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LIGHT OF DAY

Raoul Coutard

"PIERROT LE FOU".

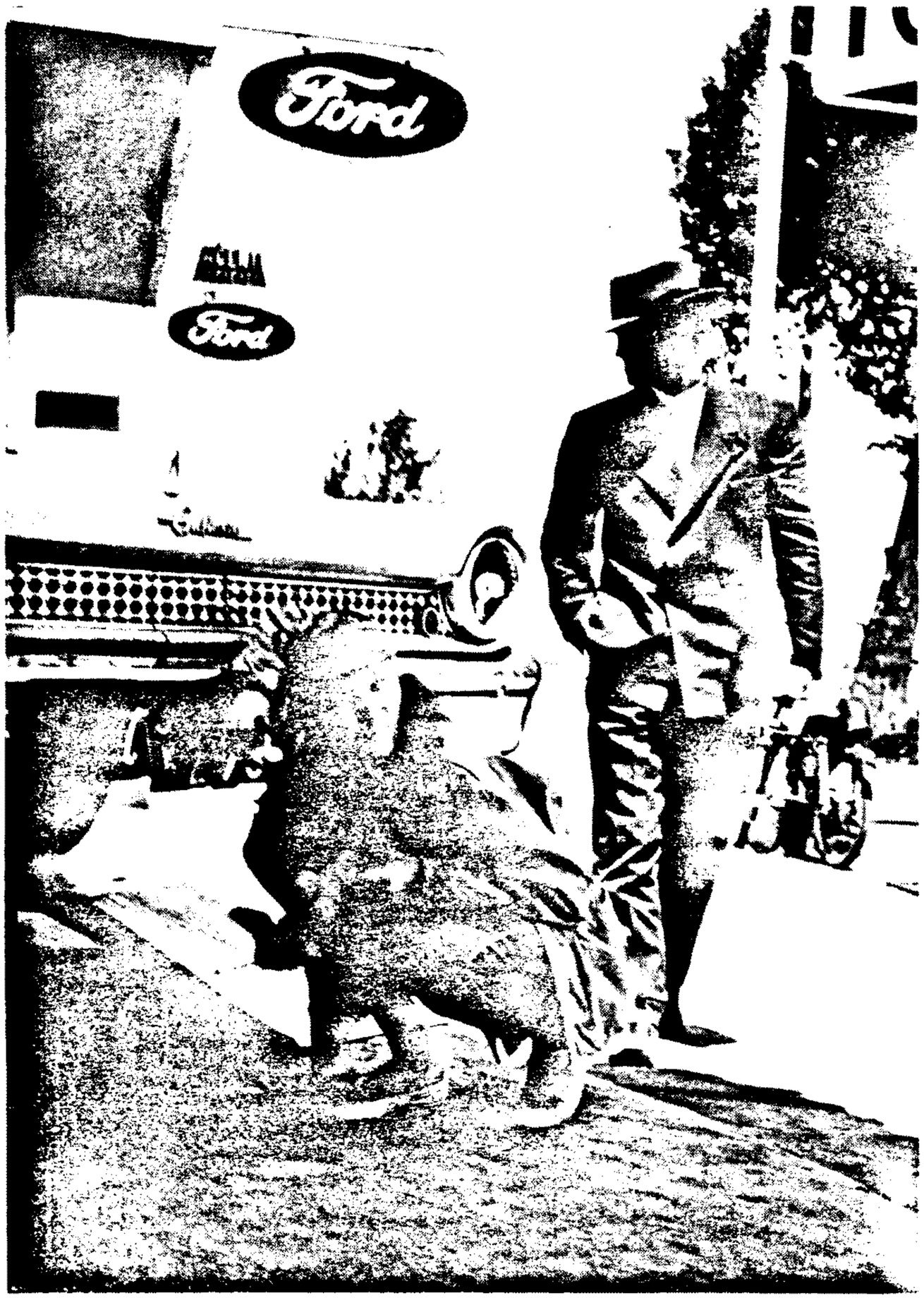
BEFORE GODARD, CAMERAMEN USED to demand an absurdly long time to set up the lights for a shot. The cameraman would insist on a good two hours to organise a straightforward horizontal pan. He could have moved five or six times faster; but he said to himself: The less I demand, the less I exist. In effect, and without him even being aware of it, the cameraman's performance had become a gigantic act. He turned down certain camera angles, certain movements of the actors, simply for the satisfaction of demonstrating his own existence. Films had become an accretion of elements which really had nothing to do with the cinema. They were the product of a collective circus, in which each technician put on his own star turn.

Godard didn't say to the cameraman: "You are going to handle the photography this way, that way, at an angle, against the light, etc." What he said to him in effect was: "I want only one thing from you. You must rediscover how to do things simply." People have been impressed by Godard and the rest because for them a film is a matter of cinema. Exclusively of cinema.

Now, it's obvious that from the moment when the cameraman agreed to return to simplicity, and stopped trying to be interesting, the general style of the film image was going to change. Because, with the cameramen all determinedly tricking out their circus turns, the image had become pretty extravagant.

I had got a fair idea about this at the French Society of Photographers, in the Rue de Clichy. Before working in films I was a photographer; and at Rue de Clichy, at that time, the pupils in general followed two styles of photography. There were street scenes, photographs of their wives sitting by windows, off-the-cuff reportage, which the instructors thought were uninterestingly lit. Then there were the photographs where the lighting was artificial and gimmicky, and where one sensed immediately that the subject was no longer a bit of real life, but had been carefully posed amidst a network of lamps. This was the "Style Harcourt"; and the instructors at the school, who were much attached to this type of photography, called it, quite seriously and without any intention of being unkind, "cinema lighting." So it was: one could say that all films were lit like that.

But the photographs that work, the ones that can be looked at for any length of time with some kind of interest or emotion, are not only those of Cartier Bresson, but also the old-fashioned portraits taken by Petit and Nadar. They took these photographs in studios lit by one big window—by the light



"PIERROT LE FOU": CAR THEFT.

of day, by that really beautiful all-over light which is daylight. And a film cameraman ought never to let himself forget that the eye of the spectator is naturally tuned to full daylight. Daylight has an inhuman faculty for always being perfect, whatever the time of day. Daylight captures the real living texture of the face or the look of a man. And the man who looks is used to daylight.

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The human eye penetrates to the depths of a room, then in a second it turns to a window; and it isn't disturbed by the transition. But the camera is disturbed—or, rather, the film stock is. To keep the natural beauty of real light on the screen, whatever movements Anna Karina and Belmondo may make around their room in *Pierrot le Fou*—that's the cameraman's job. That is what Godard was asking for when he said, in his usual hesitant way, "Monsieur, we are going to be simple." Godard himself isn't exactly simple. I wouldn't put it quite that way. I never know beforehand just what he wants, and that complicates matters. And what he wants is usually a whole lot of things at once. He wants to shoot without lights; he's thinking of a shot in a Lang film which he saw six months ago, and of the left half of a shot by Renoir . . . he's no longer sure which one, and he can't really explain any further, but really it wasn't at all bad. Then after having told me this, he sends me off the set, me and everyone else, while he thinks about the way he's going to do it. And when I come back, I find that it's no longer the same shot. And anyway he would rather like that very white light which lit up the end of a table in a shot (unhappily a very short shot) from a Griffith film, and he has always wondered whether perhaps that very white light didn't really come from the developing processes used in the Griffith laboratories, which must have been quite different from any other . . . and so on, and so on. No, Godard isn't simple.

I remember one of the very few occasions on which we worked in a studio. It was for the long interior sequence, made up of long takes, in *Une Femme est une Femme*. The camera movements were to be so weird and so complicated that Godard had for once resigned himself to studio shooting.

Well, what is the point of a studio? How does it make the work easier? In a studio, for instance, one can lift up the wall at one's back, to make room for the camera and a lamp or two. I wanted to do just that. Godard told me: "No. We mustn't move the wall. When a husband watches his wife bringing in the joint she has burned, he can't move the wall to bawl her out from further away. He stays in his chair and looks from there."

Another advantage of the studio is that with extremely complicated scenes, of the kind we had in *Une Femme est Une Femme*, the set-builder can construct his set in such a fashion that the camera dolly can move more or less anywhere without too many problems for the cameraman. I told Godard: "Change the set, move those two posts further away from each other. I can't get through." His answer: "Out of the question. A young couple in a flat near the Porte Saint-Denis don't live in rooms with acres of space. I'm talking about that sort of young couple. You'll just have to manage."

The third justification for a studio, and the essential one: the catwalks up in the roof to which one attaches the lights. We were making *Une Femme est Une Femme* in colour, and of course colour film stock at that time was slow, so we had to have at least some light to be able to see anything. So I lit the scene, with the lamps placed on the gantries which overhung the set—the sequence with Anna Karina and Jean-Claude Brialy getting ready for bed. Godard sent me away, thought it over, called me back, told me a thousand or so new things, kept breaking off in the middle of sentences, referred to twenty films I hadn't seen. I straightened out a few things, and we began. After a few seconds, Godard stopped everything. He said to Anna: "What on earth's the matter with you? You don't go to bed like that at home."

He put himself in Anna's place. Then he said: "We're absolutely mad. We're trying to film Anna going to bed in her room and there's no ceiling. Anna has never slept in a room that hasn't got a ceiling." A ceiling, of course, is expensive. The producer asked Godard: "Will we see much of your ceiling in the film? Can't you possibly do without it?" "We won't see it," Godard said, "but if there isn't a ceiling Anna can't do the scene. We must have a ceiling."

So we had a ceiling. I had no more gantries, to light the room from; we couldn't move the walls about; the set was fixed; we couldn't have any lights. In fact, all the advantages of the studio had vanished, and in the end what we found ourselves left with was a real room, with all its problems. That is the last time that we went to the trouble and expense of a studio; because in the long run, in a real room, with someone like Godard, one has more of a free hand.

* * *

Godard is even more incisive when deciding matters of film stock and laboratory techniques. Here I am going to be technical: I haven't any choice. The stock and the laboratory are 80 per cent of the film image—its finesse and subtlety, its effect or lack of effect, its punch and emotion. These, however, are points of which the public is never aware.

People often tell me that *Lola* was brilliantly shot. "Was it due to your own mood?" they ask. "Or to Demy? Or the light of Nantes? Or the look of Anouk Aimée?" It was partly all of these things, but first and foremost, and above everything else, the images of *Lola* came from the film stock—Gevaert 36, which the factory has now stopped making. So I have never been able to recapture those unsaturated blacks, those extraordinary whites, that grainy texture of real and unreal which in my opinion accounted for at least seventy per cent of the lyricism of *Lola*.

Godard knows this. And when it's a question of film stock, he is no longer hesitant. That first time, on *A Bout de Souffle*, he said to me: "No more confectionery: we're going to shoot

in real light. You've been a photographer. Which stock do you prefer?" I told him I liked to work with Ilford H.P.S. Godard then had me take photographs on this stock. He compared them with others, and we made a number of tests. Finally he said: "That's exactly what I want."

We got on to the Ilford works in England, and they told us that they were very sorry, but their H.P.S. wasn't made for motion picture cameras, only for still photographs: we would have to give up. But Godard doesn't give up. For still camera spools, Ilford made the stock in reels of 17½ metres. The perforations weren't the same as for cinema cameras. Godard decided to stick together as many 17½ metre reels as he would need to make up a reel of motion picture film, and to use the camera whose sprocket holes corresponded most closely with those of the Leica—luckily, the Cameflex. The professionals were horrified.

But that wasn't the end of it. One photo-developer got particularly good results with H.P.S. stock, and that was Phenidone. With Godard and the chemist Dubois of the G.T.C. Laboratories, we ran several series of tests. We ended up by doubling the speed of the emulsion, which gave us a very good result. Godard asked the laboratory to use a Phenidone bath in developing the film. But the laboratory wouldn't play. The machines of the G.T.C. and L.T.C. laboratories handle 3,000 metres of film stock an hour, with everything going through the same developing process, and with the equipment geared to standard Kodak practice. A laboratory could not effectively take one machine out of the circuit to process film stock for M. Jean-Luc Godard, who at the very most would probably want no more than some 1,000 metres a day.

On *A Bout de Souffle*, however, we had a stroke of luck. Tucked away in a corner, the G.T.C. laboratories had a little supplementary machine, more or less out of service, which they used for running tests. They allowed us to borrow this little machine so that we could develop our stuck-together lengths of Ilford film in a solution of our own making, and at whatever rate we chose. There's one thing that ought to be understood: the fantastic success of *A Bout de Souffle*, and the turning point that this film marked in cinema history, was clearly due mainly to Godard's imagination, and especially (what to my mind is the film's major quality) to its sense of living in the moment. But it also had to do with the fact that Godard stuck together these 17½ metre lengths of Ilford stock, in the teeth of everyone's advice, and miraculously obtained the use of this machine at the G.T.C. laboratories.

After that, we were able to use this machine once more, on *Le Petit Soldat*. When we reappeared, however, like the flowers in the spring, to ask for it for *Les Carabiniers*, it wasn't there any more.

But *Les Carabiniers* was something else again. Godard said: "I have my scenario in my head. I know how to film the war, but to develop it I need a special developing bath. Why is there something so unsatisfactory about war films?" (There followed the stammered description of 45 shots or bits of shots, this shot and that one, which, when, where, etc . . .) "They are unsatisfactory because the greys are too soft. For *Les Carabiniers* I want the film processed in such a way that I get true whites and true blacks, and I want at the most three or four greys, sprinkled here and there.* Otherwise, we will be wasting our time and we won't be filming war." This time, Godard had somehow or other persuaded the laboratory to change its usual methods for him so long as our work lasted. We had permission to use a special processing method and a special developing schedule. And Godard got his four strong greys. But that was an exception.

Pierrot le Fou meant colour. A cameraman's worries over colour are growing steadily less, as the stocks become more flexible every year. But all the same: it's when he is working with colour film that the cameraman is most aware of the fact that no film stock is as sensitive as the human eye. The problem comes from the fact that any number of techniques and working practices were developed for work with early

"PIERROT LE FOU": MEDITERRANEAN IDYLL.

colour stock, such as Technicolor, which was not very flexible. And people have got stuck there.

Here I'll only mention the problem of make-up. Make-up is essential in a colour film, for a reason which is easy enough to understand. As the film stock is unstable, the laboratories need something to use as a fixed point from which to work in re-establishing the true colours; and what they work from are the actors' faces. (They also base their colour justification firstly on a range of greys which one films right after shooting the scene, and then after that on the faces of the actors.) All make-up men, however, have been trained in the American techniques which date back to the early days of Technicolor. They make up the actors very red, a practice which apparently was necessary for Technicolor. When the laboratory wants to correct this red, it will probably add some blue; and with someone like Godard, who has a passion for filming against white walls, everything goes to pieces if the walls turn blue.

This red make-up is a pointless habit. Amateur photographers know that they can get excellent results if they photograph their wives and children in Kodachrome without putting any make-up on them at all. On *Une Femme est Une Femme*, Godard asked for a neutral make-up, very light and clear. If there were moments when we had to add a bit of colour to correct one or two lighting effects, we decided to have a clear grey over it. We tried it out; and it worked. It's the same thing, however, as with the laboratories: make-up men have their habits, their normal working methods, and it is a crusade to get a more naturalistic kind of make-up out of them. Godard needed to say to them as well: "Gentlemen, keep it simple."

*. . . here Coutard added Godard's untranslatable pun: "vous allez me faire un vrai bain de guerre, et un vrai temps de developpement de guerre."