

INTERMEDIALITY IN CONTEMPORARY AVANT-GARDE CINEMA: BLURRING MEDIA BOUNDARIES IN JEAN-LUC GODARD'S FILMS

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Abstract

Drawing on the premises of avant-garde cinema (experimentation, transformation, liminality), this paper seeks to examine how intermediality functions as a form of experimentation in contemporary avant-garde cinema. It also brings new insights regarding the nature of the medium and the impact on the spectator. Examples will be drawn from Jean-Luc Godard's films *First Name: Carmen* (1983) and *Film Socialisme* (2010).

Keywords: intermediality, avant-garde cinema, Jean-Luc Godard, *Film Socialisme*, *First Name: Carmen*

The concept of intermediality

As early as 1965, Dick Higgins, the Fluxus artist and co-founder of *Something Else Press*, coined the word ‘intermedia’ to describe the interdisciplinarity entailed in various art forms. As an artist, poet, scholar, composer, and art theorist, he understood the inevitable blending of the arts and media. As he notably explains (Higgins 1965: 21), “a compartmentalized approach” to arts is not useful for dealing with social issues. For this reason, Higgins advocated an intermedial approach which enables the co-examination of various media and arts. Intermediality has since become a critical concept: “a buzzword” examining the interrelations “between the arts and the media” (Verstraete 2010: 7). It also addresses the “linkages within and between the various media” seen under “the digital (hyper) medium” (ibid.).

Intermedial studies stem from an interest in ‘interaesthetic’ phenomena (Bruhn and Gjelsvik 2018: 3). The concept has a closer connection with aesthetics and “the idea of ‘sister arts’” (Pethö 2018: 167). Pethö, drawing on the Renaissance concept of *paragone*, Lessing’s famous Laocoön essay (1767) and the Wagnerian ideal of *Gesamtkunstwerk* (1849), explains that this rivalry between the arts is one of the precursors of intermediality. The idea of the mixing of art forms was a necessary criterion for the so-called historical avant-gardes of the beginning of the twentieth century (Bruhn and Gjelsvik 2018: 7). An intermedial approach to film studies, for instance, may involve examining the moving image’s status once static photography is incorporated (Verstraete 2010: 9). Pethö makes an interesting comment when she distinguishes between intertextuality and intermediality in cinema: she argues that, while “‘reading’ intertextual relations engages our intellectual capacities, ‘reading’ intermedial relations requires, more than anything else, an embodied spectator who gets ‘in touch’ with the world of the film” (Pethö 2011: 1). This comment links intermediality to the senses and suggests that sensory stimulation will cause the spectator to remain alert and active during the film.

Most research on intermediality comes from disciplines other than media studies such as film theory, philosophy, art history, and literary theory. As Verstraete (2010: 7–8) suggests, many researchers working on intermediality are in the margins of media studies, “right there where media and communication raise questions about art”. These researchers have used the notion of intermediality “to reconceptualize their objects of study – literary texts, paintings, films – in relation to the (digital) medium” (Verstraete 2010: 8). Evidence for its ever-emerging status is that it has been the theme for several recent conferences regarding cinema, semiotics, and translation studies. Many theoretical analyses or empirical research articles have fo-

cused on it, providing theoretical models and case studies. For this reason some scholars prefer to use the plural form *intermedialities* (Verstraete 2010); a word that is supposed to encompass all intermedial phenomena.¹ Nonetheless, as Pethö mentions, the use of diverse terminology only perplexes the issue and does not help in clarifying the various nuances of intermedial phenomena.

What exactly is intermediality? Gaudreault and Marion (2002: 15) explain that in order to understand a medium, one should study its relationship to other media. Similarly, Bolter and Grusin (1999: 65) point out: “A medium in our culture can never operate in isolation, because it must enter into relationships of respect and rivalry with other media”. Intermediality is thus a cultural phenomenon that explores the crossings and interconnections between and within media. These interconnections can be evident or oblique. If various media co-exist within an object, as in the case of websites, we can then refer to the phenomenon of multimediality. In the case of multimediality, the various media can “occur together, even interact, but do not structurally impact on each other” (Verstraete 2010: 10). Verstraete’s definition of intermediality is very enlightening, “[it] occurs when there is an interrelation of various-distinctly recognized-arts and media within one object but the interaction is such that they transform each other and a new form of art, or mediation, emerges” (ibid.: 10).

Early film theorists such as Arnheim, Bazin, and Kracauer proclaimed the unique nature of the filmic medium and its “stylistic implications” (Carroll 1996: 1). Carroll’s famous phrase “forget the medium” is vital in this respect. Elleström (2010: 14) explains that media cannot be regarded as separate entities with no or little common traits. This approach, as he discusses, would make “every intermedial relation [seem] an anomaly where the supposedly essentially different characteristics of allegedly separate media are presumed to be more or less transformed, combined or blended in a unique way” (Elleström 2010: 14). Müller (2010: 16–17) points to the fact that the concept of intermediality is materialized in a specific historical and social context.

Although scholars have used different terminology to refer to phenomena of media transformation, in order to understand intermediality and intermedial phenomena one should look first at mediality. Pethö (2011: 11) argues that intermediality is a highly controversial subject that presupposes assumptions on mediality itself. For Pethö (2011: 1), intermediality could

¹ Also see Paech, Joachim and Jens Schröter, eds. 2008. *Intermedialität Analog/Digital. Theorien, Methoden, Analysen*. Munich: Wilhelm Fink and Rajewsky, Irina. 2002. *Intermedialität*. Tübingen: Francke.

become one of the “major theoretical thinkings about cinema” because it underlines the perennial capacity of film to change and be connected with other media. All this interaction has implications on the nature of film itself and on the cinematic experience (ibid.: 2). As far as the second parameter is concerned, Pethö mentions that we have an alteration in the notion of cinematic experience, moving away from the movie theaters to our homes, to the street, into the exhibition halls, etcetera.

As Pethö (2011: 19–20) notes, following the multiplication of media in the last decades, what is missing is the analysis of media relations that resulted from this proliferation. Due to the interdisciplinarity of intermedial studies, several researchers with diverse academic backgrounds could in fact participate in the discussion and theoretical analysis of intermediality. This led to the rapid increase in this discipline in the last decades.

One key characteristic of intermediality is that of transformation: in this light, Heinrichs and Spielmann (2002: 8) suggest that “intermedia denotes a fusion rather than an accumulation of media”. This fusion of the elements of various media leads to “transformation” (ibid.: 8). Similarly, Zecca (2020: 11), summarizing the work of leading figures in the field (Wolf, Rajewsky and Montani), describes that “the notion of co-presence is an integral part of the semantic foundation of the category of intermediality”. A second key characteristic is that of experimentation. Verstraete (2010), referring to Elwell’s work, posits that intermediality is linked to experimentation and liminality. It is different from a generalized convergence that is the characteristic of digitization, in the sense that it focuses on the limits of the medium under examination and the experiences it offers. She proposes that in order to overcome convergence limits, one should examine the avant-garde or performing arts’ traditions.

Cinematic intermediality

Cinema has been described “as an art form *between media*” (Bruhn and Gjelsvik 2018: 1). Pethö has explored the intermedial and interart aspect of cinema. She explains that in order to understand a medium, one should explore its interconnectedness with other media (Pethö 2011: 32). This exploration confers an aesthetic value to cinema through synesthetic language (ibid: 31). Citing examples from Bergman’s *Persona* (1966) and Kiarostami’s *Shirin* (2008), she demonstrates how mediality can be perceived “through interactions between the senses and between media” (ibid.: 4). She explains that even films which maintain the illusion of reality can be highly intermedial. Through film, the real world can be “perceived ‘as if’

filtered through other arts (like painting) or [...] reframed, disassembled by other media” (ibid.: 5). It thus becomes apparent that the intermediality of cinema is based on the “(inter)sensuality of cinema itself, [on] the experience of the viewer being aroused simultaneously on different levels of consciousness and perception” (ibid.: 4). For example, in avant-garde films, there are overt or covert references to other media. In Alexander Sokurov’s films the influence of other media, mainly theater and painting, are quite evident. In the famous scene of the *Russian Ark* (2002), the camera moves across the room trying to cover the plot’s unfolding. It is as if the camera only registers a live performance which takes place in a large theater. Sokurov challenges the role of cinema, seen as moving images. He used a still camera to shoot the film and all action revolves around this camera. The filmmaker plays with the medium and its qualities. In this film, apart from the crossovers between cinema and theater, there are intermedial encounters between cinema and painting, in the form of tableaux vivants. As Beymers and Condee observe:

In radical contrast to the tempo of mass media, Sokurov demands of the viewer a different relation to the image, renewing its potential connections – on the one hand, to still photography and, on the other, to the enduring traditions of oil painting. (Beymers and Condee 2011: 3)

The interchange between “still painting and cinema/ moving images” or as the authors refer to it “between death and life” confers a different sensuous experience to the viewer. In the film, there are apparent influences of Sokurov’s documentary techniques. The personalized voice-over and what we see is not explicit but the result of what someone else sees, seems like “some kind of memory, rather than an immediate perception” (Hicks 2011: 25). Another example of intermediality in avant-garde cinema is Sokurov’s *Mother and Son* (1997). This film is an example in which the world of film is filtered through painting. The plasticity of the images is thus apparent; the viewer has the impression that he/she is viewing an oil painting in a museum or an art gallery rather than a film. This effect is caused by the extremely slow movement of the camera. This seems to focus on the details of the scenery, on the deep emotions of the viewer, giving the impression to the viewer that he/she is co-present in a particular scene. On the other hand, Sokurov’s *Russian Ark* seems ‘reframed’ by another medium, namely theater. The film seems to be a theatrical rehearsal in which natural sound, and conversations among actors are not filtered. Another example of avant-garde cinema in which intermedial encounters are incredibly significant is Jean-Luc Godard’s work.

Jean-Luc Godard's work

As *The New York Times*' film critic Vincent Canby once suggested, Jean-Luc Godard's work is both 'unpredictable' and 'idiosyncratic'; one that can be compared to geniuses, of other, longstanding arts. Godard is a prolific filmmaker with hundreds of films to his name and avid followers. He does not allow an in-between reading of his work: either you are an enthusiastic fan, or you disregard his films altogether. The reading of his films is intricately connected to our response while watching them. Viewers who love linear narratives with a straightforward plot will be discouraged or even annoyed by them. Others who are intrigued by non-linear films, fragmented stories and seemingly 'ingenuous' experimentations with the filmic medium will admire one or more phases of his work.

As most important filmmakers, Godard has experienced transformation in his career. Sterritt (1999) divides his work in three important periods: the New Wave period in the early 1960s; the period of political activism in the late 1960s and 1970s; and, finally, his most mature period from the 1980s until the present day. In this more 'introspective' period the filmmaker experiments with themes such as spirituality and sexuality and the aesthetics of sound, image, and montage (Sterritt 1999). These three phases of his work are not similar and straightforward:

[P]eople who admire one phase of his career often find themselves puzzled or put off by another; and those who study one phase in an effort to plumb its mysteries [...] may discover that another period is shaped by a very different set of concerns. (Sterritt 1999: 2)

Godard rediscovers cinematic conventions thus offering the audience "*traditional* pleasure", but, at the same time, he transforms these conventions by devising ingenuous methods and, in this way, leads the cinematic medium to "unlikely new forms" (ibid.: 15). His films ultimately provide the audience with "*innovative* pleasure" (ibid.). From the filmmaker's standpoint, this pleasure is created by experimenting with cinema's expressive means and by blending fiction with reality. From the spectator's viewpoint, the pleasure is felt by putting together the fragmented pieces of the story, by understanding its subversiveness, and by reconstructing the seemingly dissonant parts of the film, their interconnection, and the meaning behind them.

[His] films dazzle. They engage and enrage. Some inspire, others leave us wondering why we're bored, fraught with anger and frustration, or ready to engage dialogue. (Conley and Kline 2014: 1)

Godard is an inspired auteur who has significantly left his mark on film history. Although his contribution to filmmaking is noteworthy, there are some sceptics who continue to comment on the vast number of films he has made. In response to this, Sterritt (1999: 2) explains that “the speed of his production is inseparable from its fecundity, variety, and complexity”. What characterizes most of his work is a marked disdain towards “the Cinema of Common Sense, rooted in stories that appear ‘compelling’ and ‘entertaining’” (ibid.: 2). Godard sets out to subvert traditional film conventions, his main aim being the promotion of “active dialogue with the movie’s ideas” (ibid.: 14). Hence, he “fragment[s] the story and styliz[es] the visuals ... [so] that they lose their ability to lull the audience into its accustomed state of receptive daydreaming” (ibid.: 15). In this way, he ensures engagement rather than passivity when it comes to viewer immersion of the story. What drives all three phases of his work is his strong, almost obsessive desire, to keep the audience alert and to experiment with the expressive potential of the medium.

The aim of this article is twofold: to examine the themes and techniques used by Jean-Luc Godard in the third, more ‘introspective’ part of his work and explore intermediality in his late films and how the films interact with the spectator. This article focuses on two of Godard’s late films from the early 1980s to the beginning of the twenty-first century. These films display a focus towards aesthetics, history, and politics. Godard engages in experiments with media and genres and reshapes our understanding of the filmic medium. As Morgan (2013: 19) asserts, “Godard’s late cinematic project [entails] a sustained engagement with what he sees as cinema’s inheritance of terms and debates that come out of a tradition of philosophical aesthetics, a tradition that emerges in particular from the legacy of German idealism and romanticism”. Godard revamps this tradition by proposing a more innovative view at the expressive level. Although his films belong to the moment of their creation, they can “traverse the time of their making and speak to us in a variety of ways, as cinema *qua* cinema, as an engagement with issues related to politics, and at the same time to different modes of thinking” (Conley and Kline 2014: 2, original emphasis). The authors contend that viewers who are not acquainted with Godard’s early films will want to watch them and compare them to his later productions. They will want to unveil the evolution of Godard’s talent through the decades

and discover “why certain films continue to perturb [...], why they *work on* our ways of thinking and doing; to see where the character of the medium and its history are summoned” (ibid., original emphasis). From the beginning, Godard’s cinematic work at times caused dismay in the mind of the audience, nonetheless, as he matures, different themes capture his experimentation.

Late Godard and his films

Although Godard’s Nouvelle Vague period was marked by a high degree of experimentation with the medium of film and its rivalry with other arts and media (Pethö 2011: 232), in his more mature phase, this rivalry seems to settle, giving rise to more abstract experimentations on the aesthetics of sound and montage. Godard, like Eisenstein, is one of the most prominent artists of his generation, influencing film history as a “complex and nuanced” filmmaker (Brown 2021: 89). His influences range from Quentin Tarantino, and Martin Scorsese to Japanese anime director Mamoru Oshii (Pethö 2011: 24) and although early in his career his films took inspiration from Hollywood classical cinema, his more recent creations are markedly less mainstream.

As part of the French New Wave and influenced by Italian Neorealism and Hollywood classical cinema, he broke away from the conventional visual style and experimented with editing (Peters 2012: 682). What seems to prevail in his films is “a new kind of camera consciousness” (ibid.: 681) where different types of cinematic movement-images alternate. In the 1970s, after a near fatal accident which he survived, Godard began engaging in “unconventional” experimentations with video (Sterritt 1999: 10). In the early 1980s, he went on to explore “[the] traditional European culture in offbeat narrative features like *Passion* and *First Name: Carmen* (1983)” (ibid.). This period is characterized by his collaboration with Anne-Marie Miéville who was very supportive of his novel experimentations. Although it is not easy to identify when the late period of his work started, most critics place it in the beginning of the 1980s with *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* until the present day with films like *Film Socialisme*, *Adieu au Langage* and his most recent *Le Livre d’Image*.

As Pavsek (2013) explains, the films that Godard produced in the last two decades have the feeling of “autonomous” works of art, produced by an artist that acts as a recluse, with many critics claiming that his later work has a “melancholic and pessimistic turn” (Hodges 2014: 431). In his work he evokes a pessimist image of both cinema and Europe,

which he nonetheless calls hopeful.² What characterizes him is a polemic stance towards the European construct as it has developed in recent years. This third phase of his career seems a continuation of his involvement in the Dziga-Vertov Group. His collaboration with Miéville seems thus a smooth transition (Sterritt 1999: 251) to a more introspective phase with evident political connotations. Sterritt, commenting on this collaboration, claims that “their political overtones are overt, and their styles make absolutely no concessions to popular movie conventions” (ibid.).

Contrary to his early period in the 1960s and the Maoist period of the 1970s and 1980s, his later period from *Histoire(s) du cinéma* to *Notre Musique* and to *Film Socialisme* “signal[s] a shift to a retrospective quality in his films” (Hodges 2014: 431). In the beginning of 1980s “Godard multiplies intermedial strategies to reflect on the gestural nature of the cinematic image” (Giraud 2018: 127). This period of his career was characterized by several films with intermedial focus, with *Passion* and *First Name Carmen* being two indicative cases that outline his increasing interest in intermedial experimentations. This pursuit of experimentation is apparent in his later work too, as in the case of *Film Socialisme* (2010), in which he analyzes the hybridity of the digital medium, and in *Allemagne année 90 neuf zero* (1991) where Godard explores in detail the relationship between various arts such as painting, photography, and cinema. He thus meditates on the succession of media by positing that there exists “a developmental model for the origins of cinema based on technological innovation and progress: from painting to photography to film” (Morgan 2013: 21). However, as Morgan acknowledges, Godard reworks the genealogy of cinema by breaking away from the tradition that linked cinema to the “direct recording of the world”. He insinuates that cinema has a direct link to the medium of painting, since it needs to create images and not simply record reality (ibid.). Godard’s cinema seems to introduce “a meta-narrative discourse on the role of cinema in the context of media and the arts” (Pethö 2011: 232), thus initiating a self-reflexive comment on the role of cinema in the digital era. Godard manipulates images by devising “ingenious methods” to help cinema “find paths that will finally lead to the long-delayed realization of its vast expressive potential” (Sterritt 1999: 15). He thus engages in intermedial experimentations as in the

² In an interview to Gideon Bachman, Godard (1998: 138) expounds, “It is true that for the cinema I have a sentiment of dusk, but isn’t that the time when the most beautiful walks are taken? [...] for me, dusk is a notion of hope rather than of despair”.

case of *First Name: Carmen*, a film that delves into the affinities of cinema and its link to arts, such as dance and music.

First Name: Carmen

First Name: Carmen was based on Prosper Mérimée's short story *Carmen* (1845) which in turn inspired Bizet's well-known opera *Carmen* (1875). Godard retells the story of Carmen in a unique way, distancing himself from the well-known opera, but still incorporating important elements in the film, such as music and overt gestuality. Godard in fact relocates the myth to contemporary Paris and the Trouville summer resort on the English shore (Baumgartner 2021: 4). He utilizes the middle and last parts of Beethoven's string quartet and, in a sense, he "deflates the myth and generates surprise, irony, and humour" (Kovacs 1990, quoted in Baumgartner 2021: *ibid.*). The film was awarded the Technical Prize for Sound and Cinematography at the 1983 Venice Film Festival, featuring music by Beethoven and Tom Waits. Beethoven's music structures the film and "interconnect[s] the scattered fragments of the editing" (Giraud 2018: 126). The director finds the opportunity to revisit "the function and aesthetic possibilities of sound in cinema" (Baumgartner 2021: 4). He is apparently influenced by de Rougemont's concept of "thinking with hands"³ and structures the whole film on this concept; Godard tries to apply the theoretical premises of de Rougemont's concept and argues that since we have two hands "we can only use two tracks at the same time to mix film sound" (Baumgartner 2021: 5–6).

[Hence in the film, he] alternatively combines Beethoven's string quartet with either ocean surf, shrieking seagulls, dialogue, or voiceovers. The result is a soundtrack that reigns over the images, that adds unexpected complexity to the filmic message and surrounds the images with an enigmatic aura. (Baumgartner 2021: 5–6)

Although this experimentation with the possibilities of sound seems, at first, restrictive, the result is gratifying in the sense that it highlights the possibilities of sound and the impact of this experimentation on the spec-

³ See de Rougemont's *Penser avec les mains* (1972), Collection idées, no. 266, nouvelle édition. Paris: Gallimard. Baumgartner (2021: 5), summarizing de Rougemont's concept of 'thinking with hands', explains that this metaphor "propagates the reconsideration of the seemingly disparate entities of action and thought into a unit whose sole objective is to create. This formidable dynamism of creating through action must be executed by a creator who is fully committed (engagé) and prepared to accept all risks and responsibilities such an act of creating entails".

tator. Godard once again mixes genres, tones, and media. He builds on the heterogeneity of media and genres and creates an effect of 'dislocation' (Giraud 2018: 126). This dislocation has an immediate impact on the viewer, an element used in many of his films. As the film critic Vincent Canby suggests: "What is new is the total lack of formal political dogma and, in its place, a deadpan, cockeyed, witty re-examination of the values of Western civilization, in terms that make as much use of comic books as of the classics of our culture".

How are these artistic forms combined and what is the effect on the spectator? Giraud (2018: 129) claims that "The combination of heterogeneous artistic forms and the hybridization of the audiovisual medium foster the spectator's active reception. The combination of the musicians' and characters' gestures creates what Deleuze names a 'pluridimensional, pictorial and musical gest'". Gestures permeate the film, from the rehearsals of the string quartet "to the visual and sonic bodily attitudes of the lovers, inspired by Rodin" (ibid.). Gesturality is also of pivotal importance and acts as a major source of intermedial exchanges. As Giraud notes (2018: 127), "effort, endurance, dexterity, grace, or clumsiness are gestural qualities which manifest the characters' attitude and ethical relationship with the world and others. In this sense, gesture proves to be above all relational and intersubjective". Gestural intermediality is evident in various aspects in the film, from the interaction between the lovers, to the gestures of the musicians. It seems that together with music gesturality has a unifying function binding the fragmented parts of the story.

Giraud (2018: 134) concludes that Godard uses intermediality as a means of interacting "with the technological body of the film", but also to incorporate traits of other media. In this effect, he can raise the spectator's awareness and alertness, thus encouraging them to interact with the filmic medium. Color in the film is also very important. Gloomy and dark, it reminds us of Godard's experimentation with colors in his early films and alludes to the darkness of characters and mischief. Music then again comes as a gleam of light to structure and blend the film's fragmented editing.

Intermedial crossovers between literature and film

In his 1959 speech at Cannes, André Malraux celebrated the power of cinema, and very persistently stressed the decline of other arts, such as the novel and painting (Schmid 2019: 1). Malraux's assertion echoed the famous essay by Ricciotto Canudo in 1923 'Reflections on the Seventh Art' and his earlier manifesto on the artistic merits of cinema (ibid.: 1-2). This

assertion of cinema as an independent art and the desire to break away from literary canons or theatrical conventions was at the forefront of the ideas of early avant-garde filmmakers in the 1920s. The question of cinema's independence was still not solidified in the 1950s. Schmid's question sheds light on this idea: "Had the bold originality of directors such as Abel Gance, Germaine Dulac or Jean Epstein, and – later – Jean Renoir, Robert Bresson and Jean Cocteau ... not proven cinema's unquestionable place as the seventh art?" This rhetorical question manifests the struggle of early avant-garde artists to prove the merits of cinema as an independent art.

Cinema has always been influenced by literary canons. We can recall the numerous film adaptations from literary books, and that in the early days the new art followed the footsteps of literary genres. This was evident in the eloquent and pompous voice-over narration that accompanied the images, reminding us of in-depth character analysis and detailed descriptions of literary novels. Nouvelle Vague filmmakers tended to make explicit references to literary works, in the form of quotations, allusions or in the form of intertitles, thus paying homage to their literary ancestors and showing the great affinity between cinema and the literary genre. Another example of cinematic intermediality is one of Jean-Luc Godard's late films, namely *Film Socialisme* (2010).

Film Socialisme

Film Socialisme is the epitome of one of his late works, an account of Europe's course through the years. In it, the filmmaker ponders on the issue of Europe's future, providing a rather bleak portrait of what lies ahead. In this late era of his career, Godard seems to reinvent his technique. He experiments with the digital format – this is in fact his first film to be shot on a digital format – and moves away from old conventions. This is exemplified even in the way credit titles are organized in the film. The film is seen "as a means to resist forms of power at the turn of a Dantesque twenty-first century" (Emmelhainz 2019: 6).

Godard once again is critical of his time. Most art films cannot be explored without bearing in mind the specific society and the historical moment in which they are produced (Lay 2002). It is not an incident that *Film Socialisme* was produced two years after the financial crisis that had a major impact on Europe and led many people to openly question the validity and viability of the European construct. The film is an example of critical dystopias. This dystopic vision of what lies ahead is quite prevalent as a theme in several of Godard's late films, leaving nonetheless a utopic win-

dow of hope. The film has a close connection to a 1963 experimental film *Méditerranée* by Jean-Daniel Pollet and had an immense influence on Godard, particularly aiding him “in defining a non-ideological and theoretical method for filmmaking” (Emmelhainz 2019: 261). Emmelhainz (261–262) notes in this sense:

Along similar lines to *Méditerranée*, *Film Socialisme* could be described as a search for images of the real parting from the poetic imaginary and memory. An assemblage of images, texts and sounds, the film forces spectators to work with the film’s signifiers in order to add referents and find meaning.

How does Godard approach the issue of the European crisis and in what way does he convey the message of a utopic and dystopic era as regards to Europe and its values? Williams (2016: 204) explains that the film unfolds “more like an unprocessed dream or nightmare mash-up than an extension of the painterly compositions of his recent elegiac and often melancholic film essays”. *Film Socialisme* is not an easy film. It forces the viewers to react, to watch closely, and to try to decipher its signification. As in the case of Brecht, who spoke of the need of the audience “to detach themselves from immersion in the narrative”, Godard and Gorin “construct the spectator (or force the spectator to construct him/herself) as a player in the interplay of created, re-created and challenged meanings” (White 2017: 166). This same technique of alienation used by Godard in his early films is also present in his later work. The viewing process is continuously disrupted, and the viewer feels uneasiness. The film is so fragmented that is impossible to follow a narrative line. It is one of Godard’s skills to “dissociat[e] the indissociable” based on Rancière’s words (2001: 219) and to blend harmoniously “heterogeneous elements” (Giraud 2018: 126). This is one of Godard’s major skills as a filmmaker. His work points to “ambivalence”, an ambivalence between off-screen and on-screen reality, between documentary and fiction, in an attempt to accomplish “more ambitious things” (Sterritt 1999: 16–17). In fact, “much of his work can be understood as a sort of wrestling match between documentary and fiction, setting fabricated plots and characters against real-world backgrounds” (ibid.).

The film is presented as a triptych, divided in three sections entitled “Mouvement”, “Quo vadis Europa” and “Nos humanités”. The first part of the film “includes an assemblage of images, histories, memories, and sensible regimes from the Mediterranean sea passing through three countries and three cities that have been fundamental for the filmmaker: Egypt, Palestine, Odessa, Greece, Naples and Barcelona” (Godard 2010, cited in Emmelhainz 2014: 527). In the second part entitled “Quo vadis Europa”, apart

from the narrative where the Martin family is depicted, there are implicit references to revolution and resistance. In fact, the names used by Godard, “Réseau du musée de l’homme” and “Famille Martin”, are names of the French resistance groups during the German Occupation of the Second World War. The last part of the film revisits main historical events and sites that have marked European and World History, in an attempt to revive the past in the present, and act as a force of redemption (Emmelhainz 2014: 528). Godard is a great visionary who raises several topics in his films; only in *Film Socialisme* some of the main themes are European history and culture, the death of cinema due to the new digital era, and the Palestine issue, to name but a few. As Morgan (2013: 280) explains, Godard “takes up the intersection of film form, personal stories and national histories”.

Godard seems quite provocative;⁴ he paints a fragmented image of Europe at all levels. How is fragmentation mediated in the film? Visual fragmentation is manifested with highly saturated colors; colors that are phosphorescent and, at times, pixelated. The passage from high-definition images to pixelated is constant, especially in the first part that takes place on a cruise ship. This passage enhances the image of visual fragmentation. “The nightmarish insight in the film is obtained by inspiring a negative dose of the digital medium” (Williams 2016: 204). This is materialized using highly saturated sequences, which are then followed by poorly filmed sequences on mobile phone cameras. As Williams (ibid.: 204) aptly puts it: “The onslaught of saturated, phosphorescent, hi-gloss HD exposures intercut with low-grade surveillance footage, mobile phone images, and badly degraded video, all pushed at times to pixelated distortion”. Narrative fragmentation is manifested through the intermission of captions, documentaries, news feeds, YouTube videos, and images of manifestations. We observe the intermission of other genres that disrupt the unfolding of the narrative. Thus, one would think of it as a nonnarrative film. In fact, Williams (2016: 204) describes it as a “virtually nonnarrative magma of hybrid sounds and images”.

Finally, verbal fragmentation takes place through the use of non sequiturs, false starters, the interval of other languages, other than French, in spoken and written form (English, Hebrew, Latin, Russian, German, Italian, Arabic, Spanish, etc.), and the use of Navajo subtitles, that is subtitles that only convey the message succinctly and are often not aligned with

⁴ As Conley and Kline (2014: 8) explain, “If Godard is at his most provocative in this film, it is merely the latest version of a provocation that began in 1956, perhaps even with *Opération béton* (Operation Concrete)”.

the verbal dialogue. As Gittins (2012) puts it, “the link between signifier and signified is broken” because the subtitles do not seem to correspond to what is being projected on the screen. The subtitles confuse the audience “by only partially translating the dialogue and merging words together into a sort of code that reverberates poetically with the images and sounds” (Fox 2018: 168). In the first part of the film, several passengers speak different languages, but they do not seem to communicate with each other, or even have the intention to communicate. This was the case in an earlier film by Godard, namely *Tout va bien* (1972), in which the use of French, and English dialogue and subtitles being intertwined throughout the film, “disrupts the easy, smooth finish of a classic film narrative, forcing an intensified concentration on what is being said” (White 2017: 166). It is thus evident that both fragmentation at a verbal and visual level, as well as the intermission of other genres or even editing techniques serve to disrupt the viewing process and prohibit the audience from identifying with characters in the film. One other aspect of his films is the ‘collage’ effect. Throughout the film, the filmmaker uses random quotations from books, and other films, in a decontextualized manner that contribute to the film’s fragmentation. This same effect was used in the New Wave period as in the case of *Une femme est une femme* (1961) where Angela and Emile engage in a verbal fight and communicate using “random quotations chosen from books” (Pethö 2011: 236). In this earlier period of his work, Godard resorted to the medium of literature in an attempt to mock and deconstruct “the seriousness and the artificially constructed” nature of literary works and genre films (ibid.). In this period, the rivalry between cinema and other media is prominent and permeates many of his films. In *Film Socialisme* his experimentation with literature is evident; it is not used, anymore, with a derisive intent, but in an attempt to amplify the fragmentary nature of the narrative-purposefully selected to symbolize the decay of European values and the film’s demise due to the advent of digital technology. Finally, the intermission of intertitles at various parts of the film, forces the spectator to ‘read’ the film, transposing his experience from seeing images to reading text for several minutes. This technique can frustrate the viewer but it also awakes his imagination, making him/her feel the film at a different level.

Godard and the expanded role of the spectator

Post-classical cinema has displaced emphasis from narrative structure to emotional involvement; attention is redirected from cinema as *discourse* to cinema as an *experience* (Elsaesser and Buckland 2002: 288). The specta-

tor is no longer viewed as an external by-stander; instead, he/she “is invited to become an embodied and emotive participant” (Laine 2006: 129), being placed “in a new kind of ‘contact space’” (130). A very interesting case in this respect is what Deleuze calls “the cinema of the body” as counteracting “the cinema of action”. For Koutsourakis,

Deleuze’s definition of “the cinema of the body” synopsis an interest in a film language which is not concerned with the mere duplication of a story. It is rather a film practice which is keen on registering performances, unforeseen elements and materials not firmly controlled by the narrative and the director. The effect is that the entire process generates variations from the script that transcend distinctions between filmic and meta-filmic reality, staged and real events. In this context, “the cinema of the body” refers to a self-reflexive filmmaking process which valorizes the process over the finished product. Jonathan Rosenbaum describes it as a “cinema of doubt,” which is more interested in posing questions rather than offering answers. The filmmaker and the performers discover and explore new paths throughout the filmmaking process, while the audience is given time to think and reflect on the portrayed actions instead of passively following the storyline. (Koutsourakis 2012: 87)

Dogville, is an example of the cinema of body, the process towards exploration is more important than the end product. This emanates from the experimental techniques that von Trier has deployed, in order to leave space for thought to the audience. The film is a case of ‘performative realism’. Similar concerns are raised by Jean-Luc Godard in his films. The emphasis, as in the case of von Trier, is not on the end product, but on the reaction of the audience, and the experience they will have during the screening.

Inspired by Elsaesser’s notion of the spectator as a participant, as a “member of an instant and transient community rather than a singular spectator being seated ‘in front’ of a picture window screen” (Elsaesser 1998: 43–4), Laine argues,

Cinema is not some kind of objectified external universe cut off from the spectator by an impassable barrier that separates the corporeal from the intellectual or the private self from the public space. Rather, cinema is a matter of senses that emerges from the between the inside of the self and the outside of the world, and also from the between different temporalities and spatialities (Laine 2006: 130).

In a similar vein, Fox revisits the way Godard treats his audience, and his experimentation with the filmic medium. Borrowing Warner’s notion of ‘publics’, she suggests (2018: 168) that the role of the spectator in *Film So-*

cialisme is ‘expanded’; the spectator becomes a ‘transient participant’.⁵ She comments on Godard’s experimentation with the spectator: “As he continues to work across different media, with the film experience transcending the enclosure of the traditional cinema auditorium, the spectator’s role becomes ever more fluid and multi-dimensional, encompassing a listener, a reader and in the case of *Film socialisme*, a travelling visitor” (ibid.). In fact, the spectator in the film seems to travel to various places across time, watching passengers engage in virtual aerobic classes, watch YouTube videos, and partake in a film screening, in such a way that “a multitude of social and virtual spaces of interaction are made visible, all of which make links with places elsewhere” (ibid.: 169). In the film, “the spectator’s relationship with the sounds and pictures is misaligned” in an attempt “to forge new radical associations and make sounds and images heard in all their opacity, with a kinetic intensity that causes our ears to ring” (ibid.: 191). This is the genius of Godard; a filmmaker who does not comply with traditional values, one who experiments with all possible modes in the film, with diverse genres and media, fostering a new idea of the filmic medium. He wants to reach all possible lines of experimentation, a variety of techniques, playing with the digital image, sounds (both natural and artificial ones) and editing techniques. This is a rather refreshing and inspiring image of cinema.

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⁵ As Warner (2002: 7–8) suggests: “Most of the people around us belong to our world not directly as kin or comrades or in any other relation to which we could give a name, but as strangers ... We are related to them (as I am to you) as transient participants in common publics”.

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