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# Godard's film not what the PLO had expected

By Walter V. Addiego

**W**HEN THE AL FATAH organization asked Jean-Luc Godard in the late 1960s to make a film about the Palestinian situation, they should have expected something more than a toe-the-line propaganda tract. What they got, according to the director, hardly pleased them.

We now have a chance to judge the results, as the film, "Ici et Ailleurs" ("Here and Elsewhere"), opens today for two days at the Roxie. (Note that the picture is in French without subtitles; English translation will be provided by the theater.)

What began as a documentary on the Palestinian "revolution" — the film was initially to be called "Till Victory" — became, after several years of on-again-off-again editing, a meditation on movie-making and movie imagery. The picture combines documentary and fiction footage with Godardian video titles and political imagery, and a soundtrack that works both with and against the images.

Don't look to use the film to educate yourself about the Palestinian situation; the film is not a primer on the issue, and even if it were it would be completely out of date anyway (the editing was finished until 1975). Rather, the film's value is a part of Godard's troubled and troubling output.

The director is commonly called a film "essayist," and the term applies precisely here. "Ici et Ailleurs" is certainly an essay (attempt) to put some ideas into form, rather than a polished, closed product. Like much of Godard's other work, it's also deeply concerned with what film is, what it can be. "Ici et Ailleurs" poses problems but offers no solutions, and it relies on the audience to complete the film in whatever way it can.

Godard traveled to Jordan and South Lebanon in 1968 with his collaborator, Jean-Pierre Gorin, with whom he worked in the Dziga-Vertov film-making collective through the first half of the 1970s. (Another collaborator, Anne-Marie Mieville, was involved in the editing of "Ici et Ailleurs." The

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## What was commissioned as a propaganda piece became a film about movie-making

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films Godard made during this period were uncompromisingly political, and, some say, strident and arid. In any case, they lost for Godard a good deal of his former audience.

In the Middle East, Godard and Gorin filmed Palestinians in military training, and making political speeches. The film-makers also created some scenes of an Arab family living in Paris. These scenes are intercut with a great deal of political imagery in the form of still photographs of Golda Meir, Moshe Dayan, Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger. The narrative, a poetic recital by a male and female voice, talks of the Palestinian troubles, of revolution and capitalism, of movies and how they ought to use images, of how we live in a crush of images that threatens to displace us. Obviously all this is a far cry from simple propaganda.

Discussing the picture following a recent press screening here, the director said that the Al Fatah group contacted him to "make an anti-'Exodus'" and counter any supposed pro-Israel feeling that might have resulted from the release of that movie.

What he and Gorin discovered, he said, was the difficulty of coming into a volatile situation as cultural outsiders and trying to make sense of it for other outsiders. What's more, the director said, the Fatah people were afraid to have the truth of their situation shown. "The reality was that they were very weak." The film-makers and their subject also disagreed on what was the proper material for the picture; to the Fatah group, Godard said, information is like "advertising for politics."

Godard and Gorin worked on the footage over a period of

several years, and were disturbed at their difficulties: the film was simply not forthcoming. The director recalled asking himself, "Why can't I finish this picture?"

The answer, according to the director, came partly when the film-makers realized the naivete of their approach to the project. "We were going to make a film about Fatah like it was Coca-Cola."

They also discovered they had been editing the footage under some false assumptions. When they finally got translations of the Arabic they had been shooting without understanding, they were surprised — and upset. "We were not listening and we were pretending to shoot what we thought we were hearing."

Finally, after all the struggle on the editing table, the focus shifted to the process of making and understanding movies itself. The footage could be used to answer (or suggest answers to) the questions, "What is moviemaking, what is an image?" With this realization, Godard said, "I was finally interested as a moviemaker in the subject."

The Palestinians who saw the film were "very angry about it," he said, though they never told him exactly what they disliked.

And the director's own feeling about the film? "It's not a very good picture," he allowed, "but it's good to have done it."