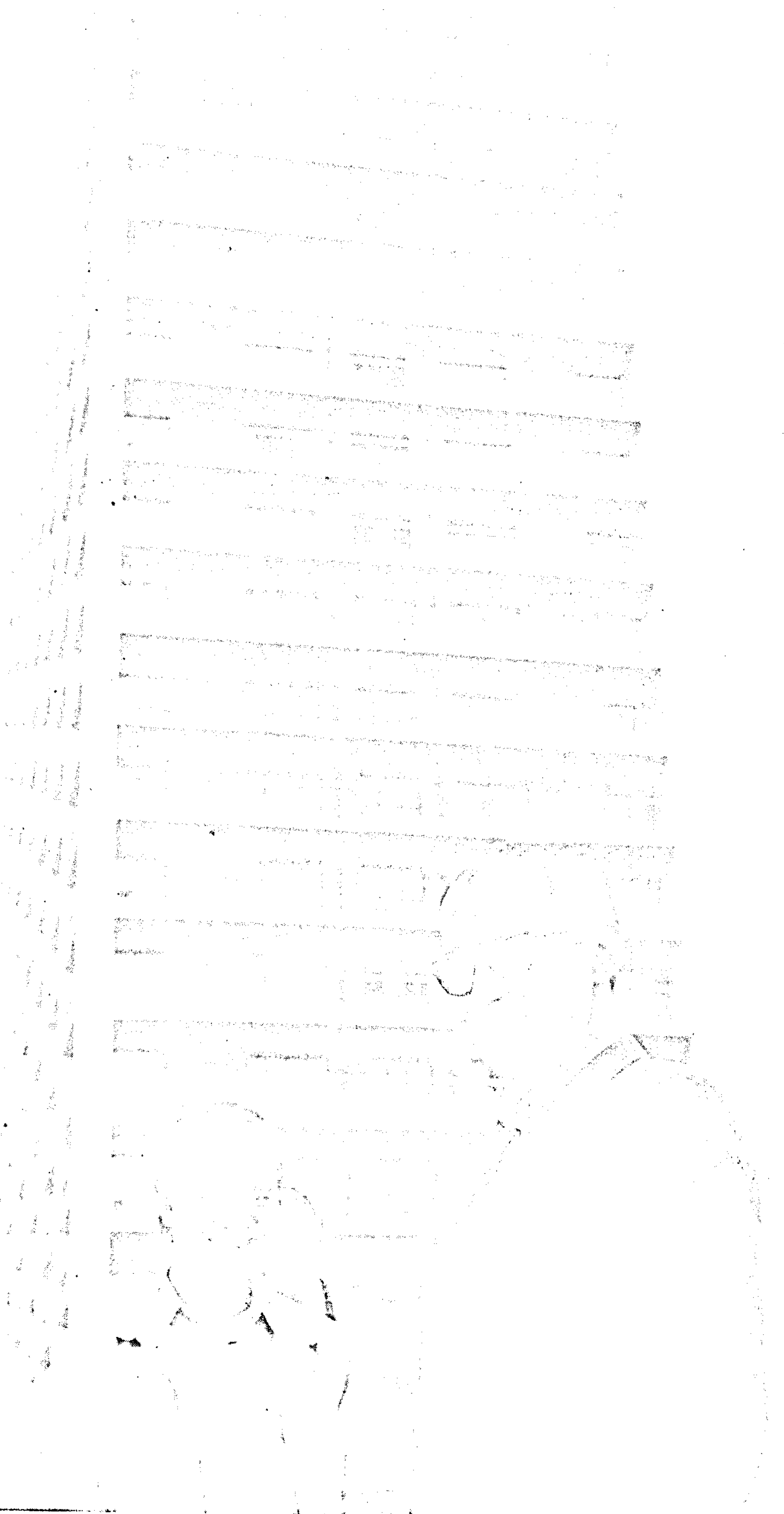


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# One or two things / Jean-Luc Godard





**Y**ES, I'M MAKING TWO films at the same time. The first is *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle*, starring Marina Vlady; the other, *Made in U.S.A.*, with Anna Karina. They are completely different in style, and have nothing to do with each other, except perhaps that they let me indulge my passion for analysing what is called modern living, for dissecting it like a biologist to see what goes on underneath. *Deux ou trois choses* was inspired by a letter in *Le Nouvel Observateur* from a woman reader replying to an inquiry into part-time prostitution in the new high-rise housing developments. *Made in U.S.A.* is the fusion in my mind of three different things: I wanted to oblige a friend, to tackle the Americanisation of French life, and to do something with the Ben Barka affair.

Why did I agree to make both at the same time? Pride, I think. It's a sort of bet. A performance. As if a musician were to conduct two orchestras at once, each playing a different symphony. It is even more difficult for me than most, as I don't work from a written scenario but improvise as I go along. This sort of improvisation can only work if the ground has been thoroughly thought out in advance, and it needs absolute concentration.

I make my films not only when filming, but as I read, eat, dream, even as I talk. This is why I find making two films at once so exhausting—and so exhilarating. To tell you the truth it wasn't planned that way. I was in the middle of making *Deux ou trois choses* when Georges de Beauregard, who was in financial difficulties after the banning of *La Religieuse*,

asked if I couldn't run something up for him in a hurry. It was the only way to get him out of his difficulties and allow him to hang on, he said. "You're the only person who can do anything at a moment's notice." "I suppose I am," I said.

I hadn't an idea in my head when I accepted. Then I read a *Série Noire* thriller which interested me. As I had just seen *The Big Sleep* again, I thought of having the Humphrey Bogart role played by a woman—Anna Karina, as it happens. I also decided to set the action in France rather than America, and worked a marginal episode from the Ben Barka affair into the main theme. My idea was that Figon was not really dead, but had fled to the country and sent for his mistress to join him. She comes to the address given her, and finds him really dead this time. I have set the action in 1969, two years after the parliamentary elections which will be held in March this year. The character is called Politzer, not Figon. No one knows why he died, and the girl sets out to uncover his past. Among other things, she discovers that he has been the editor of an important Parisian weekly which got very worked up over the Ben Barka affair, and on which she herself was a reporter. Because of her love for him she finds herself playing detective, gets tangled in a web of crooks and cops, and in the end decides to write an article about the affair. The film closes on a discussion with a journalist—Philippe Labro—in a Europe One radio station car.

I started off intending to make a simple film; and for the

GODARD AND SKYSCRAPER: "DEUX OU TROIS CHOSES". ABOVE: ANNA KARINA IN "MADE IN U.S.A."

first time I tried to tell a story. But it isn't my way of doing things. I don't know how to tell stories. I want to cover the whole ground, from all possible angles, saying everything at once. If I had to define myself I would say that I was a painter in letters, as one says man of letters. The result is that although I have respected story continuity for the first time in *Made in U.S.A.*, I couldn't prevent myself from filling in the sociological context. And this context is that everything now is American-influenced. Hence the title.

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The other film is much more ambitious, both on the documentary level, as it is about new development schemes in the Paris region, and on the level of pure research, as it is a film in which I am constantly asking myself what I am trying to do. The pretext, of course, is the life—and sometimes the prostitution—of the new housing schemes. But my real aim is to observe the vast mutation which our civilisation is undergoing at present, and to ask myself how one can best come to grips with this mutation.

I should say right away that I am particularly happy to be living in France today, in our time, because the mutations are gigantic, and for a painter in letters this is enormously exciting. In Europe today, and particularly in France, everything is stirring before our very eyes, and one must have eyes to see: the provinces, youth, urban development, industrialisation. It is an extraordinary period. For me, describing modern living is not simply a matter of describing new gadgets and industrial developments as some newspapers do, but of observing these mutations. So my film opens with a commentary.

On August 17, Paul Delouvrier is appointed administrator-in-chief of the new Parisian region. As the commentary is read, we see shots of building sites, road works, housing blocks, people trying to go about the business of living.

"DEUX OU TROIS CHOSES QUE JE SAIS D'ELLE".



Suddenly my own voice is heard, asking myself if I have used the right words in speaking about all this. For instance, I film a house and I ask myself: "Am I right to film this house and not another, at this moment and not another?" In short, the spectator is made to share in the arbitrary nature of my particular choice, and in the quest for a general rule to justify the particular.

Why am I making this film, why am I making it this way? Is the character played by Marina Vlady representative of women on housing estates? I keep asking myself these questions. I watch myself filming, and you hear me thinking aloud. *Deux ou trois choses*, in fact, is not a film but an essay at film, presented as such and really forming part of my own personal research. A document rather than a story. Stretching a point or two, it's a film which ought to have been commissioned by M. Paul Delouvrier.

Of course, it is my secret ambition to be put in charge of French newsreels. Each of my films constitutes a report on the state of the nation: they are news reportages, treated in a quirkish way perhaps, but rooted in actuality. *Le Petit Soldat* ought to have been subsidised by the Ministry of Information, *Vivre sa Vie* by the Ministry of Health, *Pierrot le Fou* by the Minister for Culture (for the quotations), and *Masculin Féminin* by our Minister for Youth.

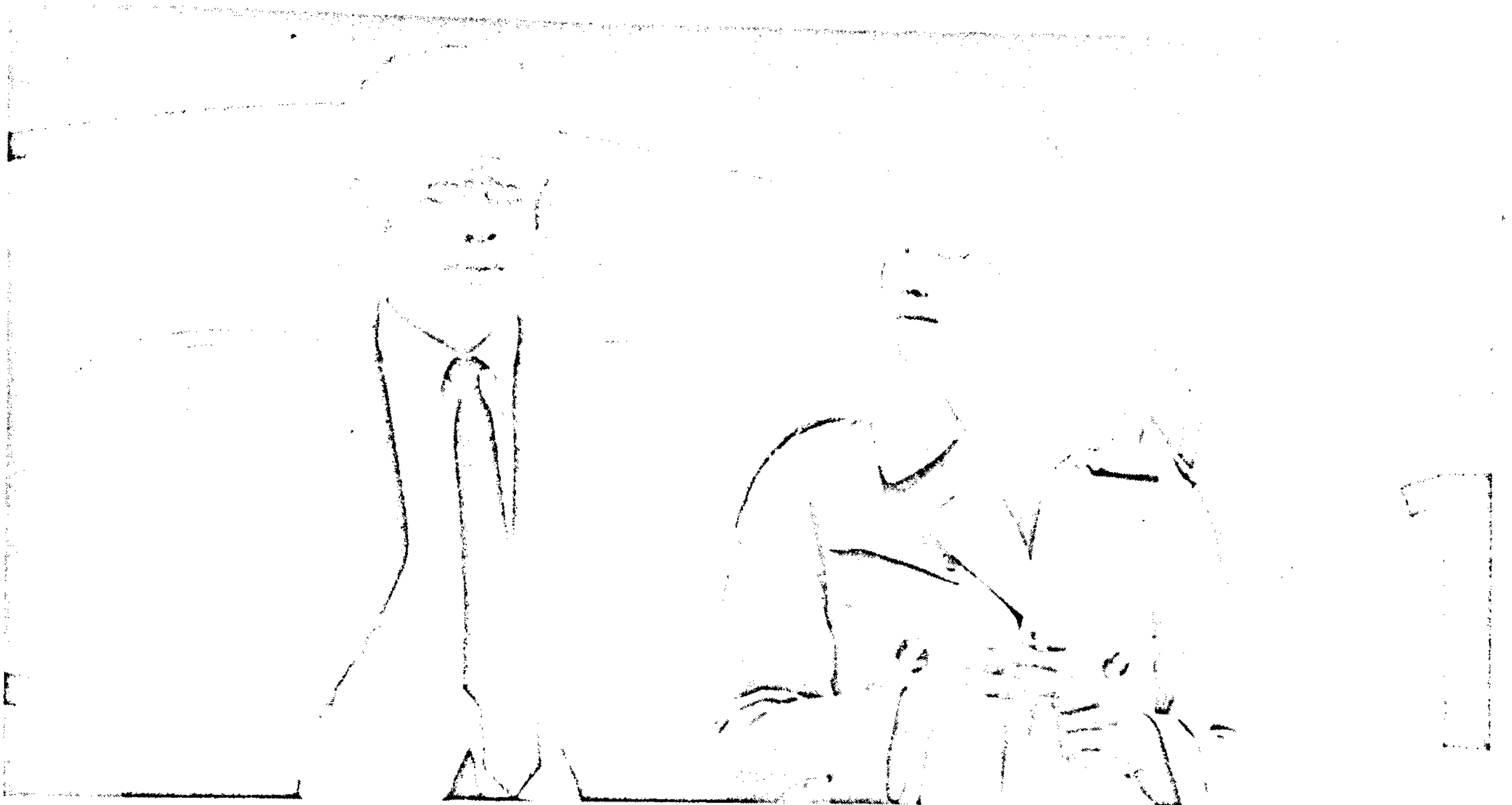
I mention subsidy because, shocking as it may seem and taking all in all, when faced by a choice between dictatorship by money and by political censorship, I prefer the former. Advertising is another of my obsessions. In the modern world, the advertising element reigns supreme, determining everything, paralysing everything. Advertising is allowed, or rather takes, liberties forbidden to everyone else; and in this way it is so representative of our society that it is a richer treasure trove of documentation than any archive. I buy certain papers solely to be able to read the advertisements. All of it interests me: how the slogans change, the graphics, the ways of seducing the consumer public. The importance of advertising is enormous, and so little recognised that I was attacked for being too outspoken about sex when all I did was film the posters which can be seen on any wall. I just brought them all together, and the result was thought 'daring'.

To return to *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle*. Although it was sparked off by a newspaper anecdote, what excited me most was that this anecdote linked up with one of my pet theories, that in order to live in society in Paris today, on no matter what social level, one is forced to prostitute oneself in one way or another—or to put it another way, to live under conditions resembling those of prostitution. A worker in a factory prostitutes himself in a way three-quarters of the time, being paid for doing a job he has no desire to do. The same is true of a banker, a post office employee, a film director. In modern industrial society, prostitution is the norm: and my film endeavours to present one or two lessons on industrial society. (I quote frequently from Raymond Aron's book, *Eighteen Lessons on Industrial Society*.) No doubt you will say that I take myself very seriously. I do. I think a film director has such an enormous part to play that he can't afford not to.

When a director makes a film, he is not only the head of a great enterprise but the strategist of a great general staff, and the possibilities are fantastic. He has to deal with banks, unions, the government, he is in contact with people from all layers of society. He negotiates, controls, influences, borrows, invests. In addition his work has public repercussions, and he is not permitted to make mistakes. As far as art is concerned, he is on his own; but in its execution, he is a veritable head of state.

I am now on my thirteenth film, and yet I feel I have hardly begun really to look at the world. Curiously enough, once again I feel this because I live in France. I have travelled a

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"MADE IN U.S.A.": LASZLO SZABO, ANNA KARINA.

good deal, and was recently planning to leave France again to make films abroad. In Cuba, for instance, about the teaching of illiterates. Or in North Vietnam, to see new ideals at war and to bear witness. Now I feel that I can do the same job by talking about Cuba and Vietnam in my films. Above all I feel that a country can rarely have offered such a range of exciting subjects as France today. The choice is bewildering. I want to cover everything—sport, politics, even groceries—look at Edouard Leclerc,\* a fantastic man whom I'd love to do a film about or with. You can put anything and everything into a film, you *must* put in everything.

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When I am asked why there are references to Vietnam in my films, or to Jacques Anquetil, or to some lady who's deceiving her husband, I refer the questioner to his daily paper. It's all there. In any old order. This is why I'm so attracted by television, one of the most interesting expressions of modern living. A televised newspaper, carefully composed and documented—that would be something extraordinary. What might be even more extraordinary would be to get the various national editors to bring out their own televised newspapers. One could have a couple of hours daily of *France-Soir*, three hours of *Nouvel Observateur* every Thursday, and so on. It would be marvellous. But television in France is the voice of Power, just as it is the voice of the dollar in the United States. So, one has to make do with the cinema, attempting the impossible in order to try to do what the newsreels and programmes don't.

There are other taboos in France, and one of them—no

\*A dynamic young revolutionary of grocery marketing—the Marks and Spencer of France.

matter what they think abroad—is sex. It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to make a frank film about sexual problems. Let's be honest: in order to make a frank film, one must oneself be affranchised, and this, I find in my own case, takes some effort. I still retain ingrained traces of my Protestant upbringing, and I have struggled to get rid of them. But each time I have tried to do something on film it shocks, and it is hard to understand why.

As a matter of fact, no one has ever made a real film about sex, except perhaps Buñuel. The difficult thing is to speak of sex as the psychologists do, coldly and clinically. In *Deux ou trois choses* (where, by the way, the 'elle' is not Marina Vlady but Paris), two people who don't know each other start talking in a café. One of them says: "It's a fine day." The other replies: "We could talk about something more interesting." "But it is interesting," the first goes on. "I love fine weather and the rain, and I talk about it because it interests me."

The other then says, "It doesn't interest me. Let's talk about something else, about sex for instance, because I think it's impossible to talk about it properly in the cinema. Actually nothing is talked about properly in the cinema. I don't know why. But sex is even less properly talked about than anything else."

—"But they're always talking about sex," the first replies.

—"Yes, but talking stupidly. Yet it's no different from the human body, legs, hair, music. So why is it considered to be so inordinately important, or conversely, not important enough? Listen, for instance, I'll ask you to repeat a sentence, and I'm sure you won't dare."

—"What sentence?"

—"First, swear to repeat it."

He refuses, then decides to swear, and the other says, "The sentence is very simple. It's: My sex is between my legs."

Then the first says, "I won't say that, I think it's stupid," etc.

Of course it's stupid, but it illustrates how sex is seen as something bizarre. Mark you, I myself will not tolerate indecency. Two people kissing, for instance. I have shown this once, with Belmondo and Seberg in *A Bout de Souffle*, but never since. The characters in my films embrace and caress each other, but never kiss. The kiss is something intimate and private, purely personal and therefore unshowable. On a huge screen it is revolting to watch. When people kiss in the street I never look at them. I respect their intimacy. But sex is a different matter. One could study it and film it, just as love is studied and filmed. Not that anyone has succeeded in discovering the mystery of love—and it is a mystery which fascinates me. How can something which is a feeling and therefore intangible, provoke such physical joy and pain? What I would like to be able to do one day is show—just show, not comment on—the moment when a feeling enters the body and becomes physiologically alive. Proust took thirty years and eight volumes on a feeling; and one still wants to know how and why it happens.

My mixed feeling of remoteness and fascination towards love also applies to actors. How can anyone be an actor? I can never understand. They are both monsters and children, and my relations with them are unhappy. I don't speak to them, and it's difficult because they are like sick children, constantly in need of reassurance. They suffer from an inability to express themselves, which is why they have become actors, of course. They are children trying to speak at birth, and because they can't, they borrow expression from others.

The plight of the actor moves me deeply because he is composed of infirmities. I don't share Camus' belief that the actor is a Don Juan, living several destinies at once. Actors have no destiny, and they know it. Far from living many roles, they are constantly made aware of their mutilation. Between the creator and the actor there is the same distance as between is and has. The actor *is* not. This said, though, I part company with Bresson when he says there can be no such thing as a good professional actor. I very much admire Bresson, who is one of our greatest directors, but I cannot help feeling that his attitude to actors smacks almost of racism. The director's ideal must certainly be to rediscover a freshness and spontaneity beyond theatricality; but that's his business.

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Put another way, it seems to me that we have to rediscover everything about everything. There is only one solution, and that is to turn one's back on the American cinema. I deplore the fact that the Soviet dream now is to imitate Hollywood, just when Hollywood has nothing more to say. This, if you like, is my own personal way of deploring Soviet-American collusion. Up till now we have lived in a closed world. Cinema fed on cinema, imitating itself. I now see that in my first films I did things because I had already seen them in the cinema. If I showed a police inspector drawing a revolver from his pocket, it wasn't because the logic of the situation I wanted to describe demanded it, but because I had seen police inspectors in other films drawing revolvers at this precise moment and in this precise way. The same thing has happened in painting. There have been periods of organisation and imitation, and periods of rupture. We are now in a period of rupture. We must turn to life again. We must move into modern life with a virgin eye.

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"DEUX OU TROIS CHOSES": MARINA VLADY.