

Conclusion

Francois Albera argues that during 1968 there was a continuation of the process of ontologically examining the way images and text are related in Godard's films.

Godard questions the notion of representation and strives to rearticulate these oppositions that exclude each other in Bergson [...] namely "matter and "memory", "recollection" and "perception", "subjective" and "objective, etc. The present is thus haunted by a past and a future, the image-perception interrogated by itself as image-souvenir.¹

With the nascent growth of varying forms of visual technology, Godard reinforces the idea that any image is transitory in meaning, and is open to ideological manipulation. This becomes a double-edged sword. The media which were largely operated by the state in France during 1968 were able to reinforce the status quo of bourgeois ideological images, but with the growth of technology, and especially consumer technology, the means of countering the media were increasingly put in the hands of the public, who in turn, were able to produce their own representations of themselves. *Le Gai Savoir* goes some way in demonstrating this, with Patricia and Emile's own collection of images, their experiments with meaning using everyday images and sounds.

The characters within the films from 1968 do share some similarities with characters from Godard's earlier films. The most significant of these similarities is their isolation. The figures in the junkyard in *One Plus One* may be part of a united guerrilla organisation, but communication between the individuals seems to be impossible without the presence of the tape recorder to give speech a purpose.

Patricia and Emile in *Le Gai Savoir* have similar difficulties in communication. Although their purpose in learning about their environment through images and sounds unites

¹ Francois Albera, 'Matter and Memory', Scope Magazine, Issue One (1992), 18.

them in their ideological struggle, the spectator is left with a feeling that any relationship outside the confines of the darkened studio space is impossible.

Even in the non-fiction film *Un Film Comme les Autres*, it seems unlikely that the students and workers in the field would gather to discuss the issues of May of their own volition. Instead, Godard forces the situation in an attempt to unite the two. The often quoted statement "There is only one way to be an intellectual revolutionary, and that is to give up being an intellectual" quoted in *One Plus One* is countered in *Un Film Comme les Autres* with the bringing together of students and workers, and is representative of one of the last transitions in Godard's thinking until his final embrace of being both an intellectual and a worker. Part of this is due to what was the increasing influence of Louis Althusser's work. Althusser writes

...the 'spontaneous' ideology of the workers, if left to itself, could only produce utopian socialism, trade-unionism, anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism; on the other hand, Marxist socialism,...could only be the work of men with a thorough historical, scientific and philosophical formation, intellectuals of a very high quality.²

This final transition in thought also reflects Godard's own change from individual director to collaborative partner, believing that the only way for the revolution to progress is through unity with others.

Colin MacCabe posits Godard's readiness for the events of May 1968 with the release of *Made in USA* [1966] and *La Chinoise* [1967].³ Although *La Chinoise* is representative of the beginnings of the overt politicisation which had gained momentum within Godard's films before 1968, both films, though significant, do not illustrate the total precedents of Godard's political work in 1968. Arguably, Godard's political essay *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle* [1966] shares a number of significant similarities with *Le Gai Savoir*. In particular, the use of the narrative voice-over began with *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle*, and arguably the accentuation of some of the semiotic analysis of images also began in 1966 with both *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle* and *Made in U.S.A.*

² Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (London and New York: Verso, 1997), p. 24.

³ Colin MacCabe, *Godard: Images, Sounds, Politics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), p. 54.

However, the films from 1968 can also be perceived contemporaneously as representative of a much larger critical and cultural movement of the time.

Given that many scholars were increasingly moving away from a "historically relative" method of examining literature as an arbiter of culture, Godard's 1968 work on the *Ciné-Tracts* complements these changing perspectives of literature by including a critique of the mass media.

Tony Bennett notes the changing attitudes to the very notions of "Literature" within academia at the time.

These sorts of questions are increasingly being asked by both Marxist and non-Marxist scholars, who feel that the historically relative way of viewing culture that is embodied in the concept of 'literature' is both unhelpful and outdated. Unhelpful, because from the point of view of historical studies it artificially separates the study of 'literary' texts from adjacent areas of cultural practice induced by the reorganisation of cultural production associated with the development of the mass media.⁴

Perhaps the most ambiguous and often repeated concepts within Godard's 1968 films is the concept of 'Zero' and the desire to destroy language. In part, the history of the term 'Zero' can be found in the work of Roland Barthes, whose book *Writing Degree Zero* was written in 1953.

In Barthes' examination of literature and language, he isolates language forms and examines their creation and destruction.

For we know that the whole effort of Mallarmé was exerted towards the destruction of language, with Literature reduced, so to speak, to being its carcass.⁵

One of the many misunderstood features of Godard's films from 1968 is their use of a highly codified textual and verbal language, including the ambiguous use of rhetoric. A

⁴ Tony Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism* (London and New York: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1979), p. 11.

⁵ Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero* (New York: Hill and Wang), p. 5.

part of this ambiguity is due to Godard's use of clichéd 'revolutionary' language. For example, in *One Plus One* [1968] the spectator is obviously supposed to reject the artificial or falsely contrived speech of the two Hippies in the bookstore. However, the danger in totally rejecting the political language Godard employs to create political discussion is obvious. One of the principal failings of the 1968 films for the politically uninitiated, is their uncompromising use of language systems that the spectator may not be equipped to understand. In a discussion of Marxist language, Barthes defines Marxist writing to be the language of knowledge, and reveals the breadth of meaning that can be contained in individual words.

...it is only in the light of its whole linguistic system that Marxism is perceived in all its political implications. Marxist writing is as much given to understatement as revolutionary writing is to grandiloquence...For instance, the word 'imply', frequently encountered in Marxist writing, does not there have its neutral dictionary meaning; it always refers to a precise historical process, and is like an algebraical sign representing a whole bracketed set of previous postulates.⁶

If 1968 is Year Zero, it seems as if Godard believes that the past has not been properly acknowledged or dealt with from a politically alternative perspective. The spectator is therefore given a renewed counter cultural perspective of the past, frequently by way of bourgeois images. But there is also an acknowledgement of the repeatability of history and the image. Like Barthes' examination of writing, Godard postulates that images and art are not created in a vacuum, they have significant historical precedents in a number of social and cultural events which create the possibilities of their development. This artistic inheritance is also likened in the films from 1968 with an inheritance of history.

Therefore, the recording of history from a counter cultural perspective is a major responsibility which Godard attempts to fulfil. If the 1960's were actually a time where there was a possibility that anything might happen, Godard exaggerates this further by the concept of Zero. It becomes a point of departure from the history that has been recognised to the present, and a point where anything might happen to create an entirely different future. In his visit to the United States in 1968 to film *One AM*, Godard certainly seems to have convinced D.A. Pennebaker that he believed a revolution may have been about to begin in the U.S.

⁶ Barthes, p. 23.

As was mentioned at the beginning of this paper, there is an obvious revisionism of the 1960's concurrently at work that denies a great deal of the politics involved. In part, this is exacerbated by mass media images that use the icons of the 1960's as advertising fodder for anything that might gain some credibility from having a small amount of rebellion attached to it. Part of Godard's anger directed against Iain Quarrier for the change in the ending of *One Plus One* must surely have been directed against Quarrier's attempt to change the meaning of the film's content into populist entertainment.

In part, the episodes such as the fight with Quarrier and the stand-off with Polanski at Cannes have made Godard into something of a 'cause celebre,' that has certainly created a great many more myths about his life and career than truths. Interestingly, the spectator is supposed to believe (if they note most of the published criticism on Godard) that Godard's 'political films' were unsuccessful esoteric examples of his having 'lost it'. Wheeler Winston-Dixon notes that in 1967 *La Chinoise* was Godard's most successful film at the U.S. box office with the exception of 1959's *A bout de Souffle*.⁷

Part of the resistance to the films is obviously the anti-narrative style Godard adopted throughout his experiments in 1968. Moreover, much of the films' content is openly directed at individuals who are either sympathetic to certain causes, or directed outside the experiences of many, which, in turn, can explain the alienation from the subject matter that many must have felt. However, the films do explain contemporary events in such a way as to challenge spectators, but also invite them to examine the political and social environment around them.

1968 is frequently given enormous significance as a year that would forever indicate world-changing events that were both politically and socially irrevocable. If Godard's frequent citing of a growing technological influence upon society in 1968 is given any credence, his films undoubtedly help examine the global benefits and dangers of technological expediency at the cost of human liberty and interaction. From the black revolutionaries in the junkyard of *One Plus One*, to Patricia and Emile in the Television Studio of *Le Gai Savoir*, each of the films from 1968, in some way, attempts to reconcile or reclaim technological advances from the forces of the status quo for personal or radical purposes.

⁷ Wheeler Winston Dixon, *The Films of Jean-Luc Godard* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), p. 83.

Usually this manifests itself in the films of 1968 in order to illustrate methods to educate or enable the reclaiming of a revolutionary political purpose, frequently using technology to defy the hegemony of the media they perceive around them, media which utilise, and (periodically, subtly) reinforce the bourgeois status quo.

It can therefore be perceived that the films from 1968 attempt to break the ideological coding of the mass media in favour of the historical beginnings of revolutionary cinema, a revolution Godard anticipates becoming a reality.