in a cloud of unawareness […]"

35 *"Don't be like that."*

"Don't be like what?"
"You know very well."

"It's your fault!"

They separate again and Paul returns to his typewriter. One again Camille makes a gesture of reconiliation by coming to Paul kissing him and saying that she loves him as she always. She questions him about what he would do if he really believed she did not love him, but she insists that she does and tells him to kiss her. At this point the second telephone call intervenes.

It is possible to interpret Camille's gesture of reconciliation as manipulative and motivated by something other than love; but this would, I think, be as much a mistake for the viewer as it is for Paul when he interprets it this way later in the scene. Camille does say that she does not want to lose the apartment. She also says, however, that Paul should not take the job if he does not want to do it, and I think it is clear that Camille wants to hold onto Paul more than the apartment. To view Camille in terms of "control of sexual and emotional commerce" in the relationship seems to me to overlook the one thing that explains all of her behavior: her love for Paul. Her love is certainly not without needs, and it obviously requires a kind of nourishment in order to flourish; but it is her ability to love in this way, as well as her sexual beauty, that makes Camille's character so attractive. The main alteration that Godard has made in adapting the novel is designed to allow him to express his adoration for a woman. The flash cuts used with the interior monologues include not just Playboy-like poses of Bardot but a shot in which Camille is seen running through an appealing landscape as though she is headed towards a pas-

"You seem to be …"

"…searching my expression to decide…"

"…the appropriate attitude to take with me."

"The private plane awaited in the blue sky. …Rex remembered something about Paula…"

"Her harmonious features…now indecisive, seemed contorted now. Rex knew this trait of hers, for it seemed that whenever Paula had to make a decision that went against her nature

"What's got into you, Paul? I love you exactly as before.

sionate rendezvous with Paul. This image is reinforced in the monologue by a nostalgia for the kind of sexual abondonement she had experienced.

The call from Prokosch, which comes right at the moment when Paul and Camille are about to kiss, is obviously emblematic of the effect Paul's work in films has had on their relationship. Camille answers the phone and attempts to chat with Prokosch briefly even though they do not speak each other's language. She inquires about whether it would be possible to swim on Capri as though she is sincerely trying to decide whether to go with Paul. Paul's conversation with Prokosch takes place off screen, so the focus of attention is on what Camille thinks of Paul's dealings with Prokosch. The first indication we have of her attitude is that she removes the setting from the table indicating that she no longer intends to fix dinner for Paul. Then she becomes overtly hostile as they talk about whether to have dinner after watching a movie. She goes into the study, pulls the page of Paul's manuscript out of the typewriter (off camera), reads it and then crumples it up and tosses it on the floor as she accuses Paul of stealing ideas rather than using his own. Presumably the passage she is reading is the one Paul has just written about the way in which Paula's features alter whenever she must make a decision.

On the surface the logic of Paul's interpretation of her behavior seems sound. He has not refused to work for Prokosch. They will be able to keep the apartment. Camille, therefore, has

"What would do if I stopped loving you?"
"I already told you."
"I forgot what you said."

"I wouldn't do the script and we'd sell the flat."
"But I love you. I find all this so idiotic."

"When Prokosch calls, tell him you'll go to Capri.

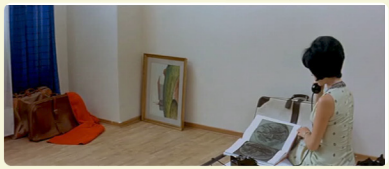
"What about you?"
"I love you. Don't make me repeat it. I want to keep the flat. If you don't want to do the script, don't do it. If you think I've stopped loving you, you're wrong. Kiss me."

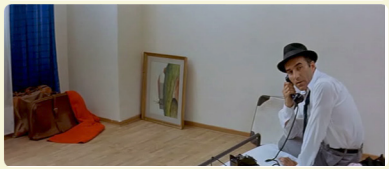
"We were just talking about you. About your movie....Yes, The Odyssey. *...About that guy who travels. In Capri can we go swimming? ... I don't know".*

"Here's Paul. I'll put him on."

"Hello, M. Prokosch..."

37





38

"We eating out?"
"I don't feel like going down for groceries."

"Fine. We're supposed to meet Prokosch and Lang at a movie theater…."

"They want to see a singer in the stage show. We can eat after."

"It'll be late if there's a movie first."

"It might give me some ideas."

"Why not look for ideas in your head, instead of stealing them?"

"What's got into you?"

"Camille…"

"Let'sget going!"

"I knew it."
"What?"

"Since I said yes to Prokosch, so long tenderness!"

"Right, no more caresses."

"What was the phone call about?"
"Our going to Capri."
"What did you say?"

"That it was up to you."
"Are you nuts?"

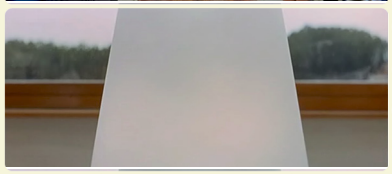
"You know that it's up to you, not me!"

"The come to Capri."
"No."
"Is there something between you and Prokosch?"
"You're pathetic."

"I have to talk to you."
"You said we were going to the movies."
"Listen, I have to talk to you."

"All right, I'm listening."

39



"I have…"

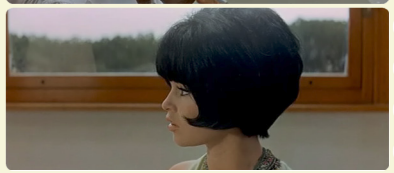
"…to talk to you."

Earlier, before the phone rang, I said I didn't want to take this job if I couldn't be sure of your love. You said you loved me and that I should take it."
"Yes…"
"I'm sure you lied."

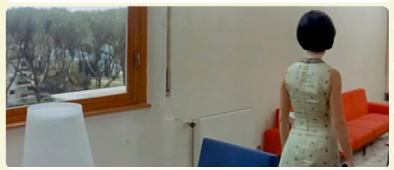
achieved what she wanted and reverts to her "real" feelings towards him. The problem, of course, is that the logic assumes its own conclusion: that Camille is being cynically manipulative or as Paul says "operating from self-interest." What it ignores is the possibility that Camille's behavior is more complicated or that there is still a lingering wound that has not healed completely.

What Camille's behavior reveals is that Paul is not able to look beyond the immediate present and treat her with the tenderness that she requires. He is able neither to forget nor forgive. This is not to suggest that she is deliberately testing him. It is simply to point out that the storm is not over, and he is unable to respond in any way other than to exacerbate it. He again questions whether Prokosch came on to her and insists that they sit down so that he can talk to her. "Talking to her" consists of accusing her of lying about her feelings for him and of cynically manipulating him for selfish material reasons. Needless to say she does not resond positively to this line of conversation and refuses to play along. He pushes to the point where she finally agrees that she no longer loves him and even agrees that it is because he gave Francesca a pat on the rear. He keeps pushing for some other explanation and finally explodes from frustration when she refuses to talk to him the way he wants. She fights back when he grabs her and then leaves, saying she despises him and is disgusted when he touches her.







"Why? I don't know. Out of pity, self-interest…"
"What self-interest?"
"To hold on to this flat."
"How can you know what I think? In fact I couldn't care less. Sell the flat, see if I care."
"Earlier you said it was better than a hotel."
"Not at all. I said that to make you happy."
"That's beside the point. I want to know why you lied."
"Who said I lied? Stop it!"
"You did. I can tell you've stopped loving me."
"What's the use of knowing the truth?"
"See? You admit I'm right. "
I don't admit a thing. Leave me alone. It's true. I don't love you anymore. There's nothing to explain. I don't love you."
"Why? Yesterday you still loved me."
"Yes, very much. Now, it's over."
"There must be a reason."
"There must be."
"What is it?"
"I don't know. All I know is I don't love you anymore."
"Since we were at Prokosch's? When you saw me pat Francesca Vanini's behind?"
"Let's say it was that. Now it's over. Let's not talk about it."

"Something happened today. …"

"It changed your mind about me, …"

"…hence your love for me."

"You're crazy, but you're smart."
"Then it's true."

"I didn't say that.

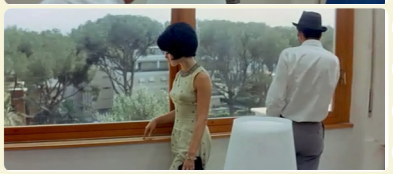
"I said you're bright."

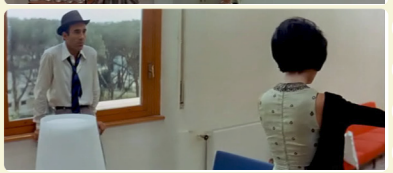
"Was it something I said or did today that you took the wrong way?"

"Maybe."

"Don't talk to me that way! I forbid you!"

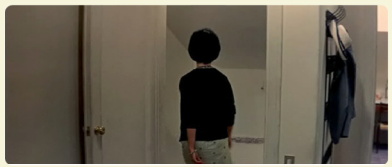




"Camille!"

41 *"Camille…"*



42 *"I despise you! …*

"…That's why the love's gone. I despise you. …

43 *"… And you disgust me when you touch me."*

Camille's behavior stems from a variety of desires and needs. One key element is relfected in the way she seems unable to respect Paul if he is abandoning his own convictions or desires in an effort to placate her. This is I think rooted in the vulnerability that comes from the kind of devotion to him involved in her love. She needs for him to be "a man." She expresses this more directly later on Capri, but there are two moments in the apartment which point clearly to this need. First of all she asks him to repeat what he would do if it were true that she no longer loved him. She tells him not to take the job if he doesn't want to, but that he is mistaken if he thinks she does not love him. She wants him to decide about the job independently of any consideration about her. Also when Paul tells her he told Prokosch that it was up to Camille whether they would go to Capri, she reacts by saying "Are you nuts? You know that it's up to you, not me!"

On Capri after Paul has told Prokosch that he does not want to work on the screenplay, he and Camille reprise their argument on the roof of the villa:

CAMILLE: I don't understand; you always told me that you loved this script. Now you tell the producer that you are only doing it for the money and that your ambition is to write for the theater. He's no fool. He's going to think about it, and the next time he won't ask for you. It's funny that you don't understand

something so simple....Besides I'm sure you're going to write it all the same.

PAUL: No.

CAMILLE: Yes, you'll see. I know you. I know you.

PAUL: If I do it, it's for you, to pay for the apartment. Anyway, I have an idea. You decide whether or not I should do the screenplay. If you say No, we'll leave.

CAMILLE: You're very cunning.

PAUL: No, why?

CAMILLE: If later you regret it, you could always say it was my fault.

PAUL: Not at all since I'm the one asking you.

CAMILLE: You really want me to tell you what to do?

PAUL: Yes.

CAMILLE: Write the script. You signed a contract and this is tiresome.

A bit later Camille pushes back harder when Paul persists: "Only five minutes ago you saw me kiss this guy and you were ready to change your mind anyway." She had deliberately let Prokosch kiss her when she knew Paul could see and returned the kiss just to make sure the point was made. One suspects she is more interested in provoking Paul than she is in becoming involved with Prokosch.

There is no single, tidy explanation of Camille's contempt for Paul. To say, as one critic has, that Godard presents Camille as a "treacherous enigma" strikes me as a cop out, although I confess my initial reaction to her behavior was close to this. She may resemble a force of nature, but natural phenomena are not enigmatic; they are just extremely complex. Many critics assume that Godard, like Brecht, had no interest in psychological explanations of the behavior of characters in his films, citing his refusal to ever explain to an actor why he asked them to do something or what the character's motivation was. Nonetheless Godard's directing technique was aimed at getting an emotional honesty in the behavior captured by the camera, and in *Contempt*, at least on some level, he was dealing with the disintegration of a marrige and the factors contributing to it.

Camille herself agrees when Paul insists that there must be a reason why she no longer loves him. She cannot articulate it and has no interest in trying to do so for his benefit. She later says she would die before she would tell him why she despises him. Explanations cannot change the facts. It does not matter if one knows "the truth", once love has died. Part of what she despises is Paul's obtuseness and his relentless demands that she explain herself.

Before the scene in the apartment we have seen Paul send Camille ahead with Prokosch while he goes to find a taxi to follow them, and we have seen Paul give Francesca a pat on the rear after attempting to commiserate with her. Paul was clearly self-conscious about the delay caused by the accident in the taxi, but we have no reason not to believe his story. He never seems to connect his abandonment of Camille to Prokosch with the change in her mood, although his self-consciousness after his arrival seems to indicate he an awareness of guilt on some level. He does question whether Prokosch did something to her while she was alone with him, but this is not really an admission that he betrayed her by telling her to go with Prokosch. She rejects vehemently any suggestion that something happened between her and Prokosch before Paul arrived. Aside from the fact that she is insulted by the suggestion that she would allow anything to happen, she surely knows that Paul is looking to shift the focus from his own behavior onto that of Prokosch. The issue is not what happened with Prokoswch or whether an accident was really the cause of his delay, but why he had allowed her to go with Prokosch in the first place.

Paul prefers to think that Camille is upset by his apparent flirtation with Francesca. No doubt he is attracted by Francesca and was in fact flirting with her, but Camille's initial reaction to the suggestion that she is jealous because of his attentions to Francesca reveals that she did not assign it any real importance. (The reaction is purely in Bardot's performance, the surprised look when Paul suggests that his flirtation with Francesca is the real problem. This is in the script. It describes Paul looking attentively at Camille while he suggests that the problem is that he gave Francesca a pat on the rear and then says "he has the impression that this explanation appears absurd to her.")

In Paul's defense I think it would be unfair to claim simply that he is too caught up in his own needs to be able to love her. His love for her is real, even if he is subject to insecurities and paranoid fantasies. Moravia's novel is much harsher in its perspective on Ricardo than the film is on Paul. Godard identifes too much with the kind of love Paul feels for Camille to make him as self-destructively blind as Moravia makes Ricardo.

The problem may be that Paul is in an untenable situation. He wants to provide for Camille and to make her happy, but in order to do that he feels he is betraying his own nature. The film preserves Moravia's image of the screenwriter as prostitute and the ironic suggestion that the prostitute is pimping his own wife in order to promote his career. It also preserves some of the suggestion that Paul's intelectual ambitions may be a bit suspect. What he writes in not serious theater or even criticism but crime novels.

Perhaps Paul's real mistake is in underestimating or misunderstanding the way in which Camille loves him. His desire to make her happy is,

to some extent, a desire to hold onto her, to insure that she will love him; but to her there is probably something insulting in the idea that he must buy her love by providing a nicely furnished apartment. On the other hand a desire to provide a nice home for her is surely a normal expression of love. The problem is that he seems to resent having to do so. The apartment is for her and not for them as a couple. It is a price he feels he has to pay.

It is difficult to explain definitively why Paul allows Prokosch to take Camille while he takes a taxi. Part of is is simple obliviousness; Paul really does not have any concept of what is at stake because he is blind to what Prokosch is or the threat that he represents. Probably he is deliberately shutting his eyes and pretending that the offer of a ride is a simple matter of logistics. He clearly does not want to alienate his new employer, and he can tell himself that it is easier and more pleasant for Camille to ride with Prokosch than to find a taxi with him.

The audience can certainly see that Prokosch is a predator who would like to have Camille. We have also seen that Camille is susceptible to the attraction of his power and wealth. While filming the scene in which Camille meets Prokosch, Godard added a touch which was not in the script. After she has also met Lang and chatted briefly about his films, she moves away from Paul and Lang to Prokosch's car and walks around it dragging her hand along the body of the car. She also seems to be basking in Prokosch's obvious attraction to her, even though he had been rude when she was introduced to him earlier. Paul may be sufficiently engaged with Lang not to notice what Camille is doing. When Prokosch invites her to his place for a drink, she calls for Paul. She even says she will go in a taxi with Paul after Prokosch has offered her a ride, but Paul encourages her to go with Prokosch.

The Characters and the Cast

Paul

As has been indicated Paul Javal is conceived somewhat differently from Riccardo Molteni in the novel. He is a writer of crime novels rather than a journalist and film critic, although Paul is a film buff in a way we have no reason to associate with Molteni. He is being hired to do a script rewrite because he wrote a script for a successful, if silly sounding, movie (*Toto Against Hercules*). Apparently one of his crime novels has also been turned into a movie directed by Nicholas Ray which is currently playing as well. The implication is that he is a bit more successful and established as a writer than Molteni. Like Molteni he has joined the Communist Party, and he cites a desire to write for the theater as the reason he does not want to work on the script for the *Odyssey*. His interest in the theater comes even more out of

Dean Martin as Bamma Dillert in
Some Came Running.

the blue than Molteni's. Before he tells Prokosch that he no longer wants to write the screenplay, the only connection between Paul and the theater comes when the camera lingers on a framed print of a depiction of what appears to be an 18th or 19th century theater hanging on the apartment wall behind his writing desk.

There is no clear indication of how long he has been married, when or why he moved to Rome nor where he lived before buying the still unfinished apartment. He does mention that he joined the communist party in Paris two months before.

The casting of Michel Piccoli alters the conception of the character perhaps even more than the details in the script. The main effect is that the character of Paul is more substantial and sympathetic than the character of Riccardo. He shares some of Riccardo's obtuseness, and there are indications that he his capable of violence similar to the way Riccardo loses control of himself, but it would be difficult to view Piccoli the way one can imagine Riccardo. When he takes a gun out from behind the books, he is playing the role of a character in a movie in a way that seems completely out of character for what we have seen of him so far; but it is a sign that the violence we have just witnessed between him and Camille may run deeper than we want to believe.

There are images in the film which suggest to me that the character of Paul is a composition of Riccardo Molteni, Alberto Moravia, Jean Luc Godard, Humpher Bogart and Jean Paul Belmondo all filtered through Michel Piccoli. There is one shot of him when he has fallen asleep leaning against the rock with his hat pulled down over his eyes where he resembles the images of Belmondo in some of Godard's other films. Unlike Molteni, Paul is a snappy dresser, and the hat which he wears so much of the time gives him a romantic (cinematic) image. He says is mimicking Dean Martin in *Some Came Running*, but he has a kind of natural French elegance.[49] The hat also conceals the receding hairline which is another part of the image he projects.

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49 Martin's character in the film was a gambler who never took off his hat because he thought it was bad luck. Martin's hat is more of a 19th century river-boat gambler's style of hat rather than the more contemporary fedora Paul wears. The reference to *Some Came Running* is probably meant to extend well beyond the hat. There are numerous connections or parallels that could be drawn between the film and Godard's approach to *Contempt*. While I can see why many people consider *Some Came Running* a masterpiece, it is not my kind of movie, and I doubt that examining its connections to *Contempt* would increase my admiration or appreciation for Godard's film.

Piccoli is obviously more believable as an intellectual than Belmondo could ever be. When he recites the passage from Dante in the screening room, there can be no doubt that he feels it deeply and appreciates it. The context is sufficiently different from the moment in the novel when Molteni recites the same passage that there is nothing at all suspect about Paul's familiarity with and love of the text. It may be a stretch to say that Michel Piccoli is playing Alberto Moravia in any way, but the way he initially relates to Fritz Lang gives the impression that he may be an intellectual and writer in a way more similar to Moravia than to Molteni or Godard himself.

Clearly he is an alter ego for Godard in some way. The hat alone is a dead give away. He is a cinephile with a kind of academic intellectuality, and the dynamic of his relationship with his wife is obviously derived partially from Godard's own experience.

The biggest difference between Paul and Riccardo, of course, is the way in which Paul seems to survive the tragedy. The novel ends with Riccardo hallucinating a vision of his wife and deciding to write his story as a way of keeping alive a relationship with the woman he has destroyed. In other words he seems to have withdrawn completely into his own delusional reality. Paul, on the other hand, in the final scene of the film appears collected and resigned, if not actually at peace. He is dressed elegantly and is able to share a warm farewell with Lang even if Francesca seems to snub him. When he tells Lang he intends to return to Rome and "finish writing his play," there is almost a sense that his integrity has been restored, that Camille's death has freed him from the conflicts that prevented him from pursuing his true callling. How much irony one sees in this will depend of course on ones own values and priorities. The sincerity with which he and Lang speak to each other about going on with their work would seem to confirm that Paul has indeed found firmer ground to stand on without necessarily diminishing the magnitude of the tragedy. All of this should probably be evaluated within the context of the overall impact of the ending of the film which will be examined later.

Anna Karina
in Vivre sa vie

Camille

The character of Camille is a composite of Emilia from the novel, Godard's ex-wife Anna Karina and Brigitte Bardot (or perhaps the pop culture persona of Brigitte Bardot). Many people, including Jerry Prokosch, have difficulty accepting Bardot as a typist. I can imagine the same difficulty might have presented itself with Sophia Loren in the role, but clearly Bardot gives the character a specificity and complexity which is not apparent in the character of Emilia in the novel. This is mostly due, of course, to the fact that the novel takes place entirely inside Molteni's head, and Emilia is as enigmatic to the reader as she is to him. As Godard described in the treatment the movie tells the story as much from Camille's point of view as from Paul's and even allows her to explain herself directly in a voice over.

Camille is also probably more attracted to Prokosch than Emilia was to Battista. Apparently even before Camille was introduced to him, she

had been impressed by whatever she knew or saw of him. When she says Prokosch is crazy as they leave his place in Rome, Paul says "You change your mind quickly. Monday you thought he was terrific." She may have simply been enthusiastic about what Prokosch could mean for Paul's career, but she does seem drawn to him as he sits in his Alfa Romeo.

When Francesca arrives at Prokosch's Roman villa on her bicycle shortly after Paul arrives, it is clear that Camille wonders if there might be something between Paul and Francesca. This may be a projection of her hurt at having been "given" to Prokosch. Even though she sees Paul being affectionate with Francesca later, it is clear during the argument at the apartment that his flirtation with Francesca is not really the problem.

In the taxi even after the argument in the apartment ended so violently Camille says, "Forget what I said, Paul. Act as though nothing happened." This exchange is not in the script, which simply says that the taxi ride takes them past ancient monuments on the

way to the cinema. Camille says this coldly, but it still seems as though she is telling him he can redeem himself and that their love can be restored.

Outside the theater after the others have left, there seems to be a degree of intimacy and awkward tenderness between Paul and Camille. Paul puts his arm around her and gives her a gentle kiss.

Paul: Don't come if you don't want to. I'm not forcing you.

Camille: It's not you that's forcing me. It's life.

She says this with a resigned sadness as though she feels her fate is out of her hands and that she cannot prevent whatever is going to happen to their marriage.

The moment on Capri when Prokosch offers her a ride back to the villa in the boat is the equivalent of the moment when Battista asks Emilia to ride with him during the drive to Capri. Paul's willingness to let her go seems to be the last straw.

When Paul returns to the villa, Camille makes sure that he sees her kissing Prokosch.

Molteni saw Battista kiss Emilia on the shoulder and Emilia was aware that he had seen it, but Emilia was clearly uncomfortable with Battista's advances. She indicates in her letter later that she might have trouble resisting him if he pursued her in Rome, but she is not as aggressive with him as Camille is with Prokosch. Obviously Camille kisses Prokosch in order to provoke Paul.

Even when it seems clear on Capri that the damage is irreparable, she is able to smile at Paul in a way the expresses an affectionate understanding of him as she says, "I know you" just as she was able to smile when she asked him what story

he was going to make up about why he was so late arriving at Prokosch's Roman villa.

Prokosch

It was inevitable that Godard would make the producer an American. To make a film about filmmaking without including Hollywood would be unthinkable, and Prokosch is an extreme representation of one type of Hollywood producer. Even though Lang considers him a dictator rather than a producer and compares him unfavorably to Samuel Goldwyn, Prokosch represents many aspects of the movie business that Goldwyn embodied. Battista is also a producer in the same vein, although being Italian he is able to cast his manipulative comments in terms of art and culture rather than just pulling out his check book whenever he hears the word culture. Battista is also playing on a smaller stage, despite the fact that Italian films were gaining world wide recognition.

There is some evidence that Palance disliked working on *Contempt*. It is easy to imagine that he would not have enjoyed Godard, and some accounts say he became so frustrated and annoyed with Godard's working methods that he ceased speaking directly to him and behaved more or less like the character he was playing. Godard may well have deliberately

provoked him to be able to capture this aspect of Palance's personality on camera, but Palance does seem to have enjoyed skewering the type of people he was accustomed to working for.

Godard presents him with a great deal more irony (and less sarcasm and skepticism) than Moravia applied to Battista, but there is clearly an appreciation of the power and sexual energy that he embodies. Prokosch has the best entrance of any character in the film. He is a preposterous figure, but he is also mythic. He emerges from the stage door above Paul and Francesca as a Greek king or god emerging from a palace or temple. He is bigger than life and believes he is a god. His sense of the larger than life characters, the "real human beings" and the "real human emotions" associated with movies (and movie production?)

is ludicrous and yet in some way admirable. The younger Godard was not the only one swept up by the power of movies, and the aura of this power clings to their creators. It is but a small step from Prokosch declaiming at the portals of his palace to the response of Samuel Fuller in *Pierrot le fou* when he is asked what the cinema is: "A film is like a battleground – love, hate, action, violence, death – in one word, emotions."

In the script as the lights come up in the screening room, Prokosch rips the screen off the wall and tramples it with his feet as he roars, "There's what I think of your cinema!" Presumably this proved impractical, and Godard had to settle for Prokosch kicking the cans of film and throwing one like a discus. He also directs his anger more specifically as the scenes which Lang has shot rather than at film or the cinema in general. While Prokosch's tantrums and abusive behavior may seem like ridiculous caricatures, they do capture the essence of a kind of behavior. The image of Francesca bending over so that Prokosch can sign a check on her back would surely still elicit nods of recognition from legions of "personal assistants" to outrageous agents, producers and studio executives in Hollywood. Prokosch is rude and abusive to everyone because of the confidence he has in his own power over them. That power is largely a matter of money, but it is also a matter of

the force of his personality and the energy which he exudes. The director will accept abuse from his producer because the producer enables him to work at his craft or create his art. There are limits, though, as when Lang refuses to let Prokosch take his copy of the script. Despite the imbalance in power there is a symbiotic relationship in which the producer needs the director as well.

Prokosch is clearly not an educated or cultured man despite he pretensions. ("Because the *Odyssey* needs a German director; anybody knows that a German, Schliemann, discovered Troy.") His fondness for quoting words of wisom from a little book that he carries is a travesty of the absorption of a literary heritage as represented by the quotations in Lang's conversation. He is dismissive of Lang's analysis of the *Odyssey*, and, like so many people associated with the distribution and exhibition of "art" films in the Fifties, he associates "art" with nudity and sexual content in films. Good movies

Fritz, that's wonderful for you and me, but do you think the public is going to understand that?

are ones that win public approval, i.e. make money, and he takes pride in making good movies. He has hired Paul because he wrote a movie which is a box office success.

Like Battista Prokosch is also an astute observer of people. He clearly sees something is going on between Paul and Camille even without understanding French and appears to be assessing it in terms of his own interest in Camille. His confidence that she will be attracted to him is part of the attraction she feels and is the inverse of Paul's fear that Camille will not love him, which drives her to despise him. Only at the very end of the film when Prokosch asks Camille what she thinks of him does he reveal any degree of uncertainty or hint of vulnerability.

Fritz Lang

In retrospect it seems equally inevitable that Godard would cast Fritz Lang as the German director, but according to Lang's biographer Godard's first choice for the role was Jean Cocteau. The idea apparently was to cast "someone of international distinction whose real-life identity would force audiences to think about an artist forced to prostitute himself."[50] Cocteau was ill and declined the offer. Lang was in need of money and thoroughly enjoyed the experience of working on the movie, even if he had his doubts about the way Godard filmed some of the scenes. The notes on his copy of the script indicate that he did not hesitate to make suggestions about what his character would do or say, but I doubt that he improvised on camera in the way he may have implied in an interview.

Fritz Lang began his career as a director in Germany in 1919. He adapted two films from the Niebelungen epic, made the futuristic *Metropolis* and *M*, the film that launched Peter Lorre, as well as 13 other films before he fled the Nazis and settled in Hollywood. He made 25 films in Hollywood including several westerns and hard-boiled

50 McGilligan 449

crime movies and is regarded as one of the fathers of Film Noir. Admirers of his earlier expressionistic German films tended to dismiss his Hollywood genre movies as the evidence of his talent having been swallowed by the industry, but critics at *Cahiers du Cinéma* championed his Hollywood films.

Casting Lang caused a fundamental shift in the underlying structure of the story. Godard admired Fritz Lang immensely; and Lang respected Godard, both as a critic and a filmmaker. Prokosch may be a pretender to the throne, but Lang is as close as the human race gets to divinity in Godard's eyes. Rather than being a soulless Germanic pedant with Nazi overtones like Rheingold, Lang is the moral center of the film. He speaks all the languages; he is a true intellectual and a committed artist; and he is extremely civil, sympathetic and generous. He accepts the realities of the film business with grace and perseveres despite all obstacles. Typically he expresses his resignation with a quote from a poem by Brecht, permitting Godard to have dialogue in which someone explains to a character played by Brigitte Bardot (known in France as "B.B.") that the "poor B.B." to whom Lang has referred is Bertolt Brecht.

Lang's interactions with Francesca and Camille are the exact opposite of those of Prokosch. With Francesca he shares an interest in Hölderlin's poetry. He has no problem asking her what the Italian word for "strange" is and insists on letting her and the editor go ahead of him as they exit the theater. With Camille he is appreciative, but honest when she expresses admiration for one of his films, *Rancho Notorious*. He says he prefers *M*, and I'll leave it to Andrew Sarris to fill you in on the implications for French cinephiles of a preference for *M* over *Rancho Notorious*. Lang accepts Paul even though he is being hired to undermine Lang's work. When Paul picks up the quote from Dante and continues the recitation during the screening, it seems as though he and Lang are kindred spriits.

In the debates about the script Lang is given the position which Molteni defended in the novel. He insists on preserving the spirit of the Greek epic and not modernizing it with a psychological interpretation. Prokosch suggests the theory that

Penelope had been unfaithful, and Paul comes up with a psychological interpretation that even Camille knows he does not believe. Paul's ability to find a psychological explanation for the reason it took Ulysses so long to return home seems to be another indication of how he has compromised his integrity in order to make money. It is also, of course, a projection of his anxieties about his own marriage. Lang is willing to hear Paul's ideas and to consider them, but he is not persuaded.

In *Contempt* Lang is, of course, an endangered species. He represents the Golden Age of Cinema whose funeral we are watching.

Francesca

Francesca is the translator, the submissive mistress of Prokosch and the competition to Camille for Paul attentions. Francesca Vanini is the name of a character Moll played in Shirley Clarke's 1962 film *The Connection*, another film partially about the making of a film. *Vanina Vanini* is also the name of the title character in a film adapted by Rosselini in 1961 from a story of a tragic romance by Stendhal.

The character of Francesca replaces the secretary in Moravia's novel with whom Riccardo flirted, but her primary function in the film is to enable all the parties to communicate with one another.

While perhaps not as sexy or volatile as Camille, she is certainly attractive, and is far more accomplished. She is able to translate difficult poetry as well as ordinary conversation, and she is well read enough to recognize a verse of Hölderlin. Her role as translator goes beyond the merely technical. She is also a mediator who is selective about what and how she translates in the interactions between Paul and Prokosch. She even speaks for Prokosch and explains his position to Paul towards the end of the long scene in the villa on Capri.

Her relationship with Prokosch apparently involves physical as well as psychological abuse, but she appears to be devoted to him nonetheless. The film really gives no indication of why she puts up with the abuse from Prokosch. There

is no reference to the sort of background information described in the treatment. What we see is an extremely competent assistant who is treated with complete disdain. As Paul and Camille are leaving Prokosch's Roman villa, Camille says she saw Prokosch kick Francesca. Later on Capri she seems to hold his hand and lean on him with genuine affection. All we can assume is some sort of sick dependence which Prokosch is able to cultivate and exploit. It is a relationship which the viewer can "compare and contrast" with that of Paul and Camille.

Francesca has her pride as well as vulnerability, as is obvious in the scene when Paul discovers her crying and she rebuffs his initial attempt to comfort her. She probably knows that his interest

is not purely solicitous, but she does lighten up a bit after he makes an attempt to amuse her. He of course responds by confirming any suspicions she may have had about the nature of his interest.

Later on Capri Francesca hands Paul his pistol which she found in the boat. In the script Lang returns the pistol to Paul saying that it fell out of his pocket as he was tying his shoe. The handwritten notes on Lang's script question whether he

is returning a loaded revolver to Paul, and one can imagine a discussion with Godard which resuslted in having Francesca return the gun and added the line in which Lang says, "Children ought not to play with firearms." This follows shortly after Paul has said that Ulysses must murder the suitors in order to regain Penelope's love and Lang has replied, "Death is no resolution." It also follows immediately after Paul has seen Camille kissing Prokosch. Francesca is presumably unaware of any of this. She hands the gun to Paul with an almost playful gesture as though she is exposing silliness on his part.

Francesca remains neutral at first during Paul's rant to Prokosch about money and why he does not want to work on the film. She is sitting on the couch holding Prokosch's hand. When Paul concludes by saying Lang is correct and one should either make Homer's *Odyssey* or not do it at all, Francesca seems to take more than the normal initiative in explaining Prokosch's position:

Camille: Mr. Prokosch has already told you, you are wrong; you aspire to a world like Homer's, you wish that it existed, but unfortunately it does not.

Paul: Why not? It does.

Camille: Perhaps you are right, but when it comes to making a film, dreams do not suffice.

This dialogue is exactly as scripted, but in the script Prokosch is described as whispering something to Francesca before she makes this last remark. In the film he has already walked over to the window and turned his back on the discussion, and she seems to offer this comment on her own in an attempt to mediate. My guess is that Godard decided that this final remark was too significant to originate with Prokosch. One also feels that the observation about Homer's world is more likely to originate with Francesca than Prokosch. All he knows is that he does not like what Lang is giving him and he wants to present the story in sexual/romantic terms he understands.

Godard

Godard himself plays the role of the assistant director for Lang. I am not inclined to read too much into this fact other than the obvious. There is a tradition of directors making cameo appearances in their own films (especially Hitchcock), and Godard liked the ironic touch of directing Lang in a movie in which he is Lang's understudy.

The Singer

The singer who is being cast as Nausicaa plays primarily a symbolic role in the story. Her performance in front of a blank movie screen is a comment on the current state of the cinema. Her wardrobe and appearance conjure up connections with Francesca and Camille, and her dancing seems to be a trivialized and commercial sexuality in comparison to the images of Camille.

The Film Within the Film

The production of the *Odyssey* is obviously a major component in the story and structure of *Contempt*. It provides the occasion for commenting on the state of the cinema, film production techniques, working relationships in a film production and the meaning of the story being told in *Contempt*. It is also a Brechtian stylistic device which helps keep the audience aware that they are watching a movie.

The shot for the credit sequence exists in a limbo between *Contempt* and Lang's *Odyssey*. It depicts the crew shooting a shot, but the subject of the shot is Francesca walking and reading a book. The dolly track in the shot appears to be the track used for the long tracking shot in which Paul arrives and the studio, is greeted by Francesca and meets Prokosch. Francesca is dressed in the same skirt and sweater and is still holding the book when she meets Paul. Originally this shot would have followed immediately after the credit sequence, and I confess I am a little surprised that Godard did not let the prologue play before the credits so the entrance into the main body of the film would still be the cut from a shot of the crew to the first shot of the film proper.

The fact that the credits are presented in a voice-over rather than as titles to be read originally seemed to me to announce immediately that the conventions of movie making are up for grabs. Thanks to Michel Marie I now know that using voice-over for credits is an hommage to Orson Welles, who was the first to do so in *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942). At the end of the shot Coutard pans and tilts the camera so that it seems to be pointed directly at the audience watching the movie, and we get a mission statement with a reference to Andre Bazin: " 'The cinema,' said Andre Bazin, 'substitutes for our gaze a world in harmony with our desires.' *Contempt* is the story of that world."[51]

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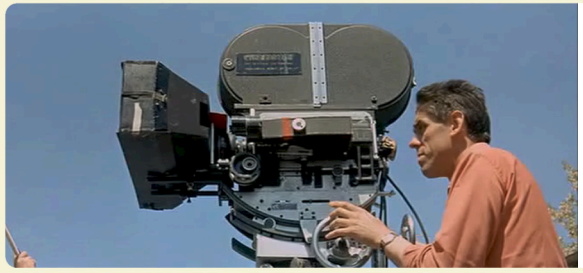
51 Apparently this quotation is wrongly attributed to Bazin and in fact comes from an article "Sur un art ignoré" by French film critic and playwright Michel Mourlet in Cahiers




TECHNICOLOR

The cinema is an invention without a future.

Given the tone with which the credits are recited, the deliberate pace of the shot and the somber music accompanying it, there can be little doubt of the seriousness of the intent. The meaning of it, however, is another matter. It is clearly on one level a celebration of film production technique. Watching Coutard check the light with his viewing filter and then spin the wheels on the gear head will stir the soul of anyone who has ever been truly fascinated with film production. Even the dolly grip and the cable guy may seem endowed with a kind of ceremonial significance. As the shot concludes Coutard and his camera rise above the viewer, and then the camera pans and tilts, almost concealing Coutard. Marie, I think justifiably, compares this final composition to the shots later in the film of the statues of the gods.[52] The difference is that here it is a camera observing us mortals rather than a god. As Godard put it, "the eye of the camera watching these characters in search of Homer replaces that of the gods watching over Ulysses and his companions." The gods, however, took an interest and could intervene in human affairs, while the camera simply records what it sees.

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du cinéma, no. 98 see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/André_Bazin

52 Marie p.88

The "characters in search of Homer" presumably are not just the filmmakers, but also the husband who is attempting to find his way back to a world in which his wife loved him, a world like which Homer's no longer exists because it has been destroyed. If, as Francesca explains, dreams are not enough for making films, what has become of the cinema which presents us with a world in harmony with our desires? The studio has been sold to make way for a five-and-ten-cent store.

I confess I have some difficulty untangling the ambiguities in all this. First of all dreams do not suffice for making movies in Prokosch's view because movies require money and an ability to tell a story that will make money at the box office. Presumably Homer's story is too old fashioned or too simplistic. Modern audiences need a modern story. Prokosch has hired Paul to fix the script, to add "not just sex... but more."

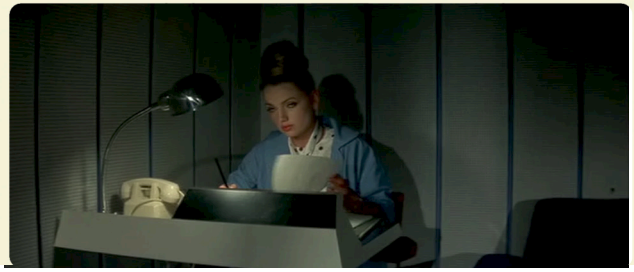
In Lang's view it is possible to capture the world of Homer on film. He thinks it is stupid to change Ulysses from a simple, clever and robust man into a modern neurotic. The story as he sees it is "the fight of the individual against the circumstances, the eternal problem of the old Greeks.... a fight against the gods, the fight of Prometheus and Ulysses." He intends to shoot a scene in which the gods discuss the fate of Ulysses as well as the scenes of physical action involving his struggle to get back home.

The one workman near the entrance to the screening room is the only sign of life at the studio, much of which seems rundown or overgrown.

If Prokosch has had to sell the studio, it is presumably because the movies he is making are not profitable enough. At the time the cinema was still reeling from the impact of television, and the big studio production seemed to many to be a doomed form of filmmaking. The New Wave itself was shooting on the streets and in apartments often with small crews and minimal equipment. But there is an aesthetic issue as well. If the essence of photography is the representation of reality, there is something self-contradictory about its use as part of a "dream factory". Lurking beneath the surface of *Contempt* is sense that movies are no longer a viable form of art or communication.

Beneath the screen in the screening room is an ironic quote from one of the inventors of the cinema: "The cinema is an invention without a future. – Louis Lumiere" The irony for Godard is that after almost 75 years of cinema the truth of Lumiere's opinion is finally being revealed. Lang thinks the CinemaScope format is only suitable for snakes and funerals. With Prokosch's production we may be watching the cinema's funeral presided over by a snake.

If *Contempt* is telling the story of the world of cinema, it is doing so in two senses. It is telling a story of characters in search of a world more in harmony with their dreams, and it is telling the story of the world in which cinema is produced. They are the same in many ways. The world of film production ("capitalist film" as Godard would



later label it) is not conducive to the expression of artistic visions nor is it conducive to working in a way that does not involve prostitution. (Lumière's status in the history of motion pictures is partially due to the fact that he and his brother were the first people to project a movie for a paying audience of more than one person.)

At the same time *Contempt* is celebrating the world of filmmaking. There is an almost fetishistic fascination with filmmaking technology evident in the shots of the camera, dolly, reflectors, lighting equipment, sound recording gear and the projector. We watch uncut dailies. We see the clapsticks or the inverted slate as well as patches for color control. We hear the assistant director's voice over a bullhorn. We see the assistant director moving cast into place and clearing the camera sight line of onlookers. We see the director tell the editor which take he prefers. The most intense moment of this aside from the opening credits shot is the cut to the projection booth window where we see the projectionist check focus and then watch the dailies. From the point of view of the "story" there is no need for this cut, not to mention the time devoted to it and the music accompanying it. From the point of view of anyone who has wanted to make films the image has a strange fascination which totally justifies its length and the music, and it is not just its association with Plato's myth of the cave.

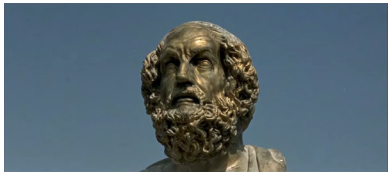
The scene in the screening room establishes the relationships between the people involved

in the production of the *Odyssey*. As is obvious in the composition of the wide shot of the group, the director is the central figure. His position is defined by his opening explanation of the footage they are viewing: "Each picture should have a definite point of view." The relationship between the director and the writer is cordial and respectful. When Paul later attempts to argue for a modern interpretation of the the *Odyssey*, Lang remains polite even though he thinks the ideas are stupid, and he debates the ideas without a conflict with the person presenting them. The director's relationship with the producer is one of conflict based on different understandings of what filmmaking is about. Lang's perspective is obvious as soon as he says to Prokosch, "I don't know if you are able to understand it. I certainly hope you can." Prokosch responds to Lang's abstract explanation of the point of view of the movie with a dismissive "Oh, please!"

Prokosch's own conception of the relationships has already been made clear in his previous conversations about why he is hiring Paul, but he underlines his view of his role by saying "Gods, I like them very much. I know exactly how they feel." The movie is his creation even if he needs mere mortals to implement his desires. He intervenes as necessary. Lang, of course, takes the opposite perspective, reminding Prokosch that the gods have not created men, but men have created the gods. It is the creative talent making the films that gives the producer his role.

We see Lang making decisions about the footage and communicating them to the editor. We see Prokosch throwing a tantrum and disrupting the orderly process of the screening. Even after Prokosch is dead, Lang is somehow able to continue making the film and is committed to finishing it.

The scene in the screening room also helps to establish thematic connection between the *Odyssey* and *Contempt*. On the simplest level Paul is Ulysses, Camille is Penelope, Lang seems to be Zeus, and Prokosch is both Neptune and one of the suitors, perhaps Antinous, the most arrogant and obnoxious suitor who is shot through the neck with an arrow. There are limits to how far one can push these correlations. Paul is hardly the resourceful and clever voyager who returns home triumphantly with the aid of the gods. If anything he is an ironic inverse, whose mind leads him astray and whose "guile" destroys the love his wife feels for him. The image of Homer is an image of



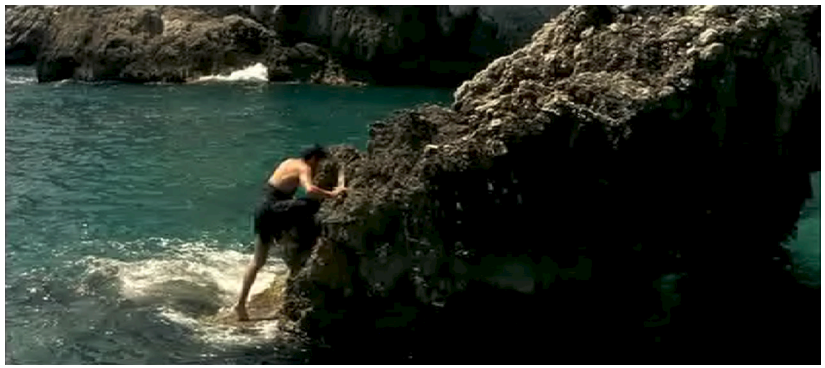
a blind writer, but the film does not develop this as an image of Paul in the way Moravia's novel does. Lang does not get involved in Paul's marriage and even refrains from getting involved in Paul's dealings with Prokosch about the script. He does seem to view events with an Olympian detachment.

I am tempted to suggest that Camille may also be viewed as an ironic version of Athena or Minerva. Paul looks to her to make the decision about what he should do. She actually gives him good advice at times (e.g. "Now, if you love me , shut up.") which he ignores or is unable to follow. She clearly has a "reasonable" perspective on the significance of this writing job for his career, and she knows what would be required to repair the breach in their marriage.

If the story is that of "the fight of the individual against the circumstances" and the hero is Paul, the circumstances are the way in which the film business works and the inherent conflicts in his marriage.

If, on the other hand, the "story" of the film is a commentary on the cultural or existential dilemma of modern man, the connecting links are provided by the quotations cited during the screening. Lang and Paul first quote Dante's *Inferno*, reciting lines from the 26th canto in which Ulysses relates to Dante (via Virgil's translation) the story of his final voyage and death at sea. This last voyage was prophesied in the *Odyssey*, but Dante's version of it is original. Ulysses and his crew sail through the gates of Hercules at Gibraltar beyond the boundaries of the known world and into the southern hemisphere. Just as they come within sight of the mount of Purgatory, a storm destroys there ship and they are engulfed by the ocean.

Neptune, whom Lang has described as "the mortal enemy of Ulysses, is the god of the water and the sea. The quotation from Dante becomes linked both with the image of Neptune which is used as punctuation later and with the scene in the dailies of Ulysses climbing out of the water onto a rocky coast. Dante's verses link Ulysses doomed voyage with the idea that men "were not born to live as brutes, but to follow virtue and knowledge." What Godard refers to as the "shipwreck of modernity" is suggested by the metaphor of a voyage which must be undertaken but which



is doomed. The history or progress of Western civilization is an inevitable search for knowledge which leads to an undermining of the bedrock on which the civilization has been built. The foundations of the culture have been shattered and man is at risk of drowning.

The second quote cited by Lang consists of the concluding lines of "The Poet's Vocation" by Hölderlin ("Dichterberuf" 1801) The same lines are cited by Heidegger in an essay on Hölderlin's poem "The Homecoming." Heidegger's essay was initially a lecture given in 1943 and then published along with another essay in 1944 under the title *Elucidations of Hölderlin.* A French translation of this work was published in 1962, and I suspect that Godard's interest in Hölderlin stems from Heidegger's interest in Hölderlin. Heidegger's reading of Hölderlin would have been very much in the air Godard breathed during the year before the production of *Contempt*.

The point of the quote is that man somehow derives aid or help from "the absence" of God. Lang comments on how Hölderlin revised the original line, "so long as God is not absent," first to "so long as God is close to us" before settling on the final version refering to God as absent. This is not the place to dive into Hölderlin, much less Heidegger's reading of Hölderin, and I think it is safe to assume that Godard himself did not delve too deeply into either; but the fact remains that there is something about the idea of living with the absence of God that resonated with Godard. A sense of absence is a sense of loss and suggests a yearning or a nostalgia for another possible way of living. *Contempt* is certainly infused with some kind of sense of loss and nostalgia, whether it be for uncomplicated sexual love or a more harmonius relationship with the natural world or even just the possibility of making films, as Paul says to Prokosch, like Griffith or Chaplin in the early days of United Artists.

After the audition at the theater Lang explains his perspective on the *Odyssey*:

LANG: Homer's world is a real world. And the poet belonged to a civilization that grew in harmony, not in opposition, with nature. And the beauty of The Odyssey lies precisely in this belief in reality as it is.

PAUL: Thus in a reality as it appears objectively.

LANG: Exactly and in a form that cannot be broken down and is what it is. Take it or leave it.

As Francesca says later for Prokosch this world no longer exists.

The movement of the film to Capri is also a movement from a modern city to an almost primeval natural setting surrounded by the sea. It

is virtually an attempt to move back in time. The villa resembles an ancient temple or fortress dominating the cliffs and sea below it. Lang and Paul walk through a dense green forest on their way to the villa. There is a long shot of Paul standing on top of one of the cliffs in which he is wearing a white suit and his hat and looks distinctly out of place in the spectacular landscape. Bardot swims nude in the ocean just as the siren does in Lang's film.

The transition to Capri is handled with a hard cut from the darkness outside the theater to a close-up of Camille/Bardot in bright sun with the ocean in the background. The next cut is to the camera crew moving the camera into position for what would seem to be the previous or following shot of Bardot. The temporary disorientation caused by these cuts is obviously a deliberate device to keep the audience aware of the narrative conventions of movies.

We see three different types of shots for Lang's film of the Odyssey: the shots of statues, close-ups of actors, which are so abstract or stylized that they could be camera tests rather than shots for the actual film, and more naturalistic scenes with or without actors. The highly stylized shots of the statues or the actors generate an analogy that encourages the audience to think about the degree of "realism" in *Contempt* itself. The pan across the ocean to the cliffs which is seen in dailies is a shot that could easily have been used for *Contempt*. The final shot in *Contempt* is virtually identical with the shot that Lang's crew is shooting in the last scene.

Lang describes the shot as the moment when Ulysses first sees his homeland after twenty years. Godard's camera moves in and over so that it seems to be seeing exactly what Lang's camera is photographing. Instead of a pan across the ocean to reveal cliffs of a coastline as we saw in dailies, the final shot in *Contempt* appears to me to be a vast expanse of ocean with no land in sight. It is

accommpanied by a voice over a bullhorn saying "Silence...", and I have always interpreted the shot as the final irony in the metaphor for the modern condition. There is no homeland, and there is only silence commanded by a human voice distorted by technology.

The script describes the ending as follows:

> Paul has come to bring news of Prokosch's death to Lang who is filming. He asks him what he plans to do.
>
> Lang says he will take advantage of it to finish the film in the way he had always wanted. He points out the ocean and quotes these lines of the poet:
>
> Oh! récompense, après une pensée
> Qu'un long regard sur le calme des Dieux!

These lines are from Paul Valéry's poem "Le cimetière marin" ("The Graveyard By The Sea") and are rendered by C. Day Lewis as

When thought has had its hour, oh how rewarding
Are the long vistas of celestial calm!"[53]

53 unix.cc.wmich.edu/~cooneys/poems/fr/valery.day-lewis.html When he was young, Godard was required to recite this poem for his grandparents every year on their wedding anniversary. (Brody p.5)

The intention of the script is clearly different from my interpretation of the ending of the film. The earlier treatment described the final sequence somewhat differently:

> Paul learns of the death of Camille and Jeremy Prokosch. He goes in turn to inform Lang, who is setting up a shot.
>
> Lang says it is necessary to finish the film and the last shot shows the gaze of Ulysses, his point-of-view of the refound country.[54]

Michel Marie's description of the final shot in the film as a panoramic shot merging with the look of Ulysses "to frame the ocean and the sky, empty and blue"[55] seems to indicate that I am not the only one who does not see the homeland on the horizon. I can only guess that ultimately Godard decided to have the final shot of the film reflect his own point of view rather than that of either Ulysses or Lang.

54 I am actually uncertain of the translation of the description of the shot "le dernier plan montre le regard d'Ulysse, plan-regard qui correspond à la paix retrouvée." "Plan-regard" is not the normal term for a point of view shot, but this seems to me to be the sense of the phrase, unless the shot is a close-up of Ulysses as he looks at his homeland. In the film Lang describes the shot as "Le premier regard d'Ulysse quand il revoit sa patrie" implying that the shot of the ocean is from Ulysses's point of view

55 Marie p. 36

The Production

Contempt was shot in 32 days between April 28 to June 7, 1963. It premiered on December 20, 1963. The scene in the apartment was shot in five very intense days. The fact that Bardot was involved meant that the production attracted paparazzi and media attention. There are two documentaries about aspects of the production made by Jacques Rozier included with the Criterion DVD release, and there was a fair amount of gossip generated during the filming and after the release. I do not have the impression that tensions among cast and crew were all that different from any other film Godard directed in his early years though the presence of a major star and a Hollywood actor obviously had an impact. While some of the stories may be amusing (e.g. Godard had to walk on his hands to persuade Bardot to alter her hairstyle.), most of them have little or no bearing on the finished film, how it works or what it means.

The production was different for Godard however since he had an American producer as well as the French and Italian ones. Apparently Levine expected daily progress reports from the production concerning the amount of pages shot in the way that was common with American productions. Godard was notorious for the free form nature of his shooting schedule, and he may have had some difficulty adapting to Levine's demands as well as to the expectations of a union crew which involved both Italians and French crew members.

When the film was first edited and being prepared for the Venice film festival, Joe Levine refused to accept it and shell out the final installment of his share of the financing because there was not enough nudity with Bardot. He demanded that nude scenes be added at the beginning, the middle and the end. Needless to say Godard was not initially receptive to Levine's input, particularly since Bardot's character is dead at the end of the film. Godard offered to take his name off the film so the producers could do whatever they wanted with it. After a month of rather public negotiations during which the producers threatened to re-edit the film, Godard agreed to shoot three additional scenes to enable Beauregard and Ponti to collect from Levine. Brody relates the juiciest version of this whole story and says that, when Godard agreed to shoot additional scenes, he insisted on $20,000 build a set duplicating exactly the apartment in Rome where the scenes between Bardot and Piccoli had been filmed. Godard expected that the demand would discourage them from requiring the new scenes, but the producers agreed. Brody also says that Bardot required the use of a body double for some shots, but concedes that Godard did not really confirm this. When the new scenes were shot, Coutard was no longer available Alain Levent was the cameraman.

The first new scene is the prologue with Bardot and Piccoli in bed. The second was a series of shots for the flashback montage which includes a "centerfold" shot of Bardot on the white rug. The third was a scene in a bedroom of the villa on Ca-

pri, which was not used in the final version of the film. It had Bardot nude on the bed as the Jack Palance character put on his clothes, and presumably would have been inserted between the scene where Paul sees Camille kiss Prokosch and the scene in the main room of the villa when Paul announces his decision not to work on the movie.[56]

Joe Levine was not the only person who felt the additional scenes improved the film, and even Godard said that he liked them and would have fought to keep them in the film if censors had objected to them.[57] The prologue was a direct response to Levine's request that there be a love scene with Bardot nude at the beginning of the film. It is as though Godard said, "You want a nude Bardot scene? I'll give you a nude Bardot scene!" and proceeded to comply with the letter of the law without violating the spirit of the film or his own sensibility. The scene is stylized by the use of a color effect which makes it appear as though much of the scene was shot through either a red or a blue filter. (This effect could have been added in the printing of the scene in the lab and at least one version of the film distributed on tape in the US attempted to remove it.) The entire scene is a single three-minute-fifteen-second shot. It starts with a wide shot of the Camille and Paul on the bed, moves into a closer shot of them, and then the camera moves down and back up Bardot's

"I don't know. Maybe I'll go to Mom's. I don't know what I'll do later."
"Come pick me up if you want Around 4 o'clock. At Cinecittà. I have to see that American."
"Maybe I will. See my feet in the mirror?"
"Yes."
"Think they're pretty?"
"Yes. Very."
"You like my ankles?"
"Yes."
"And my kneess, too?"
"Yes, I really like your knees." And my thighs?"
"Your thighs, too."
"See my behind in the mirror?"
"Yes"
"Do you think I have a cute ass?"
"Yes, really."
"Shall I get on my knees?"
"No need to."
"And my breasts. You like them?"
"Yes, tremendously."
"Gently, Paul. Not so hard."
"Sorry."
"Which do you like better, my breasts or my mipples?: […]

"The you love me totally."
"Yes. I love you totally, tenderly, tragically."
"Me too, Paul."

56 Marie *Le Mépris* 19f

57 French Television Interview on DVD]

body. The first section of the scene is red until the camera begins moving down Bardot's body and the filter effect is removed. Once the camera is back close on Camille and Paul's faces, the scene is filtered blue. Viewed in the context of the dispute over the film, the scene seems almost in your face as though Godard is thumbing his nose at the producers. He teases them by partially obscuring the nude Bardot with a heavy red filter and then as the camera starts moving down her body, the filter is removed as though all the lights came on in order for Joe Levine to get his fill of Bardot's backside.

For a normal viewer of the film, however, the scene is striking in a very different way. Some commentators describe the scene in terms of a red, white and blue color scheme that is a reference to the colors of the French flag and a nod to the fact that Bardot was a national treasure. This particular reading would never have occurred to me unassisted, and I confess I find it a bit forced. Certainly the entire film is conceived in terms of bold primary colors and retrospectively the color cast for the opening may seem appropriate, but the immediate impact of the use of the filters is surely something else. My own response may be idiosyncratic, but it is not surprisingly what interests me most.

Coming after the voice-over credits and the shot of the camera pointing directly at the audience, the cut to a scene in a bedroom looking as though it were shot through a red filter, first of all, confirms once again that I the viewer am in the hands of a filmmaker who feels free from the normal conventions of filmmaking. He is using the resources of the medium in his own way. There is secondly the association of red light with a bordello which surely plays a role in a response to this image. Needless to say the dialogue as well as the discrete framing and the fact that Piccoli is fully dressed undercut this association. There is a kind of shock when the red filter effect is removed for no readily apparent reason other than the viewer's interest in seeing Bardot's body more clearly. I think the shock is related to a (male) viewer's realization of his own "prurient" interest in the scene and serves as a reminder of the extent to which films rely on sexual images for their appeal. When the blue filter is introduced, there is an exponential increase in the sense of stylistic freedom and self-consciousness. The net effect is the sort of exhiliration that I often feel with Godard's stylistic touches even when they seem completely arbitrary to me. Godard himself said of it in one interview:

> The fact of the nudity doesn't go against the film, which is not erotic; quite the contrary. That Bardot should be shown at the beginning of the story was possible, even normal, since at that point it was she who undressed. She was not yet Camille, the touching, intelligent, sincere wife of the screenwriter Paul Javal, who at some point says – and it was a complete coincidence – "In life you see women dressed; but in the cinema you see them nude." In other conditions I would have refused to shoot

> this scene, but here, I shot is in a certain color, I lit it with red and blue so that it became something else, so that it had an aspect more unreal and more profound, more serious than simply Brigitte Bardot on a bed. I wanted to transfigure it since the cinema ought to transfigure reality.[58]

The dialogue is a distillation of an important aspect of Paul and Camille's marriage and foreshadows the story of its dissolution. It begins with an exchange that makes it clear that this is just another ordinary day in the life of a couple. She's not sure what her plans are for the day; he suggests she come pick him up at the studio at four o'clock. Then Camille begins asking Paul if he likes/loves various parts of her body. Needless to say Paul likes all aspects of Bardot's body, and Camille then draws the conclusion that he loves her completely. In other words we have begun the movie with a question about what it means to love a woman and whether a person is more than the sum total of all his or her body parts.

Paul agrees that he loves her totally: "Yes, I love you totally, tenderly, tragically." She responds, "Me too, Paul." We have no idea why their love is tragic, but we can certainly feel from the music over the last part of this scene as well as the music over the opening credits that we are about to watch a tragedy.

There are other minor points suggested by the dialogue in this scene. Obviously Camille needs to feel she is loved, and she reveals some degree of insecurity. She also reveals that she must be handled gently when she says, "Gently, Paul; not so hard" as he starts to pull her closer and kiss her. She is, however, anxious to offer herself to Paul at least visually by offering to sit up on her knees so that he can see her better. It is perhaps significant that she is concerned purely with her visible aspect and that she asks if he can see her in the mirror. In terms of the metaphorical resonances of their relationship it may be worth noting that the human mind as the "mirror of nature" is a traditional metaphor in Western philosophy and part of what 20th century European philosophy has sought is a way to rid itself of visual metaphors at the foundation of its conception of reality. This theme of voyeurism is reprised as Paul looks at the book of erotic art.

It would be a mistake to assume that this opening scene is intended to be critical of Camille in any way or to force a feminist reading onto it in terms of the way Camille conceives herself as a sexual object. I think Godard and the film love Camille/Bardot as totally as Paul does. If there is a tragic dimension to that love, it is not her fault.

The second nude scene Levine demanded was a sex scene between Paul and Camille in the middle of the film. Brody cites an interview in which Godard commented on his reaction to this request:

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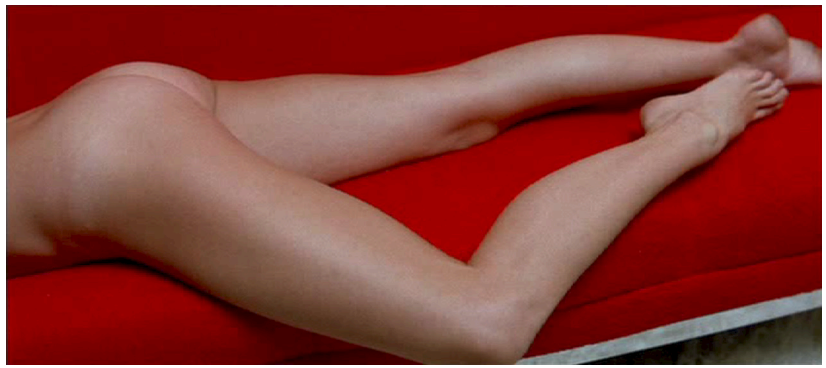
58 Marie 20

> As for the Piccoli-Bardot scene in the middle of the film, it appeared to me almost impossibly absurd, because *Contempt* is precisely the story of a woman who detaches herself from her husband and refuses to sleep with him in the conjugal bed! So I refused to do this scene, but I said to them: "You've given me an idea; I'm going to do something the opposite of what you want which will please you nonetheless."[59]

The solution may have been even more inspired than the stylization of the prologue. Godard already had a nude shot of Bardot in the middle of the film: the moment in the argument where she lies down on the couch and sarcastically agrees to make love. The shot was a wide shot in which Bardot's body is partially obscured by the couch, and it is only a matter of seconds before Paul covers her back up with her towel. This is also the point in the argument where Godard

59 Brocy p. 169



intended to have the characters express their feelings directly. He might well have originally imagined having the actors directly address the camera as they do in some of his other films. The idea he hit upon was to use subjective flashbacks along with interior voice-overs. He was able to shoot what amounted to a cinematic Playmate spread of Camille, combining posed nudity with glimpses from her everyday life. There are 10 cuts in the montage. Six are presumably from new shots or outtakes. Four are from other scenes in the film, including a flash forward to a scene on the roof of the villa on Capri. All of it reads as Paul's memories/fantasies about the way things used to be with Camille. Levine got his fullscreen CinemaScope nude shots of Bardot on a fur rug; the average viewer got an overwhelming sense of the sexual longing and loss scrambling Paul's brain.

I suspect that the decision to include the flashback montage in the middle of the argument had a ripple effect on the editing of the film and led to the decision to include two other subjective montages: one consisting of six cuts when Camille sees Francesca arrive after Paul at Prokosch's Roman villa, and the other with five cuts after Paul goes inside to wash his hands. Both are presented as Camille's memories/fantasies so there is more or less a balance between the Paul and Camille in terms of the number of cuts in the montages allo-

The first montage of flashbacks comes when Camille sees Francesca arrive later then Paul. It includes four shots which appear to be pickups specifically for use in the montage. The other three cuts are associated with Camille's response to Prokosch's invitation to come with him in the car and Paul's encouragement of her to do so.

The second montage comes after Paul goes inside to wash his hands. It also focuses mainly on the fact that Paul sent her ahead with Prokosch, but it includes a cut of the moment when Paul met Francesca at the studio. While this is a moment in which Camille was not literally present, it nonetheless functions as an indication of the turmoil in her mind, perhaps by suggesting that she is imagining the moment when Paul and Francesca met and by strenghthening the connection between Paul and Francesca and the fact that Paul offered her to Prokosch.

cated to each. The fact that the subjective montages associated with Camille come before the montage in the argument scene helps set up the later montage. The flashcuts associated with Camille's may catch the viewer a little by surprise, but it is perfectly clear how they are intended to be viewed. They are more momentary associations which indicate some of the turmoil going on beneath Camille's contained surface and do not carry the weight of the montage in the middle of the argument.

The Visual Style

Lang's *Odyssey* is being filmed in Scope as is *Contempt*. Paul expresses enthusiasm for the wide screen format, and Lang says it is suitable only for snakes and funerals. Godard himself preferred the 2.35: 1 Scope aspect ratio to the conventional 1.66:1 ratio which had replaced the traditional 1.33:1 aspect ratio in Europe after the introduction of television.

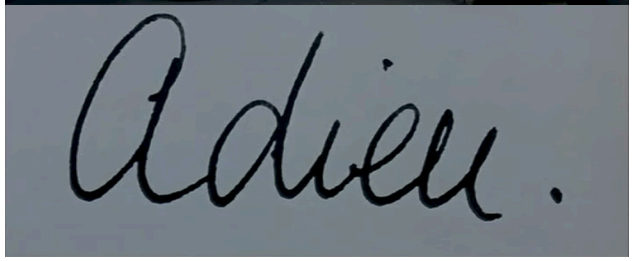
> With *Une Femme est une Femme*, I also discovered 'Scope. I think it is the normal ratio, and 1:33 an arbitrary one. This is why I like 1:33 – because it is arbitrary. 'Scope, on the other hand, is a ratio in which you can shoot anything. 1:33 isn't, but is extraordinary. 1:66 is worthless. I don't like the intermediate ratios. I thought of using 'Scope for *Vivre sa Vie*, but didn't because it is too emotional. 1:33 is harder, more severe. I'm sorry, though, that I didn't use 'Scope for *A Bout de Souufle*.[60]

In the interview on the DVD for Contempt Raoul Coutard describes how Godard had wanted to shoot the film with a Techniscope camera. Techniscope was a new process at the time based on a movement in the camera which pulled down two perforations rather than four for each frame. It permitted a film to be shot with a 2.35:1 aspect ratio without the use of anamorphic lenses and had the advantage of requiring half as much raw stock for photography. Avoiding anamorphic lenses eliminated the distortion at the edges of the frame which were characteristic of the early Cinemascope lenses. It also permitted a much greater depth of field for a given amount of light, although it tended to make the film grain more apparent because of the smaller area the image occupied on the film. Coutard remarks that Godard always loved new technology, but it is also clear that Techniscope would have been well suited to the style in which he shot *Contempt*. Unfortunately there was no Techniscope camera available when they needed to shoot, so the film was shot with anamorphic lenses. The lenses used were Franscope lenses and included anamorphic zoom lens. Franscope was an improvement over the original CinemaScope system. Both employed a separate anamorphic lens in front of the normal camera lens. With the original CinemaScope system each lens had to be focused separately. Franscope de-

60 Godard 183

signed the anamorphic element for a specific lens which was set at its hyperfocal distance so that the camera operator only had to focus the anamorphic element. Franscope also introduced one of the first anamporphic zoom lenses, but shooting a zoom with a camera like that used on Contempt was awkward because it was not a reflex camera and the operator's viewfinder did not show the effect of the zoom.

Despite Lang's objections to the scope format as suitable only for snakes or funerals, Godard and Coutard make it seem like the natural format for a film.


Adieu.

Coutard also makes it clear that the film was designed from the very beginning around the use of saturated, primary colors. Originally it was intended to be printed with the Technicolor dye-imbibition process in order to get the most vivid, saturated colors; but the producers decided the film did not warrant making the 100 prints required for a minimum Technicolor order.[61]

The frequent use of vivid primary colors is probably the most striking thing about *Contempt* visually. It almost seems on some abstract level to be a Mondrian painting. It is difficult to pinpoint the emotional impact of the use of color or the way it augments the narrative dimension of the film. The dominant color is surely red, but the use of yellow, blue and white contribute to create a sense of a palette of predominantly saturated primary colors. The main function of these colors aside from the association of red with sexual passion, I believe, is to set up a contrast between the contemporary human world and the natural world. The natural world is primarly greenery, rocky cliffs, ocean and sky. The blue of the sky and ocean is intense, but it does not have the purity or saturation of the artificial colors in the furniture in the screening room or the villa on Capri.

There is also a contrast between the vivid colors in a movie and color in the natural world suggested by the shots of Ulysses, Penelope and Antinous in the dailies. The original treatment had called for an even more striking contrast between the photography of the *Odyssey* and that of the film itself:

> The scenes of the *Odyssey* itself, that is the scenes shot by Fritz Lang as his character, will not be shot in the same way as the film itself.
>
> The colors will be more brilliant, more violent, more vivid, more contrasty, more schematic.. One could say that the effect will be of a painting by Matisse or Braque in the middle of a composition by Fragonard or a shot by Eisenstein in a film by Rouch.

The treatment had described the photography of the film itself in terms of newsreels shot in color and obviously the conception of the photography evolved before the film was shot.

I doubt that it is possible to "interpret" consistently the use of color in *Contempt* schematically in terms of thematic elements or narrative motifs.

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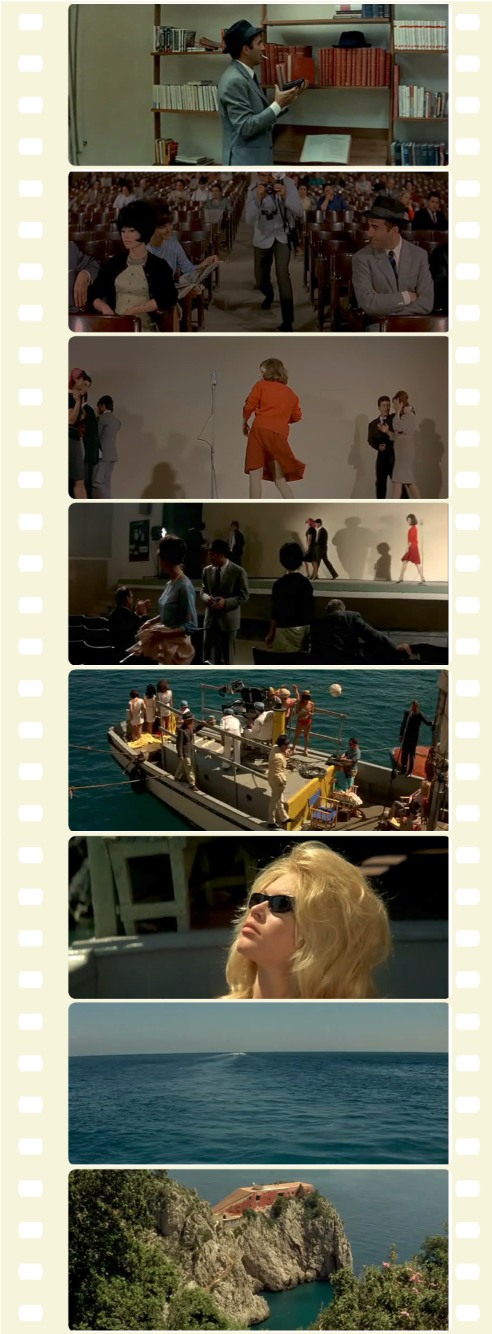
61 Coutard tells an ironic story about the color in the dailies made by a lab in Rome. They were not able to print them onto Eastman Kodak print stock and the Italian print film they used had flat, desaturated colors in comparison to Eastman Kodak print film. At first Godard and Coutard were appalled by the look of the film, but the lab was able to assure them that a Technicolor print would have the look they wanted and Coutard manged to get some Kodak print stock so that the first few days could be printed onto it. Godard and Coutard were sufficiently reassured that they went ahead viewing dailes printed on the Italian stock. By the time the film was edited and first printed on Kodak print stock, they were so accustomed to the look of the Italian print that they hated the bright saturated colors in the Kodak print. Eventually they became accustomed to it, though, and realized it was the look they had always wanted for the film


HATARI!



Red is initially the color of Prokosch's Alfa Romeo, and blue is the color of the furniture in the screening room. The editor taking notes wears a blue lab coat, and Lang wears a dark blue suit. Camille is also wearing premonimantly blue when she arrives at the studio. Francesca wears a mustard or gold sweater until she changes into a red sweater as Paul starts to flirt with her. There is a bright red love seat next to Paul and Camille as he tries to amuse her. Later Francesca changes into a pale blue blouse and white skirt. At Capri she wears a bright yellow robe.

Camille wears a red towel for much of the scene in the apartment and the red furniture is surely the dominant color in the scene. Camille changes into a green dress with a black sweater and a black wig by the end of the scene. At Capri she wears a gray skirt with a pastel pink and gray blouse or a bright yellow robe. There appears to be a slight discontinuity in that the robe next to her on the deck while she is sunbathing is red, but the robe she has on after she stands up off-camera is yellow like the one worn by Francesca. By the end of the film Prokosch has changed out of his gray suit into a bright red sweater. The railing next to the service station appears to have been painted red to match the car; and of course, the blood on Camille after the accident is bright red.

Beyond this I am inclined to let the colors speak for themselves.

Although the film is entirely shot on actual locations, it is clear that choice and redecoration of the locations was driven by formal or stylistic concerns similar to those behind the color scheme. Since "homecoming" may be regarded as one of the themes in the film, it may be worth taking a brief look at the three homes in the film: Paul and Camille's apartment, Prokosch's Roman villa and the villa on Capri.

Paul and Camille's apartment is unfinished and still partially unfurnished, but it is by no means a sterile, inhospitable environment one might expect from some descriptions of Godard's films.

> Godard's world is a very special one: it is urban, transient, grey. In his films the country is simply a space you have to go through to get to another city. The one important exception to this rule is the idyll on the island of Porquerolles in *Pierrot le Fou*, but of course it is just that – an idyll, and one which, given his other films, one knew to be doomed. And so it was.
>
> His city is Paris, and it is the Paris of hotel rooms, chambres de bonnes, and, above all, cafés, with their pin-ball machines and the endless conversations nursing the lait chaud against the inevitable moment when one has to go out on the streets or back to the dreary hotel room. So one drinks, and eats, and talks; one stands at the bar or sits down at a table. No one in his films has a flat, a home. Or if

> they do, they have either just moved in or are just about to move out. In *Contempt* the Roman flat of Camille and Paul has got barely a few sticks of furniture, no curtains, no carpets.... [62]

Roud either considered *Contempt* a very atypical work or he viewed it through the lens of his need to write a coherent narrative about Godard's oeuvre. Not only does he completely ignore the Romantic image of the natural world in *Contempt*, but I believe he misreads the presentation of the apartment. I realize that most commentators want to see the apartment as a sterile enviornment, but it has never affected me in that way.

Both Paul and Camille express pleasure at the sight of their apartment, and its exterior is photographed in a way to make it about as attractive as a high rise apartment can be. There is also a modulation in the music when they look up a the apartment that seems to imply a positive reaction. Paul mentions a "horror" being built across the street, and the implication is that he genuinely likes their own apartment. It is furnished with a spare, modern aesthetic, but there is art included in the décor; and the dining area, kitchen and bath all seem comfortably domestic in a mid-century modern style. The floors are not all unfinished. In fact the living room floor seems to be a fairly nice parquet floor, and it has a white shag rug under the sitting area. There are what appear

The neighborhood does seem to have gone downhill a little by they time they leave after the argument.

62 Roud p. 16

to be fresh cut flowers in two vases in opposite corners. There are in fact curtains hanging in the bedroom. There is plenty of light in the apartment thanks to the large windows, one of which has a view overlooking trees in something like a park. There is a balcony off the living room. The bathroom is spacious and modern. Paul has a separate study where he can write. There is also another room with a large ladder in it that may be a second bedroom. Other than the fact that it is an apartment in a large building, whether one finds it appealing or sterile is surely a matter of taste.

The only negative association with the apartment is the money required to pay for it. The fact that it is unfinished is a reference to the money, but it also has connotations of nest building in process which do not necessarily seem negative. Clearly the apartment is associated with the love that Paul and Camille have for each other, and the unfinished aspect of the apartment may be connected to the way in which that love is in jeopardy.

Prokosch's Roman villa on the Appian Way was originally rented by the production for Bardot to stay in. When she decided to stay in a more centrally located apartment instead the villa was used to house the crew and serve as Prokosch's home. It seems to have a history, but the kitschy décor seems to reveal an inauthentic relationship to history. The past is being used, perhaps even abused, much in the way Prokosch envisions using Roman erotic art to add spice to his film of the Odyssey.

Much of the scene at the villa takes place outside in the garden. The move from the studio to the Roman villa anticipates the move from Rome to Capri. The garden is a tamed version of the natural world which is much more hospitable than the cliffs of Capri, but it is also the place where the conflict between Camille and Paul emerges. It is perhaps an ironic Garden of Eden.

As a place in the story the villa is associated with Prokosch's predatory interest in Camille, his abuse of Francesca, Paul's betrayal of Camille and Camille's pain and anger. The only one who seems comfortable there is Prokosch, and it seems more a lair or den than a home. As Paul and Camille leave the iron gate closes behind them and Camille reacts to seeing Prokosch kick Francesca. The walled villa seems almost like a prison in which Prokosch is holding Francesca hostage.

The villa on Capri seems more like a fortress or a temple than a home. The sparse interior seems colder than Paul and Camille's apartment, due largely to the predominance of blue in the sparse furniture. There is an iron gate on the door which suggests a prison. The steps leading up to the roof conjure up associations with steps to a sacrificial site in a Mayan complex. There can be no question that the location and design of this villa is inspired and inspiring, but in the context

of the film it has a decidedly inhuman aspect. It seems to stand in defiance of nature. If it is a reference to the past, it is a past within which the characters are imprisoned and being prepared for sacrifice.

The Use of Camera

After the use of color the most striking thing about the visual style of Contempt is surely the way in which Godard stages the scenes for a moving camera rather than relying on editing. There are 12 shots in the film which are over two minutes long and another 16 which are over one minute. The entire film consists of only 177 cuts including the title cards.[63]

The most famous use of the moving camera is the scene in which the camera moves back and forth past the lamp for close-ups of Paul and Camille during the argument in the apartment. This is a obvious example of the way in which Godard knows rules are meant to be broken. Conventional rules for film directing would insist that time spent on the lamp between the two of them was irrelevant and that one should cut back and forth between the two close-ups. Godard knew that the time spent on the lamp would not only increase the sense of the separation of the lovers but would also permit the lamp to take on some kind of symbolic value. Paul arbitrarily switches the lamp on and off during their "talk" just as Camille had switched a wall lamp on and off as she spoke to Paul on her way to the powder room in Prokosch's villa. According to Coutard the moves in this shot were not planned specifically before the camera rolled, and Godard initiated each move by tapping the dolly grip on the shoulder as they shot. I think this is another instance in which a slightly arbitrary feel to a stylistic

63 Just for the sake of comparison Figgis' version of *The Browning Version* has 1120 cuts and Asquith's version has 390

touch enhances a sense of the reality of what one is watching. Godard obviously knew what he was interested in seeing as the scene unfolded, but the shot also has a life of its own.

Much of the use of moving camera, however, is relatively conventional, and *Contempt* is a case study in elegant and efficient choreography of actors and camera. In many instances the movement of the camera and of the actors in and out of the frame is so natural that one may not even be aware of it. The viewer is simply swept along.

The first example of this are the two long tracking shot at the studio when Paul arrives and Francesca takes him to meet Prokosch. The first is one minute forty-seven seconds long; the second two minutes twenty-five seconds. Both involve what I estimate to be well over 100 feet of dolly track. The track for first shot is the track seen in the credit shot, but the camera is going the opposite direction in the credit shot. The second shot is essentially an extension of the first so that the beginning of the track has been moved to a point beyond the end for the first shot. The transition between the two is a cut with a pan on Paul's movements so that the second shot is a reverse angle and tracks from right to left rather than left to right. The transition also corresponds to the point in the scene where Prokosch actually begins to speak to Paul rather than simply declaiming and ignoring him. Francesca had led Paul and the camera in the first shot. Now Prokosch takes

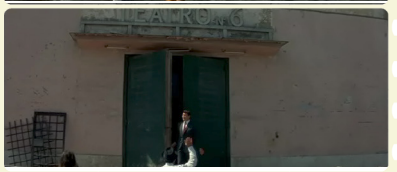
"Hello. How are you?"
"Fine , thanks."

"Say, what's going on here? The place is empty."
"Jerry fired nearly everybody. Italian cinema is in trouble."
"Where is he?"
"Over there."
"Where?"

"Jerry? … Jerry!"

"Jerry!"

"Jerry!"










"Only yesterday, there were kings here. Kings and queens, liars and lovers…"

"…all kinds of real human beings, and all the real human emotions."

"Yesterday I sold this land…"

"…and now they're going to build a five and ten cent store, a prux-unique' …"

"…on this, my last kingdom."

"It's the end of the cinema."

"I don't think cinema will ever die.."

"They tell me that you wrote that wonderful successful motion picture Toto Against Hercules*."*

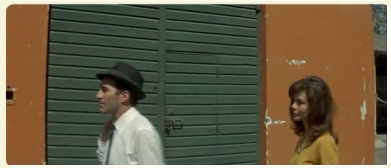
"Yes."
"It's doing good business in New York."
"Fair to middling."

"Oh you don't have to be modest with me; I don't believe in modesty."







"…I believe in pride. I believe in the pride in making good films."

"So you know the Odyssey*?"*

"Your film with Fritz Lang?"
"No! …"

"…I've already lost the studio; now I'm going to lose my shirt because of him. …"

"Why did you hire him?"
"Because the Odyssey needs a German director. Anybody knows that a German, Schliemann, discovered Troy."

"So what must I do?"

"I want you to write some new scenes for the Odyssey…not just sex, but more…more.

"Producers are all the same. They never know what they want."

"To know that one does not know is the gift of the superior spirit. Not ot know and to think that one does know…"

"…is a mistake. To know that this is a mistake keeps one from making it."

"I have the knowledge here."
"I don't believe Lang will accept it."
"This is my money…"
"In '33 Goebbels asked Lang to head the German film industry and that very night Lang left Germany."

"But this is not '33; this is '63. And he will direct whatever was written, just as I know that you are going to write it."
"Why?"

"I will tell you in the projection room."

"Come. It's this way."

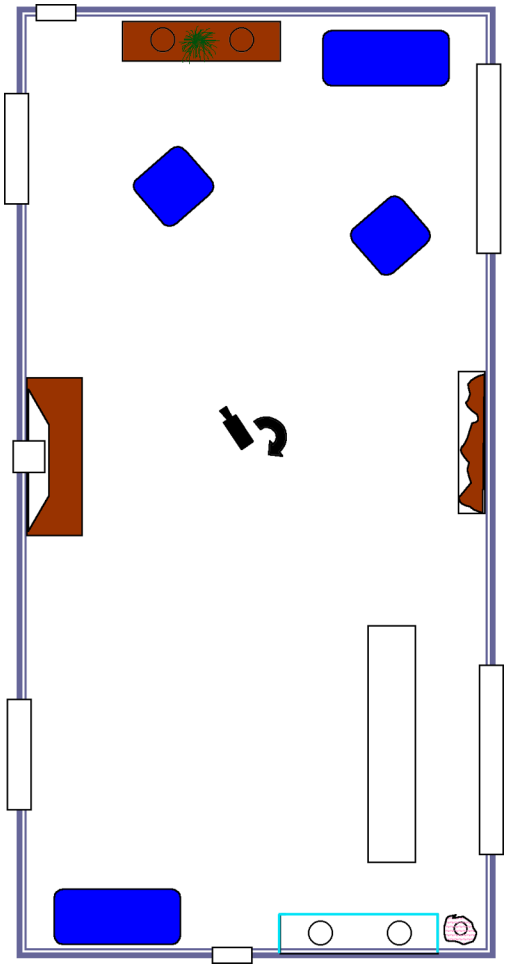
over and leads the way until he gets into his car to drive to the screening room.

The two shots are also good examples of the way in which Godard and Coutard compose the scope frame. The first shot frames Paul and Francesca comfortably in a full figure shot that enables the camera to reveal the deserted studio around them. It then tilts up to frame for Prokosch's entrance as he comes out of the huge doors to the stage onto the loading dock above Francesca and Paul. The loading dock becomes his stage from which he announces the demise of the studio, and we see only the heads of his audience in the bottom of the frame. Prokosch is able to move back and forth within the frame above Paul and Francesca.

The second shot is composed more tightly but the frame still permits the characters to occupy different positions relative to each other. The initial pan enables a kind of complementary medium shot of Paul and reverse angle on Prokosch achieved by movement of the camera and the actors rather than cutting.

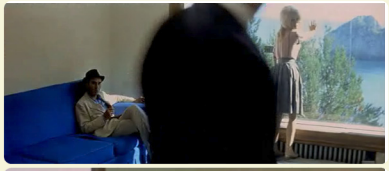
The longest continuous shot in the movie is the 4-minute-and-21-second scene in the villa at Capri after Paul has seen Camille kiss Prokosch. It takes place in the grand salon of the villa which is 60 feet long and 30 feet wide with four large windows offering a panoramic view of the ocean and the island. There is a large hearth with crystal panes at the back permitting one to see the ocean through the fireplace on one side of the room between two windows and a large piece of bas relief between the windows on the wall opposite it. There are couches at each end of the room.

During the course of one shot the viewer sees all four walls of the room as the camera pans perhaps 300 degrees and dollies slightly following the action around the room. Except for the moment when Prokosch invites Camille to see the view through the fireplace, the camera is following Paul as he enters and paces around the room. It is, of course, mainly Paul's scene as he rants about the effect of money on people's lives and his own ambitions to write for the theater. All the main characters are involved in the scene plus a servant who is putting out china and silver for a buffet. Paul and Lang enter at one end where they have come up the stairs from the entrance. The are presumably followed shortly by Francesca who came into the house with them but whom we do not see entering the room. Soon after Lang has taken a seat and Paul starts pacing, Camille and Prokosch enter through a door at the opposite end of the room. Lang and Francesca remain seated throughout the discussion until they finally get up to leave the room. Most of the "action" consists of either Paul or Prokosch moving to and from the couch and various windows. Paul manages to separate Camille from Prokosch and she is the first to leave. Prokosch leaves summoning Lang to follow him and Francesca exits just ahead of Lang.



"Paul, what will you have to drink?"
"I was there, outside. … Nothing."

"Camille, come here I want to show you something."



"Look how beautiful, the sea, the trees, the rocks, the boats…"

"I've decided not to write the script you want."
"Why?

"May I be frank?"
"Ah, Paul, you can always be frank with me."

"I'm a playwright. I'm not a screenwriter. …"

"Even if it's a fine script…I'm being frank, …"

"…I'd do it only for the money!"

"That's why I'm in a bad mood."

"We all have an ideal. Mine's writing plays. I can't. Why? In today's world, we have to accept what others want."

"Why does money matter so much in what we do, …"

"…in what we are, in what we become? Even in our relationships with those we love. …"

"He is right. Either you do Homer's Odyssey or you don't do it at all."

Mr. Prokosch already said it: You're wrong.

"You aspire to a world like Homer's You want it to exist, but unfortunately it doesn't."

"Why not? It does!"
"No!"

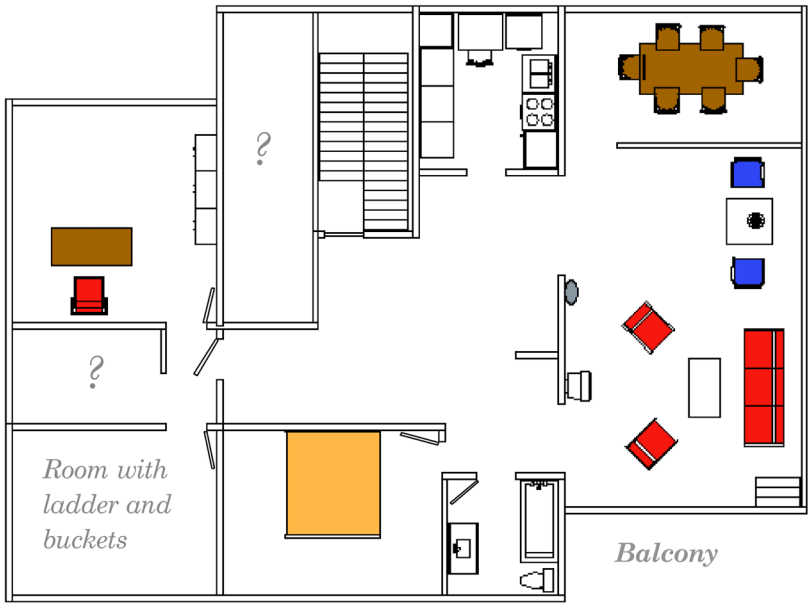
"You may be right, but when it comes to making movies dreams aren't enough."

"When do we eat?"
"In an hour."
"I'm going for a walk."

"Mr. Lang…"
"Mr. Prokosch wants to speak with you."
"Where're my shoes!"

"Is that an order or a request?"
"A request."

"One must suffer."



The size and arrangement of the room permits Godard to capture what amount to several small separate scenes in one continuous take. The choreography of the shot consists mainly of Paul trying to put himself next to Camille or between Camille and Prokosch and then wandering off to isolate himself from everyone. Each time when Paul moves closer to her, Camille eventually moves away from him. She moves first to an empty corner of the room. Paul pursues her, and she accepts Prokosch's invitation to look at the view through the fireplace. Paul sits down between them, and she gets up to go sit on the couch across from where Lang is seated. When Paul finally settles on the window ledge close to Camille's end of the couch, she asks how soon they will eat and exits saying she is going for a walk.

The hallways and smaller rooms of the apartment offer a completely different challenge or opportunity. Normally the scope format might not seem well suited to filming an argument between two people in the relatively confined space of an actual apartment, but the flooplan of the apartment seems almost as though it were designed for Godard to shoot in, so well does he use the space. Often the camera is positioned in the central hallway so that it can see Paul and Camille moving between the kitchen, dining area, living room, bathroom and hallway to Paul's study by simply panning around with only the minimum amount of dolly movement. Only eight of the 31 shots in the apartment actually involve a dolly move and two of these are the short shots of Camille and

Paul as they start to leave the apartment. Even though the camera is often completely static there is never any sense that it is restricted even when the actors exit frame or are obscured by a hallway wall as they move about.

The first shot in the sequence is a one-minute-fifty-second dolly shot which manages gradually to reveal most of the apartment. Paul and Camille enter, and she goes into the kitchen while goes first to the living room and then to his study (both times exiting frame). When he returns to the living room and Camille brings the book in to put on the coffee table, the camera follows her so that we get to see both the small table with the lamp on it and the couch in the main area of the living room. The camera then moves laterally so that we can see her going towards the bedroom (exiting frame) and Paul standing in the hall as he follows her.

The boldest shot is actually a completely static frame which is held for 2 minutes and 3 seconds while Camille starts to take a bath (off screen) and Paul answers the phone when her mother calls. The camera is in the living room looking through

The first shot in the apartment reveals the kitchen, the dining area, the hallway to Paul's study, the living room, and the bathroom.

It also introduces the metal sculpture of the girl who is a virtual third party in the procedings, a metal shell of a woman, a passive observer caught in the middle, perhaps a young goddess unable to intervene.

a doorway to one of the hallways and at the door to the bedroom across the hall. Much of the action takes in the bedroom and is visible only through two doorways. At one point for almost 6 seconds neither character is visible but we know what is going on. We can also imagine Joe Levine wondering why we don't see Bardot getting into the tub after she has thrown her towel to Piccoli.

Perhaps the most striking single compostion in the sequence is one in which the apartment is clearly coming between Camille and Paul.

Another striking moment is the way Godard shoots the couple kissing after Paul has slapped Camille. Godard uses closeups rather sparingly in *Contempt*. This adds to the impact of the closeup of Camille reacting to the slap and then turning towards Paul as they apologize to each other. Paul enters the frame and just as he is about to kiss her Godard cuts away to a shot of their feet and legs from the knees down. Camille raises one of her feet between Paul's legs and it is up to the viewer to imagine the kiss. Godard only cuts back to a full figure shot as Camille pulls away and extricates herself from Paul's arms.

Later in Paul's study Camille leans over to give Paul a kiss, but they are interrupted by the sound of the phone ringing when Prokosch calls.[64]

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64 The only time in the movie when we actually see Camille and Paul kiss each other is when she arrives at the studio and they embrace right after Prokosch drives between them. She gives him a peck on the cheek earlier in his study

The lights go down in the theater as Prokosch asks Camille why she isn't saying anything.

Contempt is, at least to my eye, filled with one striking shot after the other. In almost every frame the composition, color, and movement combine in varying degrees with a metaphorical dimension of the image to engage the viewer. There is also in many images a degree of self-consciousness, which is both witty and dead serious and which makes the viewer's engagement with the images and the story more complex. We may be watching a tragic and pathetic collapse of a marriage as well as a funeral for traditional filmmaking or even for the whole of Western culture, but the experience is somehow exhilarating because of the way the movie looks.

I am convinced this shot is designed to make a location shot look like a process shot.

and he gives her a gentle kiss on the side of her head outside the movie theater.

Bardo as Anna Karina, Piccoli as Dean Martin

In 1963 few films dared to shoot night-for-night in color and let an international star be engulfed in darkness.

French critics are wont to see all kinds of significance in the decision of whether to use cuts or a moving camera, and Godard himself is notorious for having said, "A tracking shot is a moral act." In 1968 when someone asked him to elaborate on that and to comment on the tracking shots in *Contempt*, he said:

> Well, it's not only a joke, but it's about people who separate style and content. We of the *Cahiers du Cinéma* never thought like that. We always thought style and content are one. That's why we say technique has to do with morals, because when style and content are one you can't say artificial things.[65]

I have to confess I don't find that very helpful, however noble and irrefutable it may be. The only kind of work I can imagine in which style and content are completely merged is an abstract painting, a piece of music and perhaps a poem. I do understand that the meaning of Moravia's novel is completely dependent upon the rhetorical means by which he puts the reader inside Molteni's mind, and in fairness to Godard (who was being interviewed in English in this case) I can see that ultimately the "content" of a work is its "meaning". Nonetheless I am inclined to view the shooting style of *Contempt* primarily as a rhetorical device. There is too much narrative content in the film for it to be viewed purely in formalist terms.

65 Interviews - Youngblood p. 46

I love the effect of a moving camera when it is properly used, and I get very annoyed by senseless arbitrary camera movement. Aside from *Last Year At Marienbad*, the film in which I love the camera movements the most is *The Conformist*. *The Conformist* is for me an operatic film, and the moving camera sings arias which I dare not attempt to analyze. The moving camera in *Contempt* seems to me to be a different kind of rhetoric. Strangely enough the camera move that I probably find the most affecting is also probably the most conventional. It is the move in to a close-up of Paul as he views the dailes and recites the lines from Dante. This is exactly the same convention that Figgis employed for the move in on Andrew as he began to explain his marriage, although the moment in *Contempt* is a great deal more powerful. In this case the camera move towards a character provides both a sense that one is entering the inner reality of that character and a sense that ones moorings have been severed to allow an ascent into a transcendent realm. The moves on the statues in the dailies are also strangely affecting,[66] largely because of the music but also because of the compositions of the shots.

Most of the camera movments in *Contempt*, though, seem to me to be a beautifully elegant way of advancing and enhancing the narrative. The tracking shots of Paul, Francesca and Prokosch

66 The shot of Neptune semms to be a zoom rather than a dolly and the movement of the head of Athena is caused by rotating the statue not moving the camera.

provide an energy which pulls the viewer into the film as well as enabling us to see the environment and to watch the dynamics of the relationships being established through body language and choreography. The tracking shots in the apartment pull us into a private world and let it unfold. They also make us feel we are literally tracking these two creatures in order to observe their behavior in their natural habitat. More than the movement of the camera, I think the length of the shots contributes to an enhanced sense of reality, and in this case I think Godard is validating some aspects of Bazin's insights.

Godard's comments on "point-of-view" in *mise-en-scène* make more sense to me than his descriptions of camera movement. As his treatment indicated he approached the shooting of *Contempt* in terms of whose point of view was the determining factor at each point. Obviously he is not talking about point of view in the literal sense it has in filmmaking where the camera sees only what the character would see. He is talking about the focus of interest, a point of view more like that of a written narrative in which things are experienced or interpreted as the character would have felt them. The extreme close-up of Camille after she has been slapped, for example, is her point of view on the scene. I doubt that the film can retrospectively be broken down schematically in terms of which point of view is predominant in each scene, but I do think Godard approached the staging and direction with this kind of schema in the back of his mind. I also think he felt free to use whatever

type of shot or scene construction seemed to work best for each moment in the film. The sequence in the apartment may be constructed primarily of long takes many of which have camera movement, but there are also conventional complementary reverse angle medium shots used in the bathroom just as they are used for the scene on the roof of the villa on Capri.

The Use of Music

By far the most powerful aspect of *Contempt* is Georges Delerue's score. Marie describes it as Brahmsian and majesterial. To my ear it conjures up some of the Romantic interpretations of Baroque music which were popular during the Fifties, and I would be inclined to label it elegiac.[67]

Delerue was born in 1925 and studied under Darius Milhaud. He first attracted the attention of filmgoers with a waltz he composed for a scene in *Hiroshima mon Amour* and had his first major success with his score for *Shoot the Piano Player*. He has said of his score for *Contempt*:

> There were two schools at the time of the Nouvelle Vague, a tendency to write music that was extremely close to the action and another that encouraged detachment, keeping a distance with regard to the image. I preferred the second direction.[68]

Given how pervasive the music seems to be, it is surprising to discover that Delerue actually composed only 14 minutes of music for the film. There are 6 tracks on the CD representing the entire score as composed:

1.	Overture	1:51
2.	Camille	2:28
3.	Credits	2:08
4.	Capri	1:44
5.	Paul	2:01
6.	The Rupture at Prokosch's	2:55

"Overture" is used only once over the scene in which Paul and Lang walk back to the villa along the wooded path and discuss the Odyssey.

"Camille" is used once in its entirety over the scene in which Paul and Camille return to their apartment from Prokosch's Roman villa. The first part of it is also used in two other cues.

"Credits" is used first in its entirety over the credit sequence and then portions of it are used in nine other cues.

"Capri" is used 14 times. There is a 13 second intro to it which is never used, but the remaining

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67 Camille's theme reminds me of the adagio movement in Albinoni's Concerto in D minor Opus 9 No. 2 in which a simple melody line soars above a repetitive figure in the strings

68 Liner notes for *Le Mépris* George Delerue. Universal CD 013 477-2

1:33 is used in four places and other sections of it are used in ten more cues.

"Paul" is used once in its entirety for the scene in which Paul goes to find a taxi and arrives late at Prokosch's Roman villa. Portions of it are used in four other places.

Only the first 1:16 of "The Rupture at Prokosch's" is used over the scene in which we first see the Villa on Capri and Camille is on the roof. The remaining 1:39, which includes a very nice interlude featuring the flute and clarinet, is never used.

Some variation of the famous Camille's theme is used in "Capri", "Paul" and "The Rupture at Prokosch's" as well as "Camille". "Capri" is identical to the first part of "Camille" except for the 13 second intro, which is never used, and the ending. The first portion of "The Rupture at Prokosch's" is also virtually identical with the first part of "Camille". There is a section in "Paul" which is a slight variation on Camille's theme, differing mainly in terms of its tonality which seems to have more minor overtones. What this means is that a virtually identical musical theme is used 18 times in the course of the movie. Needless to say the theme, which already involves repetitions of motifs in itself, begins to take on an obssessive or haunting quality as it is repeated 18 times.

The pasage used over the shot of Neptune in the dailies screening is not to be found on the CD, and there are some other bridges or endings in a few cues that I can not find as well. The final chords used over the very ending of the film are also not in the music for the CD. I suspect these passages were recorded as bits to be used in editing but were too short to warrant putting them on the CD.[69]

I have found no detailed description of how Godard worked with composers, but it is clear that he felt free to use the recorded music however he felt worked. I suspect perhaps the fact that only 14 minutes of music were recorded may have been due to a budget limitation, and Godard hit on the repetitive, obsessive way of using the music while the film was being edited.

One clue to Godard's approach to the music may be inferred from the sound editing in the audition scene in the theater. There is dialogue which occurs while the woman is singing. Rather than mix the dialogue and the music in the conventional manner, Godard simply lets the music drop out completely during the dialogue. The result is "unrealistic" and seems at first to be a surprisingly primitive way of editing the sound. It is the sort of thing an editor used to do temporarily when it was not feasible to mix the dialogue and the music in the editing room. Godard like any other director or film editor would have been

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69 The liner notes say nothing about such pieces but there is a section on the website for Delerue in which Stéphane Lerouge talks about the difficulties involved in assembling all the material for the CD reissues of Delerue's work because of the condition of some of the tapes

Music Cues

Start	Scene	Length	Composition
0:00:08	MainTitle	2:06	Credits: (enitre)
0:02:41	Prologue Red	1:33	Capri: 0:13 - 1:46 (end)
0:04:24	Prologue White	0:30	Paul: 0:12 - 0:42
0:04:54	Prologue Blue & Cut	0:32	Paul: 0:22 to 0:32 + Credits: 0:11 to ~0:33
0:11:17	Dailies Ulysses	1:06	Paul 0:00 - 0:34 + Missing Cue
0:12:24	Dailies Neptune	0:18	Missing Cue #1
0:15:29	Dailies Dante	1:16	Credits: 0:11-1:28
0:21:08	Camille Arrives at Studio	0:45	Camille: 0:00 - 0:45
0:23:53	Paul Takes Taxi	1:59	Paul: 0:00 - 2:00 (entire cue)
0:26:40	Camille in Garden Montage1	1:34	Capri: 0:13 - 1:46
0:29:07	Why do you ask that? Montage 2	0:30	Capri: 1:14 - 1:46
0:34:53	Going Home	2:25	Camille: 0:00 - 2:31 (entire cue)
0:39:23	Wig (Capri vacation)	0:46	Capri: 1:00 - 1:46 (last 46 seconds)
0:43:01	Kiss	0:45	Capri: 1:00 - 1:46 (end)
0:44:30	I'm not going	1:33	Capri 0:13 - 1:46 (end)
0:55:28	But fast (Montage 3)	1:34	Capri: 0:13 - 1:46 (end)
0:57:14	My turn now (Montage 3)	1:32	Capri: 0:13 - 1:46 (end)
0:59:40	What would you do	0:44	Capri: 1:10 - 1:46 (end)
1:01:23	Talking of you	0:44	Capri: 1:10 - 1:46 (end)
1:07:33	I despise you	1:23	Paul 0:00 - 0:40 + Credits: 0:11- 1:10 ?? (slightly different ending)
1:13:56	Nothing to say	1:30	Capri 0:13 - 1:46 (end)
1:17:55	Boat to villa	0:45	Capri: 1:10 - 1:46 (end)
1:19:01	Ocean & Path to Villa	1:50	Overture (entire cue)
1:22:15	Villa on cliff	1:16	Rupture 0:00 -1:16 (first part)
1:24:47	Paul reacts to kiss	0:10	Credits: 0:00 - 0:10
1:25:29	Main Room	0:27	Credits: 0:11 - 0:38
1:26:25	Fireplace	0:18	Credits: 0:46 - 1:04
1:26:59	Money	0:35	Credits: 1:28 - 2:03 (ending except for final chord)
1:29:08	Going for walk	0:42	Credits: 1:28 - 2:10
1:33:53	You're the reason	0:46	Capri: 0:59 - 1:45 (ending)
1:35:23	Swim	1:16	Capri: 0:13 - 1:29
1:39:12	Accident & Goodbye	1:25	Camille: 0:00 - 0:55 + Bridge + Credits: 0:11 - 0:46
1:42:28	Silence	0:23	Missing Cue #2

accustomed to hearing a track like this, but few others would have the nerve to use it as a stylistic device in a finished film. In the context of a Godard movie it is another way of keeping the audience aware of the artifice involved in what they are viewing.

Many of the music cues in the film function in a similar way. There is something surprising about the way they start and end abruptly in the course of a scene, or so at least it seems on first viewing. In analyzing the music cues it became apparent to me that the timing of many of the cues is determined by the placement of the ending of the cue. The music cue is "backed in" from a point where it makes some kind of sense for it to end. This also seems to be why the version of Camille's theme in the cue called "Capri" is used so many times. It has a natural ending at a point where "Camille" modulates into a different motif.

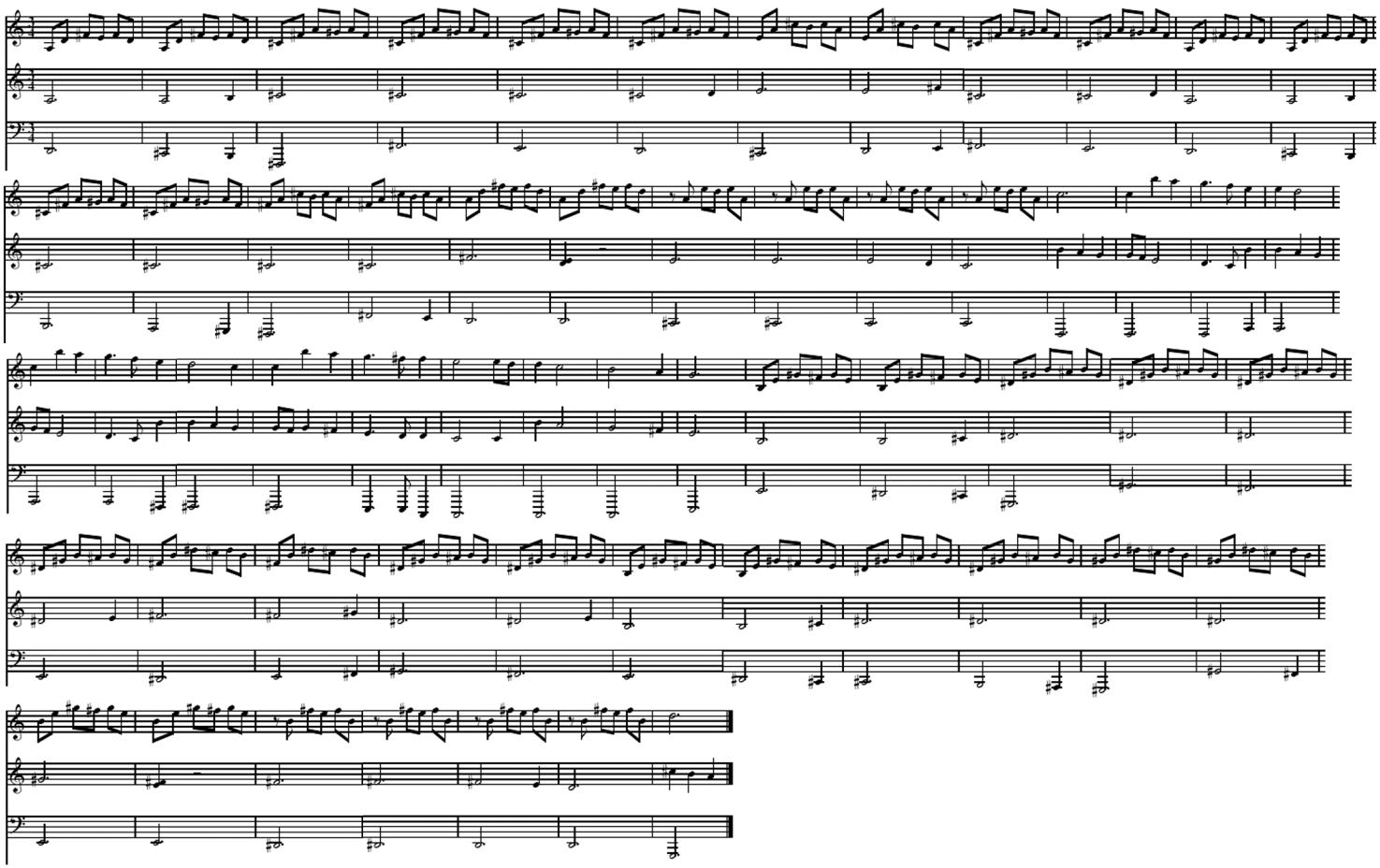
"Credits" contains the second most distinctive musical elements after Camille's theme. Two minor chords over the the main title cards clearly announce the tenor of the musical world of the film and the anticipation of a tragic and romantic story. They are reprised over the shot of Paul descending the steps to the roof after he has seen Camille kissing Prokosch.

For the the shot of the crew with the verbal credits the composition continues with a musical theme, which consists of a simple slow melody line of 19 notes over a kind of almost subliminal walking bass. The passage is used in five other places in the film. Only three of these other instances allow the passage to resolve into the final chord, a fact which I cite because I find the resolution of this motif mysteriously powerful, and I suspect that Godard did as well. The orchestration seems to be purely strings and involves a lush sounding use of the lower register of the violin. The resolution at the end, which I assume involves a modulation to a different key, is one of those musical moments in which I feel the ground shift beneath me. The three instances in which the passage resolves are during the dailies sequence as Paul is reciting the lines from Dante, over the shot of Camille during the taxi ride after the argument and over the shot in which Paul walks up the stairs and across the roof to say goodbye to Lang at the end of the film.

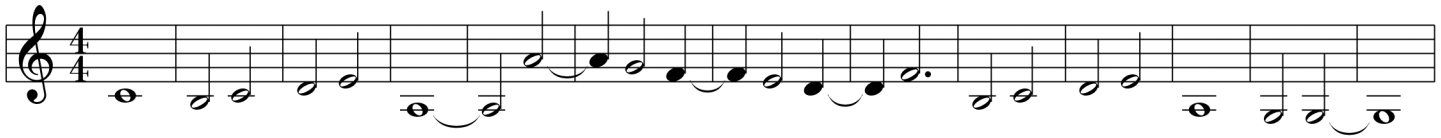
Camille's theme seems to me to combine a romantic yearning with a melancholy. It is used primarily to convey a sense of Camille's inner state even when she is angry at Paul and to convey Paul's sense of loss. The fact that it is so all pervasive makes it's frame of reference encompass the film as a whole, and it obsessive and unrelenting presence opens up a kind of emotional force field within which the film exists. It creates a kind of stasis in which the film seems to be a product of the tension between romantic nostalgia and ironic modernism.

Given the gravitas which Delerue's score adds to the film, it is amazing to me that the Italian

Camille's Theme



Motif from Credits cue

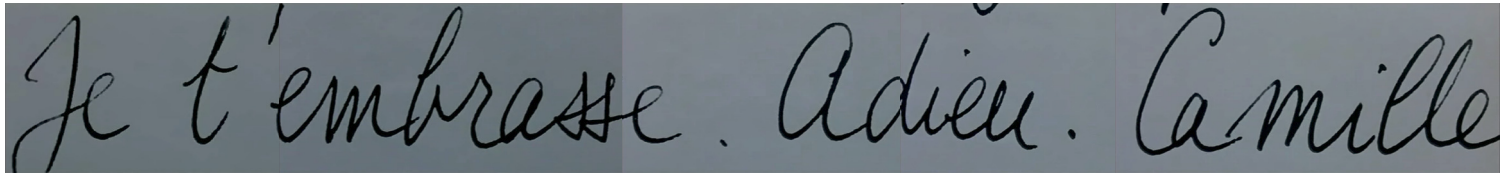


distributor insisted on rescoring the movie completely with a score by Piero Piccioni. Piccioni was a popular and versatile composer of scores for numerous Italian and American films and was particularly known for his light jazz or pop scores. His score for *Il disprezzo* consists of 53 minutes of music in 19 different pieces, most of which are jazz with a heavy use of Hammond organ.[70] I have no idea what his score would do to the movie, and I am not at all sure I want to know. There is apparently an Italian DVD of the film with his score. The original Italian distributor also dubbed the film completely into Italian and may have re-edited it as well. Godard was able to have his name removed from the Italian version although it is on the Italian DVD release.

Quotations, Text and The Theme of Language

Godard uses literal quotations throughout the film, and he includes comments on his own use of quotations, most notably the parody of having Prokosch read "wisdom" from a pocket-sized book. Moravia also used literary references in the novel, including the passage from Dante describing the death of Ulysses. Godard uses a virtual quote from *Il disprezzo* when he has Paul typing a passage for one of his novels about how "Rex" noticed the way in which "Paula's" face contorted when she became perplexed. Godard adds his own literal

70 It can be found on the internet at http://www.moviegrooves.com/shop/ildisprezzo.htm



quotes from Andre Bazin, Lumière, Lang, Hölderlin, and the classical author describing the beauty contest in the book on Roman erotic art.

The backgrounds in two sequences in *Contempt* are also filled with movie posters, providing yet another way of using text to make references in the film. Outside the studio screening room are posters for *Psycho* (Hitchcock), *Hatari* (Hawks), *Vanina Vanini* (Rossellini), and the Italian release of Godard's own *Vivre sa vie* (*Questa è la mia vita*). The posters on the wall at the theater include an Italian poster for *Time Without Pity* (Losey – *L'alibi dell'ultima ora*), *Hatari*, and three others I am unable to identify. In the lobby of the theater is a poster for *Viaggio in Italia* as well as one for another movie. Godard obviously chose posters which had significance for him personally, but I don't think too much need be made of the particular choices.

Just as Moravia related the dissolution of Riccardo and Emilia's marriage to the rupture in the relationship between man and nature which characterizes modern civilization, Godard is attempting to relate it to a question of how language provides the bond for civilization and can connect man to the divine. In addition to using an international production in which the principals speak four different languages as a metaphor for the Babel of modern civilization, Godard is attempting to ask how the "absence of god" has affected

language. The key metaphor for this is the letter which Camille leaves for Paul to find when he wakes up. Paul has lost Camille even more permanently than he can know. He has only a text which we pan across so that each word fills the theater screen. A handwritten letter is in some way an intimate connection with its author. Sometimes one feels reading a letter that one has even more direct access to the interior life of another than one may have in conversation. And yet a letter is an artifact, something that remains after the other is gone. Modern man is buried under texts which both give him access to the past and make him aware of what he has lost. Only Godard could use this as the subject for a Cinemascope production in color starring Brigitte Bardot.

Both Moravia and Godard have created works about "the modern condition." Moravia's ironic existentialism is much harsher than Godard's vision, although it is also funny in a way that the movie never is. While Moravia has fleeting moments of a romantic appreciation for the beauty of the natural world, he is nowhere near the romantic that Godard is. Moravia's work has a cool detachment in comparison to Godard's agonizing passion.

The End of Cinema

PROKOSCH: And now they are going to build a five and ten cent store, a Prix Unique, on this…on this, my last kingdom. I fear it's the end of motion pictures.

FRANCESCA: C'est le fin du cinéma. (It's the end of cinema.)

PAUL: Je crois que le cinéma existera toujours. (I don't think the cinema will ever die.)

The predominant mood of *Contempt* is a sense of loss. The contempt that Camille feels for Paul is possible only after love. The film moves from a foreboding intimation of the end of love to complete and utter loss. Paul may or may not ever realize the part he has played in his own fate, but he must carry on. Lang also continues by filming the moment when Ulysses first sees his homeland again, but we are left with silence and a vast expanse of sea with no home in sight. The past is gone.

Part of what Godard feels has been lost is the possibility of making meaningful films in the traditional way. The cinema as we have known it is irrelevant to the point of being dead. What exactly is the meaning of this? Obviously filmmakers the world over have continued to make movies, most of which are completely traditional. Godard, himself, went on to make 40 or 50 more films, none of which are "traditional" except for the fact that he has established his own tradition. His 2001 film *Éloge de l'amour* (*In Prais of Love*) was the Swiss submission to the Academy for the foreign language film award. Cinema in the sense of large moving images projected on a screen for an audience is clearly still alive and Jean-Luc Godard is still making films.

A lot of people feel that old-fashioned Hollywood movies are an obsolete form of entertainment offering sentimental perspectives on life that can have a perverse affect on people's ability to live life to its fullest. Plenty of people also still love to watch "old movies" on television. Many can appreciate the artistry involved in the production of "classics." Some people who feel that conventional movies have fallen prey to the superficial values of consumerism or are even part of a repressive power structure nonetheless still feel films are able to function as art which increases genuine awareness, broadens horizons, undermines repression or celebrates individuality.

News of the death of cinema may have been greatly exaggerated, especially since the cinema is for Godard simply the ultimate form of thought and that is why he cannot live without making films.