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Jean-Luc Godard's

MASCULINE FEMININE

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The Film:

A common theme in the episodes of Godard, for the cinema itself, and--some critics would say--for Godard personally, is the struggle to communicate. Such a struggle grips the young lovers of Masculine Feminine. Through more than a dozen separate and discontinuous vignettes, Godard develops the character of these lovers, their own ambiguities and the incompleteness of their relationship. He does this not through any chronological series, but rather through the counter-pointing of similar and dissimilar visual experiences, interspersed again and again with reminders of the presence of the movie-maker. The lovers struggle to express themselves to the world and to each other--this is the central theme of this film. The cinematic presentation more than any subtly developed plot demonstrates the complexity, the simplicity, the frustration and joy of this boy-girl relationship.

What is to be noticed and appreciated in this film is not the unfolding of the characters through a sequence of events, but rather what Godard himself would ask to be "critically appraised," the pictorial content, as it manifests the characters and the events in each of the fragmented moments, leaving the final yet incomplete impression to the viewer himself. Godard has said that he would rather be thought of as a painter than as a novelist.

The Director:

Jean-Luc Godard makes his own unique contribution to this exploration of the cinema. The plot of his films are very thin, and often fragmented and ambiguous. One of his main concerns seems to be with visual techniques. Godard is famous for interrupting scenes by introducing subtle and not so subtle reminders that this episode is "staged," "on camera." Often this can be done to mock traditional methods of film-making, and to prevent the viewer from escaping his own real world into the illusion traditional cinema creates so easily. Godard refuses to let his viewer completely escape from self into his films. One is constantly going in and out of Godard's movies. This technique enhances the fragmentary effect desired and is also Godard's way of demanding that the individual viewer relate the sensual impressions created in the movie to his own here and now existence not only as participant in, but as judge of the film. The spectator wishes to be taken into the movie, the story, to be given an illusion, to confuse film and life; but Godard wants to establish (by these intrusions) a distance between movie and viewer, to make the viewer's reflection on self and situation more realistic, and also to make the viewer reflect on a concern which Godard considers fundamental--the cinema itself. If, in the face of a fragmented and incoherent and discontinuous plot we ask: "What is the movie about?" and consequently: "What is life about?", then the artist insists we ask this further question: "What is the cinema itself about?" These constant ruptures and side-steppings offer us insight--more than perhaps the plot itself--into the character of modern life today and how it can be reflected through the medium of the cinema.

Background:

The New Wave in French cinema is dated from the appearance in 1959 of The 400 Blows (Francois Truffaut) and Hiroshima Mon Amour (Alain Resnais). In this new movement the cinema was no longer to be concerned with the neat, straight-line plot with a thesis to be drawn out. The words of Resnais, commenting on his second feature, Last Year at Marienbad, expresses the directions and ambition of this new cinematic endeavor: "Apparently the time has come to address this public in a new language...to construct a film on a foundation other than the 'story'....For true dramatic tension and genuine emotion probably do not derive from so-called story 'content' but from some ineluctable way of creating an impact on the senses, on the eye and ear." Directors such as Resnais, Truffaut, Cocteau, Bresson, and Jean-Luc Godard have been striving to do just this, striving, that is, even now when neither the world of the arts, nor the world itself seem to have settled upon acceptable forms of dialogue or communication.

Other Films by Godard:

Breathless	Alphaville
Band of Outsiders	The Married Woman
Contempt	A Woman is a Woman