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Herbert Feinstein; Jean-Luc Godard

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HERBERT FEINSTEIN

## An Interview with Jean-Luc Godard

The following is part of an interview given in October. Since then, reports of continued problems with *LE MÉPRIS* have been rife. As we go to press in March, it is still not clear if Godard's name will be on all three language versions.

*M. Godard, why did you really dedicate Breathless to "Monogram Pictures"?*

I did it to prove that you can do pictures that are both interesting and cheap. In America a cheap picture is not considered interesting, and I said "Why not?" because actually there are many American directors who do B and C pictures who are very interesting. *Vivre Sa Vie* I dedicated to B pictures, because in my opinion it is a B picture.

*You're being dead serious now?*

If it's less than \$100,000, it's a B picture. The trouble is that in Hollywood the B budget is all they consider; it can be a B or Z budget, but even with a Z budget you can attempt to make an A quality picture. If you talk to a Hollywood producer—if you make a B picture then you are a B director. You are only an A director if you make films with A budgets. . . . I think this idea is wrong. But if you go to see bankers or producers in America they still think in Hollywood's way, even though Hollywood is dead.

*Have you tried to make a film in America?*

I am trying—for example my last one, with Brigitte Bardot, *Le Mépris* [*Contempt*], is entirely produced by an American, Joseph Levine. And I have a fight with him—it's very hard. I am probably going to take my name off the picture, because they want to change too many things in it.

*This has happened to Orson Welles, Irving Lerner—I mean it happens to Americans, too.*

The great directors from all over the world, like von Stroheim, Chaplin, Welles—they never can work in America. Up to a certain point [they can] but after that it's impossible. . . . Even now, you can speak for example of Stanley Kramer, who is supposed to be an intelligent, free producer; but if you ask John Cassavetes how he made a film with Kramer, you'll hear another sound. . . . Even with an intelligent producer, they are too much used to a certain way of making pictures—a certain way of financing it; and when Stanley Kramer calls his pic-

(Above) Brigitte Bardot in *LES MÉPRIS*.

ture an art picture he doesn't mean what I mean in calling a film an art picture. . . .

When I was discussing *Le Mépris* with Joseph Levine, I learned little by little that the words did not mean the same things to him that they did to me. —He is not a bad man; but I am not either. When we say "picture," it doesn't mean the same thing at all.

*Maybe Levine's aesthetic sense is different and less sophisticated than yours. He did put up the money for Two Women, the Moravia story directed by De Sica, which I thought was a satisfactory film.*

It was a good one, but nothing special. Like *Bridge on the River Kwai*: it's commercial; it's a good one, but in my opinion there is nothing artistic in it.

*I was wondering about Brigitte Bardot—an international star, and I was thinking a director would be asking for a lot of trouble, it would be like getting mixed up with an institution. She may be a very talented actress, but if you hire a woman like Judy Garland in America or Brigitte Bardot in France, you are undertaking a whole mafia of people.*

Well, I thought I was going to have a lot of trouble with her. I considered her the real producer. But on the contrary it was very nice with her, and I have trouble with the producer. She is really not a screen star but a newspaper star. And it helped me, because I could not have made the picture without her; it was an expensive one, and I wanted to do it in an expensive way. It was not I who asked for Brigitte; she asked me to do the picture. And I accepted because with Brigitte I could go to the bankers and the producer and say give me a million dollars to do the picture, and they say OK. Whereas two years ago, with only myself and the novel by Moravia, I wasn't able to do the picture. If I had Marilyn Monroe or Paul Newman I can make anything I want; without them I can't.

*What is the story of Le Mépris?*

It's the story of a girl who is married to a man and for rather subtle reasons begins to despise him. And it goes on in that way. . . . [Unlike Louis Malle's *Une Vie Privée*], it's not a picture of Bardot, it's a picture by Godard with Bardot.

. . . They thought they could do the same thing with *Le Mépris*—an international star, a novel by Moravia, a New Wave director. But when they saw the picture they realized it was very interesting but difficult for them.

*Who has the right to edit your films—does the producer keep that right in the contract?*

Nobody. I have the only right to edit it. Of course you can't prevent someone in Tokyo from taking his scissors. . . .

*Elena et Ses Hommes, made by Jean Renoir, was ruined in the American version by cutting. It was all pushed into flashback.*

Sure, like *Lola Montez*—that was destroyed too. I understand that the audience in America is different from the audience here—but so why ask me to do a picture? A picture from a Moravia novel which is rather intellectual, to show to Texas or Alabama?

*There are many theaters in America that would show it, that show Breathless for example.*

I know that, but Levine doesn't know that, and he's not willing to—he's doing a picture with me and Moravia, but he hasn't even read the script; he spent a million dollars to buy a novel he never read, to make it directed by me. I've made five pictures since *Breathless*; he never asked to see them, and doesn't know in which direction I'm going now.

Another thing he said: when he got the picture he said, Oh, I've spent a million dollars so I'm obliged to sell it everywhere around America. I say: you can't. If you have a Rolls Royce you can't sell it as a Chevrolet. You must sell it to people who like Rolls Royces. You can't say to people who like Chevrolets, come on and buy a Rolls Royce. They don't have the money for it. That's the trouble with the picture. The producers can't accept this. They prefer no audience to some audience. They prefer to put a picture into a drawer and do another one. The trouble with producers now is that they don't like the job they're doing. When you are speaking to an aircraft company president, he likes his job, he knows the way it is done. But when you are speaking to a 20th Century-Fox president he doesn't know the way pictures are done. He doesn't know it has to go through cameras and through laboratories—nothing about it. An editor knows the kind of paper his book is printed on. A producer doesn't know the kind of film his films are made on—he doesn't know the difference between Eastman and Ferrania. He is not interested in what he is doing. He is only interested in giving money, selling it, and getting money again. But the production has life in it if it is good, but he is not in that life. For example when Zukor and Goldwyn were beginning they knew *everything*. When you speak to old producers, they knew they were *fighting*. Yes, they were afraid, they were—but now they are not fighting. They want just to go to Miami or to Nice and to the sun and the girls. They are neither interested in nor do they know the pro-

ductions they are selling. So sometimes it goes but sometimes it goes wrong. They are financiers, capitalists interested in manufacturing their product. But I don't blame them for being merchandisers, I blame them for not knowing what their merchandise is.

When a man in a market is selling potatoes, he knows the difference between potatoes and strawberries, so he can sell his potatoes. But a producer doesn't know if he is selling potatoes or strawberries.

*You know, there's an American word "packaging." Has it come to France yet? I think a man like Levine is certainly smart and at times he is quite nice—I rather like him—*

Yes, but he doesn't know what is in the package. You have to know because if not, people may be surprised sometimes but sometimes disappointed. Levine buys something and makes a very nice package

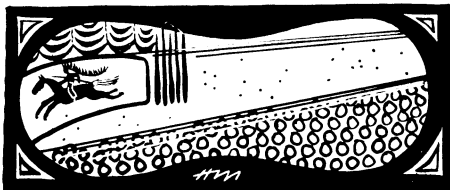
out of it. He is selling the package and not the contents. If the package were a gift, it could be a pleasant or an unpleasant surprise . . . but the audience is paying one or two dollars to see it and they should know what is in the package beforehand. I know what's in it—I always know what is in my films—why doesn't he know?

*Mr. Levine got his start with Hercules, Hercules Unchained, Godzilla, and so on.*

But he also bought Fellini's 8½ and had a big success with it. He doesn't know why he had success with it, and he doesn't know why he won't have success with mine.

*Are you so sure that Le Mépris will not be a success?*

It can't, because it is a difficult film. It can have some audience, but you have to work for them. . . .



## More Festivals

CAROL BRIGHTMAN

### Montreal

Contrary to *Time's* apocalyptic decree (September 20, "The International Cinema"), the modern film is not "the whole of art in one art." In an age of packaged deals where almost everything comes four for the price of one, it is hardly surprising that movies should be freighted with a similar guarantee—as if a movie can't sell itself as a work of art unless it borrows from other more regulable brands of art. But it is now more important than ever to appreciate the modern film's departure from the "all-in-one" claim, which *Time* has so rashly arrogated from Eisenstein.

Of the New York Festival films which *Time* mentions, *Hallelujah the Hills*, *Trial of Joan of Arc*, *Knife in the Water*, *The Exterminating Angel*, *An Autumn Afternoon*, *Harakiri*, and *The Chair* also ap-

peared at the Fourth Montreal International Film Festival. Together with Godard's *Le Petit Soldat* and *Les Carabiniers* (exhibited only in Montreal), these films may be said to share one concern, and that is their lack of concern with laying claim to any artistic form other than that which they have proven unique to the medium of film. They are each bent upon exploiting the perspectives of *filmed* reality rather than ulterior interests such as the personal style of an actor (Newman in *Hud*), artistic decor (*The Leopard*), dramatic dialogue (*Long Day's Journey into Night*), or psychotherapeutic tropes (*David and Lisa*).

These films are revolutionary precisely because they approach cinema as a medium which does not reproduce reality so much as it *creates* it. The camera, once liberated from its utilitarian status, becomes the decisive formal principle. What it "sees" naturally exists, and seeing becomes believing. In *The Exterminating Angel*, the disembodied hand which scurries across the table is believed *not* just because we realize a moment later that it is seen (and stabbed) through the eyes of a madwoman, but because by this time Buñuel has deftly displaced the conventional logic of possibilities by his own law of