

# LE MÉPRIS AND ITS STORY OF CINEMA: A FABRIC OF QUOTATIONS\*

In *Le Mépris* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1963) the cinema has a central presence on various different levels. The making of a film has brought the central characters together and the dramatic processes of film-making are often shown on screen, as a backdrop to the human drama. But woven into this overt presence is another story about the cinema: its histories and its contemporary crises. Only occasionally explicitly reaching the surface of the film, this story is concealed in signs, images and allusions. The unifying thread that ties these oblique references together is the world of *cinéphilia*, Godard's formative years as a critic for the *Cahiers du Cinéma* and the films and directors he had written about and loved during the 1950s. That world had, by 1963, moved into a past tense: the Hollywood studio system that had produced the *politique des auteurs* had aged and had been overtaken by industrial changes; Godard was no longer a *cinéphile* critic but a successful New Wave director. But through allusions

and quotation the world of *cinéphilia* seeps into *Le Mépris* mediating between past and present. As quotation necessarily refers backwards in time, Godard evokes a now ended era with an aesthetic device that always comes out of the past. Thus, in *Le Mépris*, form (quotation) is appropriate to its content (history).

But, on the other hand, quotation is a key modernist formal device, fragmenting a text's cohesion, disrupting traditional forms of reading by introducing other layers to a linear structure. As Peter Wollen puts it in his discussion of quotation in Godard's *Le Vent d'Est* (1970):

One of the main characteristics of modernism [...] was the play of allusion within and between texts... The effects to break up the heterogeneity of the work, to open up spaces between different texts and types of discourses... The space between the texts is not only semantic but historical too, the different textual strata being residues of different epochs and different cultures (WOLLEN, 1982: 102).

These kinds of insertions also necessarily address the reader/spectator and generate two possible directions of engagement: one remains with the text's overt meaning while the other takes a detour into a latent and more uncertain terrain. To reflect on the passing references, especially if they are not underlined or emphasised by the film's action, involves a step aside from the main line of the film's narrative. The temptation is to pause, to attribute a reference to its source, or attempt to trace it until the trail is lost, as opposed to following the forward flow of a text. So, for instance, when I analyse, later in this essay, further associations triggered for me by the posters in Cinecittà, I will be giving priority to certain background images over the crucial narrative moment when Camille and Jerry meet, when Paul betrays Camille and the theme of *contempt* begins. Mikhail Iampolski describes the relationship between quotation and the spectator's detour in the following terms:

The anomalies that emerge in a text, blocking its development, impel us towards an intertextual reading. This is because every *normative* narrative text possesses an internal logic. This logic motivates the presence of the various fragments of which the text is made. If a fragment cannot find a weighty enough motivation for its existence from the logic of the text, it becomes an anomaly, forcing the reader to seek its motivation in some other logic or explanation outside the text. The search is then constructed in the realm of intertextuality (IAMPOLSKI, 1998: 30).

I would like to reflect on those moments when reference to the cinema within *Le Mépris* intrude and direct the spectator away from the internal logic of the text, its manifest narrative, and towards "other explanations". To my mind, when followed up, the *anomalies* begin to form a network, relating back to a latent, other story of the changes

that had overtaken and were overtaking the cinema. The anomalies do, of course, take on multiple shapes or forms, deviating from a strict concept of *quotation*. Iampolski sums up this multiplicity when he points out that an

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*anomaly* takes the form of a fragment which means: "what is traditionally considered a quote may end up not being one, while what is not traditionally seen as a quote might end up being one" (IAMPOLSKI, 1998: 31).

Godard's *taste for quotation* has often been commented on and he himself uses the phrase in a long interview in the special *Nouvelle Vague* issue of *Cahiers du Cinéma* (168, December 1962) he says, in relation to *À bout de souffle*:

Our earliest films were simply films made by *cinéphiles*. We could make use of whatever we had already seen in the cinema to deliberately create references. This was particularly the case for me. [...] I constructed certain shots along the lines of ones that I already knew, Preminger's, Cukor's, etc. Furthermore, Jean Seberg's character follows on from *Bonjour Tristesse*. I could have taken the last shot of that film and added an inter-title "Three Years Later" [...] It comes from my taste for quotation that has always stayed with me. In life, people quote things that appeal to them... So I show people quoting: except I arrange their quotations in a way that will also appeal to me (GODARD, 1968: 28).

Quotation, Godard seems to be saying, offered a point of cinematic transition in his trajectory from *cinéphile/critic* to *cinéphile/director*,

from the days of the *Cahiers* to those of the *Nouvelle Vague*, from loving a particular shot to using it in his own films. About thirty years later, this lifelong partiality for quotation culminated in *Historie(s) du cinéma. Le Mépris*, released in 1963 as a comparatively large budget fiction film with corresponding production values, adapted from a quite conventional novel, benefits from the retrospective shadow cast by *Histoire(s)*. Not only are both made up of a tissue of film quotation and reference, but both were also made during transitional periods in film history. Looking back at *Le Mépris* from this

perspective, its juxtaposition between cinema history and quotation gains in significance, the fiction dominates less, the characters give way to their emblematic casting and the network-like structure, central to the *Historie(s)* aesthetic, becomes more visible. Furthermore, *Historie(s)* draws attention to the place *Le Mépris* itself occupies in film history, how close it lies, in 1963, to 1950s Hollywood, both as a time of industrial decline but also the decade which the last great films studio system films were still being made. It was these films that Godard loved in particular and that provided his formation as a director (as he points out in the 1962 interview). But the presence of history draws attention to an aesthetic shift. Quotation in *Le Mépris* is no longer simply a *taste*. It enables anelegiac commentary on the decline of one kind of cinema while celebrating another, the style that Godard had himself developed within the context of the French New Wave. Summing up this situation, Michel Marie says:

The aesthetic project of *Le Mépris* is entirely determined by the context of the end of classical cinema and the emergence of new *revolutionary* forms of narrative (MARIE, 1990: 14).

It was Alberto Moravia's novel *Il Dizprezzo* (1954) from which *Le Mépris* is adapted that gave Godard, in the first instance, the necessary film-within-a-film framework from which to develop his own themes and reflections. The novel was based on Moravia's own real-life encounter with the Italian film industry when, as a journalist, he visited the location of Mario Camerini's 1954 spectacular *Ulisse* (a Lux Film production with Kirk Douglas as Ulysses, also starring Silvana Mangano and Anthony Quinn). *Il Dizprezzo* uses a film production of *The Odyssey* as the setting for a tight group of characters (producer, director, screen-writer and screen-writer's wife). The setting brings together the story of a film in production, a marriage in decay and intellectual debate about Homer's epic poem. The novel shows no interest in either the mechanics of film-making or the history of cinema. Godard, however, makes the most of the way that, unlike a novel, a film about a film in production is necessarily self-referential and thus modernist. But above all, Godard inserts into the adaptation of the human story, his story of the cinema.

To reiterate, the latent story in *Le Mépris* makes visible a break in film history: on the one hand, there is the new flourishing cinema of the New Wave and Godard's own modernist, innovative style and, on the other, Hollywood cinema of the 1950s, and the flourishing *cinéphilie* it had fostered in Paris, both of which had disappeared by the beginning of the 60s. Thomas Schatz sums up the radically changed conditions in the Hollywood industry that lay behind the disappearance of the films valued by the *politique des auteurs* critics:

Gone was the cartel of movie factories that turned out a feature every week for a hundred million movie-goers. Gone were the studio bosses who answered to the New York office and oversaw hundreds, even thousands of contract personnel working on the lot. Gone was the industrial infrastructure, the *integrated* system whose major studio powers not only pro-

duced and distributed movies but also ran their own theatre chains (SCHATZ, 1998: 4).

In the first instance, these changes were set in motion by the Paramount Decree of 1948. The Federal Government wanted to break the restrictive practices inherent in Hollywood's vertically integrated system of production, distribution and exhibition. After the Decree, the studios had to sell their cinemas. The old financial mode of self-investment, through which production was supported by box-office returns, was gradually replaced by individual package deals put together by independent producers, stars and increasingly powerful agents and agencies, with the increasing participation of banks and other outside investors. Furthermore, during the 1950s box office receipts declined due to the rise of television (from \$80 million c. 1950 to below \$20 million c. 1960) and the industry struggled for survival. It was in this context that Hollywood began to invest in spectacular historical blockbusters. In *Le Mépris*, the conflict between Fritz Lang, representing old Hollywood, and Jerry Prokosh, who represents the new breed of producer associated with *package deals* gestures to this history. And the film of *The Odyssey* does, of course, represent the new focus on the big movie that would, with luck, pull off a major box office hit; this was very different from the returns made from a *feature a week* that had sustained the Hollywood genre system and its auteur directors.

### The Cinecittà triptych: the studio lot, the screening room, the posters

The story of cinema in *Le Mépris* is vividly laid out through a kind of *pre-story* at the beginning of the film and is clearly marked by use of quotation. Leaving aside its subsequently inserted *prologue*, *Le Mépris* opens with three sequences set in Cinecittà, the film studios outside Rome, which were as evocative of the Italian film industry as Hollywood for the US, or Pinewood for the UK. Together, the three sequences

form a triptych in which the *old* that Godard loved, especially Hollywood, is enunciated through the *new* he believed in. In his book on Fritz Lang, Tom Gunning uses the screening room sequence in *Le Mépris* to discuss the complex question of film authorship. He says: "The film-maker functions less as a scriptor than as a fashioner of palimpsests, texts written over other texts creating new meanings from the superimposition of old ones" (GUNNING, 2000: 6). For all three of the triptych sequences, the concept of palimpsest has special relevance, evoking the way that quotation and reference create layers of time, bringing something from past into the present, which then inscribes the present onto the past. In a similar but different manner, ghostly rather than textual, the actors too have meaning layered into their present fictional roles. As Jacques Aumont puts it:

Jack Palance, Georgia Moll and Fritz Lang are vehicles, in the flesh, of part of the past, of history. They are living quotations and, already survivors of a vanished world...: through them, Godard quite consciously evokes not only his own immediate past as *cinéphile* – *The Barefoot Contessa*, *The Quiet American* – but a more distant, already heroised and mythic past... (AUMONT, 2000: 176).

In the first sequence of the triptych, the studio lot stands idle and deserted. Francesca (the producer's assistant) explains to Paul (the screen writer): "Jerry has sent everyone home. Things are hard in the Italian film industry at the moment". Jerry, the American producer, then appears on the edge of the sound stage and proclaims, in long shot and as though addressing a vast audience, that he has sold the studios for real estate development. And Francesca's final remark: "C'est la fin du cinéma" carries the sense of crisis beyond Cinecittà to the general decline of industrial cinema by the late 1950s and even to the question of cinema itself [Figure 1]. The studio lot is itself, to adapt Aumont's terms, "a vehicle, a part of the past, a history" and, as such might be understood as *mise-en-scène*



Figure 1 (top). Francesca's final remark: "C'est la fin du cinéma" carries the sense of crisis beyond Cinecittà to the general decline of industrial cinema by the late 1950s and even to the question of cinema itself. / Courtesy of Paramount Home Media Distribution Spain

Figure 2 (bottom). Set in the studio screening room, the confined space is criss-crossed by quotation and reference of all kinds: spoken, enacted, written, personified, discussed. / Courtesy of Paramount Home Media Distribution Spain

as quotation. Poignantly, the scene is set in the lot belonging to Titanus (the studio that had produced Roberto Rossellini's *Viaggio in Italia* in 1953) and which was, in actual fact, just about to be demolished. The fate of Cinecittà corresponds to that of the Hollywood studios at the time, more valuable as real estate than for film production.

The second sequence of the Cinecittà triptych, brings together the central group of *Le Mepris's* characters who all, fictionally, belong to the cinema through their various roles in the production of *The Odyssey*. It is here that Godard introduces most intensely the

aesthetic of quotation. Set in the studio screening room, the confined space is criss-crossed by quotation and reference of all kinds: spoken, enacted, written, personified, discussed [Figure 2]. Francesca and Paul join Prokosh, the producer, and Fritz Lang, the director to watch rushes from their production of *The Odyssey*, (part Italian peplum, part Hollywood spectacular). The conversation between the characters enables Godard to juxtapose references to the contemporary state of cinema and classical European culture; and these two themes are reiterated, on the one hand, by literal quotations from European

literature, on the other, by the presence of figures with an emblematic association with Hollywood. And Louis Lumière's grim prediction, written in large letters under the screen, "Le cinéma est une invention sans avenir" creates a link to the elegiac spirit of the first and third sequences [Figure 3]. Central to the screening room sequence are the rushes, shots of the statues of the gods or snippets of the story composed more in tableaux than in continuity [Figure 4]. As bits of cinema, they are short and finite, as indeed are rushes, but they take on the aesthetic characteristics of quotation: fragmentation and repeatability. Several commentators have pointed out that the style with which the statues are filmed, accompanied by Georges Delerue's music, strikingly quotes the filming of the statues, accompanied by Renzo Rossellini's music, in Roberto Rossellini's *Viaggio in Italia* (1954).

While the literary quotations are, by and large, overt and attributed, the conjuring up of Hollywood is more complex, here taking place through the signifying properties of the actors as living quotation. Fritz Lang, as the fictional director, obviously brings his own cinematic history with him, but so do Jack Palance (as Jerry Prokosh) and Giorgia Moll (as Francesca) who also represent, metonymically, particular Hollywood films that had significance for Godard. Michel Piccoli (as Paul Javal) brings to this collective of signifiers a particular resonance of Paris: as an actor, he evokes the French New Wave; as a character, he evokes Parisian *cinéphilie*.

As well as having appeared in Italian peplum productions, Giorgia Moll had played the French speaking Vietnamese heroine in Joseph Mankiewicz's *The Quiet American* (1958), thus crea-

ting a direct link to one of Godard's favourite directors. He had reviewed the film on its release with his usual admiration but also disappointed that Mankiewicz's intelligent, elegant script was imperfectly realised as film (*Arts* 679 July 1958). In *Le Mépris*, Giorgia Moll plays Francesca Vanini, a character invented by Godard (she is not in the Moravia novel) whose name refers directly to Roberto Rossellini's latest film *Vanina Vanini* (1961), (which will represent him on the line of posters in the third sequence). As Prokosh's interpreter, she comes to stand for living quotation in a different sense, repeating the words of others, translating, often very freely, between the mono-linguistic Paul and Camille on the one hand, and Prokosh on the other. As well as her own native language, Italian, with Lang she can speak English, French or German and gains his approval for her recognition and translation into French of his quotation from the German poet Hölderlin's "The Poet's Vocation".

Jack Palance brings Hollywood into *Le Mépris* in several ways. As a star in his own right, he represents the Hollywood star system as such. But he also represents a link, both as a star and through his fictional character, Jeremiah Prokosh, to a cluster of Hollywood films-about-film that had been made in the 50s, all of which include an unscrupulous and exploitative producer or studio boss. In the first instance, Palance would, for Godard, have linked back to Robert Aldrich's 1955 film *The Big Knife*, an adaptation of a Clifford Odets play about the conflict between a star (Palance) struggling to maintain his ethical principles in the face of the power and persistent bullying of the studio boss, played by Rod



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Steiger. Palance thus brings with him a double quotation: he is the star who had played the role of a star, while in *Le Mépris*, in the persona of Jeremiah Prokosh he references the character personified by Steiger. Furthermore, as Michel Marie points out, Prokosh is a direct descendent of Kirk Edwards, the megalomaniac, casually brutal and sexually predatory Hollywood producer in Joseph Mankiewicz's 1954 *The Barefoot Contessa*, a film that had been highly prized by *Cahiers du Cinéma*. Palance's chiselled, mask-like features (due to plastic surgery after being wounded in World War 2) and his

slow, almost Frankenstein-like movements recall Warren Stephen's stony, almost motionless performance as Kirk Edwards. To these two *Hollywood on Hollywood* films should be added Vincent Minnelli's 1952 *The Bad and the Beautiful* in which Kirk Douglas plays the prototypically unscrupulous, if more engaging, producer Jonathan Shields.

Although Prokosh has been said to evoke Godard's real life producers Carlo Ponti and Joe Levine, the iconographical legacy of these Hollywood movies is very strong. But, as well as inscribing these traits and characteris-

tics, Godard uses Prokosh specifically to signal the decline in Hollywood production values in the face of cynicism, philistinism and a taste for kitsch. A throwaway remark of Fritz Lang's indicates that Prokosh is not, for him, within the true tradition of Hollywood independent production. Refusing his invitation to have a drink, Lang quotes a famous Goldwynism (Sam Goldwyn tended to mix up language): "Include me out', as Sam Goldwyn a real producer of Hollywood once said". And Prokosh's first appearance in *Cinecittà* underlines the new commercialism. While Godard's citation of the Hollywood-on-Hollywood films puts *Le Mépris* within this *sub-genre*, evoking a tradition of films of self-reference (that does, of course, pre-date the 1950s), he is also clearly gesturing towards the industry's uncertain future, underlined by the Lumière quotation. The decline, he seems to imply, was already there in the beginning.

Fritz Lang is first introduced to the film by the most well-known anecdote of his career. Paul tells Francesca that Goebbels offered Lang a privileged position in UFA, to which he had replied by leaving the following day for Paris and then the United States<sup>1</sup>. Godard follows this up with an enacted confrontation between Lang and Prokosh in the screening room. In a moment that seems anomalous and strange, Prokosh violently interrupts the screening, claiming that the images on the screen were not in the script. Lang brings the argument to an end saying calmly: "Naturally, because in the script it's written and on the screen it's pictures, motion pictures it's called". According to Tom Gunning, this is a re-enactment of a confrontation between Lang and Eddie Mannix, his first US producer. Both these anecdotes show Lang confronting authority; but one is given its place in Lang's biography, while the other floats, functioning dramatically as a fragment but without explanation. Together, these two anecdotes represent two very different kinds of quotation, the attributed and the *to-be-deciphered*,

both with very different aesthetic implications.

If Prokosh, in his *Le Mépris* role, is emblematic of changing Hollywood, Lang stands, in stark contrast, for a long history of the cinema, some of its most outstanding films and its more generally changing fortunes. Born in 1890, shortly, that is, before the cinema and making his first film in 1919, Lang and cinema matured, as it were, side by side. Due to the *Mabuse* films (1922), *Metropolis* (1927), and his prolific output during Weimar period, as a *living quotation* he brings to *Le Mépris* the memory of aesthetic achievements of German silent cinema, then, with *M* in 1931, early experiment with synch sound. (It might be worth remembering, in the context of the late 1950's blockbuster, that Lang had almost bankrupted UFA in 1927 with his spectacularly expensive spectacular *Metropolis*). In 1933, he joined the stream of exiles from Nazism who then contributed so much to Hollywood during the years of the studio system. From *Fury* in 1936 to *Beyond Reasonable Doubt* in 1956, he made a film, sometimes two, every year (except one). Although he was, by and large, successful (unlike some of his compatriots), he too found it increasing hard to direct by the mid 1950s. In Germany, in the late 1950s, he directed his own versions of *spectaculars*: *The Tiger of Eshnapur* and *The Indian Tomb* as well as an attempt to return to the *Mabuse* cycle. By the time he appeared in *Le Mépris*, he had made no films for three years; on the other hand, as an early pantheon director of the *politique des auteurs*, his critical status had risen in France and Luc Moullet's book *Fritz Lang*, that Camille reads and quotes from in the apartment sequence, had been published in 1963. Godard treats Lang reverentially, himself acting the role of the fictional director's assistant. He frames and films Lang so that his literal presence takes on the mythical quality due to an old man, no longer employable but, more than any other director still living at the time, stretched across and emblem-

atic of this complex cinematic history. Still wearing, as a badge of belonging and distinction, the monocle that signifies the old days of Weimar, Lang is quotation as embodiment, summoning up the past and inserting it into a present to which he no longer belonged.

In the third sequence of the triptych, these themes are realised and confirmed. Outside the screening room, the characters act out their scene in front of a wall of posters; Howard Hawks' 1962 *Hatari!*, Godard's own 1962 *Vivre sa Vie*, Rossellini's 1961 *Vanina Vanini* and Hitchcock's 1960 *Psycho* [Figure 5]. Apart from Godard, the three were great directors celebrated and defended during Godard's time as a *Cahiers du Cinéma* critic, but all were, by this point in time, nearing the end of their careers. Appropriately, Godard inserts the figure of Fritz Lang into this series of *homages*. Framed alone, in front of the posters, Lang walks quite slowly towards the camera as he lights a cigarette and, emphasising the mythic nature of this portrait shot, music briefly appears on the sound track. In the next couple of shots, Paul, as a *cinéphile*, brings cinema directly into his conversation with Lang. Lang brushes aside Paul and Camille's admiration for *Rancho Notorious* (1952), "the western with Marlene Dietrich", with "I prefer *M*". But Paul persists and mentions the scene in which Mel Ferrer (as Frenchie Fairmont) allows Marlene Dietrich (as Altar Keane) to win at chuck-a-luck. This was a favourite moment of Godard's, to which he refers specifically in his general discussion of the Western in his *Man of the West* review. The citation of *Rancho Notorious* has its own relevance to the posters that frame the conversation between Paul and Lang; the film is itself about aging but mythic figures of the West (Frenchie Fairmont and Altar Keane) who have become part of its legend, just as these directors have become part of the legend of Hollywood as told by the *Cahiers du Cinéma*.

But this sequence is also the one in which Brigitte Bardot, as Paul's wife,

Camille, first appears. As she stands against the backdrop of posters, she personifies new cinema, a new kind stardom, as well as a new kind of glamour, European as opposed to Hollywood. In the last resort, she stands for the personification of cinema. If Godard tends to fuse cinematic beauty with that of his female star, this is particularly so in *Le Mépris*. But the presence of the *Vivre sa Vie* poster creates its own distinctive chain of female beauty reaching back across the history of cinema. Later in the film, Camille wears a black wig, bobbed in the style worn by Anna Karina in *Vivre sa Vie*, which in turn cites Louise Brooks. Much admired by the director of the Cinémathèque Française, Henri Langlois, for an insouciant seductiveness in films such as Hawks' 1928 *A Girl in Every Port* to Pabst's 1929 *Pandora's Box*, Louise Brooks might be seen as a pre-figuration of Godard's fascination with a feminine beauty that fused with the beauty of the cinema.

The bracketing of Hawks and Hitchcock conjures up André Bazin's ironic term *Hitchcocko-Hawksianism* to describe the dedicated supporters of the *politique des auteurs* at the Cahiers. Both directors had started their supremely successful careers in the 1920s and had flourished under the studio system but with comparative independence (Hitchcock, of course, arriving from Britain in the late 30s). But both were old by the time of *Le Mépris* and would only make films occasionally until the 1970s. Although he was to make two more films (*Anima Nera* in 1962 and *Italia Anno Uno* in 1974), Rossellini's career in cinema was also just about over. From 1961 to the end of his life in 1977, apart from a few documentaries, he would work exclusively for television. *Vanina Vanini* was adapted from a novella by Stendhal. Set in Rome during the Risorgimento (Rossellini had celebrated its centenary the previous year with *Viva l'Italia*), the story bears witness to Stendhal's love of Italy and his fascination with its struggle for liberation. As if to emphasise its significance, Godard has "Franc-

esca Vanini" summoned by name over an intercom a few seconds before the film's poster appears on the screen.

In this concluding section, I would like to exemplify ways in which quotation can set in train further lines of thought that might be particular to the spectator. A quotation or reference might trigger associations for the spectator that go beyond the specific textual context and produce an *extra-textual reverie*. Thus for me personally (and, very likely, others), thinking about *Le Mépris* in the light of *Hatari!* and *Psycho* unexpectedly draws attention to coincidences of narrative and theme. Like *Psycho*, *Le Mépris* is separated into two distinct parts, the first takes place over the course of one day during which the ordinariness of everyday life is overtaken by catastrophe: Marion's crime and death in one case, the loss of Camille's love in the other. Although the second part of *Psycho* is not, as in *Le Mépris*, streamlined into a single day, both films are overshadowed by fate: what might seem a minor ethical failing (on the part of Paul and Marion) is punished beyond reason by "the gods" of narrativity. The relevance of *Hatari!*'s more thematic and has less to do with narrative structure. The film repeats one of Hawks' preferred story settings: a small group of people are arbitrarily thrown together in some

isolated situation, in which death and love intermingle with the group's internal dynamics. The Hawksian group has a certain resonance for *Le Mépris*: here again a small group of people are thrown together by the chance contact of their profession creating a drama of professional and personal conflicts and loyalties.

I would like to end by reflecting on the particular importance of *Viaggio in Italia* for *Le Mépris*, due not only to the filming of the statues of the gods, but also more generally to the story of a marriage in crisis. Here the latent references to cinema history link specifically to the modernism of quotation as a formal device. Godard confirms the relevance of Rossellini's film very precisely: at the end of the *audition* scene, the group leave the cinema and pause to talk outside, allowing a poster for *Viaggio in Italia* to be clearly seen in the background. *Viaggio* introduces another kind of palimpsest in its relation to *Le Mépris*. In the first instance, the story of Paul and Camille's marriage re-inscribes that of Emilia and Riccardo from the novel *Il Dizprezzo*, creating another temporal layer, just as any adaptation must necessarily hover behind its retelling [Figure 6]. In *Viaggio in Italia* Alex and Katherine Joyce are an English couple staying in Naples whose marriage, quite suddenly, falls

Figure 5. Outside the screening room, the characters act out their scene in front of a wall of posters; Howard Hawks' 1962 *Hatari!*, Godard's own 1962 *Vivre sa Vie*, Rossellini's 1961 *Vanina Vanini* and Hitchcock's 1960 *Psycho*. / Courtesy of Paramount Home Media Distribution Spain



apart. During one of their embittered exchanges, Katherine turns to Alex with the words: “I despise you”. But just as Godard uses the quarrelling couple in *Le Mépris* to quote *Viaggio*, so Rossellini inserts into his film, without acknowledging the source, the troubled marriage in James Joyce’s *The Dead*. Katherine retells Joyce’s story, as though transposed to her own memory. She reminds Alex that she had once been loved by a young man who had then died; his sensibility and his poetry continue to haunt her and irritate Alex, contributing to their deteriorating relationship. Although Rossellini uses the story for his own fiction, making no hint of its status as citation, it shares something of Iampolski’s anomaly, inserting, due to a feeling of excess or oddity, a kind of blockage into a text. Katherine’s monologue is quite long and furnished with a few details that belong to the original. Ultimately, Rossellini does provide a clue to its source through the couple’s name: Joyce. The layering of references to a marriage in crisis across the Moravia’s novel, Rossellini’s film and Joyce’s story create an intertextual network that ends most appropriately with Godard’s *Le Mépris*.

From this perspective, the presence of *Viaggio in Italia* in *Le Mépris* does considerably more than cite a director of the greatest importance to Godard. In *Viaggio*, the memory of the dead young man acts as a figure for a more general metaphor of haunting, but it also acts as a figure for the ghostly nature of quotation itself. The relationship of *Le Mépris* to *Viaggio in Italia*, and its specific reference to Joyce generates a

fragile link to his *Ulysses*, his retelling of *The Odyssey* into the great epic of modernist literature, itself a palimpsest of quotation and reference. These links bear witness to the significance of quotation as a modernist strategy and the way that a citation from the past works as an aesthetic device precisely for the destruction of tradition and the generation of the modern.

The blurb that accompanied the London Consortium’s seminar on *Le Mépris*, specifically mentioned the film as “a fabric of quotations”. The phrase, coming from Roland Barthes’ 1967 essay *The Death of the Author*, is a reminder that Godard’s prolific and stylistic use of quotation and reference predates its theorisation. The origin of the phrase, however, is also a reminder that the search to trace the fragment and the anomaly to its source can never stabilise the uncertainty of meaning or pin down the intention that lies at the heart of quotation. Important and minor instances will always remain overlooked, hidden and unlocked. But, all the same, Godard’s use of allusion and reference, of palimpsest and living quotation, creates a layered form of film reading. The experience of watching the film, for me, a *cinéphile* formed by the *Cahiers politique des auteurs*, involves the triggering of memories and the recognition of the special significance of films and directors cited. For instance, the sudden, unmotivated and anomalous reference to Nicholas Ray’s *Johnny Guitar* leads me back to the particular emotional resonance the film had for *Cahiers*-influenced *cinéphiles*. And the reference links back

to Godard’s earlier film *Le Petit Soldat* in which he quotes dialogue between Joan Crawford and Sterling Hayden (“tell me lies”) and forward to its nearly invisible but key place in *Pierrot le Fou*. It is because Ferdinand had allowed the maid to go to *Johnny Guitar* that Marianne come to baby-sit and they meet again “after five years”.

If the latent story of cinema exists, as in a palimpsest, in another layer of time and meaning outside that of the fiction, enabling a detour into the quite different discourse, it also doubles back on an allegorical level into the film’s manifest content. Just as the spectator struggles to decipher the film’s quotations, so Paul struggles to decipher Camille. Alongside, or overshadowed by, the enigma of Camille and her desirability are signs and clues suggesting that the cinema has a similar status for Godard as enigma and elusive object of desire. And on this allegorical level, Paul and Camille’s lost love and their mutual inability to understand their emotional history relates to Godard’s sense of loss at the disappearance of the cinema that had formed him so completely. Just as Paul promises at the end of the film to become the writer he had always wanted to be, out of the ruins of his lost love, so Godard turned into a New Wave director, out of the ruins of his love of 1950s Hollywood cinema. As always for Godard, the beauty and inscrutability of his female star and of cinema are fused in his aesthetic and erotic sensibility. Ultimately, the use of quotation in *Le Mépris* shifts the uncertainty of emotion to the spectator. The uncertainties of attribution, the abrupt anomalies that erupt into the text, leave the spectator with a sense of yearning for understanding, always conscious of just missing a point, contented with some moments of satisfied recognition. In addition to its modernist significance, its layering of the text (as formal device and latent story), quotation puts the spectator into the situation of longing and loss that characterises the *feeling* of the film as a whole. ■



Figure 6. The story of Paul and Camille’s marriage re-inscribes that of Emilia and Riccardo from the novel *Il Dizprezzo*, creating another temporal layer, just as any adaptation must necessarily hover behind its retelling. / Courtesy of Paramount Home Media Distribution Spain



## Notes

\* Edition Note: This article was first published in Colin MacCabe, Laura Mulvey (eds.) *Critical Quarterly, Special Issue: Godard's Contempt. Essays from the London Consortium*, 53, July 2011. *L'Atante. Revista de estudios cinematográficos* thanks the author the licensing of the text, which is published for the first time in Spanish. *L'Atante* also thanks Paramount Home Media Distribution Spain the authorisation for publishing the stills of *Le Mépris* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1963) illustrating these pages.

1 Tom Gunning analyses this anecdote and demonstrates that Lang elaborated it considerably over the years (Fritz Lang, p. 8–9).

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