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Author(s)	Larry Bensky
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# Rolling Stoned

## A Tale of two Festivals

by Larry Bensky

A year ago, November 1968, Jean-Luc Godard shows up in London, which he hates, to speak at a press conference, which he loathes. The subject is *One Plus One*, his newest film, which is to be shown that night at the London Film Festival. Godard has split with his producer, a young hip-capitalist Canadian, Iain Quarrier. According to Quarrier, Godard objects to the insertion at the end of the film of a complete track of *Sympathy for the Devil*, the song which the Rolling Stones are shown developing and rehearsing throughout *One Plus One*. According to Godard, Quarrier is catering to blatant commercialism. Quarrier's statement is that he "has a duty to the ten million teenagers who will see the film" and that such a duty indicates the Rolling Stones song must be played entirely.

Godard is furious. His lousy English, which he insists on using, is attempting to explain to the press that bourgeois culture doesn't allow for the expression of revolutionary genius. And that as a filmmaker he has been forced to come to London to ask that his film not be shown. As an alternative (it is six months after May, 1968, in Paris, and it is still possible to think of direct contact with the people) Godard is proposing that the audience at the film festival demand its money back, donate the ticket prices to the Eldridge Cleaver Defense fund, which has recently set up a London branch, and walk outside the 600-seat theatre to watch his version of the film projected on a sheet hung from two trees under a bridge over the Thames.

The press doesn't understand. Why did he make this film? Does he think the Rolling Stones are revolutionaries? The quibbles and bumbles of the hypereducated effetes of the London press corps continue—"how dare this messy little Frog fly over and demand anything?" is the general attitude, alternating with a sort of "poor chap, he's an artist of course, books and articles have been written about him, we know he must be a genius because all the intellectuals talk about him, and we all know that

geniuses are morally irresponsible for their creations, so let's report his state of confusion or forget the whole thing and tell stories about him to our friends."

The press conference stops, rather than ends, and in the embarrassed silence, Godard leaves, small frail leaf in the endless cold rain. He wants to consult with the tiny group of London cinema revolutionaries (almost all of them American) who are planning a counter-festival at a former railroad round-house now used for rock concerts.

That night, Godard is introduced before his film is shown. He insists, again, on speaking English, despite the fact that his friend and biographer Richard Roud, the director of the London Film Festival, is standing beside him and has volunteered to translate. Godard says that the choice of every man politically is a matter of conscience, that Eldridge Cleaver is a political exile and the first American political figure to have been forced to such a position, that as a revolutionary filmmaker he must express solidarity with Cleaver by asking that the spectators act, rather than remain passive. Some people pass out mimeographed biographical sheets about Cleaver. (These people are also Americans, running a collapsing branch of Liberation News Service.)

The audience is first silent. Then an Indian stands up and says, "why can't we see the movie here and give money to the Cleaver fund, too?" "You've got some bloody cheek," a fat man jammed into his seat screams at Godard. "Let's get on with it, this isn't the Oxford Union debate," screams a fair-haired scion of privilege, to the amusement of his dark-haired goddess. About 40 people get up and leave, in response to Godard's request; more than 500 remain. Godard is boiling over. "You are all fascists!" he screams, running off the stage. As he leaves, he sees Quarrier, shining in formal evening dress, with red cummerbund, glittering black shoes. Godard, without breaking stride, smashes Quarrier with an open hand, and disappears into the wings. Quarrier's escort, 6 foot 1 inch black American model Donyale Luna, screams; her impossibly thin arms reach far up onto stage to Quarrier, who stands holding his cheek, mumbling. The audience is in turmoil. The lights go out. *One Plus One*, Iain Quarrier version, begins.

Outside, Godard is met by 500 young admirers, who have been reached by counter-festival organizers and told of the free showing. A sheet is hung from trees, but there are problems with the projection; the sheet is blown in the wind. Also it is raining, and even the drowned-rat-like English hippies are shaking. Roud, a gentle liberal of incredible knowledgeability about films and of total devotion to Godard, is near tears. He arranges for the counter-festival to use theatre electricity to run their projector outside. The police arrive. Everything is illegal, they say, there is no license for an outdoor projection. Roud says he wants the film shown outside and will take responsibility. This is England--the police leave.

Godard is surrounded. A PL type says, "what the fuck good are you, you come over for a few hours, cause some excitement, then leave for Paris and we've got to deal with the situation over here." Godard, who looks like he hasn't laughed in twenty years, almost cracks a smile. "I'm ready to come back anytime it will be useful," he says, "and anyway, I'm leaving my print of the film over here to be shown free everywhere." Others hang onto him



JEAN-LUC GODARD

photo/Jeffrey Blankfort

as he walks away slowly. "Why do you make films if they're inevitably part of bourgeois culture?" a girl asks in French. "I make films because I'm a filmmaker," he answers. "Yes," she continues, "but you tried to get everyone to walk out and they go to films because they're spectators, just as you make them because you're a filmmaker." "Spectator," Godard says excitedly, "that's not a category!" He is implored to address the shivering crowd waiting for the outdoor projection to start. "Have a nice time, I hope you enjoy the film," he says, and leaves.

A year later, November, 1969, in San Francisco, the retitled Godard film closes the film festival. Tickets are impossible to find, but somehow hundreds of people sneak in, aided by ticket-passing and fire-exit-door opening. The titles begin; the crowd cheers Mick Jagger, boos Iain Quarrier, cheers Jean-Luc Godard, and settles back for the event of the Festival--a crowd almost entirely devoid of the society swingers and young climbers by and for whom the Festival seems to be run.

Quarrier has changed the opening; Godard fans know that his films never open with straight, running titles. The producer's hand, dreaded from Hollywood to Baghdad, is dripping lead from the opening moment. The Stones appear on screen; Jagger is messing around with a song that sounds

something like *Sympathy for the Devil*, but is in a different key with a somewhat different melody. Brian Jones is tuning up; the audience murmurs, it's like seeing a ghost. The Stones look stoned, or merely strung out, but it's obvious there is work going on, the kind which Ralph Gleason is always praising as an alternative to revolutionary violence. The experimentation continues, until suddenly the camera cuts to the inside of a hotel room, looking out, and a girl is lettering on the window

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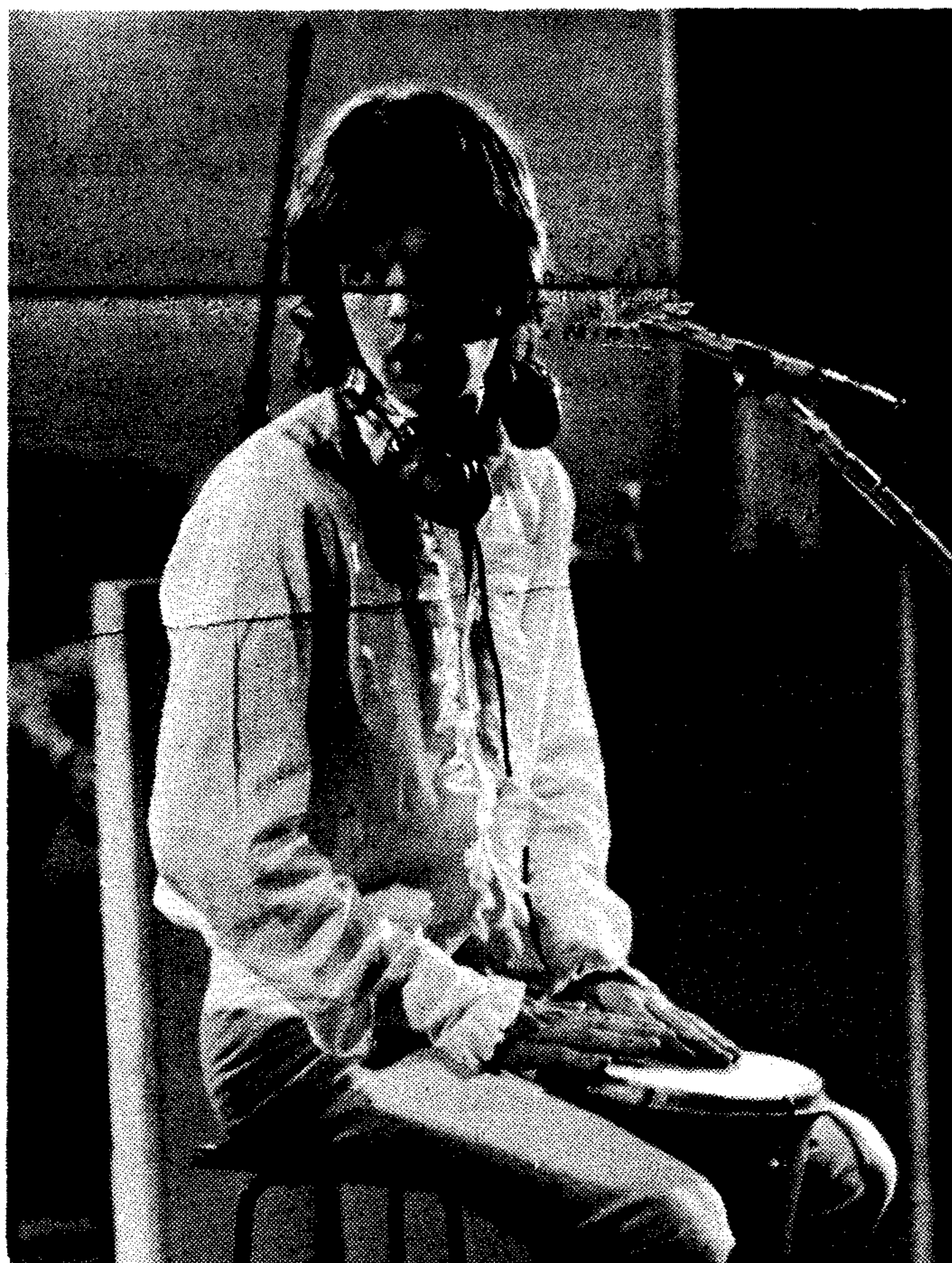
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Then a voice starts reading from a pornographic novel (someone involved in the film told me it was bought at random in London, and real names substituted for the characters), "Kiss me, darling, the Pope implored the luscious child. Brutally, she kissed the so-called apostle of non-violence on the mouth..." Etc. The story goes on, the audience laughs, and all of a sudden the camera switches to an automobile junkyard outside London, on the river. The joke is over, for we see black men reading from Leroi Jones' *Blues People* and Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*. The Message is about how blacks cannot accommodate themselves to whites, how all culture is white, all blacks must be revolutionaries, and particularly in relation to women.

cont. p. 10



# godard/jagger

cont. from page 9

Which leads to the film's most startling scene: the debarkation of three white girls, dressed in white hospital gowns, from a red car. They are paraded at gunpoint past several black men reading from Jones, Cleaver and Carmichael. Then they are seen lying bloodstained and dead on the ground. Someone is lettering on a wall FBI + CIA = TWA + PAN AM. The film moves back to the Stones, who are improving the song somewhat, Jagger is still fucking around, as are Keith Richard and Jones. But something is happening here, at least it begins to, when suddenly a voice from the pornographic novel begins again, "Oh, Miss Kosygin and Miss Brezhnev, won't you be my bridesmaids. 'No, I'm afraid we can't accept, but ask Miss Gromyko, I'm sure she can. '"

Back to the black folks under the bridge, who are reading passages of cultural nationalism, socialism and racism in a confused collage of destruction. They pass guns to each other like the Living Theatre, and write the names of Stokely, Lumumba, Panthers on the sides of wrecked cars.

And back to the Stones. And off to the pornographic novel, where John Foster Dulles' daughter is fucking Robert McNamara. And then to the junkyard, after a brief interview with Eve, played by Godard's magnetic wife, Annie Wiazemski, who answers yes and no to a series of banal cultural questions stated by Quarrier, who is playing a TV interviewer.

By this time, a third of the way into the film, no one knows what's happening. It isn't the artful intellectual distortion common to elitist genius. It's a total confusion of material and purpose. Is

the clue to the film the subtitle "The Heart of the Occident," within which the letters "A C I D" are outlined in red? What would it be like to see this film while tripping? What happened to Godard when he visited Berkeley in 1967, and what color was it?

Another, equally disappointing conclusion is that the music, sex, black, political themes are all meant to hit as heavily as possible a single simple point--the incompatibility of the cultural and political revolutions. If so, so what? Who, aside from the cult creeps, can stop to figure this kind of thing out?

By the time producer Quarrier produces his ultimate horror, the track of a complete "Sympathy for the Devil" played over a series of colored tints superimposed on the scene where red and black flags fly over a camera boom on which Annie Wiazemski lies dead, it makes no difference. Is this Cinemarxism( one of the words scribbled on a wall sometime during the film)? If so, what is Cineselfishness? Cineselfishness? How can one find out, except by getting involved in the consummation of Godardesque and Godardian articles by Godardophiles? The audience in San Francisco had very few of these. Those who came to dig the Stones hated the indecipherable politics; those who came to witness Godard's revolutionary conversion hated the confusion worst of all. The loudest applause of the night came for the line, "There is only one way to be an intellectual revolutionary, and that is to give up being an intellectual." It was spoken by the imaginary Eve to the parody of an interviewer. Among those not listening was Jean-Luc Godard.

