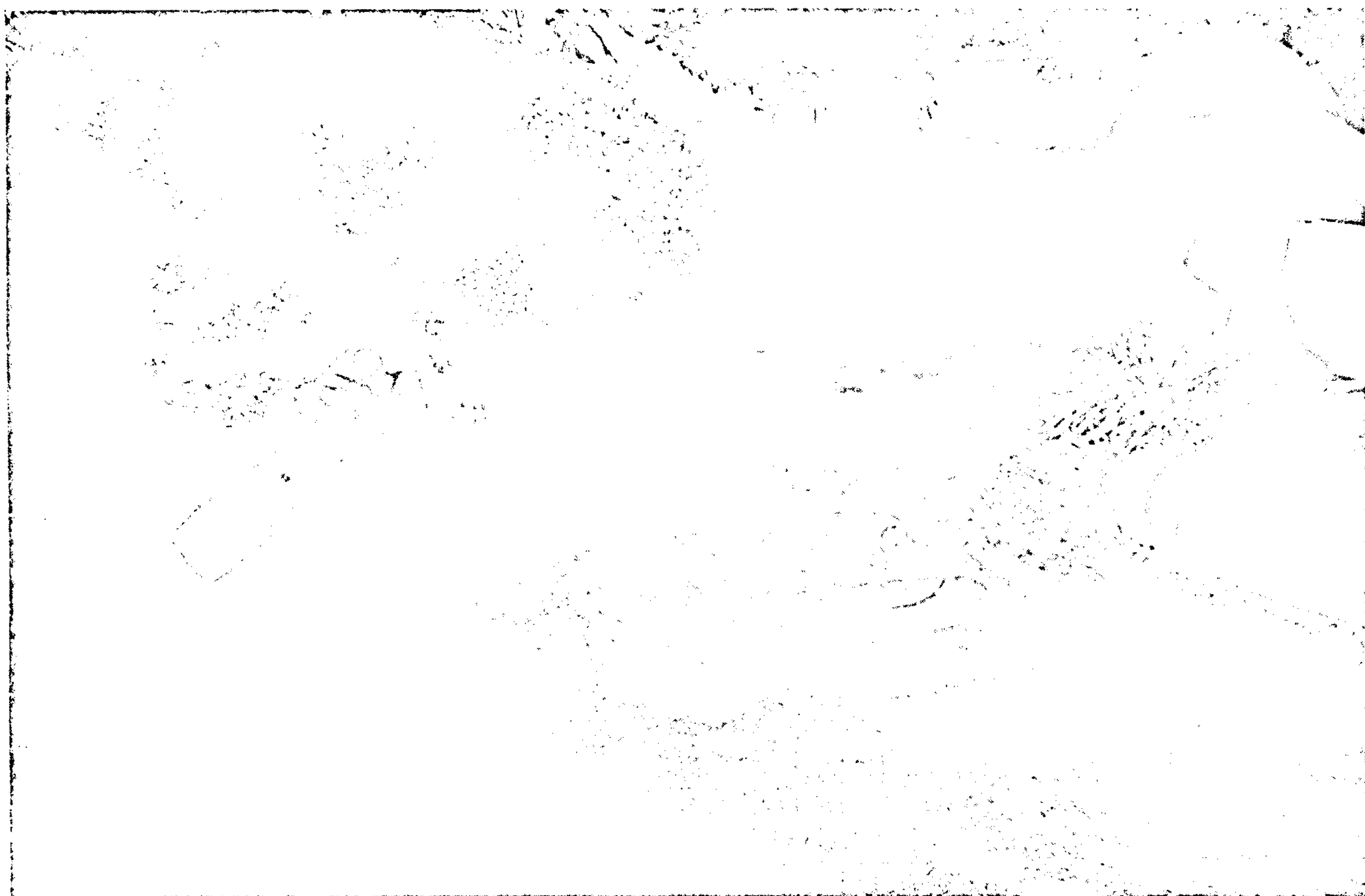


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ANNA KARINA IN "MADE IN U.S.A."

uncomfortably, making us ask, where do *you* stand, comrade? And then the level of reality keeps breaking down as imagination subsides into righteously indignant caricature: I've never seen a TV commercial director as pretentious as the one in this film. And the progression of the central character's consciousness is perfunctory: from grim, clenched-teeth submissiveness (OK, so they *could* have ground him down to that state, by constant surveillance of PROs, managers, bodyguards) to hysterical outburst, with scarcely a glimmer of awareness in between. And everyone talking into camera has the manner of talking to a television interviewer, some kind of cosmic Robin Day whom you never see. How does he fit into the scheme, the reality of the film's world?

What remains is a very real and disturbing impulse to *desecrate*—the beat version of Blake's *Jerusalem* sung at the national resurgence rally packs an uncomfortable charge—but this blasphemy never becomes poetry, as it does in Buñuel when he attacks police and priests—I mean that blazing, destructive poetry like a laser-beam. Instead the tone of the film is hysterical, as if Watkins had to blow up his cops and bishops and bankers into huge father-figures before he could attack them. Someone called *Culloden* a 'sado-pacifist' film; I think that here again he's half in love with the thing he hates, and can't acknowledge the ambivalence in the film's structure, so it gets shrill. But at least he's starting to try to dig down to our ugly social roots. The figures for profits or record sales quoted are accurate: the trouble is that in the unformed world of the film, sliding from documentary into fiction, you don't know if you can trust them.

7 "THE LANGUAGE PROBLEM, but you have to try," wrote Empson. Godard has rarely been as scrupulous about his intentions, targets, and methods as in *Deux ou Trois Choses que Je Sais d'Elle*, and has rarely achieved a film in which the manner and difficulty of speaking at all is so insistently present along with the thing spoken. *Privilege* compared with *Deux ou Trois*

Choses is like an anecdotal 1890s canvas with a literary message set beside a Cubist masterpiece, alive with self-questioning. Let me quote two statements by Godard, the first the text of his trailer for the film, the second his run-down of the action:

SILENCE

Learn in silence two or three things that
I know about HER.
HER, the cruelty of neo-capitalism
HER, prostitution
HER, the region of Paris
HER, the bath which 70 per cent of French
people don't have
HER, the terrible law of housing-estates
HER, the physical side of love
HER, life today
HER, the war in Vietnam
HER, the modern call-girl
HER, the death of modern beauty
HER, the circulation of ideas
HER, the Gestapo of structures.

SYNOPSIS: "While the Americans continue to wage an immoral and unjust war in Vietnam, the French government, whose links with international capital are well known, builds round Paris enormous blocks of flats whose inhabitants, whether through boredom or because of the anxiety which this kind of architecture produces, or because of economic needs, are led to practise prostitution, for Americans returning from Vietnam among others. At the same time, this Society, which is building these blocks of flats, distributes, in the form of paperbacks, a cheap culture which is assimilated by the population in a fragmentary and lamentable way. All this goes on among a very loud noise of pile-drivers, motors, cement-mixers, and compressed materials which, to a certain extent, prevents communication."

With *Une Femme Mariée*, Godard began his exploration of signs, slogans, headlines, advertising images. Now he carries this punctuation of the 'three-dimensional' action by printed two-dimensional signs to its furthest degree, setting up a constant *trompe l'oeil* which twists us back to the documentary level at which this human being is no longer a young wife called Juliette but an actress called Marina Vlady—and then pulls focus one degree further, returning us to the flat surface of the screen on which we read print titles, book jackets and street signs constantly becoming anagrams of themselves as he zooms in and out of them. "There is a greater and greater interference by image and language," says Godard's voice in commentary halfway through the film. "One might almost say that to live in society today is something like living inside an enormous comic-strip."

But imagine a comic-strip in depth: for added to this fluctuating stream of thickening and thinning images is a sinuous commentary, spoken by Godard, which is the thread of the whole film, leading us into the fiction, drawing back to watch himself filming, questioning why he should be filming these girls rather than those trees, asking himself where he stands in relation to his camera, the person he is filming, the society, the time of day, the universe. And the tone of this commentary is not the nudging, salesman-like tone of the Peter Watkins commentary: it continues as it begins, in a whisper, urgent, tentative, trying to find a purchase in a world governed by the grind of bulldozers and the roar of trucks. This is what I mean by self-reflexive: it is a voice which can say the firm uncomfortable things about social and political structure that need saying, and also recognise that it is in some sense a victim of what it denounces, as we all are. Two extracts from the commentary will serve to make the point:

COMMENTARY 3: "I deduce that the Gaullist regime adopts the mask of the reformer and moderniser while it really only wants to perpetuate and regularise the natural tendencies of high capital. I also deduce that, by systematising the cult of planning and centralisation, this same regime underlines the distortions of the economy, and even more of the daily morality on which it is based."

COMMENTARY 13: "The world alone today, where revolutions are impossible, where bloody wars threaten me, where capitalism is no longer sure of its rights . . . and the working class is in retreat, where progress . . . where the astonishing progress of science makes future centuries weigh oppressively upon us . . . where the future is more present than the present, where distant galaxies are at my door. 'Mon semblable, mon frère . . . Where does it begin? . . . Where does what begin? God created the heavens and the earth. Of course . . . but that's a bit simple, too easy. One should be able to say more . . . Say that the limits of my language are those of my world. That as I speak, I limit the world, I end it . . . and when logical and mysterious death comes to abolish this limit . . . and there will be no more questions, no more answers . . . everything will be amorphous. But should things become clear again, that can only be through the appearance of conscience. And then, everything picks up again."

The two poets have merged: David Goodis and Richard P. are one. And the image which accompanies this latter text is an unbelievably close close-up of the whirling froth on a cup of espresso, so close that it fills the whole screen and when a grain of sugar is dropped in, revealing the dark coffee beneath, it seems like the swirling of the heavenly bodies themselves. This image, occurring at the end of a sequence which began perfectly realistically in a bar, sums up the method of the film. Again and again, a scene begins which tells some part of the simple plot of the film—how Juliette takes to prostitution. We see her in her flat, her husband listening to his ham radio set (Jules Feiffer's parody of Johnson coming over the headphones); we see her leave her child in a sort of crèche so she can pick up clients on the street; we see her take a young man

to a hotel room, go with a girl friend to an appointment with an American war correspondent on leave; take the family Mini to a carwash; climb into bed with her husband.

And each of these scenes is not there to keep the story moving, to be captured realistically. In each of them, Godard moves out, drawing in other strands, through his commentary, through direct address by the actor into the camera, through surrealist details—the apartment that serves as a crèche is papered with alluring travel posters, materialising the temptations of foreign travel. It is as if Godard took this anecdote—which came originally from a press exposé on prostitution among housewives—as if he had passed it through a retort and come out with a quintessence in which the observed and the observer were inextricably, poignantly married.

"I want to be able sometimes," he writes, "to make you feel far from the person when I do a close-up. And when I do a long-shot, an establishing shot, then sometimes, not always but sometimes, I want to give the feeling of being very close to the people . . . A film like this, it's a bit as if I wanted to write a sociological essay in the form of a novel, and all I had to do it with was notes of music. Is that what the cinema is? And am I right to continue doing it?"

Deux ou Trois Choses traces the malaise of its characters, actors and maker, stuck in this uncomfortable comic we have made of our world and our cities. It has a form—the form of inspired collage—which can encompass absurdist actions (Flaubert's heartbreaking polymaths Bouvard and Pécuchet turn up in a café sequence, ploughing through mountains of books), fragments of direct documentary interview, a fictional story, and a sustained, anxious meditation, in a stream of rich and rigorous imagery. The opposing categories of the brown envelope and the novel, public and private, without and within, dissolve into something incandescent.

Every considerable artist proposes his own unique angle of vision. Godard, of all the film-makers I have mentioned in these thoughts, goes deepest in forging his. He is the Blake of the modern cinema, "seeing through not with the eye," its Rimbaud, operating "a reasoned disordering of the senses." And now he is moving out of the kind of privacy which was a threat for both of those poets, and making films which are indissolubly personal and public.

COMMENTARY 23: "The birth in the human world of the simplest things, man's spirit taking possession of them . . . a new world where both men and things will have a harmonious relationship. There's my goal. When you come down to it, it's as much political as it is poetic. In any event, it explains the rage for expression. Whose? Mine. Me, writer and painter."

Meanwhile in England, we are still seeking our Cubist/Cuban revolution.

"JUST LOOK AT THE MESS YOU'VE MADE, WILSON!" (28 FEBRUARY 1966). CARTOON REPRINTED BY PERMISSION OF THE NEW STATESMAN AND ALLEN LANE, THE PENGUIN PRESS.

