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## The Forest for the Trees: Political Contexts for Godard's Nature Imagery in *Film socialisme* and *Adieu au langage*

For all the critical stress that has been placed on their technical innovations (use of 3D, images filmed on mobile phones), one of the most striking features of Jean-Luc Godard's *Film socialisme* (2010) and *Adieu au langage* (2014) is his on-going research into images of nature. *Film socialisme*, set, for its first half, on a cruise ship in the Mediterranean, contains many images of the sea taken from the deck of the ship: the swell of waves, the churning wake, plus the rain-swept and deserted decks themselves. These shots are often taken at night with the result that the glint of the ship's lights, or of moonlight over the waves, creates semi-abstract patterns of light in motion. It is perhaps for this reason that water can be seen as a cinematic image *par excellence*: its restless, protean quality, together with its capacity to reflect light, makes it particularly apt for capturing the two elements that are fundamental to the cinematic image: light and motion. Indeed, Gilles Deleuze (1983, 112-13) implies that it is for precisely this reason that water imagery was so ubiquitous in the work of French filmmakers of the classical era like Renoir, Vigo and Epstein. The images filmed from the deck of the ship in *Film socialisme* are often strikingly beautiful and there seems to be an implied negative comparison between the majesty of this natural imagery (apparently unappreciated by the boat's passengers, given the empty decks), and the noisy, garish, artificially-lit world below deck. In some cases, scenes below deck (particularly those in the ship's nightclub) are given a properly hellish tinge by being filmed on a mobile phone, such that the kaleidoscopic disco lights are heavily saturated while the thumping electronic music is received as a cacophonous howl of distortion. The contrast between inside and outside is strengthened by repeated glimpses of an indoor pool on the ship, a tame, sanitized and often crowded little body of water in comparison to the ignored sea outside.

*Adieu au langage*, meanwhile, was shot, like most of Godard's works since 1979, near his home on the shores of Lake Geneva. As a result, images of the lake punctuate the film, with repeated shots of ferry boats arriving at dock and several scenes of Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville's dog, Roxy – who becomes one of the film's central 'characters' and who will be discussed in detail below – out for walks beside streams and on the shores of the lake in different seasons. The film's determinedly local setting allows Godard to build up a portrait of the natural rhythms of his immediate surroundings over the course of a year (albeit with the seasons deliberately scrambled in the montage): the river flood waters of the spring snowmelt; the bright flowers of summer; damp leaves underfoot in autumn and dark, snowy streets in winter. As well as the imagery of water, *Adieu au langage* privileges the figure of the forest. Aside from the woods through which Roxy roams and a repeated excerpt from *Menschen am Sonntag* (1930) in which a man chases a woman through a forest, we twice hear a character in this doubled narrative remark that, in the Apache language, the word used to designate the world literally means 'forest'. (This seems highly improbable given that most Apache speakers lived in the desert regions of the American southwest. At best, it could be a reference to the Lipan tribe of north-central Texas, supposedly known to other Apache speakers as 'People of the forest'. More likely, given Godard's taste for science fiction – his long-time favourites

Clifford D. Simak and A. E. Van Vogt are both cited in *Adieu au langage* – the line could be a buried reference to Ursula Le Guin’s 1976 novel *The Word for World Is Forest*.) In addition, Godard cites his own review of Alexandre Astruc’s *Une vie* (1958), in which he affirmed that it is not the showing of a forest on film that is difficult, but rather showing a room in which we can tell that the forest is only a few feet away (Godard 1998, 148). In his own attempt at this formal test, Godard depicts a bedroom whose window opens on to a summer field.

The privileging of nature imagery has arguably been a constant in Godard’s work for nearly four decades, but its very deliberate foregrounding within his aesthetic system in *Film socialisme* and *Adieu au langage* tends to mean that these recent films often recall the work of the early 1980s, what Marc Cerisuelo (1989, 207-31) called Godard’s ‘trilogy of the sublime’: *Passion* (1982), *Prénom Carmen* (1983) and *Je vous salue Marie* (1985), although different groupings of these films have been asserted, notably including *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* (1980) (Morrey 2005, 132). The views of lakeside locations in all seasons are reminiscent of *Je vous salue Marie*, while the experimental use of 3D and mobile digital technology in filming nature recalls the stop-motion effects essayed in *Sauve qui peut*. Several shots of a menacing sky in *Adieu au langage* closely resemble the opening shot of *Passion*, famously filmed spontaneously by Godard himself using a handheld camera (de Baecque 2010, 609). The particular focus on water and trees in the recent films brings especially to mind 1990’s *Nouvelle Vague*, set almost entirely on a wealthy estate on the shores of the lake and turning around a somber plot of drowning on the lake and apparent resurrection. *Nouvelle Vague* also shares, especially with *Film socialisme*, an interest in the mysterious, intangible, and possibly criminal circulation of money among the ruling classes, for which the restless movement of water – together with its deadly force – becomes an ominously powerful symbol.

Daniel Morgan, who has conducted the most detailed analysis of Godard’s images of nature, remarks that the dramatic appearance of nature in his films of the 1980s was often associated by critics with a retreat from the political and a turn toward the theological (an understandable interpretation of titles like *Passion* and *Je vous salue Marie*). However, Morgan, following Adorno, argues that this approach to nature as sublime, effectively seeing God in nature, tends simply to replace or overwrite nature with ‘a higher actuality, born of the spirit’ (Morgan 2013, 71). The recovery of nature from this supernatural ideological interpretation thus becomes ‘of central political (as well as aesthetic) importance’ (72) and Morgan suggests that Godard’s work of the 1980s can be seen as a staging of precisely this debate. Morgan argues further that Godard’s proliferating shots of trees, water and sunsets are not some blithe or disingenuous acceptance of an aesthetic canon, but rather that he is using nature images as ‘an intellectually productive analytic tool’, employing ‘images that have an aesthetic history of the sublime in order to describe the experience of modernity’ (76). As Morgan puts it: ‘we long for unmediated nature only in a thoroughly industrialized, mechanized, and mediated society’ (81), but Godard’s use of nature imagery is not so much a symptom as an analysis or deconstruction of that longing. *Film socialisme* seems to oppose the glitz and noise of the cruise ship – the late-capitalist tourism industry operating at its peak – to the impassive majesty of the Mediterranean waves and, in doing so, it sometimes seems to fall back on a rather facile demonization of an overfed and over-stimulated leisure

class. The film effectively shows how consumer society creates a longing for unmediated nature while necessarily failing to meet that need; but, in the process, it sets up a hierarchy of images whereby the cheap consumer technologies (mobile phones, portable cameras) used to film the comings and goings below deck are aesthetically subordinated to the glossy high-definition images filmed on deck. In *Adieu au langage* the dialogue between nature and technology is more complex since many of the most striking images of nature are rendered deliberately artificial by being filmed with portable digital cameras that over-saturate the colour palette or in inadequate light conditions that result in a fuzzy image. *Adieu au langage* constantly reminds us that our access to nature is mediated by technology: mobile consumer technology is the *dispositif* that generates our desire for nature, frames it, comments upon it, and re-ignites it. The remainder of this article will explore this process through close reading of motifs and montage sequences in both *Film socialisme* and *Adieu au langage*, asking how far a political meaning can be read into Godard's aesthetic research in these films.

As mentioned above, *Film socialisme* and *Adieu au langage* often recall Godard's films, and in particular his nature imagery, from the 1980s. *Adieu au langage* especially also recalls those films' interest in female sexuality and the depiction of the feminine form, a focus which has made these 1980s films the site of the most sustained feminist criticism of Godard's work. As in the earlier films, *Adieu* – and particularly the scenes taking place inside the house, filmed, in fact, in Godard's own home – privilege the naked female form in a way that has more to do with classical visual composition (or, less charitably, with fetishism) than with domestic realism. The two female leads (Héloïse Godet and Zoé Bruneau, playing two avatars of essentially the same character) are repeatedly filmed naked with the camera at approximately crotch height. Several times, Godard uses a staircase and has his actresses descend until their pubis is frontally framed or else ascend with the camera on their buttocks (a possible reference to Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* [1912]). Godet similarly approaches the camera naked as she pulls on a trenchcoat and, when Bruneau dons the same garment in a later scene, she drapes it laterally across herself so that only one breast is covered. While the women's male companions (Kamel Abdelli and Richard Chevallier) are also seen naked, the camera does not linger on their bodies with the same fascination. As Constance Penley noted, reviewing Godard's discourse around *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, he finds the filming of women's bodies 'more engrossing' than filming men because women are taken to be 'naturally enigmatic' (Penley 1982, 17, original emphasis). Laura Mulvey, discussing *Je vous salue Marie*, identifies 'a complex conflation' in Godard's work 'between the enigmatic properties of femininity and the mystery of origins' (Mulvey 1996, 85), whether the origins of the natural world or of the creative process. In *Adieu au langage*, this conflation is made most apparent when a shot of the sky (recalling *Passion*, as mentioned above) cuts to a dimly-lit extreme close-up of a woman's pubis and navel, presumably Josette's (Godet), just as the latter is declaiming, off, 'Today, everyone is afraid'. This then leads in to Gédéon's (Abdelli) comments about the supposed Apache use of a term meaning 'forest' to designate the world and the pixelated clip of sylvan pursuit from *Menschen am Sonntag*. Here, then, a woman's body and sexuality is explicitly associated with nature – both with the light and airy image of sky and with the dark and

foreboding image of the forest – while also being discursively connected to fear and violence. The image's inevitable reminder of Courbet's *L'Origine du monde* (1866) connects this fear and foreboding to the mysterious power of creation, both the life-giving potential of female sexuality and, through the artistic intertext, the enigma of creativity. The reference to fear also recalls *Sauve qui peut* ('La Peur' was the title of one of the sections of that film) and, like the films of the early '80s, *Adieu au langage* turns around a narrative of violent jealousy: the female character has a German husband who, in one repeated scene of the film, arrives with a gun and shoots another man. Meanwhile, a scene of Ivitch (Bruneau) and Marcus (Chevallier) wrestling in the shower recalls a similar violent sexual tussle in *Prénom Carmen*. Finally, another repeated shot of blood (or, anyway, red liquid) being washed down a plughole implies further violence between these couples and evokes one of the canonical screen portrayals of violent misogyny: Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960). It is perhaps by association with this famous image that Godard cites a more recent film in which pretty young women meet their horrific demise in watery graves: the softcore creature feature *Piranha 3D* (2010), seemingly cited as an ironic counter example of the uses of 3D technology (Morrey 2016). Janet Bergstrom observed of Godard's early '80s films that they seem to present the impossibility of living sexual difference as anything other than violence (Bergstrom 1982, 21) and *Adieu au langage* implies, at least at first glance, a disappointing lack of progress in this regard. Elisabeth Lyon's identification of a 'logic of ambivalence, aggression and idealization' (Lyon 1982, 10) in Godard's depiction of women seems as pertinent today as it did in 1982.

What is new, however, in *Adieu au langage* is the presence of Roxy the dog. Roxy's insistent role in the film certainly contributes to its reflection on nature but does so in a more playful register. The images of Roxy intervene in the aesthetic research into the depiction of nudity, just as the dog himself intrudes upon the domestic life of the couple. At one point in the film, we hear a citation from Jacques Derrida's lecture *L'Animal que donc je suis* which remarks that, since animals are always naked they cannot in fact be naked (nakedness having no value as a concept in the absence of clothes) (Derrida 2006, 19-20). But the line can also serve as a displaced commentary on the images of naked humans (and especially women) in the film, reminding us of the extent to which that nakedness, far from a 'natural' state, is a cultural construct and inscribes itself quite deliberately within an aesthetic history. At the same time as Roxy's presence serves to complicate the film's aesthetic and philosophical reflections, however, one of his principal functions in the film is as light relief, helping to deflect the portentousness and pomposity that sometimes weighed down the films of the early 1980s. Thus, one of the nude shots in the house (Josette climbing the stairs) is cut against a shot of Roxy hiding his head under some furniture, as though in embarrassment, and a subsequent hardcore pornographic insert of copulating human bodies is accompanied by the sound of Roxy whining in the off-screen space.

The presence of Roxy may also be taken to explain many of the crotch-level shots in the house since they could be interpreted as views from the dog's perspective. Several other shots taken in the house are roughly at the height of table legs and chair seats, giving a cluttered *mise en scène* that makes little sense in terms of classical film grammar but becomes broadly 'realistic' when

interpreted as Roxy's point of view. In this light, too, several other shots in the film make more sense, notably many of the shots of flowers, weeds and grasses, again filmed approximately at a dog's height. The film's many canted angles could almost be seen as the perspective of a dog tilting his head to one side, while the jerky handheld low-angle shots of trees and sky become something like the views of a dog in motion. This interpretation of the film as being visualized from Roxy's point of view is, however, complicated by the fact that many of these low-angle canted shots also occur in scenes which do not feature the dog and indeed in scenes which take place before Roxy has entered the narrative. It is thus somewhat as though the dog's-eye-view, adopted for many shots within the house, becomes a kind of aesthetic principle ruling the overall composition of *Adieu au langage*. Hence, the opening scene in which Josette's husband arrives and shoots another man is largely filmed using canted low angles, even though Roxy only enters the narrative when adopted by Josette and Gédéon (the reconstruction of the narrative timeline is fraught in this film, but Gédéon/Marcus seem first to approach Josette/Ivitch after witnessing this murder; Roxy subsequently invites himself into their car while they are stopped at a filling station).

From this perspective, then, we could see Roxy's role in *Adieu au langage* as working to undo the anthropocentric bias that predominates in film form. At one point in the film, over images of Roxy playing in snow, we hear the line, 'It is not the animal who is blind, but man, blinded by his insensibility [*inconscience*] and incapable of seeing the world.' At one level, this play with Roxy's apparent perspective can be understood simply as offering a new way of seeing familiar things: a familiar generic narrative about desire, jealousy and murder; the turn of the seasons; the landscape around Lake Geneva, familiar to Godard from his daily existence and to his viewers from four decades of filmmaking. In this sense, the experimentation with low and canted angles is part of Godard's on-going research which has sought, at least since the 1970s, to use filmmaking technologies in a quasi-scientific investigation of the limits and meaning of the visible world. As Jonathan Burt points out, the attempt to film from an animal's point of view rejoins the scientific aspirations of the early pioneers of motion studies: 'The fantasy of looking through the camera as if through the eye of an animal to reveal further those realms of nature invisible to the human eye is an extension of this idea' (Burt 2002, 53). But *Adieu au langage* seems aware of the danger of replacing one naturalized perspective (the anthropocentric) with another (the dog's-eye-view) and, as such, the film repeatedly disrupts the viewer's learned expectations, for instance, by using angles that reflect neither human nor canine vision. Thus, the camera is placed practically at ground level, around Roxy's paws, or in extreme close-up under his chin. (A cut to a nest of crows during this scene invites the speculation that we could almost be looking from the perspective of a grounded crow, as though in homage to Pasolini's *Uccellacci e uccellini* [1966], prominently cited at the end of episode 3A of *Histoire(s) du cinéma* [1998].) Elsewhere, what appears as one of the clearest examples of Roxy's perspective – when the camera roams around the river bank before plunging into the water to look at fish – subsequently belies that interpretation when Roxy himself appears in the background. As mentioned above, the images of Roxy, despite their 'simple' content, are often among the least naturalistic in *Adieu au langage*, marked by heavy saturation, colour-

bleeding or blown up so that their pixilation cannot be ignored. Burt notes that the 'extreme collapse between the figural and the real' (2002, 44) in the filming of animals tends to lead to a 'realist' treatment of these subjects, yet Godard insistently undercuts this realism thereby demonstrating the fetishization of assumed naturalness and spontaneity in animal behaviour that generates the success of wildlife documentaries and Youtube videos (*Film socialisme* cites a video clip of two kittens mewling while *Adieu au langage* ends with an excerpt from the soundtrack of a Youtube hit, first published in 2011, in which a howling dog accompanies the cries of a baby). Burt also argues that the gaze of animals on film is fetishized to such an extent that animal films often imply a kind of telepathic communication between animals and humans. Burt proposes that this fantasy of telepathy needs to be understood as something like the dream of the medium, since 'it is also a telepathy characterized and desired by the technology of modernity' (Burt 2002, 64). In other words, the ever increasing acceleration, responsiveness and miniaturization of consumer technologies seems designed to meet a vanishing horizon in which they would enable the immediate and direct communication of our thoughts. Meanwhile, the deliberate opacity of *Adieu au langage* recognizes the image's false claims to transparency and does everything possible to refute and obscure it. The presence of Roxy serves as a kind of ironic illustration of this process: the cute dog is reminiscent of nostalgic and escapist Youtube videos, yet Godard's formal recalcitrance insistently refracts and refuses this cuteness.

This wariness around the potential totalizing effects of technology is present from the very beginning of *Adieu au langage*. The film opens, following the credits and a clip from *Only Angels Have Wings* (1939), with a sort of framing sequence that introduces the narrative of sexual jealousy – Josette's husband arrives in a Mercedes and shoots another man – while discussions between another set of characters, peripheral to the 'main' narrative, set out some of the key thematics of the film. Central to these discussions is the twentieth-century legacy of totalitarianism. A man subsequently identified as a professor, Davidson (Christian Gregori), evokes Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and his *Gulag Archipelago* (1973). The sequence repeatedly demonstrates the way in which history is, today, accessed in fragments via mobile technology. Thus, referring to the subtitle of the *Gulag Archipelago – An Experiment in Literary Investigation (Essai d'investigation littéraire)* –, Davidson remarks to a woman that, if she doesn't know it, there is no need to look on Google (since he is holding the book in his hand). Meanwhile, a young man in the entourage seems to look up a picture of Solzhenitsyn on his phone, before scrolling to an image of another bearded man, Saddam Hussein. Next, Davidson evokes Vladimir Zworykin, who, he points out, invented television in 1933, the same year that Hitler was democratically elected Chancellor of Germany. The connection between technology and dictatorship is thus established, but with the proviso that totalitarian regimes are not unilaterally imposed, but often pass into existence with the will of the people. The sequence then expands upon this theme with a quotation from a 1945 article by the sociologist and theologian Jacques Ellul entitled 'Victoire d'Hitler'. The citation is one of the longest in the film and, arguably, given greater weight since it is spoken (off-screen, as are the majority of the citations and lines of dialogue in the film) by one of the principal characters, Josette (although her privileged voice within the film can perhaps only be identified retrospectively, since her

status as principal has not yet been established by this point). Ellul's article, published at the end of the Second World War, argues that, despite his military defeat, Hitler's ideas have proven victorious. His tactics of the massacre and displacement of civilian populations have been adopted by other western powers, notably by the Allies; and, following the model of Nazi Germany, the Allied nations adopted a totalizing technocratic control of the national economy and culture as part of the war effort. History teaches us, however, that no state ever abandons what it has gained and Ellul predicts that the Allied powers will subsequently move toward 'an economic dictatorship over the entire world' (Ellul 1945, n.p.). There is no political resistance to this technocratic state, Ellul remarks, because its pillars (*dirigiste* economics, a strong police force, social services) are generally held to be 'good things'. In *Adieu au langage*, the end of this lengthy discourse from Jacques Ellul shades imperceptibly into a quotation from the philosopher Jean-Paul Curnier, a friend of Godard's who appeared in *Notre Musique* (2004) and was responsible for the title of *Film socialisme* (Godard 2010, 100). *Adieu au langage* cites an article by Curnier, 'Un monde en guerre' (2002-3), in which he identifies the disappearance of a certain will-to-politics in advanced democracies in the twenty-first century. Writing in terms similar to those he employed in *Notre Musique*, Curnier describes a generalized culture of victimhood, security and protection, which he suggests has led to a desire for paternalistic leaders and hence explains the resurgence of far-right politics. Or, to reiterate Josette's line from later in the film, 'Today everyone's afraid.' Interspersed with Josette's readings from Ellul and Curnier, a young man's voice reminds us that, during the Terror that followed the French Revolution, the Convention nationale produced: the *Code civil*, a new calendar, the decimal system, the manufacture of steel, the general ledger of national accounts, and the Paris Conservatoire. *Adieu au langage*, then, seeks to remind us that a culture of terror is not always something imposed by the feared foreigner (the 'terrorist'); a regime of terror can be willed into being by a nation's own people and can appear perfectly compatible with technological and social progress even as it closes down opportunities for real community life and interpersonal communication. At the end of this same scene in *Adieu au langage*, we see the young man from earlier reading Pierre Clastres's *Society against the State* (1989 [1974]), a work of radical anthropology which suggests that political economies based on growth and the accumulation of capital are by no means a 'natural' organisation of society but only arise through the violent imposition of a state apparatus on a pre-existing community, the state bringing with it debt, exploitation and alienated labour.

How, then, does all of this lecturing about the state and technology relate to the imagery of nature discussed above? It would no doubt be naïve to suggest that nature somehow stands outside the state. If nature's perceived eccentricity to the state is part of its appeal, then that appeal is at least partly fantasmatic. That landscapes and ecosystems are increasingly 'managed' by human societies and economic interests must come as a surprise to no one. Instead, it is the global dominance of the technologically mediated state that induces a powerful nostalgia for nature. The risk, as Adorno observes, is that 'Natural beauty, in the age of its total mediatedness, is transformed into a caricature of itself' (Adorno 1997, 67). For Adorno, the experience of natural beauty is momentary, evanescent, ungraspable, which is why, in commodified form, it can only be a



caricature of itself. It is this intangible nature of natural beauty, which 'disappear[s] in the instant one tries to grasp it' (72), that art seeks to imitate. Adorno specifies: 'Art does not imitate nature, not even individual instances of natural beauty, but natural beauty as such.' (72) He comments further: 'Nature's eloquence is damaged by the objectivation that is the result of studied observation, and ultimately something of this holds true as well for artworks, which are only completely perceptible in *temps duré*, the conception of which Bergson probably derived from artistic experience.' (69) This conception of natural beauty may help to explain the extreme fragmentation of Godard's formal design. Godard's cinema has worked with fragmentation of one kind or another since its very beginnings (see for instance Roud 2010 [1967], 41-89), but it is possible to see a gradual distillation of this form over the decades such that his most recent films achieve the most intense discontinuity: narrative strands are thin and tenuously connected to each other (if at all), with key elements of plot introduced in such an off-hand manner as to be easily missed, even after several viewings. Characters proliferate but have such a schematic, or even spectral existence that it is difficult to associate them conclusively with actors who may appear on screen only a handful of times. Shots, while often startlingly beautiful, are generally short on duration and apparently chosen for their formal properties rather than their narrative logic. Editing is deliberately disruptive, refusing to elaborate clearly relations between characters, story elements and spaces. Contrary to Adorno's warnings about the 'objectivation' of artworks, Godard's films do reward close, analytical, repeat viewings: indeed, it is often necessary to watch these films three or more times in order to work out basic elements of plot such as the nature of relationships between characters and the fabula sequence of events. However, if, in their fragmentation, Godard's recent films encourage repeat viewing and repay attentive spectatorship, the discontinuity of narrative, form and ideas never resolves itself into a reassuring whole. Godard is no Christopher Nolan: the non-linear narrative is not a puzzle to be solved but a constant, irreconcilable challenge to self-satisfied, sedentary thought.

Recent developments in radical political thought insist upon the unprecedented fragmentation of our social experience (although this is arguably just the latest iteration of a refrain that has been ubiquitous since at least the modernist period). The anonymous French theory collective *Comité Invisible* have recently suggested that it is anachronistic to speak (à la Jacques Ellul) of a totalizing state; on the contrary, the experience of life in contemporary capitalist states is one of total fragmentation. One reason why there is no coherent labour movement in the west today is that there is no longer any common experience of work. Meanwhile, the self is indefinitely refracted through social media. No state or government can hope to control the totality of this dispersed economy of experience; at best, it can be more or less 'managed' (*Comité invisible* 2017, 22). In fact, far from totalitarian states, we are witnessing contemporary capitalist states gradually but methodically dismantling themselves, leaving us with a 'global every-man-for-himself' (*'sauve-qui-peut mondial'*, 26). Of course, this dismantling of the state is accompanied by acute anxiety over lost cultural identity and national sovereignty and the consequences in terms of populist votes have been well documented. But: 'The process of generalized fragmentation is so unstoppable that whatever brutal methods are used to try

and restore the lost unity can only serve to accelerate the process, to make it even more profound and irreversible' (Comité Invisible 2017, 27). The Comité Invisible suggest that, given the absence – indeed the impossibility – of a unified political opposition to this process, an alternative approach is to embrace the fragmentation, to see in it the occasion for 'new collective realities, new constructions, new encounters, new thoughts, new practices, newcomers in every sense' (42).

The recent work of Jean-Luc Godard, I suggest, is a cinema adapted to this new political reality, one that resists all-purpose solutions or comforting class fictions (à la Ken Loach), instead spitting out ideas in all directions, inviting their uptake into new and unforeseen assemblages. Godard's recent work can be seen as an illustration of the dictum of contemporary anti-capitalist movements to think globally and act locally (a slogan sometimes attributed to Jacques Ellul [Ellul 2013]). *Film socialisme* begins with a Mediterranean cruise during which the narrative discussions encourage us to think about the legacy of the Second World War (the very strong implication of this first part of the film is that the good times of the baby-boomer leisure class are being paid for from the spoils of war), but the second half of the film is tightly focused within a family who run a filling station in provincial France. The use of the family structure enables Godard to evoke the generational stakes in twenty-first-century politics, the grievances of a young generation many of whom may never expect to enjoy the permanent employment and property ownership taken for granted by their parents, even as these same young people are asked to pay for the older generation's extended retirement and to shoulder the burden of environmental damage caused by decades of exponential growth. All of this can perhaps be read into the title of the paperback that Florine (Marine Battaglia) reads as she hangs sulkily around the petrol pumps: Balzac's *Illusions perdues* (1837-43). When asked if she works at the garage, Flo confirms that she does, but points out that she does not have a work contract. Flo also talks about her generation's responsibility for paying off the debts accrued by her parents' generation. She tells her mother: 'We're going to pay thirty per cent of the national debt because you're getting old. That's precisely the profit that insurance companies make from debts.' Appropriating the language of Marxism, she tells her parents that, as regards the garage, 'There needs to be a redistribution of property' and she quotes St. Just from 1789 on the dissolution of individual rights in common law. Florine and Lucien (Gulliver Hecq) even suggest that they should stand for the local elections in place of their mother. When asked about her political programme, Florine replies: 'Being twenty years old. Being right. Holding on to hope. Being right when your government is wrong. Learning to see before learning to read.'

*Adieu au langage*, meanwhile, constitutes local cinema *par excellence*, given its quasi-home movie aspect discussed above. Zoé Bruneau, who plays Ivitch in the film, confirms that there were never more than ten people on set, and typically fewer than half-a-dozen (Bruneau 2014, 62). Thus, when Godard includes the clip from *Piranha 3D*, the purpose is presumably to underline for the viewer the fact that it is possible to challenge Hollywood on its home territory, that is to employ, with minimal resources and for entirely different ends, technologies that have been thoroughly commodified and culturally codified by Hollywood, producing a film that constitutes aesthetic research and encourages

politico-philosophical discussion but that can still meet, given its more modest origins, with considerable success. Resistance to Hollywood's aesthetic and economic hegemony is a recurring theme in Godard's work, one that, in *Éloge de l'amour* (2001), was explicitly tied to the history of the French Resistance during the Second World War. As in so much of Godard's historical work, and unsurprisingly for an artist who was an adolescent during the Occupation, the French wartime resistance becomes emblematic of all political struggle, a model of vigorous refusal of a political reality deemed illegitimate and unjust. However different the current context may be, Godard's work seems to urge us to incorporate into our lives something of the Resistance movement's uncompromising commitment to a different reality. Thus the 'Familie Martin' in the second part of *Film socialisme* is named after a clandestine Resistance cell (as a set of intertitles make clear late in the film) while *Adieu au langage* quotes repeatedly from Jean Anouilh's *Antigone* (1944), an updating of classical tragedy easily interpretable, in its context, as a call to resistance. In today's context, the specific lines quoted from the play – 'You disgust me, all of you, you and your happiness! And your life, that has to be loved at any price [...] I'm here to say no to you, and to die' (Anouilh 2000, 47, 40) – can be read as a critique of the culture of compulsory enjoyment encouraged by rampant consumerism, a position that has been formulated by cultural critics such as Slavoj Žižek (2008).

Resistance here would thus be to a culture that privileges pleasure and consumer 'choice' at the expense of critical thought (on the critique of choice in Godard's cinema, see also Morrey 2005, 155-6). A number of key lines in these films express this idea. In *Adieu au langage*, Davidson pronounces a line drawn from Philippe Sollers (2011, 16): 'inner experience is henceforth forbidden, by society in general and by the spectacle in particular'. In *Film socialisme* Olga (Olga Riazanova) proclaims: 'It's always said that one can only compare that which is comparable. In fact, one can only compare that which is incomparable in the non-comparable (*que de l'incomparable du pas comparable*).' The character named as Otto Goldberg (Jean-Marc Stehlé) walks into the shot, places a patronizing hand on her shoulder and says dismissively, 'That's all over now (*C'est fini, tout ça*).' Although this offhand dismissal provides a moment of light relief and may be met with a smile by the spectator weary of the litany of pretentious citations, there is no doubt also a serious point intended here. What, after all, should we take as being at an end? The sublime (the incomparable)? Philosophy (the line has echoes of many of the great French poststructuralist thinkers: Derrida, Levinas, Lyotard...)? The ability of language to make fine distinctions within abstract concepts? Is thought itself at an end? Finally, in *Adieu au langage*, Josette relates – in one of only very few lines in that film delivered diegetically with the speaking actor's face visible in close-up – a story of a child led into a Nazi gas chamber who, when he asked his mother why, was met by an SS officer's perfunctory '*Hier ist kein warum!*' ('There is no "why" here.'). The sequence reminds us that the physical violence of totalitarianism (extermination, genocide) is the consequence of a violence to thought, a willful impoverishment of the generative capacities of thinking. It is out of resistance to that reduction of thought's capacity that Godard generates, in *Film socialisme* and *Adieu au langage*, some of the most dense and recondite passages of montage in his career, constantly refusing the facile and reassuring transition from shot to shot. As Craig Keller notes (2014), 'not one shot/reverse-shot is to be found in *Adieu*

*au langage*, like in *Film Socialisme*'. More precisely, the only shot/reverse-shot in *Adieu* is a trick cut that gives the impression that Roxy the dog is watching a high-speed train enter a railway station. The obvious reference to the Lumières' *Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* (1895), augmented by the anachronistic overlay of a steam whistle on the soundtrack and ironized by the presence of the canine spectator, would seem to be another in Godard's long line of suggestions that the cinema has never attained its potential and that it remains, in a sense, in its infancy ('l'enfance de l'art' was a recurring epithet used to designate the cinema throughout Godard's 1990s work). In other words, the rapid codification of film forms into a set of predictable patterns has removed the power of the moving image to astound and illuminate. In Godard's work, by contrast, each shot, each edit brings a new surprise and constitutes a fresh idea.

Godard's most recent films are full of the imagery of nature, particularly the movement and cycle of water, the evocation of woods and forests and the increasing importance of his dog Roxy as both a character and a kind of perspectival inspiration. These films prolong the aesthetic research of the 1980s' 'trilogy of the sublime', unfortunately retaining the misogynist implications of their approach to gendered representation. At the same time, however, they seek to use the imagery of nature as part of a sustained reflection on the technocratic government of consumer society. Like Adorno, Godard seems to see natural beauty as that which ultimately resists commodification and containment even as it is appropriated by competing discourses and ideologies (the scientific, the touristic, the picturesque and the pleasant). Godard's own filming of nature, and particularly his play with different film technologies and representational traditions, at once illustrates or imitates this appropriation of natural beauty and at the same time resists it by refusing it any transparency. With the same gesture, these films resist any social or political organisation that would seek to impose itself as natural. If the extreme fragmentation of these films reflects something of the atomization and compartmentalization of experience in hyper-modernity, Godard's narratives and film form refuse any comforting resolution of this experience into an easily understandable pattern or trajectory. On the contrary, the films seek to replace contemporary political reality within all the irreducible complexity of their historical implication, while at the same time pointing to the urgency of local acts of resistance in the here and now. Through the singular density of their montage they undo an ideology of choice and enjoyment, encouraging instead a practice of critical thought and discernment.

### **Filmography**

*Adieu au langage*, 2014, Jean-Luc Godard, Switzerland/France.

*L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de la Ciotat*, 1895, Auguste and Louis Lumière, France.

*Éloge de l'amour*, 2001, Jean-Luc Godard, France/Switzerland.

*Film socialisme*, 2010, Jean-Luc Godard, Switzerland/France.

*Histoire(s) du cinéma*, 1998, Jean-Luc Godard, France.

*Je vous salue Marie*, 1985, Jean-Luc Godard, Switzerland/France.

*Menschen am Sonntag*, 1930, Robert Siodmak and Edgar G. Ulmer, Germany.

*Notre Musique*, 2004, Jean-Luc Godard, France/Switzerland.

*Nouvelle Vague*, 1990, Jean-Luc Godard, Switzerland/France.

*Only Angels Have Wings*, 1939, Howard Hawks, USA.  
*Passion*, 1982, Jean-Luc Godard, Switzerland/France.  
*Piranha 3D*, 2010, Alexandre Aja, USA.  
*Prénom Carmen*, 1983, Jean-Luc Godard, Switzerland/France.  
*Psycho*, 1960, Alfred Hitchcock, USA.  
*Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, 1980, Jean-Luc Godard, Switzerland/France.  
*Uccellacci e uccellini*, 1966, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Italy.  
*Une vie*, 1958, Alexandre Astruc, France.

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