

Document Citation

Title	"Weekend" and history
Author(s)	Brian Henderson
Source	<i>Socialist Revolution</i>
Date	1972 Nov
Type	article
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	36
Subjects	Godard, Jean Luc (1930), Paris, France
Film Subjects	Weekend (Week-end), Godard, Jean Luc, 1968

"Socialist Revolution
Number 12 (Vol. 2, No. 6)
November-December 1972
Agenda Publishing Co.
396 Sanchez St.
San Francisco, Ca. 94114

"WEEKEND" AND HISTORY

Brian Henderson

I. "WEEKEND" AND THE BOURGEOIS FILM

JEAN-LUC GODARD'S *Weekend* is about the dehumanizing character of advanced capitalism and its irreconcilable contradictions. It is important to realize, however, that this critique of advanced capitalism takes place on two levels—content and form, signified and signifier.¹ The visual form of *Weekend* has been analyzed elsewhere as a break with and commentary on previous fiction film camera styles.² Equally important is the film's revolution in dramatic form, by which is meant here its

1. Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology* (New York, 1967), pp. 35-37.

2. Brian Henderson "Toward a Non-Bourgeois Camera Style," *Film Quarterly*, vol. 24, no. 2 (Winter 1970-71), p. 2.

method of character formation or human figuration. Its visual form and dramatic form make *Weekend* as much a critique of the bourgeois film as a critique of capitalism and the bourgeoisie. It may be the former action which is, in the long run, more important; for if one film can hardly have much impact on capitalism and the bourgeoisie, it can have a serious impact on the bourgeois film if its assault is as direct and total as that of *Weekend*. Bourgeois films continue to be made but they are made in the shadow of *Weekend*, which stands as a permanent embarrassment to later efforts in the form.

The dramatic form of *Weekend* might be called class typage or, perhaps, extreme class typage. The film's bourgeois man and women are not the individualized characters of bourgeois novel, drama, film, but entirely general class types. This typage is "extreme" because Godard's man and woman stand for the bourgeoisie itself. Their function in the film is like that of figures in a pageant. They might have been called M. and Mme. Bourgeois. While individualized characters can be multiplied and set off against each other, *Weekend* could not absorb one more bourgeois couple. A second couple could only mimic the actions of the first. To collapse the bourgeoisie into two figures means that one is not interested in individual differences among its members, but in the social, economic, and moral features of the bourgeoisie as a class. Brecht illuminates this mode of character formation, though he does not specify Godard's extreme class typage:

The parts were built up from a social point of view. The modes of behavior shown by the actors had transparent motives of a social-historical sort. It was not the "eternally human" that was supposed to emerge, not what any man is alleged to do at any period, but what men of specific social strata do in our period.³

Building characters from the social point of view and ignoring individual differences among members of the bourgeoisie means, above all, eliminating psychology, subjectivity, and spirituality, the formal and ideological mainstays of many bourgeois novels, plays, films. Such explorations add nothing

3. John Willett, editor, *Brecht on Theatre* (New York, 1964), p. 100.

to "transparent motives of a social-historical sort" and, indeed, very often serve to hide or distort or distract attention from such motives. Again Brecht:

Great areas of ideology are destroyed when [film] concentrates on external action, dissolves everything into processes, abandons the hero as the vehicle for everything and mankind as the measure, and thereby smashes the introspective psychology of the bourgeois novel.⁴

The man and woman of *Weekend* have no inner life; or, rather, their inner life is their outer life—greed, pornography, murder. By flattening inner life into outer life, class typage also flattens individual into class; as it is precisely the psychological, the subjective, the spiritual which serve to obscure class membership, often by propagation of a universal psychology, subjectivity, spirituality. The method of class typage does not imply that bourgeois individuals have no psychologies or inner lives, only that these are of no interest to a class analysis of the bourgeoisie and its motives.

But while the man and woman of *Weekend* stand for the bourgeoisie in general, they are also typical bourgeois individuals in dress, manners, speech, etc. Two modes of signification overlap or intersect in the film, specifically in its two principal figures. At the narrative level, the couple stands abstractly for the bourgeoisie; the adventures they meet and the stages they go through have reference to the bourgeoisie as a class (this is discussed extensively below). At the acting or performance level, the couple dress, act, speak in codes which signify the bourgeoisie concretely. Dress and speech are "realistic," plot or narrative not at all. Typical Parisians probably dress, talk, and gesture something like this, but typical Parisians will not encounter destroyed highways, Third World spokesmen, and armed youth bands when they go for a country weekend. Godard balances or juxtaposes the concrete appearance of typical bourgeois individuals against abstract ideas concerning the class as a whole.

Substituting class types for the individualized characters of bourgeois narrative affects every other aspect of the work of

4. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

art also, in fact transforms all of its internal and external relations—plot, mode of signification, relation to history, relation to viewer and critic. We may perhaps usefully test this complex of transformations, amounting to a new configuration of the narrative work, by considering *Weekend* in light of Georg Lukács theory of narrative literature. Lukács's theory fits best, and most of his criticism addresses, the classical European novel and drama of the nineteenth century, that literature primarily for, by, and about the European bourgeoisie. *Weekend* takes up this subject at a later point, hence the bourgeoisie it portrays stands in historical relation to the bourgeoisie of nineteenth-century narrative. Comparing *Weekend* to Lukács's model of narrative will tell us how the French bourgeoisie has changed and also how narrative dealing with the bourgeoisie has changed. *Weekend* itself is aware of, and transformed by, these relations at both levels. *Weekend* is a meta-film or meta-narrative, as well as a narrative in the ordinary sense. It problematizes its own relationship to its subject, the bourgeoisie, and its own relationship to the tradition of the bourgeois film and to the tradition of bourgeois narrative.

For Lukács, the link between Marxism and literature is a common central concern with the wholeness of human personality.⁵

Thus the object of proletarian humanism is to reconstruct the complete human personality and free it from the distortion and dismemberment to which it has been subjected in class society. . . .

The ancient Greeks, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, Balzac, Tolstoy all give adequate pictures of great periods of human development and at the same time serve as signposts in the ideological battle fought for the restoration of the unbroken human personality.⁶

Lukács concludes: "The central aesthetic problem of realism

5. The theme of wholeness of personality as universal human telos is common in the German Romantic writers. It may be found, for instance, in Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*. In some versions, Greek culture was such an integration which fell apart in order to be reconstituted at a new and higher level.

6. Georg Lukács, *Studies in European Realism* (New York, 1964), p. 5.

is the adequate presentation of the complete human personality."⁷ In bourgeois society, the quest for completeness of personality always fails; but it is important to understand the way the terms of the struggle and the nature of its failure are dependent upon particular conditions of time and place. Great realist literature reflects the conditions, course, and outcome of the struggle for wholeness of personality in the particular period concerned. It does this through the type.

Realism is the recognition of the fact that a work of literature can rest neither on a lifeless average, as the naturalists suppose, nor on an individual principle which dissolves its own self into nothingness. The central category and criterion of realist literature is the type, a peculiar synthesis which organically binds together the general and the particular both in characters and situation. What makes a type a type is not its average quality, not its mere individual being, however profoundly conceived; what makes it a type is that in it all the humanly and socially essential determinants are present on their highest level of development, in the ultimate unfolding of the possibilities latent in them, in extreme presentation of their extremes, rendering concrete the peaks and limits of men and epochs.⁸

Because they embody "all the humanly and socially essential determinants" of an age, fictional types test the possibilities for human development in that age, and thereby test or critique that age itself. The developmental limits reached by the type reflect or reveal the human limits and contradictions of bourgeois society at a particular point in its history. In Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther*, Werther's love for Lotte and his rejection by aristocratic society "show[s] the insoluble conflict between the free and full development of personality and bourgeois society itself."⁹ In Werther's tragedy are reflected "all the great problems of the struggle for the development of personality."¹⁰

7. Ibid., p. 7.

8. Ibid., p. 8.

9. Georg Lukács, *Goethe and His Age* (New York, 1969), p. 45.

10. Ibid.

Lukács's model postulates a certain relation between art and reality. By reality itself Lukács means the movement of history, seen as "an immanent historical tendency." He says:

Every great historical period is a period of transition, a contradictory unity of crisis and renewal, of destruction and rebirth; a new social order and a new type of man always come into being in the course of a unified though contradictory process.¹¹

Art reproduces or depicts or reflects reality; as many commentators have noted, Lukács's theory of art is a mimetic one. This reflective relation of art to reality implies distinctive roles for criticism and for the artist also. Thus literary critics complete the mimetic cycle by seeing and addressing history itself through the work; they read history in light of the work and/or the work in light of history. According to Lukács, great artists address themselves to history; in a sense they are responsible to it. If there is a conflict between the artist's convictions and history, the artist must give way.

A great realist such as Balzac, if the intrinsic artistic development of situations and characters he has created comes into conflict with his most cherished prejudices or even his most sacred convictions, will, without an instant's hesitation, set aside these his own prejudices and convictions and describe what he really sees, not what he would prefer to see. This ruthlessness towards their own subjective world-picture is the hallmark of all great realists, in sharp contrast to the second-raters, who nearly always succeed in bringing their own *Weltanschauung* into "harmony" with reality, that is, forcing a falsified or distorted picture of reality into the shape of their own world-view. . . . The characters created by the great realists, once conceived in the vision of their creator, live an independent life of their own: their comings and going, their development, their destiny is dictated by the inner dia-

11. *Studies in European Realism*, p. 10. It is easy to see the hand of Hegel in these formulations of Lukács—particularly in what Althusser criticizes as the Hegelian reduction of historical periods to simple internal principles or essences which are characterized in turn by simple contradictions of the whole.

lectic of their social and individual existence. No writer is a true realist—or even a truly good writer—if he can direct the evolution of his own characters at will.¹²

Lukács makes an ideal case of the author who writes against his or her own opinions. Lukács never says it, but it is as though history speaks through great artists, who must in no way oppose themselves to its direction and force.

Lukács's position led him to oppose the principal trends of twentieth-century literature. Joyce, Kafka, Beckett and others broke the novel's connection with realism and thereby broke its connection with history also. Lukács finds twentieth-century literature allegorical rather than realist, allegory being "the genre par excellence which lends itself to a description of man's alienation from objective reality."¹³ Allegory rejects the assumption of an immanent meaning to human existence and to history, which is the basis of realism. Lukács quotes Walter Benjamin:

Every person, every object, every relationship (in allegory) can stand for something else. This transferability constitutes a devastating, though just, judgment on the profane world—which is thereby branded as a world where such things are of small importance.¹⁴

Lukács comments:

The conviction that phenomena are not ultimately transferable is rooted in a belief in the world's rationality and in man's ability to penetrate its secrets. In realistic literature each descriptive detail is both individual and typical. Modern allegory, and modernist ideology, however, deny the typical. By destroying the coherence of the world, they reduce detail to the level of mere particularity.¹⁵

Lukács's argument against twentieth-century literature is that it is allegorical in nature and that allegory is inherently ahistorical.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

13. Georg Lukács, *Realism in Our Time* (New York, 1964), p. 40.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

WE TURN BACK from the Lukácsian theory of literature to *Weekend* and class-typed art. The internal and external relations of the latter deviate from, indeed are opposed to, the Lukács model in nearly every respect. The film does not concern the struggle for wholeness of personality; its types are not general and particular but only general; it is not an imitation of reality but, by its own declarations, an entirely synthetic construction; criticism of it correspondingly calls for clear distinction between the work and history and careful attention to its mode of relation to history; the film is or closely resembles allegory, yet also directly connects with history; its aesthetic requires of the artist not submission to history but fidelity to the artist's convictions and the making explicit of these convictions in the work itself. Let us consider these points in turn.

The man and woman in *Weekend* do not struggle for human development; their goals and methods are in fact inhuman. In the film the question of human development in advanced capitalism is foreclosed in advance. Built into Godard's bourgeois figures is a negative answer to the question, which is not determined, as in Lukács, by submission to history or to the inner dialectic of the figures themselves. Taking up a position in advance, the artist and not history takes responsibility for this judgment. Whereas plot in Lukács tests the developmental possibilities of a society through characters typical of a period, plot in *Weekend* constitutes an argument or demonstration, constructed by the film-maker through extreme class types, concerning the contradictions and destiny of an entire class. Also, whereas in Lukács art imitates reality and narrative art reflects history itself, *Weekend* is non-imitative. It is not only a constructed, synthetic work, it declares its constructedness or difference from reality in several ways: in its self-conscious relation to the bourgeois film and in the arbitrariness and schematism of its own plot. The film is not reality, not history; the tendency of history is not caught or reflected in it. The film is rather a construction standing in a certain self-conscious relation to history.

As a synthetic narrative of pure class types, *Weekend* is an allegory. But it is an allegory about history and not the mod-

ernist ahistorical narrative which Lukács calls by that name. This mode of relation to history is, moreover, in no way inferior to that of Lukácsian realism; in several important respects it is superior. It is a more open, direct, and explicit relation of art to history; one therefore more responsible to its audience. This mode of signification redefines the critical function also. The critic addresses not history but the synthetic construction of the artist. This construction is based upon a class analysis which the critic must engage and criticize. *Werther* and other nineteenth-century works relate to history only through the cumbersome mediation of the individualized character, in whom the individual and the general are mixed. In order to understand the work's relation to history, the critic must unmix these elements. From the author's point of view, history moves through *Werther*—it rides on his actions, words, and gestures. In short a good deal of cleverness and indirection must be displayed on all sides—in writer, reader, critic—so that the historical genie will appear in this garden in which the three friends walk. But the work itself hides its relation to history, it attempts to convince us in the first instance that all we see is the particular *Werther* and his particular actions. We congratulate it for its success in doing so, that *Werther* is simultaneously very particularized yet turns out to carry the meaning of an age in his actions.

The love of *Werther* and Lotte is no mere outburst of passion of two young people; it is an intellectual tragedy. In this case the love can illuminate wonderful, obscure qualities of the life of the society. Few writers are capable of introducing this kind of intellectualization into the private lives of their characters. With most writers therefore the events in the characters' lives remain private, accidental, unsuggestive and lacking relevance.¹⁶

Thus nineteenth-century literature is (programmatically) split between surface and depth, phenomenon and essence. The critic addresses this split and seeks, as it were, to heal or bind it, or to discover an underlying unity. Class typage simplifies the entire matter and, above all, makes its historical relations

16. Georg Lukács, *Writer and Critic* (London, 1970), p. 186.

explicit, placed up front for the viewer to examine and evaluate. Not only is it more direct; in truth class typage constitutes a new mode or relation of art to history, or a new complex of modes. Above all, it insists that the relation of the work to history be entirely conscious on the part of the artist and that this relation be made explicit within the work.

Finally and most important, class typage implies a new relationship between the artist and the work and between the work and history. In a sense all of the above factors have included this one and are perhaps reducible to it. Thus, foreclosing the question of human development in advance, constructing a work rather than imitating reality, creating allegory rather than realism all involve a new activity on the part of the artist. The artist is in each case taking responsibility for his or her art and its relation to history, not presenting the work itself as history. Roland Barthes says of Brecht:

The entire force of his work opposes the reactionary myth of unconscious genius; its greatness is the kind which best suits our period, the greatness of responsibility.¹⁷

In the case of class-typed art, the viewer and critic hold the artist accountable for the class analysis on which his class typage and his art are founded; and take upon themselves the responsibility of examining that analysis critically and of voicing their agreement or disagreement based upon their own analysis.

As compared with the nineteenth-century narrative, *Weekend*'s critique of capitalism and the bourgeoisie is direct and explicit, and its relation to history is self-conscious and responsible. But there are problems and ambiguities. By its very foreclosure of the humanist question in advance (through its extreme class typage), *Weekend* seems to go beyond bourgeois self-critical art toward a cinema of revolutionary action and explicit commitment to the working class. But the basis of its class analysis is ambiguous. Its critique of the bourgeoisie is oddly from inside and from outside the class at the same time, wavering between self-critical bourgeois art and art committed

17. Roland Barthes, *Critical Essays* (Evanston, 1972), p. 71.

to the working class and its perspective. In the first sense, *Weekend* is the final stage of bourgeois self-critical art: absolute negation of the bourgeoisie and elimination of bourgeois art. Because there is nothing human in the quest of the film's characters nor in themselves there cannot even be the disillusion of nineteenth-century narrative, since no illusion is possible to being with; there is also no ethical conflict or contrast between individual and society since the *Weekend* figures are at one with their society in values. In this sense, *Weekend* brings all the tendencies, traditions, and themes of bourgeois self-criticism to their completion: the elimination of any human possibility or interest in the bourgeoisie.

In another sense the film exhibits a working-class perspective on the bourgeoisie. It ignores psychological and moral differences among bourgeois individuals and concentrates upon the objective political, economic, and moral conditions of the class *as a whole*—its dominant role in the production and consumption of material goods and ideology. To see the bourgeoisie as a whole is necessarily to see it from outside itself, that is, from a working-class perspective. But although the extreme class typage of *Weekend* is derived from a working-class perspective, the film does not commit itself to the working class. This makes the film a contradiction: it flattens the bourgeoisie into a working-class perspective without, however, revealing the basis for doing so, i.e., its own commitment to a working-class perspective. *Weekend* is a film with an object (the dehumanized bourgeoisie) but without a subject. It presents the bourgeoisie as a spectacle but does not say who is looking or seeing it in this way. What Roland Barthes says about avant-garde art could be applied to *Weekend*:

The avant-garde is always a way of celebrating the death of the bourgeoisie, for its own death still belongs to the bourgeoisie; but further than this the avant-garde cannot go; it cannot conceive the funerary term it expressed as a moment of germination, as the transition from a closed society to an open one; it is impotent by nature to infuse its protest with the hope of a new assent to the world: it wants to die, to say so, and it wants everything to die with it. The often fascinating liberation it imposes on

language is actually a sentence without appeal: all sociability is abhorrent to it, and rightly so, since it refuses to perceive sociability on any but the bourgeois model.¹⁸

In fairness to Godard, we note that he did not prolong the moment of *Weekend*; he resolved its ambiguity soon after by personal and cinematic commitment to the working class. In this larger perspective, the film is simultaneously the last act of a bourgeois artist and the first of a committed one—some overlay of the two, without being precisely either. It is just this transitional oddness, however, which makes the film interesting: a last look by a bourgeois film-maker at bourgeois characters and the bourgeois film, in which the objects of sight are flattened to a consistency of zero, into pure negation. Before Godard departed from the bourgeois film, he sought to burn the last bridge behind him. By virtue of this odd circumstance the film's greatest value lies in its commentary on the bourgeois film, toward which its destructive power is primarily directed.

A brief look at the place of *Weekend* in Godard's development will illuminate both. Many of Godard's films before *Weekend* are concerned with politics; several experiment with narrative and visual forms sharply at odds with prevailing bourgeois norms. Nevertheless the films themselves remain uncommitted politically. Godard's films through *La Chinoise* (the last before *Weekend*) exemplify the romantic theory of artistic creation as irony: the artist sets in motion a variety of characters, forces, ideas, viewpoints which oppose each other and work toward some resolution in the course of the work. The artist does not choose among these, and need not even have preferences among them. Instead the artist plays over, above, through, around the viewpoints, forces, and personae he or she has set in motion. For certain romantics, this unlimited freedom of the artist, the untrammelled play of his or her subjectivity, was the principal glory of art and the emblem of subjectivity itself; for nowhere else (since heroic times) could the subject exercise and express itself so extensively and freely. Shades of this position, if not the theory itself, have persisted strongly in

18. Ibid., p. 69.

bourgeois notions of art since the romantic period. Godard is surely the figure (at least in recent times) who has exercised and demonstrated most fully the play of subjectivity or of irony in cinema. Godard's early films showed that the cinema could be an entirely personal means of expression, following the nuances and impulses of subjectivity instantly and supplely. The early films are notorious for just this—they flit from perspective to perspective and from idea to idea very quickly and often willfully. Godard's achievement was original and genuine and he soon became the hero as artist or artist as hero for many—the very figure of the bourgeois artist in our period.

Even in *La Chinoise*, all of whose characters are Maoist activists, Godard remains detached, i.e., ironic, giving full expression to the political ideas and passions presented but not himself taking sides and in fact reserving judgment on the entirety of the action. Only in *Weekend* is irony and lack of commitment foreclosed, though not entirely. Godard projects his principal characters without ambiguity; only one perspective is taken on them and maintained from beginning to end: visually, dramatically, humanly. This alone forecloses the principal realm of ironic play in Godard's previous films, his multiple and contradictory attitudes and feelings toward his characters. Irony and ambiguity are not entirely foreclosed, however; at least in that the actions and words of the bourgeois couple, the youth bands, and the Third World characters are presented by Godard objectively. i.e., without formal choice or endorsement on his part. These perspectives are enacted objectively, put alongside each other as in bourgeois art. Formally at least the artist is still detached here, though the terms of choice themselves embody an extensive foreclosure in relation to his earlier work—that is, no choice among bourgeois characters and attitudes, only between the (foreclosed) bourgeoisie and the youth bands, etc.

The later films (*Pravda*, *Wind from the East*, *Vladimir and Rosa*, *Struggle in Italy*) make good the incipient commitment of *Weekend*—they commit themselves to an explicit Marxist-Leninist perspective that eliminates the ambiguities of the earlier films. This is done chiefly through spoken narrations which are in effect the application of revolutionary theory to

concrete problems and situations. This is never a position which is applied but a self-critical inquiry into concrete conditions. In these films alone, the object of the bourgeois world (critical images) is met by a subject that shapes and criticizes them and takes responsibility for the distinctive perspective offered—i.e., revolutionary theory, the theoretical arm of the proletariat.

But *Tout Va Bien*, the most recent film by Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin, is a bourgeois film, a pre-*Weekend* film for several interrelated reasons. It abandons the explicit working-class perspective of the earlier films; i.e., without the Marxist-Leninist soundtrack discourse or indeed any explicit commitment, the film reverts to bourgeois objectivity—sounds and images presented for their own sake without criticism. Furthermore, the film presents bourgeois characters sympathetically, devoting a film to them and their problems, in effect expressing hope and good wishes for their survival, well-being, and development; with no sense of irreconcilable opposition between this motive and the well-being and development of the working class. *Tout Va Bien* clearly requires separate and detailed treatment. The film is perhaps valuable in any case for proving what we knew anyway: that Godard has no more power than anyone else to revoke the rule of *Weekend*.

TWO THINGS ARE CLEAR, that *Weekend* did not invent class typage and that the entire subject of class typage has been too little studied. The history of dramatic form, let alone of class typage, has not been written. Class typage has its roots in earlier forms of theatre (and painting and literature), including the commedia dell'arte and medieval theater and other traditions using stock characters, pageant figures, and types of various kinds. But class typage of the sort used in *Weekend* is something new in the history of dramatic forms; at least in the sense that bourgeois and proletarian typage depended on the historical development of those classes themselves. The development of a proletarian ideology and of an art based upon it took still longer; and perhaps the latter did not clearly and self-consciously exist until seizure of power by the proletariat at one time and place. Thus class typage is a dramatic form

unique to the twentieth century because directly dependent upon the social and economic developments of that century. Moreover, since industrial civilization and its class system is not the product of individual countries or regions but is an organization of the entire world economy and population, it follows that class typage is not the product of national art traditions (though it is mediated by these) but of the world economy and class struggle itself. The world-wide profusion of class-typed art confirms this. Class typage is central to the productions of the Peking Opera and to films based on them, such as *The East Is Red* and *Red Detachment of Women*. One could list related examples from theaters all over the world. In film, Oshima uses a version of class typage in *Death by Hanging* and other films; a large number of films from South America, especially from Brazil, make integral use of class typage. Soviet films, theater, and poster art of the twenties and early thirties and Brechtian theater of the same period pioneered the development of class-typed dramaturgy, but it is perhaps only in the present that class typage has come fully into its own. It is, we might say, the dramatic form of our time; it is all around us. Wherever there is mime troupe, radical theater, puppet shows, comic strips or street happenings, there is class typage.¹⁹ On stages, in streets and parks, at meetings and in movie houses everywhere, people are acting out the class struggles of advanced capitalism, the principal social process of our period.

THE FOREGOING is intended to provide a theoretical framework for the critical essay which follows. Film critics, like other workers, must be theorists of their own practice and, so

19. Not all current uses of typage are Marxist; each instance must be examined critically to determine its underlying class analysis. *L'Amant Militaire*, a 1967 production of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, employs a mode of racial typage that is not an improvement on bourgeois individualist dramaturgy but a regression to medieval obscurantism. The play's stage directions read: "Accents and Characterization: Except where otherwise noted, Garcia and Alonso are played as Spaniards; Pantalone as a Jew; Rosalinda, Corallina, and Arlecchino as Italians; Brighella as a Mexican and Espada as a Negro." In combining racist typage with a spurious class analysis, this dramaturgy recalls the fundamental method of fascist ideology. The text of the play is on view in *The New Consciousness*, edited by Albert J. LaValley (Cambridge, 1972), at p. 212.

far as possible, make explicit their theoretical assumptions so that the reader may examine their critical work in light of them. We determined that *Weekend* is a kind of allegory; the essay which follows is therefore a kind of allegorical interpretation. It is not criticism which moves between individualized character and social structure, reading these into each other, tracing interactions and interrelations. It sees the figures of *Weekend* as pointing beyond themselves toward descriptions of a certain society. It therefore addresses itself to the adventures of these figures, the film's plot, as the center of meaning in the work. The central defect of the following essay is that it does not go beyond an interpretation of *Weekend* toward a critique of its politics and class analysis. This task must await a separate occasion—hopefully a study extending to all of Godard's films.

II. "WEEKEND" AND THE BOURGEOISIE

OUR INTERPRETATION OF *Weekend* begins with its plot. A bourgeois husband and wife, after consulting their lovers, set out to murder her mother for money; after many obstacles and interruptions they accomplish their task but are prevented from collecting their gains by the intervention of unexpected outside forces. The significance of *Weekend*—both meaning and aesthetic effect—derives from this plot and its internal relations.

This is not just a plot involving a bourgeois man and woman, it is *the bourgeois plot*. The principle of typage operates not only in regard to character presentation, but also in plot construction. The plot of *Weekend*, considered apart from its execution, suggests the work of Henri-Georges Clouzot (*Diabolique*, *The Wages of Fear*, etc.). Clouzot's bourgeois characters are just as vicious, greedy, and murderous as Godard's bourgeois couple, his treatment of them as corrosive and illusionless, and their self-made plots as sordid and complex as that of *Weekend*. Clouzot penetrates bourgeois mystification as relentlessly as Godard. But there is a farcical element in Godard's treatment missing in Clouzot. Clouzot treats his bourgeois characters in accordance with their own solemnity—he lets

them stew in their own juices as it were, until their highly rational calculations undo them. If we balance Clouzot with Jacques Tati's farcical but equally acid treatment of the bourgeoisie, we will have a fair account of the tonal influences on *Weekend*. *Weekend* places Godard in a long tradition of scourges of the middle class, going back at least to Stendhal and including Flaubert, who is referred to in the film (over a sunny shot of a deserted provincial street: "Go over to Monsieur Flaubert's and get a rabbit").

Comparison to Clouzot makes clear another aspect of the film: its plot is not well-made; more precisely, the plot is never finished. The film ends only half through it. We know from the early scenes—the husband's call to his lover, the wife's meeting with hers—that the real struggle will begin only after the money is obtained from the wife's mother. Husband, wife, wife's lover, and husband's lover will then plot and scheme to control the money and to eliminate their competitors. Who knows what surprise alliances, betrayals, and other turns will be revealed before the money and the characters are finally disposed of? We need only imagine what Clouzot would do with this situation. No wonder the man and woman are in such a hurry—they have so much story to get through! The plot of *Weekend* is a high-powered motivation-machine that breaks down on the road, or is broken down, destroyed, by an outside force. The film has far more motivation or plot energy than it uses. In this sense *Weekend* is the leisurely exploration (and critique) or the first half of a bourgeois melodrama. But of course this suspension of plot is more to the point than the subsequent grisly details that we are denied. What occurs after the husband and wife get the money is the suspension of the premise on which they act and on which bourgeois drama and narrative rest—the existence and continuance of bourgeois society itself, its class rule. (The extent of this suspension—whether local or general, temporary or permanent—is not made clear in *Weekend*.) The characters and the class they represent no longer control the context in which motivations may be pursued. In the most literal sense—they no longer control the roads.

It becomes clear that we are dealing not with the story of an

individual couple but with that of a class. If this couple is truly M. and Mme. Bourgeois, if they are genuinely typical and representative, then what happens to them is what happens to the bourgeoisie, its fate as a class. (This of course puts it the wrong way around—Godard's subject is the bourgeoisie; in order to represent it he has resorted to typage of character and of plot.) In addition, it should be clear that the historical stage represented in *Weekend* is the bourgeois epoch, or more precisely, the end of that epoch. We are watching the fate of a class in history, presented theatrically through typed figures. Godard makes this design explicit in his famous title: "From the French Revolution to Weekends with De Gaulle, a summary of the historical progress of the French bourgeoisie from 1789 to the present." Thus when we examine the plot of *Weekend* closely in order to determine (1) What is the fate of the couple along the road? and (2) What comes between the couple and its goals? we are really asking (1) What is the historical fate of the bourgeoisie? and (2) What has/will come between it and its goals? The entire thrust of Godard's art in *Weekend*—his plotting, his typage, even his camera set-ups—requires this equation. It may be argued that ridicule is the chief purpose of *Weekend* and/or that its obvious ridiculing element is inconsistent with the serious purpose we suggest. In fact the evident contempt that Godard has for this couple (which he communicates to us also) does not stand in the way of his seeing precisely its operations and its fate in history. Of course the teacher in this respect is Marx himself. Marx abhorred the bourgeoisie and often described its activities in scathing terms, but he studied its movements and its entire historical span in closest detail.

Before we turn to the plot, we must take note of its setting—the road. Road and plot, plot and road are correlative here. The road is the locus of the plot, the plot is the measure of the road. The road is traversed by a plot, the plot is described by a road. The fate of the bourgeoisie has always been bound up with the development of roads, in an actual and a symbolic sense. It is a historical commonplace that the rising middle classes allied themselves with the royal power against the noble class whose feudal land rights and power over locali-

ties were a serious obstacle to trade. The royal highways were primarily designed for kingly travel and display, but they symbolically proclaimed the interests of the bourgeoisie by brushing aside local restrictions and the petty sovereignties of landholding barons and nobles. The king's highways and the royal power generally advanced centralization and nationalization of power (and accompanying uniformity)—the hallmarks of bourgeois rule. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the bourgeoisie had the option to derive its rights and status from the crown rather than from the towns, that is, to become *bourgeois du roi*. The bourgeoisie thus became the first delocalized or landless class. Over centuries, the power of the aristocracy declined and that of the bourgeoisie increased; gradually also, certainly from the suspension of the Estates General in 1614, the common cause of bourgeoisie and crown disintegrated. Having secured its gains, the class now found the crown a barrier to further gains. Even at the time of the Revolution, local landowners (by now not all nobility) had the power to impose duties on goods carried along local roads. One of the acts of the Directory was to abolish all seigniorial rights. There had been a vigorous highway program in the eighteenth century, and throughout the Napoleonic era and the nineteenth century highway improvement and expansion projects were continually undertaken. In these activities, as always, the bourgeoisie acted universally, "for all." "Everyone" could use the highways, they were open to each and all for the full exercise of his economic and personal individuality. Also as always, universality and openness were only formal rights, empty of content for all except the bourgeoisie, which alone had the means and interests to make use of the highways. Thus the national highway system was—in fact and symbol—a historical triumph of the bourgeoisie. The wreckage of this triumph in *Weekend* is an important symptom. Stendhal defined the novel, the art-form of and about the middle class, as "a mirror riding along a highway."²⁰ In chronicling the latter bourgeois epoch, *Weekend* is the continuation of the social

20. Stendhal, *The Red and the Black*, translated by C. K. Scott Moncrieff (New York, 1953), p. 100. Moncrieff leaves this motto to chapter 13 untranslated: "Un roman; c'est un miroir qu'on promène le long d'un

novel of the nineteenth century (by very different means), not of the subjectivist novel of the twentieth century. It is, quite literally, a camera riding along a highway.

We turn our attention now to those plot elements—forces, persons, things—that come between the couple and its goals. There are basically three sets of obstacles: those of the highway itself—traffic jams, accidents, and finally near-total wreckage; those of the young people, along the road and at its end; and that of the Third World figures. We will consider each of these groups separately and follow out the implications of each before we consider their interrelations. We see along the road the contradictions of the bourgeoisie coming back to itself at last. Everything that the couple meets on the road, every obstacle encountered, is some aspect of themselves coming back to them, no longer capable of banishment or denial. These are the contradictions of the bourgeois epoch itself, once dim and remote, now huge, inescapable, pressing in. What the couple encounters along the highway is thus a portrait of themselves, a mirror-image of their and their era's contradictions. Everything they meet on the highway is in fact their own. They do not recognize themselves in these persons, forces, things, they experience them as "obstacles," as other, but this is the meaning of their journey: the return of the bourgeoisie to itself in the last moments of its historical epoch. If bourgeois society and the bourgeois era are founded on certain fundamental contradictions that cannot be overcome within that era, then the return or reconciliation of these contradictions to the bourgeoisie signals the end of that era and the advent of a new one. The bourgeoisie may be allowed a few moments of tragic self-knowledge in its eclipse as a class, its historical termination. Of course Godard makes sure to show that this ending is also farcical—and not a little of the farce derives from the bourgeoisie's stubborn refusal to recognize itself in its own catastrophes, its determined, absurd insistence that what comes down the road is unrelated to itself, its naive "surprise." (Which is to say that the bourgeois epoch is in fact not yet

chemin." The translation given is that of Harry Levin, *The Gates of Horn* (New York, 1966), p. 129. Levin also points out that Stendhal's attribution of his motto to Saint-Réal is false.

over—Godard's images carry him somewhat ahead of reality. When the epoch indeed ends these truths will be inescapable.) In sum, the couple's journey along the highway is a journey of self-identity (a through-the-looking-glass): what they meet at every point is themselves. What appears as other is in fact own or self, not the very end of the journey but stages on the way, a getting-very-near-the-end. Given this scheme, the reader will not find it difficult to anticipate how each set of obstacles will be treated. The highway deadlock and carnage represent the cumulation and apotheosis of self-contradictory bourgeois individualism, leading finally to mutual negation and paralysis. The Third World figures represent the imperialistic adventures of the bourgeoisie at last returned to it, standing now on the home soil ready to succeed their former masters in power. And the youth bands are of course the children of the bourgeoisie, the contradictions of its own flesh, facing it with its innermost bankruptcy. In this sense the young people are the purest negation. Unlike the proletariat, they cannot redeem history and inaugurate a new era. They merely help to end the bourgeois order.

The highway motif (like that of the revolt of the young people) is carefully built and developed by Godard. It is introduced in the parking-lot skirmish that the wife observes from the balcony. On the road it proceeds from the first, plausible, police-controlled accident to greater and greater wreckage. It's as though the *density* of the highway medium increases as the couple proceeds along the road, until an accident for them is unavoidable. Gradually but inevitably, all is being gathered into one huge piece of fire-fused flesh and metal sculpture, executed in the totality of the human environment, the ultimate expression of a fascist aesthetic.²¹ (Compare Godard's sketch in *Paris vu par . . .*, in which a metal sculptor and an auto designer are equated.) Even the sky is incorporated into this frieze-frame—they bury her mother beneath the collision of an airplane and a car, possibly the sign of a new era as in the mating of Zeus and Leda (cf. Yeats's "Leda and the Swan").

21. See Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations* (New York, 1969), at 219, especially pp. 243–44.

The highway obstacles met by the couple do not come from the young people or from the Third World, but from the internal breakdown of bourgeois society itself. We are concerned here with the causes and implications of that breakdown. The economics of roads (and of other basic transport or "social overhead" facilities) is relevant here—at least by analogy.²² The building and maintenance of roads require greater outlays of capital than are normally available to the individual entrepreneur, they take a long time to construct and a longer time to yield profit, and the return on investment is indirect and to the business community as a whole rather than to individual entrepreneurs. In short, the building of roads always requires enlightened self-interest in governments and in the classes they serve, that is, consideration of long-range advantage and postponement of the immediate one. Similarly with rules of the road and with the other exchange rules of bourgeois society—all agree to abide by certain restrictions on immediate self-interest in order to secure a system of exchange on which all can rely. In this way each individual can secure his maximum economic and human development. This is the theory of the bourgeois state. But there is a basic contradiction in this theory, and in bourgeois society itself, that constantly threatens to tear it apart. Bourgeois society demands both the severest competition among individuals, that is, their most strenuous assertion of self-interest, even while it requires limitations of self-interest in order to preserve the exchange structure. The economic success of the arrangement at any given time determines whether the system holds, but so do sociological and ideological factors such as group sense, custom, etc. A runaway inflation is an example of group self-interest disintegrated by individual self-interest. In any case—humanly if not always economically—bourgeois society generates and develops the anti-social behavior and traits that tend to destroy it. It is this self-generated destruction that we see in *Weekend*. The couple sneak ahead of the other cars in the traffic jam, run a cyclist off the road, bump and smash other cars, then are surprised when others smash them and

22. My source here is Phyllis Deane, *The First Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge, 1965), p. 69.

finally the entire highway becomes unusable. They feel no socialized restraint or group sense whatever; they feel only antagonism even for people exactly like themselves. At several points in the film they shout "Help, help!" to passers-by, but never once do they themselves help anyone and no one helps them. (This isolation and atomization of the bourgeoisie makes them easy prey for the youth bands, who seem at least to have rediscovered group sense and solidarity—"retribalization.") We see in the couple the decadence of individualism in which the imperative of self-thrust wrecks the system of mutual restraint that makes self-thrust possible. The portrait of the highways confirms this condition. Each man for himself, each car for itself, has led finally to deadlock, to absolute immobility, to a situation in which the will of each individual is thwarted by that of all the others. Each negates each and all and in this mutual contradiction bourgeois society itself dissolves.

What does this deadlock mean? First of all, it means the economic stagnation of bourgeois society through the wreckage or immobilization of economic facilities and commerce. It means also that bourgeois society can no longer secure or provide for the economic development of the individual. We must not forget that it is an economic quest that the couple undertakes; the economic fate that they meet along the road is part of the meaning of their journey. (It is interesting that the bourgeois pictured here are *non-productive*, even in an entrepreneurial sense; they engage neither in manufacture nor in commerce. They pursue an inheritance, that is, stagnant, unproductive wealth—another sign of the decadence of the bourgeoisie at this stage of its history.)

Closely related to the economic fate of the individual in bourgeois society is his human or personal development, and to this we turn. Economic and human development have always been linked in bourgeois life, expression, and art. Often the same terms are used for both, less as metaphors than as literal truth. Thus: "expansion, growth, development, diversification, integration"—all apply both to bourgeois economics and to bourgeois selves. It is well-known that the great bourgeois period (following the Revolution of 1789) inaugurated an unprecedented economic development. This development

was progressive and an important historical achievement: only by virtue of it can socialism come about. It must not be forgotten either that the early bourgeois period also produced an important expansion of personal or human development. The bourgeois eclipse of feudalism permitted vastly greater numbers of people than ever before to develop themselves and seek fulfillment. It is also true that these people pursued their development at the expense of still greater numbers of people who were not allowed to do so. The bourgeois human revolution was an important step forward in the emancipation of humanity, and truly revolutionary, but it was blighted from the first and doomed to failure by its basic contradiction, its liberation of many and its repression of many more. The classical art of this period—Goethe, Schiller, Balzac, Tolstoy—celebrates the expansion of human possibilities, but also reflects its limits and contradictions.

It is no accident that the great theme of nineteenth century fiction is that of disillusion. The characters of the greatest novels virtually *exhaust* their societies in the search for fulfillment . . . and do not find it. As the bourgeois period develops, however, there is a qualitative change. The contradictions of capitalist society become inescapable; disillusion can no more be an authentic theme because the illusion of general human emancipation under bourgeois rule is untenable from the start. Capitalism enters into the lives of the bourgeoisie, deadening the human in them. Georg Lukács argues persuasively that Flaubert's doting on cruelty in *Salammbô* and elsewhere reflects the brutalizing tendency of late capitalist development.²³ It is this brutalization that we see full-blown in *Weekend*. The bourgeois couple cannot be disillusioned in any meaningful sense—only thwarted. Their journey is itself corrupt; nothing human is at stake in it. No human development is involved in any of their strivings; they seem incapable of human development. Not only their violence to other bourgeois and to the youth reflects this, but their personal relations also, in which sexuality is equated with pornography. This point is nicely

23. Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, translated by Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (Boston, 1963), pp. 192–95.

capped when they say "I love you" over the body of her mother.

The typage point discussed above also relates to human development, or its absence, in the latter bourgeois epoch. Balzac created a vast gallery of bourgeois "types" while Godard needs only two characters or figures to represent the bourgeoisie of today. This reflects a great impoverishment of the human resources of the bourgeoisie and also a severe contraction or elimination of its possibilities for human development. In bourgeois society human development as well as economic development was traditionally based on an exchange principle or model. Thus one developed oneself by interacting as thoroughly as possible with as many different kinds of people as possible. The richness of bourgeois types in Balzac was a reflection of the human wealth of bourgeois society itself. Godard's radical typage, the dwindling of this richness to two, reflects the human poverty and abstraction of advanced bourgeois society. (This point may also be tested concretely by a consideration of *Stolen Kisses*, Truffaut's ill-fated attempt to create a gallery of modern characters. Detectives stalk the streets of Paris but they find no mysteries there.) Human development is impossible in latter-day bourgeois society because interaction is impossible—everyone is the same. (The paradox of excessive individualism coexistent with conformity or sameness is treated by Tocqueville in a brilliant chapter, "How France had become the country in which men were most like each other," in which he shows that the two phenomena are in fact correlative.²⁴) It is interesting that classical bourgeois economics also assumed a diversity of tastes, interests, work skills, etc., and based economic development on its increasing diversification. Modern advertising and other manipulative techniques make this diversity unnecessary and themselves further human sameness. The bourgeois era has not in fact ended; but Godard's demonstration of the impossibility of human development in it suggests its death as few things can.

24. Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, translated by Stuart Gilbert (New York, 1955), pp. 77–81.

THE JOURNEY FORMAT OF *Weekend* is related to its aesthetic effect. As with all journey films or stories, we identify with the journey's motion—we want it to go forward. Upon a first viewing, the continual interruptions and obstacles are highly irritating. This journey is sordid and in itself rather uninteresting, but we want to get on with it. Godard's interruptions of course serve to detach us from this identification, literally to create distance between the journey and ourselves, and to encourage a critical perspective in our viewing. In his famous comparison of dramatic theater with epic theater, Brecht lists the following oppositions:

<i>Dramatic Theater</i>	<i>Epic Theater</i>
the spectator is involved in something	he is made to face something
the spectator is in the thick of it, shares the experience	the spectator stands outside, studies
eyes on the finish	eyes on the course
one scene makes another	each scene for itself

When we become irritated with Emily Brontë for spinning her whimsies instead of answering the simple question "Which way Oinville?," we realize that we are sharing the experience of the couple rather than judging it. On subsequent viewings our perspective shifts and the film seems very different. In *Weekend* it is the course, not the finish, that is central. But there may be a larger design or implication in this necessary shift of perspective. By our identification and disappointment, we come to realize in an especially vivid way that—humanly and historically—this couple and its class aren't going anywhere.

The Third World figures also interrupt and delay the couple but—what is essential—they do not prevent the couple from pursuing its goals and reaching its destination. (They are *there*, waiting for their turn, but meanwhile the destruction of the bourgeoisie is being carried out by itself and by its children.) The African and the Algerian merely require the couple to listen to what they have to say. They give the bourgeois man and woman, in effect, a history lesson—an account, past,

25. Brecht on Theatre, p. 37.

present, and future, of their class and its destiny. During the lesson, the man and woman sit bored, impatient, looking at the camera restlessly as though sitting for their portrait. And, indeed, the summary of Morgan and Engels and of the Third World future is in fact a portrait of the European bourgeoisie. Appropriately also, the couple goes directly from this history lesson to the killing of her mother and capture soon afterwards; they meet their destiny. Not long after the lecture on prehistory, we see man reduced or returned to savagery—once again he lives by hunt and slaughter, principally cannibalism, mates by group marriage rather than monogamy, etc.

Two books stand over the entire last section of the film, from the Third World sequence to the end: Engels's *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* and Freud's *Totem and Taboo*. The former is summarized in the Third World lecture, the title of the latter is flashed on the screen several times during scenes of slaughter, group life among the youth bands, etc. Both books attempt to give systematic perspective—Marxist and Freudian—to man's early history and evolution, through the analysis of anthropological evidence. (Central to both books is the nineteenth-century idea that early human history lies embedded, archeologically, in the life modes of existent primitive tribes.) These books provide the film's largest historical framework, fully appropriate to the events of its final section. It is also appropriate that this commentary—or chorus—is delivered by the Third World figures, whose enslaved labor over centuries has given them a knowledge of reality superior to that of the bourgeoisie and whose historical experience and role give them a superior understanding of history. They themselves are the cumulation of the class struggle whose history they read to the bourgeois couple (themselves an earlier, transitional cumulation or product of that struggle).

Engels's book, the more important of the two for *Weekend*, touches upon and ties together most of the themes and elements of the film. A few passages from the book will indicate the underlying connections and throw some light on the film's design. Throughout his study, Engels contrasts civilization unfavorably to the ancient gens of savagery and barbarism. (The

gens was one of several groups within a tribe; it consisted of "all persons who, by virtue of punaluan family [the extension of the incest prohibition to brothers and sisters] and in accordance with the conceptions necessarily predominating therein, constitute the recognized descendants of a definite individual ancestress, the founder of the gens."²⁶

The stage of commodity production, with which civilization began, is marked economically by the introduction of (1) metal money and, thus, of money capital, interest and usury; (2) the merchants acting as middlemen between producers; (3) private ownership of land and mortgage; (4) slave labor as the prevailing form of production. The form of the family corresponding to civilization and under it becoming the definitely prevailing form is monogamy, the supremacy of the man over the woman, and the individual family as the economic unit of society. The cohesive force of civilized society is the state, which in all typical periods is exclusively the state of the ruling class, and in all cases remains essentially a machine for keeping down the oppressed, exploited class. Other marks of civilization: on the one hand, fixation of the contrast between town and country as the basis of the entire division of social labor; on the other hand, the introduction of wills, by which the property holder is able to dispose of his property even after his death. This institution, which was a direct blow at the old gentile constitution, was unknown in Athens until the time of Solon; in Rome it was introduced very early, but we do not know when. . . .

With this constitution as its foundation civilization has accomplished things with which the old gentile society was totally unable to cope. But it accomplished them by playing on the most sordid instincts and passions of man, and by developing them at the expense of all his other faculties. Naked greed has been the moving spirit of civilization from the first day of its existence to the present time; wealth, more wealth and wealth again; wealth, not of society, but of the shabby individual was its sole and determining aim.²⁷

26. Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, in *Selected Works* (of Marx and Engels) (New York, 1969), p. 519.

27. Ibid., pp. 591, 592.

It is easy to see that the bourgeois couple of *Weekend* projects the features of civilization, as Engels outlines them. The youth bands also reproduce certain features of the gens; at least the two share an opposition to civilization. The two are linked also in that Engels believed that civilization would be followed by a return to gens organization, that is, to barbarism. At one point he says:

All that was vital and life-bringing in what the Germans infused into the Roman world was barbarism. In fact, only barbarians are capable of rejuvenating a world laboring in the throes of a dying civilization.²⁸

And he ends the book with a long quote from Lewis H. Morgan, the American anthropologist on whose findings much of Engels's study is based:

"A mere property career is not the final destiny of mankind, if progress is to be the law of the future as it has been of the past. The time which has passed away since civilization began is but a fragment of the past duration of man's existence; and but a fragment of the ages yet to come. The dissolution of society bids fair to become the termination of a career of which property is the end and aim, because such a career contains the elements of self-destruction. Democracy in government, brotherhood in society, equality in rights and privileges, and universal education, foreshadow the next higher plane of society to which experience, intelligence and knowledge are steadily tending. *It will be a revival, in higher form, of the liberty, equality and fraternity of the ancient gentes.*" (Morgan, *Ancient Society*, p. 552.)²⁹

Many other correspondences and cross-references to Engels could be drawn. (Engels's use of the word "rejuvenating" is especially interesting.) The point is that Godard did not invent his vision of the future out of whole cloth. Whether, in the film, the triumph of the youth bands over the bourgeois couple represents the end of civilization and the revival of the gentes, like the nature of their "revolution," is not clear. Perhaps it is

28. Ibid., p. 576.

29. Ibid., p. 593.

enough to say that they *prefigure* that end and revival, as well as the armed revolution of the proletariat itself. Insofar as they negate the bourgeoisie they participate—if only figuratively or decoratively—in the revolutions that are to come. (It is no accident that the young guerrillas, like the little boy with bow and arrow in an early scene, appear in American Indian dress. For Morgan, who lived with the Iroquois, “the American was the original form of the gens and the Greek and Roman the later, derivative form,”³⁰ a line quoted by the Third World spokesmen.)

Totem and Taboo seems to have a far more general reference to the film than the Engels book. Perhaps its title, suggesting rituals and “primitivism” generally, rather than anything in it, is the reason for its mention. We see very little of the mating habits of the youth band. Perhaps there is a reversion from monogamy to group marriage, but even this is not clear. The intimacy of the guerrilla who holds a dying girl suggests a “pairing” consistent with either system. The captured wife is in effect “adopted” by the group, a practice followed by many tribes; but another female captive is prepared for cooking. Of totem and taboo proper, that is, of incest dread and its displacement, we see nothing—which is hardly surprising in that the group is composed of persons from a single generation. Perhaps the spirit of the book is to be found in the film’s last shot, in which the mature bourgeois woman and a young boy eat the body of her husband, an image of incest and cannibalism. But even this suggests a giving-in to the incest drive, foreign to savagery and civilization alike.

The third set of obstacles that come between the couple and its goals, to them the most important obstacles, are the young people they meet along the road. The violence of these confrontations suggests a major conflict or division within the bourgeoisie. The conflict of bourgeois generations here expands into open warfare. This is not a class war, which cuts across age lines. Here age cuts across class lines. (Thus the rich girl of the early tractor accident is later seen with the rebels.) There are no young on the bourgeois side and no older people

30. Ibid., p. 518.

on the “revolutionary” side. What is the cause of this savage conflict? What are the issues involved? The obvious answer is that the young people reject the bourgeoisie and what it stands for. The bourgeoisie rejects the young people *and* refuses to allow their apostasy (a contradiction). This description is true but does not exhaust the subject. The nature of the generational conflict is further revealed by examining the stages of its development in the film, for Godard carefully builds this theme throughout the film, as he does the highway motif.

The introduction of the youth theme is the skirmish that occurs in the parking lot when the bourgeois couple sets out on its journey. In his haste the husband dents or smashes a neighbor’s car and one of the latter’s children sounds the alarm. In the scuffle that follows his entire family is engaged against the bourgeois couple, a boy in an Indian suit shooting arrows, an older girl hitting tennis balls with her racket. Here the children fight on behalf of the family, that is, in defense of their father and his property. This is where the young people begin—in the bourgeois situation. Gradually, through various stages and modes of separateness and opposition, they will arrive at armed conflict against their parents’ generation. Godard does not show the process itself but only incidents along the way that imply it. Thus Anne Wiazemsky, who plays the daughter-with-racket, appears three times in the film: here; as an observer at the Action Musicale; and as a resident at the rebel camp, where she is referred to as Mme. Gide. She does not carry a gun when we see her at the camp, but the other girls do—figuratively the bourgeois girl has traded her tennis racket, symbol of imposed triviality, for a rifle. Calling her Mme. Gide underlines her escape from the stultification and non-fulfillment of bourgeois marriage.

The tractor-sports car accident, which does not directly affect the bourgeois couple, pits rich children against workers. Through argument and clash, and a montage of posed portraits, they seem to arrive at common cause—though how and why this could be so is not explained by the film. The next incident involving young people is that of the self-styled Minister of Interior—a raving youth who, his own car blown out from under him, commandeers the car of the bourgeois couple

and forces them to take him where he directs. This encounter introduces the note of armed conflict between youth and bourgeoisie (he orders them at gunpoint), but what is most important here is that he *turns them around* in their journey, reversing their progress toward their goal, a direct statement of the negation of the bourgeoisie by its children. The highways (or public sphere) undo the context in which the bourgeoisie acts, the Third World eliminates its future, but only the children of the bourgeoisie directly thwart and undo it. When the Minister lets the man and woman go, they no longer know where they are. Besides turning them around, he has thrown them off course, disoriented them. In fact they never do regain direction—soon after this they have their own accident. Thus when they come, on foot, to Emily Brontë, they are very angry. She does not answer their question and they kill her. In their next encounter with young people, the bourgeois man and woman are captured by an armed band.

This is the sequence of events. What is its meaning? What is the dialectic at work here? The Minister of Interior uses wit and art against the bourgeois couple. He flamboyantly waves a gun but does not use it. Emily Brontë is non-violent and passive (appropriately her death is that of immolation)—she simply refuses to cooperate with the bourgeois couple. These postures are both ineffective. The Minister had power over the couple, but he let them go—whereupon they murdered the girl. Next time they are captured they are not let go. The young people arrive at the point of armed conflict through experience. In the course of the film they discover their own vulnerability and the impossibility of reaching an accommodation with the bourgeoisie. This dialectic throws light also on the underlying conflict, which is at base aesthetic. Throughout the film the wit and grace of the young people is contrasted with the solemnity of the humorless bourgeoisie (a near-constant theme in bourgeois studies, at least from Stendhal onward). While the Minister spins dexterous fantasies of utopia, the bourgeois man and woman screech at passers-by for help; offered a miracle they list their corrupt desires. The conflict between the spirit of the young people and the grim utili-

tarianism and literalism of the bourgeoisie is enacted with special force in the Emily Brontë episode. The language of the two groups defines everything about them. The bourgeois man and woman use language in a purely functional, unimaginative way—"Which way Oinville? Which way Oinville?" Language—and life—for them is purely instrumental, a means to something else. They use language and time to get somewhere. Emily Brontë refuses to answer them in their own terms: she refuses to submit to their aesthetic. For her, language and time are ends in themselves, are play; she refuses to fit them into instrumental categories. To their questions she poses riddles, sings songs, asks fundamental questions about man and nature. To her nothing is more important than these questions and activities; she has time for them. She has no need to go elsewhere; everything is where she is. Of course she infuriates the man and woman, and they burn her. To them the purpose of language and time is to cover distance and get goods.

This conflict of styles widens by stages into one of societies. Arguably, even in the Emily Brontë incident, civil war is already inevitable. There is no other way to resolve the conflict. The mechanics of this incident, and of the expansion of the conflict, suggest that the posture of the youth bands is essentially defensive. Through the film's early stages they merely want to live their lives in their own manner, but the bourgeoisie will not let them. The bourgeoisie insists on incorporating them into its system—its utilization program—and the young people refuse, finally coming together to resist in force. The struggle that results is one for control of the countryside (of the environment). More correctly, the bourgeoisie wants to use the countryside for its own ends; the youth bands do not want to use the countryside for any extrinsic purpose but just to exist there. Thus—from what we see—the young people do not seek to overthrow society nor to install a new society and inaugurate a new historical age. They are not revolutionaries. They just want to be let alone—there is nothing to indicate any further revolutionary program than this, certainly no connection with the working class or with racial minorities. The young people are dissident bourgeois, seeking to maintain a

separate and humanly, aesthetically superior society within the decadence of latter bourgeois society. This is a contradiction and is doomed to fail, but it is interesting and important. The youth rebellion is a secession *within* the bourgeoisie, one—significantly—in favor of *earlier* bourgeois ideals (in a sense, then, it is a bourgeois reaction). What the young people demand and stand for are the human values of the early bourgeois revolution. Thus their aestheticism is not a mere preference of life styles, it is an implicit demand for human development. The classical formulation of the relation between art and play and human development is to be found in Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*:

An animal *works* when a lack is the driving spring of its activity, and it *plays* when an abundance of force is this driving spring, when the excess of life spurs itself into activity.³¹

Man plays only where he is human in the full meaning of that word, and *he is wholly human only where he plays*.³²

To solve . . . political problem[s] in practice we must proceed by way of aesthetics, since it is by way of beauty that we attain to freedom.³³

This is an important addition to our discussion of development above. The bourgeois couple are incapable of humor and play, therefore—in Schiller's terms—they cannot develop; they are stunted, grotesque, limited to one faculty (that of wealth-gathering). The aesthetic impotence of bourgeois society makes human development within it impossible.

The young people attempt to create a separate society within bourgeois society, in which they might develop. The opposition of the bourgeois order forces them into an armed conflict in which they appear to be victorious. What is the nature of

31. Friedrich von Schiller, *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, letter 27, translated by Walter Kaufmann; quoted in Kaufmann, *Hegel: A Reinterpretation* (Garden City, 1965), p. 28.

32. *Ibid.*, letter 15; quoted in Kaufmann, p. 29.

33. *Ibid.*, letter 2; quoted by Julius A. Elias in his introduction to Schiller's *Naive and Sentimental Poetry* (New York, 1966), pp. 1–2.

this attempt and this victory? There is no second bourgeois revolution. Any "revolution" short of proletarian revolution is merely a change of regime. One bourgeois regime cannot redeem or permanently transform another. Godard does not show us the consequences and fate of the youth regime (if it is that). But even so we do not have to rely on the predictions of theory to criticize the young people and their order, for Godard shows them already corrupted. This is shown literally in their killing of the picnickers and of some of their captives and figuratively (as well as literally) in their devouring and absorption of the bourgeoisie through cannibalism. The fact that the bourgeois wife survives as the woman of one of the youths is also a sign of succession. Thus the transfer of brutality is instant—the very struggle within the bourgeoisie (in the name of nothing more than separateness) generates it.

Still—though we know that brutalization blights and stultifies human development—the youth regime seems *aesthetically* superior to the previous bourgeois regime. Though cruel, their life is also genuinely beautiful—consistent, rigorous, total. This aesthetic order is tested when one of the band is shot. Even in death she sings a little song—no eloquence, no pathos, just a song then as always. Throughout the scenes with the young people we see the easy integration of aesthetics into war and revolution, life and death. Thus the drum beaten during war preparations, the body painting of victims before slaughter, etc. Life and death—and war itself—have become aesthetic. But this recalls (in a different context) Walter Benjamin's argument in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction":

The logical result of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life. . . . All efforts to render politics aesthetic culminate in one thing: war.³⁴

This is the direction taken by the aesthetic impulse, conscious and unconscious, in late bourgeois society: the primitivism of the youth bands and the highway wreckage of the bourgeoisie are two sides of the same aesthetic. The final paragraph of Benjamin's essay remains prophetic:

34. Benjamin, p. 243.

Mankind, which in Homer's time was an object of contemplation for the Olympian gods, now is one for itself. Its self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order. This is the situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic. Communism responds by politicizing art.³⁵

"Politicizing art" is the formula for all of Godard's work since *Weekend*, and a response to the vision of that film itself.

Most critical attention devoted to *Weekend* has centered on its ending, on the conflict between the bourgeoisie and the youth bands. It was widely assumed that Godard was presenting a choice or a contrast between the two groups and their distinctive forms of horror and that this was the point of the film. In our view the exact nature and meaning of this ending, of the takeover by the young people, is not so important. The Brechtian principle of "eyes on the course" rather than "eyes on the finish" prevents us from giving too much emphasis to the ending that Godard devised. The journey is everything. The portrait of the bourgeoisie and its contradictions, not its projected, necessarily fantasized terminus, is central. By its nature the film is unfinished and unfinishable. Analogously, we have argued that the ending too is merely a contradiction of the bourgeoisie in figurative form. That is, the film does not offer an alternative between bourgeois horror and hippie horror, nor even a contrast between them. The youth, like the highways and a Third World in arms, are a product of the bourgeoisie, its consequence; they are in every sense its children. Their terror does not overcome bourgeois terror, as one youth says, it merely extends it and, finally, turns it against itself. Thus the film has one subject, not two. The fact that the bourgeois children are shown in the same visual band, in the film's single format, confirms this. There is no montage—literally or metaphorically—between them, just a single long-take or tracking shot that takes them both in. The real conflict is not between bourgeoisie and youth but between viewer and image or world-picture, between viewer and the bourgeois world that contains both groups.

35. Ibid., p. 244.