

One AM / One PM

One A.M. [1968] AKA: 1 A.M., One American Movie, One P.M. [1972] 90 Minutes

In 'Without Marx Or Jesus,' French journalist Jean-François Revel hypothesises a youth led revolution in the United States. Revel believes this revolution is possible due to unprecedented changes in technology and its ability to disseminate information, effectively creating a different social fabric. However, Revel has reservations about the context of the basis of this chance of revolution. There is, he believes a "spirit of criticism of values, which is still more emotional than intellectual, [and] is made possible by a freedom of information such as no civilisation has ever tolerated before..."¹

Intrigued by the prospect of revolution in the United States, and the rise of a new radicalism, Godard undertook a collaborative project with the U.S. filmmakers Richard Leacock and D.A. Pennebaker in October of 1968. Provisionally entitled *One A.M.*, or 'One American Movie,' the project was to be shot in the United States, but never reached completion under Godard's direction². Pennebaker and Leacock continued with the project under the title *One P.M.* [1972], or 'One Parallel Movie,' and did not release the film until 1972. At the time of Godard's collaboration with Pennebaker and Leacock, the two American directors were known and regarded for their use of cinema-verité (direct cinema) techniques in documentary films. In particular, their success was cemented by the popularity of *Don't Look Back* [1967], a cinema-verité styled documentary film which followed Bob Dylan on his tour of England in 1965.

In an interview at the Sydney Film Festival in 1998, Pennebaker explained the genesis of *One A.M.*³

¹ Jean-Francois Revel, *Without Marx Or Jesus* (London: Paladin, 1972), p. 126.

² Richard Roud, *Jean-Luc Godard* (London: Indiana University Press, 1970), p. 152. Roud reveals Godard had completed 90 percent of the film when he left it. He also says that Godard announced he had abandoned it, changed his mind in September of '69 about the abandonment, but had not returned to complete it. In an Interview with the Dziga-Vertov Group during their tour of the U.S. in October of 1970, Godard reveals his abandonment of the project.

³ Richard Phillips, *Pennebaker and Hegedus: seminal figures in American documentary film* Internet WWW page, at URL: <<http://www.wsws.org/arts/1998/aug1998/penn-a12.shtml>> (version current at 5 October 2000).

I ran into Godard in Paris—he used to hang around the Cinémathèque which had shown a couple of our films. He saw *Primary* and wanted to make a film with us. The idea was that he would go to a small town in France and he would rig it up with all kind of things happening: people would fall out of windows, people would shoot other people, whatever. We would arrive one day on a bus or something with our cameras and then film whatever we saw happening around us. Anyway, this idea never happened, but then somebody at PBS, in those days it was known as PBL, decided they wanted Jean-Luc to make a film in America and we were brought in. It was to be a combination of what Godard called documentary and real life.

Jean-Luc was very keen to make this film, which he wanted to call *One AM* (One American Movie). Godard was, and still is, one of my very favourite filmmakers but he was convinced that America was about to burst into revolution like the student uprisings in France in 1968. He kept saying we have to hurry and get to California because this is where it is going to begin.

“I asked, what was going to begin? ‘The revolution you fool,’ he told me. I said I didn’t think so, but we sort of went along with it.

In Stephen Mamber’s examination of cinema-verité⁴, he reveals that the techniques employed are used across a broad spectrum of filmmaking, and are hardly confined to non-fiction filmmaking. Mamber describes the essential or primary technique to be the “...use of real people in undirected situations...By ‘real’ I mean not only the avoidance of professional actors (unless, of course, we see them as actors) but even to the extent that non-actors are not placed into roles selected by the filmmakers.”⁵

In the October 31 1968 discussion shot by Robert Leacock and included in *One P.M.* [1972], Godard reveals his stylistic intent for *One A.M.*, which consists of a combination of fictional film and cinema-verité. Breaking the film into two parts, the original concept of *One A.M.* is a synthesis of cinema-verité and a fiction film – the reality of the ‘real-life’ protagonists Godard wants to speak, and the fictionalising of their speeches done by actors. Godard elaborates five ‘A’ reality stages for the film, each of which will have a ‘B’ fictionalised counter-part.

⁴ Stephen Mamber, 'Cinema-Verité in America: Part 1', *Screen*, 13(1972), 79.

⁵ Mamber, p. 79.

1. Wall Street Lady
2. Eldridge Cleaver
3. The Jefferson Airplane
4. Tom Hayden
5. A Little Black Girl

Godard also wishes to play with the spectator's perception of gender roles by switching the original speaker's gender with a male or female actor giving their speech. Cleaver's speech is to be redone by an actress, and is given a number of different modes of address which are under consideration. It will either be redone where Cleaver made the original speech, taking the speech directly to the streets as a private 'one to one' address to strangers, or publicly via the use of a megaphone. The speech delivered by 'Wall Street Lady' is to be redone with a series of 'improvisations' by the male actor in front of school children at the Ocean-Hill, Brownsville school Godard has selected.

Godard implies the site where actor Rip Torn talks to the school children has been specifically chosen with the end result or effect in mind. It is obvious he expects the children to react unfavourably to the speech the actor will give, before he has shot the information the actor will use.

The scene can be interpreted as a set-up, in a basic, very reactive way. The oppositions of affluence and race represented by the 'Wall Street Lady' contrasted with the inner-city poverty represented by the (predominantly black) children, are a situation Godard believes will establish some form of controversial, or at the very least negative, reaction. The use of these kinds of situations, and the creation of oppositions fall outside of the 'pure' cinema-verité formulations that Mamber outlines, but they do provide a different kind of politicised synthesis for the *One AM* project.

The use of simple opposites, and mixing the fictional/non-fictional forms Godard wants to employ for the film, may appear to be the 'wearing of so many different hats'. However, the transparent objectives of this process examine issues of social roles, gender, race and the inherent problems of communication these different functions create. In other words, Godard obviously perceives an enormous number of class and racial tensions within the U.S. urban environment that he believes are the basis of the presently

impending revolution. He wants to capture some of these ideas on film, but he does not want an overly simplistic depiction of these tensions, he wants to capture and experiment with language using different models of race, class and gender.

The tightness of the hypothesised construction of the film appears sound as well. Superficially, the construction is comprised of five episodes of conventional cinema-verité, with a complement of five fictional episodes that utilise the speech from the cinema-verité sections. This kind of form is reminiscent of *One Plus One* [1968], which Godard had shot earlier in the year, with its use of episodes or chapters that involve the use of binaries. In the discussion about the execution of the film, Godard also makes explicit the kind of camera work he wants to use in the project.

Earlier, in a 1964 article for 'Cahiers du Cinema', Godard had been extremely critical of Richard Leacock's use of camera⁶.

In his directions for how he wants the *One A.M.* project to be shot, he says he wants to avoid the 'reportage' style of shooting, and would like to keep each scene to be edited almost entirely in camera with 'one piece of film for each section'.⁷

In my opinion, there is no editing at all of the picture. The editing is done by the way it's done. The interesting thing is just...block by block...a movie is not in one piece or another piece, it's the relationship between each other.

Significantly he also wants Leacock and Pennebaker to minimise the use of zoom shots.

I don't care if you zoom. Not too much, in my opinion, because it's not done of that. Sometimes it might be interesting...If you are not sure to be focused when you're zooming, I prefer don't zoom.

⁶ Jean-Luc Godard, 'Richard Leacock' in 'Dictionnaire de 121 Metteurs en Scene', *Cahiers du Cinema*, XXV (December 1963-January 1964), 40.

⁷ "...he wanted something which was, again, something of a furthering of the concept of a documentary, in which we'd take a roll of film and not stop it until we had finished an entire roll, which would be 10 minutes long." D.A. Pennebaker interviewed by Nathan Rabin, *The Onion AV Club*. Internet WWW page, at URL: <<http://avclub.theonion.com/avclub3318/avfeature3318.html>> (Version current at 5 October 2000).

By excluding the heavy use of zoom shots, Godard appears to want to keep the footage confined to a distanced or unintrusive presence upon his subjects. Also, by the avoidance of zoom shots, the spectator is less distracted by the camera work and left to concentrate on the sound and what the subjects are saying. However, for the fictional sections, Godard wants the footage to reflect Brechtian concepts by revealing the camera.

I don't mind if I can have one of you in the picture...one or two sequences with the actor...to see a camera looking at the actor. It will bring the difference between both. But in the documentary sequence, I think we just have to be maybe two camera, I don't care, but I don't want to see another camera in the picture.

By blurring, or inverting the forms of fiction and non-fiction film, the methodology removes expectations the spectator may have of the situations Godard is trying to examine; it also provides a new perspective on the rigid forms he is trying to break. By breaking the stereotypes of film narrative in this way, Godard illustrates the conventional reception of forms the spectator has become accustomed to, and questions the authenticity and veracity that non-fictional films usually aspire to.

The original intention of using black and white film stock for the fictional part of the film goes some way to confirm this. The use of black and white is one of the more obvious signs of reportage or newsreel footage along with documentary. By using the stock for the fictional part, it is one more expectation destroyed. Godard's use of black and white, and his belief that it is a good idea, is due to the separation of function he believes its use will delineate. However, he is also hesitant that the contrast of colour and black and white might separate the functions too much, and thus ameliorate the blurring of form.⁸ Clearly separating the different functions of the film by their colour will not give Godard the latitude to blur the line between the reality of the recorded events and the recreations he wishes to experiment with.

⁸ In an interview in 1968, Godard mentions the shooting of the black and white footage for *One AM*, none of which was used by Pennebaker and Leacock for *One PM*. See: Martha Merrill, 'Black Panthers In The New Wave', *Film Culture (U.S.)*, Spring (1972), 145.

One P.M. bears very little resemblance to Godard's original concept, or even many of the rudimentary ideas from *One A.M.* It offers none of the inversion of form that Godard's original concept of the film wanted to explore, none of the clarity of purpose in editing, none of the camera guidelines that he wanted followed, and significantly, nothing of the delineation of social hierarchy which lay at the foundation of the film. If it were not for Robert Leacock's introduction explaining Godard's intentions for the film, the contributions actor Rip Torn makes would be rendered almost totally nonsensical.

One P.M. comprises the original interviews with Cleaver, Hayden, and what might be termed a 'guest spot' by the Jefferson Airplane.⁹ 'Wall Street Woman' is used in a perfunctory way, and there is an acknowledgement of using the originally conceived speeches being done by an actor (Torn only), but the presentation is so disorganised that the meaning it may have had is all but lost. One of the greatest losses to the film is its emphasis on Godard's interpretation of 'America' and the loss of the hierarchy of oppression Godard wanted to explore. Examining mythology and hierarchies, Godard wanted to use a woman for the Wall Street sequence to break with the expected 'myth,' but he also places the Wall Street Woman's role at the beginning of the film to introduce the top tier of American social class.

Well really it was to find, particularly at the beginning, someone who symbolized America, that is money and imperialism, Wall Street, and especially a woman rather than a man because that's in accordance with the American myth, where the woman has a rather important power, and then to show the people who are trying to struggle against it. Then after that musicians or beatniks who try to escape, who at least have a defense reaction, and then to show the blacks who have the most advanced position, and at the end to show a child, a black child, because he is the most oppressed.¹⁰

⁹ D.A. Pennebaker suggests the scene with Jefferson Airplane was constructed to have them arrested. "And then he had other scenes that were completely documentary, like Jefferson Airplane playing on a roof and getting all of us arrested, which we would film as it happened." D.A. Pennebaker interviewed by Nathan Rabin, *The Onion AV Club*. Internet WWW page, at URL: <<http://avclub.theonion.com/avclub3318/avfeature3318.html>> (Version current at 5 October 2000).

¹⁰ Godard, quoted in Merrill, 144.

Instead of the five clearly defined sections to the film, the viewer is left with a discordant series of scenes that begin with the two small children skipping along a waterfront industrial area and cutting to actor Rip Torn in native American Indian costume repeating what sounds like Hayden's speech in a wooded area. From this point we get more of Torn in iconic revolutionary costume (black beret and red scarf) repeating more of Hayden's speech in a skyscraper construction site.

The discord between Godard's structured vision of hierarchies for *One A.M.* is entirely destroyed in the film that was eventually released as *One P.M.*

1. Two small girls in industrial area
2. Torn in Native American costume in rural area (Hayden's Speech)
3. Torn in Revolutionary costume in urban area (Hayden's Speech)
4. Tom Hayden discussing revolution and ideas about labour in the U.S. (source for above).
5. Eldridge Cleaver speaking about prison and black experience of prison and society
6. Scene with Black nationalists in Dashikis performing song in street.
7. Tom Hayden listening to earlier speech of himself.
8. Wall Street Woman (Carol)
9. Hayden
10. Torn being directed by Godard about use of voice and tape recorder.
11. Hayden listening to Cleaver's speech
12. Cleaver giving speech
13. Wall Street Woman
14. Torn in Confederate uniform talking to school class using speech of Wall Street Woman
15. Torn changes into a contemporary militaristic uniform.
16. Torn discusses revolution in U.S. while talking to Godard in car around New York streets.
17. Jefferson Airplane and break-up of the concert on the roof.
18. Marching band in street
19. Individual shots of signs and buildings cutting to time-lapse destruction of the building where Jefferson Airplane played.

In part, much of the loss of the original form of the film can be attributed to Pennebaker's camera work. In particular, the sections with Hayden are filled with zooms that are

frequently out of focus. He shows Leacock working the other camera numerous times, and there is an enormous number of shots of just about anything else but Hayden.

Given the volume of scenes that reveal Godard to the spectator, it is almost as if Pennebaker and Leacock were so intensely bored by the subjects Godard wanted to shoot, they have made him the central focus or subject of the film. He is either just one of 'the cast of personalities' they interview; or they believe Godard's presence is one of the prime marketing tools they can use for the film's distribution.

The opening credits of the film seem to reinforce this idea. By identifying the subjects featured in the film in blue script, Pennebaker and Leacock choose individual letters from the subject's names in the credits to spell Godard's name on the vertical axis in red. Accompanying each changing letter with the sound of gun-shots, train horns, and railway crossing bells, the sound continues into the opening image of *One P.M.* revealing a tape recorder sitting on top of a large cannon ball. Thinking metaphorically, this shot can be interpreted as communication being a weapon, a familiar motif throughout Godard's 1968 films. The use of industrial live sound that opens *One P.M.* is also similar to the sound used extensively throughout *One Plus One*, particularly in the junk-yard sequence.

The opening of *One P.M.* sets a similar scene. Two small girls walk and skip with a tape recorder on the banks of an industrial area. The two girls sing along to the tape following the refrain 'Beautiful is Black,' skipping away as the camera stays statically rooted in the industrial area. By having the girls sing the refrain 'Beautiful is Black' Godard provides an attack on bourgeois aesthetics.

After all, if beauty (like language) is one of the arms the ruling class uses to pacify us and 'keep us in our place', then one of our tasks is to turn that weapon around and make it work against the enemy. One way to do this is to demystify beauty and to show how the ruling class uses it against us; another way is to effect a 'transvaluation of values' in which we make a vice of the bourgeois concept of

beauty while making a virtue of a different concept (e.g, 'Black is Beautiful') which the bourgeoisie will be unable to recognise or accept.¹¹

In his discussion with Martha Merrill in the winter of 1968, Godard makes it clear that the opening of the film, with the two small girls, was intended to be the ending, completing the film by illustrating a class hierarchy.¹²

The film cuts from the opening scene in the industrial area to an image of a waterfall and Rip Torn in full native American Indian costume, together with a tape recorder, the scene surreally reminiscent of Wiazemsky's 'Eve' in *One Plus One*. As in *One Plus One*, Godard has visualised the *One A.M.* project as illustrating the differences between nature and the civilised urbanity of city life; or technology and nature. By juxtaposing icons of each environment, he projects the contrasts of a pre and post-lapsarian world.

Torn uses the taped speech recording by accentuating different words and phrases in order to create new or different nuances of meaning. The effect is similar in style to the dictation of speech given by the activists in the junkyard in *One Plus One*. Godard extends the typed images of natural vs. urban in the figures of the 'Indian' and the 'Revolutionary' costumes he puts Torn into. Each of these costume changes illustrates Godard's attempts to try to find a uniform, or physical appearance that fits the speech used.

Contrasting the images of nature and city environment with the skyscraper and the country, Godard uses Torn's repetition of Tom Hayden's speech as an illustration of the spread of communication. Noticing sound bites of the speech, Godard provides illustrations that frequently seem literal. When Torn says "action in the streets" the camera pans to show us the street from the lift Torn is in. The fact that Hayden's speech is not recorded until later in the film, illustrates the breaking of the film's linear chronology that Godard had projected for *One A.M.* Instead, the chronology is shattered into a discordant series of fragments for *One P.M.*

Links between scenes usually come from the recordings of the speeches. For example when Torn descends in the lift repeating Hayden's line "It starts with students," the

¹¹ Jean-Luc Godard, quoted in James Roy MacBean, 'Vent D'Est: or Godard and Rocha at the crossroads', *Sight and Sound*, 40 (Summer 1971), 147.

¹² "and at the end to show a child, a black child, because he is the most oppressed." Godard talking to Merrill, 144.

camera cuts to Hayden saying the line in the original footage and shows the machine recording Hayden's speech.

The interesting things that *One P.M.* contributes are a time capsule of the interviewees and their thoughts of America at the time. In 1998, 30 years after the recording of *One P.M.*, Pennebaker says

It always surprises me when I go back and see parts of a film...For instance in *One PM* you forget how almost paralysed the country was with fear..and it was. And you could kind of understand why Nixon was in such a paralysis himself, because there was this overhanging thing that somebody's going to push a button and there'd be some sort of revolution, y'know? And now you look back on it, you can't believe for a minute that anybody thought that. But at the time, a lot of people were very nervous, and conducted their lives in a very nervous way. And that's history too, but it isn't a history that gets passed down easily.¹³

The authoritarian worker on Wall Street who questions Pennebaker and Godard about what it is they're doing in the building with a camera, goes some way in illustrating the paranoia Pennebaker mentions. However, it is Cleaver's nervousness and his hesitancy in contributing to the film at all that illustrates the power of the media and the problems of communication that is most compelling. Pennebaker explains part of Cleaver's motivation in doing the film.

We interviewed [Tom] Hayden and others, including Eldridge Cleaver, who had just written *Soul on Ice*. Cleaver was deciding what to do with the rest of his life at that point. We fell into his clutches and paid him some huge amount of money to interview him.¹⁴ I think this was the money that got him into Mexico and then North Africa.¹⁵

¹³ Julian Zelizer, 'Talking History: The War Room', *Talking History*, University of Albany-SUNY (1998). Available from: <<http://www.albany.edu/talkinghistory/archive/pennebaker-hegedus.ram>>

¹⁴ "We paid him a thousand dollars and for him to take that money was correct. His was a political decision—he needed the money to escape America." Jean-Luc Godard quoted in Royal S Brown, *Focus On Godard*, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972), p. 62.

Cleaver openly discusses the nine years he spent in prison, but also offers theories on state sanctioned killings of black revolutionaries in prisons, or at the very least, state control keeping them in prison. Cleaver is adamant he will not return to prison, saying he would “rather die in the street”. However, his experience publishing ‘Soul on Ice’ had taught him of what he describes as ‘Mafias’. Telling Godard that he is part of a Film Mafia reveals Cleaver’s suspicion of the media image of himself that may be presented, but also reveals the institutionalised hierarchies Cleaver recognises in existence. Cleaver believes the image of the Black Panthers has been stolen and misused by media sources, sources that act as a force of “ethnic imperialism over black communities.”

Much of Cleaver’s speech is not concerned with racial repression by the police, but is more concerned with the ownership and production of black language, ideas and images. Godard’s experience shooting *One A.M.* in the U.S. seems to have shaped his opinion to concur with Cleaver’s, believing that images to counteract ethnic imperialism are going to have to be produced by organisations such as the Black Panthers. In an interview with Martha Merrill, Godard says

As for me, I don’t want to do the things that MGM will accept. Hollywood can do a film on Che Guevara because he isn’t in America, but the idea that they have of doing a film on Malcolm X with a script by Baldwin—that I don’t think they can do.¹⁶ Because, even if they can do it, it won’t be released. The only people that can do it are the Black Panthers or someone like them.¹⁷

Although *One P.M.* does not illustrate the power and repression of the police upon the Black Panthers, Godard does demonstrate the conservatism and repression by the police after the performance by the Jefferson Airplane. Situated on the rooftop of the building opposite the Leacock-Pennebaker offices, Jefferson Airplane play a song live from the

¹⁵ Richard Phillips, *Pennebaker and Hegedus: seminal figures in American documentary film* Internet WWW page, at URL: <<http://www.wsws.org/arts/1998/aug1998/penn-a12.shtml>> (version current at 5 October 2000).

¹⁶ Godard's prophetic powers have always been of the highest order. The film about Malcolm X wasn't made using Baldwin's script. See Jonathan Rosenbaum, 'Hollywood Radical (Malcolm X)', *Movies as Politics* (Los Angeles, Berkeley, London: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 145-153.

¹⁷ Merrill, 145.

rooftop. Supposedly as part of a larger set of songs the band are to play publicly, police stop the concert, partially due to a perceived disruption in the flow of traffic below the building. Godard is shown operating one of the cameras from the Leacock-Pennebaker offices, while footage is cut in of the scene from the street below. One of the many policemen who arrives on the scene offers the contradictory statement in regard to the band's efforts, "I don't mind, it's nice believe me, it's a good change, but the city can't stand it. I can't either." Torn gets arrested, and one of the police officers puts his hand over the camera. The next scene illustrates the double standard as an 'ideologically sound' marching band parades through the street.

One of the last shots Pennebaker and Leacock include in the film is a time-lapse shot of the destruction of the building where the Jefferson Airplane played. Metaphorically, the shot has a double meaning. It represents the rapidly changing epoch Pennebaker and Leacock believe they are living in. However, it can also be interpreted to reflect a different, more cynical message—one of disappointment that the impending revolution never happened, and the razing of the old building is representative of its demise.

The ending of the project and its completion under the guidance of Pennebaker is unclear and contradictory. When interviewed by Martha Merrill in the Winter of 1968, Godard gives the impression the project had been completed, but had been 'blocked' by those in charge of the production of the film.

It's associated with people from Channel 13, who won't show it because they are like the New York Times.¹⁸

Godard's disappointment in the conclusion of the project is obvious, however, he is made acutely aware that the footage is from a different time when he revisited the U.S. in 1970. With only two years passing in between Godard's initial shooting of the project and his return to the United States in October of 1970, there is a clear redefining of Godard's outlook upon filmmaking.

¹⁸ Merrill, 144.

In an interview with Kent E. Carroll for the 'Evergreen Review' (October 1970), Godard states that the project had finally been abandoned by himself with the following explanation.

No, it is dead now. When we first arrived, [Godard and Gorin] we looked at the rushes. I had thought we could do two or three days' editing and finish it, but not at all. It is two years old and completely of a different period. When we shot that I was thinking like a bourgeois artist, that I could just go and do interviews with people like Eldridge Cleaver and Tom Hayden. But I was wrong. And Tom Hayden was wrong to allow me to do that because it was just moviemaking, not political action. When we were in Berkeley I talked to Tom and apologised and told him I thought he was wrong. But Cleaver was correct. We paid him a thousand dollars and for him to take that money was correct. His was a political decision—he needed the money to escape America.¹⁹

Pennebaker offers his own explanation of the final film that became *One PM*.

Of course Godard was very serious about the prospect of revolution in America but towards the end, when he realised that he misjudged everything, he lost interest in the film and abandoned it. At that point I was left with a contract that said 'you will deliver' by a certain date a film by you and Godard. So, I had to finish it. I called it *One PM* or One Perfect Movie. Godard referred to it as One Pennebaker Movie. I think there is a copy of it at the Cinémathèque in Paris but I don't think it is one of Jean-Luc's favourite movies.²⁰

Godard was obviously extremely disappointed in the project in numerous ways. Moreover, Godard's naming of *One P.M. as 'One Pennebaker Movie'* makes obvious that he does not perceive any of his own work in the film that was finally produced.

¹⁹ Kent E. Carroll, 'Film and Revolution: Interview with the Dziga-Vertov Group' In Brown, ed., *Focus on Godard*. p. 62.

²⁰ Richard Phillips, *Pennebaker and Hegedus: seminal figures in American documentary film* Internet WWW page, at URL: < <http://www.wsws.org/arts/1998/aug1998/penn-a12.shtml>> (version current at 5 October 2000).