

One Plus One

One Plus One [1968] (AKA: Sympathy for the Devil) 99 Minutes.

"One toke? You poor fool! Wait till you see those goddamn bats. I could barely hear the radio...slumped over on the far side of the seat, grappling with a tape recorder turned all the way up on "Sympathy for the Devil." That was the only tape we had, so we played it constantly, over and over, as a kind of demented counterpoint to the radio. And also to maintain our rhythm on the road."

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas --Hunter S. Thompson

One Plus One/Sympathy for the Devil [1968] is Godard's first film to use English as its principal language; and is accorded by Godard as the last 'bourgeois film' he would make.¹ Approached by Eleni Collard in early 1968 to make a film in England about abortion, Godard agreed to shoot the film if financing could be made available. However, due to changes in English abortion legislation in 1968, the project was cancelled. Godard told Collard he would come to England and 'make a film' if she could get either the Beatles or the Rolling Stones to participate. Collard, working in conjunction with other novice English producers, actor and director Iain Quarrier, and the son of an English Lord, Michael Pearson, eventually raised the finance to begin the project. A budget of £180,000 was raised, and a commitment from the Rolling Stones was assured.² Arriving in London on May 30 of 1968, Godard chose the then unknown cinematographer Anthony Richmond³ for the project and began shooting.

However, before long, the shooting of the production ran into a number of difficulties.

¹ Kent E. Carroll, 'Film and Revolution: Interview with the Dziga-Vertov Group'. In *Focus On Godard*. ed., Royal S. Brown, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc, 1972), p. 62.

² The majority of the financing came from Pearson, who in conjunction with Quarrier considered the film to be the first in a series the two would co-produce as a means of providing finance for young start-up directors. Martha Merrill's account of the *One Plus One* premiere at the London Film Festival includes comments from Quarrier about this scheme (See: Martha Merrill, 'Black Panthers In The New Wave', *Film Culture (U.S.)*, Spring (1972), 139-140), culminating in *Cupid Productions* formed with Pearson. Michael Pearson's only other production credit is *Venom* in 1971. *Venom* (UK), AKA. *The Legend of Spider Forest* (USA), dir. Peter Sykes, 1971.

³ This was Richmond's first feature film. Notably he went on to do *The Man Who Fell To Earth*, ironically, with Rip Torn, in 1976. *The Man Who Fell To Earth*, dir. Nicolas Roeg, UK/USA, 1976.

He (Godard) did not ever want to make a film in England, and being obliged to leave Paris in the middle of the May revolution undoubtedly caused a degree of strain. During shooting, Brian Jones was arrested, as earlier was Terence Stamp who was due to play the Quarrier role. The roof of the Stones' recording studio caught fire, and as a result Godard went back to France.

He later returned, only to have the shooting of the Black Power sequences jinxed by rain. He left for Paris again, came back....⁴

One of the other complications that arose throughout the production of *One Plus One* was a change in the film's original premise. Originally, *One Plus One* was almost that of a straight narrative story, an investigation of social issues concerned with race and militancy that would reflect a

parabole based around the parallel themes of creation and destruction. A tragic triangle in London—a French girl, who has at first been seduced by a reactionary Texan, falls in love with an extreme-left Black militant. The girl (Anne Wiazemsky) is named Democracy. The Nazi Texan opposes the Black, who obviously represents Black Power...⁵

This early 'straight narrative' idea was to be illustrated by the visualising of the two themes running in parallel. The first theme of 'Creation,' was to be reflected by the Rolling Stones recording in the studio. The other, of 'Destruction,' was to be Wiazemsky's character Eve's suicide.⁶

Whether or not the story changed due to the circumstances of the production shoot is difficult to determine. However, given Godard's determined movement away from narrative filmmaking, it seems unlikely that the original premise would have eventuated. In a July article written by Richard Roud on *One Plus One* for *Sight and Sound*, Roud reports that the film was also going to be experimental in the way it was shot. Discussing the witnessing of the shooting of the junkyard sequence, Roud reports,

⁴ Richard Roud, *Jean-Luc Godard* (London: Indiana University Press, 1970), p. 151. It is assumed that part of Godard's urgency in returning to Paris was to complete the projects that were all at differing stages of production throughout this time, including, *Le Gai Savoir*, the *Ciné-Tracts* and *Un Film Comme les Autres*.

⁵ Royal S. Brown, 'Introduction: One Plus One Equals'. In *Focus on Godard*. p. 8.

⁶ Roud, *Jean-Luc Godard* pp. 147-148.

The whole thing lasted about 8 minutes. Talking to Godard later, I remarked on the length of the shot, to which he slyly replied that the whole film was going to consist of ten eight-minute takes, unless of course he decided to do it in eight ten-minute takes instead.⁷

In place of the conventional narrative story, *One Plus One* is comprised of three fictional episodes, intercut with documentary and quasi-documentary sequences. The fictional episodes are allegorical representations of contemporary social and political concerns. The first of these depicts black militant revolutionaries in an urban Battersea junkyard reading political and literary texts. The second scene is a fictionalised media interview of Eve Democracy shot in a woodland area. The scene is significant in its reflection of Godard's thoughts on revolution, and the role of culture and the revolutionary. The third scene, set in a pornographic newsagents or book store, illustrates the role of western fascism and imperialism, and the role these relationships have between art and exploitation. Godard intercuts these scenes with images of the Rolling Stones recording 'Sympathy for the Devil' in the studio, and Wiazemsky/Eve Democracy writing graffiti on walls and billboards. Just as Eve's character appears at random as a silent visual presence throughout the film, Godard's narrator performs a similar verbal function.

When the film premiered at the London Film Festival on November 30 1968, Godard asked the audience in attendance to ask for its money back. The producers had changed Godard's ending of the film to include a complete version of the Rolling Stones song 'Sympathy for the Devil'. Throughout the film, the spectator is shown the process of the Rolling Stones recording the song, but part of Godard's scenario for the film is a lack of any kind of closure for the issues represented in *One Plus One*. Therefore, to include the full version of the song is in contradiction with the meaning of the film.

During the premiere, Godard also asked the audience to contribute their refunded money to the international committee for the defence of Eldridge Cleaver, who had gone underground two days previously. After many in the audience rejected Godard's proposal he stormed from the cinema calling the audience "Fascists," and struck Quarrier on his way out. Quarrier, who plays the fascist proprietor in the 'Occident' scene, must have, in hindsight, felt like an excellent casting choice on Godard's part.

After its premiere, the film with the completed version of the Rolling Stones song was renamed 'Sympathy for the Devil,' thus including a marketable reference to the Rolling

⁷ Richard Roud, 'One Plus One', *Sight and Sound*, 37 (1968), 183.

Stones' song. Partially as a concession to Godard, Quarrier agreed to distribute both versions of the film, often to the same theatre. Which of course created added confusion as to which version the audience would be watching.⁸

Godard's reaction to the new ending was "'One Plus One' does not mean 'one plus one equals two'. It just means what it says, 'one plus one'"⁹

The first of the fictionalised episodes within *One Plus One*, 'Outside Black Novel' depicts black revolutionaries organising arms and reading from various texts. Setting the scene in the junkyard provides a dreary backdrop that metaphorically signals a human and technological scrap heap. Using iconic representations of the black power movement, the revolutionaries in the junkyard are a curious mix of both the black nationalist movement and, in particular the Black Panthers in the United States. Godard illustrates the group's affiliation with the Black Panthers ideology by having his characters dialogue throughout the first of the junkyard sequences be almost exclusively from Eldridge Cleaver's 'Soul on Ice,' which had been released that year.

Cleaver, who had become the Black Panthers' spokesperson and Minister of Information in 1968, had become a publicly controversial figure in the black revolutionary movement because of his literary work, and as a consequence of his involvement with the Black Panthers. The reading of Cleaver's text in the junkyard provides a partial narration for the events happening in the junkyard, but also provides commentary for the larger issues of language Godard wishes to explore. Using Cleaver's concept of the "Omnipotent Administrator," Godard uses Cleaver's text as a means of providing a revolutionary attack on white bourgeois values, but also uses the text to illustrate the controversiality of Cleaver's ideas.

Cleaver's novel had pointedly criticised white values and fears, marking out instances of black exploitation. One of his targets of exploitation were the white musicians and the music industry for stealing what had originally been 'black music' and diluting it for their own wealth. Cleaver articulates the white musicians' exploitation of black music as not

⁸ The film was not open for widespread distribution in the United States until April of 1970 when Godard and Gorin toured the U.S. to promote *See you at Mao/British Sounds* [1969] when they were working in conjunction with Grove Press and New Line Cinema. Notably, both versions were distributed. See Andrew Sarris, 'Godard and the Revolution'. In David Sterritt. ed., *Jean-Luc Godard: Interviews*. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), p. 51.

⁹ Roud, *Jean-Luc Godard* p. 150.

just theft, but the double standard of derisively criticising black music until it is performed by the white culture.

A well-known example of the white necessity to deny due credit to blacks is in the realm of music. White musicians were famous for going to Harlem and other Negro cultural centers literally to steal the black man's music, carrying it back across the color line into the Great White World and passing off the watered-down loot as their own original creations. Blacks, meanwhile, were ridiculed as *Negro* musicians playing inferior coon music.¹⁰

Cleaver's statement can equally reflect on the music of the Rolling Stones, who are heavily influenced by 'black music' such as blues. Godard appears to recognise this by passing an acknowledgement when he momentarily cuts from the junkyard to the Rolling Stones in the studio. However, Godard is not attempting to make a reactionary statement by illustrating the Rolling Stones recording in the studio, he is attempting to reveal the politicisation involved in art, and the historical development involved across all artistic mediums.

The interview scene 'All about Eve' with Wiazemsky provides a critique of the media and a contrast with the predominantly static camera work of the junkyard scenes. The questions the interviewer asks Eve confine her answers to binary responses of yes or no. Using false bird noises, the sound of passing cars and the 'fashionable' crew, Godard illustrates the artifice of the environment Eve is placed in. Saturating the environment in technology, information is both a tool to help catalyse the revolution Godard believes possible, but also the potential enemy when used as rhetoric.

The interview with Eve reveals a changing focus in Godard's own revolutionary ideology. The belief that "there is only one way to be an intellectual revolutionary and that is to give up being an intellectual" rejects passive involvement and asserts direct revolutionary action.

In part the scene reflects a broad number of issues in both the U.S. and May '68 French events. Youth rejecting the ways of the old bourgeois order, student politics; but there is

¹⁰ Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc, 1978), pp. 81-2. The opening of the scene where the revolutionary discusses Blues music is taken from LeRoi Jones' *Blues People*. See Julia Lesage, *Jean-Luc Godard: A Guide to References and Resources* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1979), p. 97.

also a hint of resignation within the sequence. Wiazemsky agrees with the interviewer that culture survives revolution. It is almost as if technology has created so many artefacts and social debris, that there is no longer hope of removing or ameliorating them. The mass media have won.

In contrast to the previous scene with 'Eve Democracy,' the political message we see the Occident figure employing within the scene is the print medium. The Occidental figure dictates his message to a typist in the corner of the store.¹¹ Godard therefore provides a comparison to the 'Outside Black Novel' scene contrasting and recontextualising technology, sexuality and violence within a white, conservative, male perspective. He provides a reevaluation of the print medium and its power to convey what has been the traditional means of spreading political and ideological thought.

The Heart of Occident sequence is Godard's assessment of right wing and left wing propaganda and rhetoric. The opening of the scene uses close-up in a long take, similar to the shots used of both the Rolling Stones in the studio and the junkyard sequence. The images of pornographic magazine covers reinforce the political/sexual equation that has developed throughout the film. The majority of the magazine covers reflect sexual imagery accompanied by either political images or textual accompaniment that reflects sexist/right wing ideological comments.

The images of males are representative of macho stereotypes and are seen mixed with hobbyist car magazines, creating a link between the mechanical and sex. To emphasise this, the storeowner reading from 'Mein Kampf' quotes an extract about Hitler's desire for man to become like the machine. Critically denoting that neither age nor gender is reflective of ideology, each of the customers who enter the store are of different ages. Godard uses the Grandfather figure in the store with his grandchild to illustrate the right's fear and contempt of the symbolic 'hippies' who are imprisoned in the corner of the store. Although his Grandchild is witness to the pornography, it is prohibited to communicate with the two Hippie figures. Instead the child is left to hold the pornography its Grandfather has bought and witness him violently strike them.

Educating the audience in the political techniques of the right against the left, Godard harshly exposes the pornographic image. The two figures that are beaten are an example

¹¹ A visual pun on 'dictator'

of left wing ideals and culture that the right uses as a cultural scapegoat. A parallel is drawn between the new right and Hitler's Nazis, as they both produce and consume the problem they hypocritically blame and victimise the left for. The revolutionary hippie figures' "Long live Mao" and anti-Vietnam war slogans counter the use of Hitler's sloganeering. Consequently, Godard reveals the sloganeering as programmed epithets, revealing the danger of ideological rhetoric. The warning he issues dismisses the uncreativity of regurgitated statements, and directs the viewer to a desire for a creative revolutionary means.

It is possibly through his own post-war experience that Godard directs the viewer to Hitler's use and success using other mediums in the Second World War. The manipulation of medium and message for propagandised uses had the ability to spread faster in an increasingly evolved technologically based world in the late 1960's. As Marshall McLuhan states

For electric light and power are separate from their uses, yet they eliminate time and space factors in human association exactly as do radio, telegraph, telephone, and TV, creating involvement in depth.¹²

Godard illustrates that who owns or controls the medium, controls the message. Media involvement in sex, politics, and corruption within England had become a major determinant of public perception during the sixties, certainly after cases such as the Profumo Affair in 1963. The opening intertitle: 'The Art of CID' can be interpreted as a simple drug reference (ACID), or may also be related to this form of exposure of state corruption. The scene therefore provides an indictment, and, somewhat sardonically, a parallel between the fascist right wing and the state. In Martha Merrill's article about *One Plus One* she states that Godard extends this argument to indict an entire cultural identity. "Anglo-Saxon society...is fascistic, violent and dirty-minded."¹³

Using the premise of a Bolivian revolutionary hiding in a London lavatory, Godard's narrator is killing time by reading a pornographic novel. The novel that Godard's narrator reads from is similar to some of the pornographic texts that have been used in earlier Godard films. For example, in *Masculin-Féminin* [1966] two men read aloud

¹² Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press, 1995), p. 9.

¹³ Merrill, 138.

The Duchess was naked, and the little prince was dressed like Charlie Chaplin.¹⁴

The narrator verbally rises at random throughout the film, contributing snap-shots of political pornography before waiting "on the beach for Uncle Mao's yellow submarine to come and get me." The narrator links popular cultural figures and politicians with pornography, satirising their power within western culture. Godard uses the narrator to sour the cult of celebrity and highlight bourgeois notions of politics and power, reducing it to vicious parody. The result is an equation where politics, sex, power and pornography become interchangeable artefacts of a bourgeois hierarchy. The use of the narrator in many respects epitomises the sound techniques used in *Le Gai Savoir* [1968], destroying expectation and divorcing image from sound.

Godard uses many of the techniques from his earlier 1968 films in *One Plus One*. The film's intertitles use different highlighted letters for different or tangential meanings; and Wiazemsky's graffiti uses word games and double meanings providing textual signs which have their origins in the *Ciné-Tracts* [1968] project.¹⁵ Frequently they point to a convergence of concepts such as Godard's word for Marxist cinema--'Cinemarx,' or to an unusual conflation of concepts, such as 'Freudemocracy'. The effect is similar to the role of the narrator who similarly conflates ideas and dissolves boundaries between concepts. It is almost as if Godard has taken earlier ideas he has had about projects such as his comments on *Masculin Féminin* [1966] and made them literal. Asked about the use of pop music as a means of politicising youth. Godard's response was

But, you know, I think it was Baudelaire who said that it was on the toilet walls that you see the human soul: You see graffiti there– politics and sex. Well, that's what my film is.¹⁶

Godard utilises the mediated image of the pop star not only as a recognisable entity, but also as a vehicle for revealing the pop star's art. As Godard often reveals the mechanics of his own work, in *One Plus One* he reveals the laboriousness of the collaborative process of the Rolling Stones art, also adding a suggestion of Godard's own process. Colin L. Westerbeck states that

¹⁴ Jean-Luc Godard, *Masculin-Féminin* (New York: Grove Press Inc, 1969), p. 61.

¹⁵ The *Ciné-Tracts* project immediately preceded *One Plus One*.

¹⁶ Godard, quoted in Godard, *Masculin-Féminin* p. 230.

Godard's interest in the Stones was clearly the chance that there would be some instructive analogy between their method of improvisation and his own. A film might attempt to synthesise its rushes the way an A and R man can 'mix' tracks in a recording.¹⁷

If Godard is playing with figurative and literal concepts and puns in language, the puns also reflexively extend to visual cues that highlight Godard's history in cinema. Godard's film *Weekend* [1967] was subtitled 'A Film Found on the Scrap-Heap'; in *One Plus One*, a great deal of the film is literally shot in a junkyard.

Filmmaker D.A. Pennebaker recently discussed his youth and the influence early changes in recording technology had upon society in the United States.

You never could hear Louis Armstrong on the radio, never played black people on the radio...The only way you could hear him was you had to buy these little 'race' records that Blue Bird brought out. And they carefully made yellow labels so that you wouldn't mix them up with normal Blue Bird's, in which there weren't any black people singing or playing.¹⁸

An essential component of *One Plus One* is its focus on the uses of sound and visual technology, especially the significance of sound and its distribution. Perhaps more significant are the issues surrounding ownership of the recorded voice and its application.

Marshall McLuhan writing about the invention of the phonograph discusses Edison's first thoughts of its application being like the telephone for the use of voice. Using an example of a song lyric, McLuhan writes

Take, for example, the shift of English into an interrogative mood, since the arrival of "How about that?" Nothing could induce people to begin suddenly to use such a

¹⁷ Colin L. Westerbeck Jr, 'A Terrible Duty is Born', *Sight and Sound*, 40 (1971), 82.

¹⁸ D.A. Pennebaker, and, Chris Hegedus Interviewed by Julian Zelizer, 'Talking History: The War Room'. Department of History, SUNY-Albany, 'Talking History' series. Internet WWW page, at URL: <<http://www.albany.edu/history/specialfeatures.html>>. Online Audio Recording (requires 'RealPlayer', at WWW URL: <http://www.real.com/products/player/download_player.html>) Internet WWW page, at URL: <<http://www.albany.edu/talkinghistory/archive/pennebaker-hegedus.ram>> (last updated January 24, 2000/Version current at 7 October, 2000)

phrase over and over, unless there were some new stress, rhythm, or nuance in interpersonal relationships that gave it relevance.¹⁹

McLuhan asserts that it is recordings of voice and the advent of broadcast that have prompted changes in people's methods of communicating. Godard illustrates the same concerns within *One Plus One* using tape recordings in the 'All About Eve' scene with Wiazemsky's Eve, and in the junkyard sequences. However, the import of Godard's message is that the technology is becoming that much more dynamic, and the velocity of its dissemination is that much greater. With the creation of taped sound,²⁰ information is given even greater mobility and ease of dissemination. It was only in the early 1960's that synchronised sound was available for 16mm film, which led filmmakers such as D. A. Pennebaker and Richard Leacock to experiment and further the methods of direct cinema.

Merrill's article highlights Godard's politically critical thinking, hinted at through his use of intertitles. By adding the highlighted letters of two of the intertitles, Merrill believes Godard is intimating that

...the revolution will bring about Communism, but that to Communism must be added the continuing possibility to criticise that society. This is the one plus one of the title.²¹

To accomplish the revolutionary ideals Godard has made, the sacrifice is of liberal democracy, which Merrill interprets to be embodied by Wiazemsky's character Eve. Caught between communist and anarchist flags in the final scene, Eve is sacrificed on the altar of black revolution.²²

The final irony in the Godard ending is that the screen goes black and the soundtrack fumbles and runs down and the Rolling Stones never finish the song "Sympathy for the Devil." For Godard the Revolution is not finished. It remains to be done...For him, we have not yet learned to add.²³

¹⁹ McLuhan, p. 276.

²⁰ Philips introduced the cassette tape recorder in 1963.

²¹ Merrill, 138. In an interview with Richard Sarris in 1970, Sarris mentions the title originates from graffiti Godard saw during the events of May. See Sarris, 'Godard and the Revolution'. p. 52.

²² Merrill, 138.

²³ Merrill, 138.