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CONTEMPT REVISITED

Godard at the Margins of Adaptation

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In his interviews and multimedia essays, Jean-Luc Godard has often referred to the written word as his “number one enemy.” But he has done so with remarkable ambivalence, not quite ready to throw out “the text” on the one hand or to confine himself to the audio-visual on the other. He has said that “texts are death, images are life,” but “both are needed.”¹ Indeed, he has experimented with literary forms—such as book-length commentaries² and “phrases,” as he calls them, that poetically transcribe spoken lines from his films³—as a means of offsetting his image practice. If this literary output has occurred mainly in his later stages, it continues from an impulse that surfaced much earlier, both in his *Cahiers du cinéma* criticism of the 1950s and in his New Wave features of the 1960s. Famously, he claimed to have written reviews as though he were already making films, and to make films as though he were still writing on a blank page.⁴

As he shifted between film criticism and filmmaking, Godard tried to “write” in cinematic terms, whether integrating handwritten or typewritten text into the image, or appropriating text from all manner of sources—a device which, as Marie-Claire Ropars argues brilliantly, opens “fracture zones” between levels of signification and permits a “cinescriptural” force to overwhelm both mimetic depiction and narrative progression.⁵ Godard’s use of writing has served a number of aims over the years, from quotation to anagrammatic wordplay, but it has always marked an intense engagement with image-text relationships.⁶ The practice allows Godard to put across “both his love and distrust of words,” while “opening up his work to the complex and dialectic interplay between the order of the visible and that of the readerly.”⁷

Given his attraction to forms of writing and his insistence on placing cinema among the other arts, one might assume that Godard would gravitate naturally toward adaptation. A glance at his filmography during the

1960s might seem to confirm this assumption, as six of the eight features he made between 1962 and 1966 are credited as adaptations of original material: *Les Carabiniers* (1963) from a Benjamin Joppolo play; *Le Mépris* (1963) from an Alberto Moravia novel; *Bande à part* (1964) from Dolores and Bert Hitchens's novel *Fool's Gold*; *Pierrot le fou* (1965) from Lionel White's novel *Obsession*; *Masculin féminin* (1966) from Guy de Maupassant's short stories "Le Signe" and "La Femme de Paul"; and *Made in USA* (1966) from Richard Stark's novel *The Jugger*. However, few of these productions qualify as adaptations in the usual sense, and even fewer faithfully transpose elements of their source texts. As Colin MacCabe has pointed out, only *Le Mépris* offers a "genuine reworking" of its source, whereas the other examples regard their sources mainly as pretexts for formal experiments.⁸ Godard thus remains averse to adaptation as it is commonly practiced, but from time to time he does suggest alternative methods, such as filming the pages of a novel while a character reads them aloud, or filming actors while they audition for roles in an adaptation (see *Grandeur et décadence d'un petit commerce de cinéma* [1986]).⁹

Godard's own views notwithstanding, I want to suggest that he is actually among the most prolific "adapters" in cinema, and that adaptation plays a critical role in his still-evolving practice as a multimedia montage artist. More specifically, I want to examine how his work in film and video brings together the notions of adaptation, translation, and quotation without simple analogy or equivalence. The crucial work in this regard is *Le Mépris* (*Contempt*), an adapted film which in many ways hinges on these three related concepts and which Godard continues to quote visually, verbally, and musically at key moments in his late video projects, most notably in *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988–98). As we'll see, Godard effectively re-adapts *Contempt* to suit new conditions as his work progresses. Responding to this practice calls for a broader understanding of adaptation than is customary in film criticism, but one which attends to a fuller range of its cultural and aesthetic possibilities. By placing the French-Swiss director at the junction of these three transcriptive modes, I hope to shed light on his equivocal attitude toward "the text" and to offer some possible ways of addressing adaptation in a multimedia context.¹⁰

THE TASK OF THE MISTRANSLATOR

Contempt bears a complicated relation to Godard's experience as a *Cahiers* critic and New Wave filmmaker. As has become legend, Godard, François Truffaut, Jacques Rivette, and their fellow auteurs writing for *Cahiers* in

the 1950s revered Hollywood on account of its stable system of genres and its directors like Howard Hawks, Nicholas Ray, and Fritz Lang who, despite working in the world's most labor-intensive production environment, developed their own *mise-en-scènes*. *Contempt* laments the passing of this Hollywood as Godard had known it, from its casting of Lang as an aging director called "Lang" to its metacritical treatment of the international coproduction. Moreover, in that the film features a superstar (Brigitte Bardot) and adapts a bestselling novel (*Il disprezzo*) written by a respected author (Moravia), it ostensibly resembles the "tradition of quality" that the *Cahiers* group found so detestable. In Truffaut's famous polemical essay of 1954, "A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema," adaptation looms large in the attack on retrograde practices in postwar French filmmaking. Yet Truffaut's quarrel is less with adaptation itself than with its undue focus on the "scenarist" instead of the director. He reproaches the "quality" screenwriters Jean Aurenche and Pierre Bost for misconstruing their source texts, for slipping in extraneous political commentary, and for failing to take advantage of cinema's unique aesthetic possibilities. For Truffaut, only a veritable "man of the cinema" can adapt and transform literature acceptably.¹¹

The *Cahiers* critics and eventual New Wavists were equally inclined to celebrate adaptations that stylistically embellish lowbrow sources, a tendency that stemmed from their support of American B-films. Godard's own *Pierrot le fou* and *Made in USA* (and for that matter Truffaut's *Tirez sur le pianiste* [1960]), fall squarely within this category, whereas *Contempt* is more difficult to situate. Despite Moravia's reputation as a novelist and the accomplished psychological realism of *Il disprezzo*, Godard dismissed the book as a *roman de gare*—a cheap paperback one might read aboard a train—"full of classical, old-fashioned sentiments in spite of the modernity of the situations. But it is with this kind of novel that one can often make the best films."¹² He claims to have "stuck to the main theme" while making few changes, although he insists that "something filmed is automatically different than something written, and therefore original."¹³ Relative to Godard's other adaptations, *Contempt* does seem rather orthodox, but otherwise it radically transforms its source text, recasting Moravia's melodrama as an exploration of the cinematic state of things in 1963.

Moravia's *Il disprezzo* (translated into English as *A Ghost at Noon*), like Godard's *Contempt*, has to do with a contentious adaptation of Homer's *The Odyssey*. Its less-than-reliable narrator and protagonist, Ricardo Molteni (Paul in the film), a playwright turned screenwriter, recounts and tries to make sense of the events that led to the unraveling of both his marriage and his involvement in the production. He sets out to prove to himself and the reader that his wife, Emilia (Camille in the film), who has died in a freakish auto accident while embarking on a relationship with *The Odyssey's*

producer, is to blame for their breakup inasmuch as “she judged me and in consequence ceased to love me.”¹⁴ But Ricardo gradually comes to see that his retelling of *The Odyssey* and his recounting of his personal life are intimately bound up, and that his textual and personal representations of Odysseus (to his wife’s Penelope) fall miserably short of the idealism and simplicity of the Homeric original. On the point of “reasoned insanity” by the novel’s end, and unable to accept his story’s ambiguities, he finds himself alone on a boat, talking to Emilia’s ghost.

Given that Ricardo’s first-person narration is the novel’s most distinctive feature, *Contempt* might have used a reflective voiceover, framed its narrative with scenes of the protagonist writing his tale, and flashed back and forth throughout. But Godard proceeds in a fashion that immediately discards textual notions of fidelity and directs our attention to the technological disparities between cinematic and literary production. In the opening shot at Rome’s deserted Cinecittà, a camera operated by Raoul Coutard tracks alongside a young woman as she studies a script and approaches from the background, tailed by three crew members, one holding a boom microphone, one pulling cable, and the other pushing the Mitchell apparatus along a dolly track. As the figures enter the foreground, and as George Delerue’s score plays on the audio track, a male voiceover announces the film’s credits, starting with, “It’s from a novel by Alberto Moravia.” Coutard soon occupies the entire frame, then turns his lens toward the extra-diegetic camera and thus the spectator. The voiceover cites a passage attributed to André Bazin, “The cinema substitutes for our gaze a world more in harmony with our desires,” then tells us that “*Contempt* is a story (*histoire*) of that world.”¹⁵ From the very beginning Godard assures us that his film will be “automatically different” from its source novel, and he anticipates Lang’s defense of his own cinematic rendering of *The Odyssey*: “In the script it’s written, and on the screen it’s pictures . . . motion picture, it’s called.”¹⁶

In keeping with the prologue, Godard iterates throughout the primacy of sound and image over text, maximizing the potential of widescreen framing, color composition, camera movement, shot duration, and montage, often putting sound and image in conflict to foreground cinema’s multiple registers. Yet his assault on the text is characteristically ambivalent: at times he uses books dismissively as props for non-literary functions, while at others he shows his characters engaged in meaningful acts of reading, as when Camille (Bardot) recites a passage from Luc Moullet’s book on Fritz Lang, or when Paul (Michel Piccoli)—performing an activity that occurs throughout Godard’s work—flips through an art book and encounters images within a primarily text-based medium. This interplay of texts and images intensifies in the sequence in which Camille and her new love interest, the boorish American producer Prokosch (Jack Palance), fatally crash his red convertible

between two tractor-trailers. Such an event calls out for spectacular treatment, but just before impact, the film cuts to a lateral track across Camille's hand-scribbled farewell letter to Paul. At the moment most typically suited to audio-visual elaboration (and to showing the limits of literature), Godard instead offers an image of cursive writing.

Besides his omission of Moravia's retrospective and introspective narration, Godard's other major changes include a reduction of plot duration. While *Il disprezzo* covers more than a year, Godard condenses the events into two consecutive days, one at Cinecittà and the other on the isle of Capri. He compresses the couple's arguments into a single thirty-minute scene that occurs inside their apartment, and although this section takes up almost a third of the film's running time, it strips their marital conflict to its most basic elements, leading Harun Farocki to consider this sequence "a trailer for a film based on Moravia's *Ghost at Noon*."¹⁷ Godard's self-described "Aristotelian" economy¹⁸—together with the film's Homeric intertext and its critique of the commercial forces propping up modernity and polluting the contemporary arts—has led several commentators to describe *Contempt* as an embrace of classicism.¹⁹ In terms of film aesthetics, the matter is not so simple. In the extended apartment sequence, Godard channels, without discord, the innovations of Michelangelo Antonioni (the relentless play of frames within frames, the "autonomous mediating gaze" of the camera, the "inquiring detachment" that regards incidental details as elements of suspense²⁰), as well as the *mise-en-scène* of Vincente Minnelli (a delicate, anxious choreography of motion and gesture in domestic space, the cuts relatively sparse and unimposing, the camera mid-range and itinerant, the color pitched to emotional shifts in the CinemaScope frame). Godard made *Contempt* in a time of serious tension between classicist and modernist positions at *Cahiers du cinéma*, led by Eric Rohmer and Jacques Rivette respectively, and the film treads somewhere in the middle, as though to test what a teacher scrawls on the chalkboard (and attributes to T. S. Eliot) in Godard's next feature, *Bande à part*: "classique = moderne."²¹

And yet, Godard is troubled by the decline of the Hollywood studio system as an aesthetic *sensus communis*. As MacCabe explains, Hollywood had offered Godard and his *Cahiers* associates not simply a pantheon of auteurs but a guarantee of "an audience secure in its knowledge of genres and stars, who allowed the artist to demonstrate his art within a popular and established medium."²² *Contempt* registers anxieties over the loss of this stability, not least because the New Wave figures had begun to face "the problem of the audience in its most direct form—failure at the box office."²³

While mourning the loss of Hollywoodian classicism, *Contempt* suggests that Hollywood has mutated into an abject commercial force that now occupies European cinema. It's against this backdrop that Godard internationalizes

the production of *The Odyssey* (which in Moravia's novel is an all-Italian project, save for its German director, Rheingold). By pitting the German émigré Fritz Lang against a domineering American producer in an Italian-French-American coproduction beset by miscommunication and artistic compromise (conditions that mirror Godard's struggles in the film's making²⁴), and by suggestively changing the Greek names and titles in the Homeric source to their Roman counterparts (Ulysses, Minerva, and Neptune in place of Odysseus, Athena, and Poseidon), *Contempt* doesn't embrace classicism so much as it stages its irrecoverability. Through the figure of Lang, the classicist aesthetic paradigms of ancient Greece and Old Hollywood are shown to be equally out of reach.

This set of concerns motivates Godard's invention of the character of Francesca (Giorgia Moll), a multilingual translator for whom there is no equivalent in *Il disprezzo*. His casting of Moll, the actress we see reading a script in the film's prologue, fits neatly into the industrial context sketched above. Moll had gained recognition for her roles in Italian peplum epics—a popular genre which helped to sustain the Italian film industry during the 1950s and 1960s (and which Godard mimics in the rushes for Lang's film of *The Odyssey*—perhaps because two of *Contempt*'s producers, Joseph Levine and Carlo Ponti, had made forays into the genre).²⁵ Moll had caught Godard's attention because of her performance in Joseph Mankiewicz's 1958 adaptation of Graham Greene's *The Quiet American*, a film in which, as Godard put it, each character “speaks his own language.”²⁶

The significance of Francesca goes well beyond matters of casting. We can be sure that Godard saw her role as crucial to the film's overall design, since he withdrew his name from Carlo Ponti's alternate version, which dubbed all the dialogue in Italian, removed the subtitles, and replaced Francesca's translations with trivial remarks. Some critics have speculated that Godard introduced the quadri-lingual translator as a means to guard against dubbing and to ensure subtitling. It's worth noting on this score that in the late 1950s, Roberto Rossellini—whose films, especially *Viaggio in Italia* (1954), provide a key reference point for *Contempt*—launched an influential attack in *Cahiers du cinéma* on dubbing for broader, non-regional distribution, calling this practice a “mad idea” that robbed the film of its authenticity, minimized cultural distinctions, and thereby “assured failure.”²⁷ Godard obliquely relates Rossellini—and perhaps his stance on dubbing—to Francesca by giving her a surname from a Rossellini film, “Vanini” from *Vanina Vanini* (1961), the poster for which appears on the back-lot wall at Cinecittà. While embedded in the usual Godardian fashion, this reference would seem to imbue the translator with a creative license not unlike that of a filmmaker. After all, Francesca not only enables the cross-lingual discussion among the German director, French screenwriter, and American producer, she also

participates, as a fourth authorial agent by contributing and reshaping ideas through her own translations.

Her translations frequently enlarge on, obscure, or recontextualize the “original” statements. For instance, when Prokosch first appears at Cinecittà and gripes about the replacement of movie houses by supermarkets, Francesca translates to Paul, “C’est la fin du cinéma” (“It’s the end of cinema”), thus rendering a commercial complaint an artistic lament, and one which looks ahead to Godard’s closing titles for *Week-end* (1967): “End of story. End of cinema.” This moment is important to note, as it marks one of Godard’s earliest articulations of an idea that has assumed an increasingly prominent role in his work: the death of cinema. In his series *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, Godard hinges cinema’s demise on three separate moments: (1) the ill-timed and mismanaged arrival of sound in the late 1920s, which stunted the growth of silent cinema, or rather replaced it with the artistically inferior talkie; (2) the failure of cinema to sufficiently confront and document the atrocities of World War II, namely the Nazi death camps; and (3) the commercial and aesthetic “occupation” of cinema and its modes of reception by television.²⁸ Stemming from our reading of *Contempt*, we might add a fourth “death”: the failure to combine the resources and stability of Hollywood with the sensibility of the New Wave. As Godard stated in a 1962 *Cahiers* interview, “When we were at last able to make films, we could no longer make the kinds of films which had made us want to make films. The dream of the Nouvelle Vague—which will never come about—is to make *Spartacus* in Hollywood on a ten million dollar budget.”²⁹ If Godard exaggerates this point, it is only to emphasize the importance of *the popular* in his conception of cinema and its possibilities.

Prokosch’s original statement persists in translation, but in a radically altered form. In this way, Francesca’s method of translating accords with Godard’s method of adapting—*Il disprezzo* endures its transformation to the screen, but in fragments that barely echo the original. Most of her inventive translations come at the expense of the monolingual Prokosch, whereas she more accurately reproduces the comments of Lang and Paul, two fellow Europeans. But without rehashing a clichéd opposition between American wealth and European culture, Godard interweaves the devices of translation and quotation to draw attention to the production’s core conflicts. For instance, Lang not only shifts gracefully among German, French, and English (while inspiring Francesca to speak in her own Italian), he also draws on a range of quotations to argue his points and highlight his predicament. With Francesca he cites verses from Hölderlin’s “The Poet’s Vocation,” compliments her French translation, then discusses three different variants of the original German that harbor three distinct meanings. With Paul he quotes Bertolt Brecht’s short poem “Hollywood,” which concerns selling out to

the American film industry, “the market where lies are bought.” In contrast, these quotations are lost on Prokosch and not just because of a language barrier. Prokosch similarly recites maxims from a small book he carries in his pocket, but he has neither memorized them nor grasped their relevance. At one point, apparently without knowing it, he rephrases Hermann Goering’s infamous motto “Whenever I hear the word culture, I get out my revolver” as “Whenever I hear the word culture, I bring out my checkbook.”³⁰ An unwitting misquotation thus underscores the film’s connections between fascism and Hollywood’s presence in European markets.³¹

Contempt’s most instructive use of translation occurs when Francesca translates comments in advance of their being spoken. She does this more than once, again with Prokosch as the primary target. For instance, when Prokosch describes his take on *The Odyssey* so as to persuade Paul to rewrite the script, Francesca’s “Toutes les émotions humaines” precedes Prokosch’s “All the real human emotions!” It would be simple to attribute this moment either to Prokosch’s mundane predictability or to Godard’s well-known hostility toward “chains of causation.”³² But given that it occurs in a film that thematizes problems of adaptation, this reordering of “original” and “translation” clearly has more important implications. The effect isn’t merely to challenge the twin concepts of anteriority and seniority,³³ but to subvert and invite reflection on the temporal aspects of translation (and hence of adaptation), which are routinely understood in chronological terms. In other words, though Moravia’s novel predates its adaptation, the transcriptive process sets up what Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit describe as a “temporality without priority.”³⁴ Discussing *Contempt*, they suggest intriguingly that “*within the translation*, there is a relation that is neither a betrayal nor an identity nor, finally, a coming after or a coming before.” Translation in its Godardian sense enacts “the *opening* of the text to be translated, its removal from a supposed textual finality and its renewal as something still in the process of being made.” This process permits us “to see the openness, the always-taking-place, which is the incorporative mode of translation and citation.”³⁵ Put simply, whether we see Godard’s adaptive work in terms of adaptation, translation, or quotation, it opens intertextual relationships that, at some level, remain incomplete and subject to further transcription.³⁶

RE-ADAPTING CONTEMPT

The characters in *Contempt* cite their sources, but Godard often quotes without quotation marks, consciously or not, as many “borrowings” appear to just seep in, their sources forgotten.³⁷ Somewhere between a Romantic plagiarist,

Eliot's self-sacrificing absorber of tradition, and Barthes's mosaicist, he doesn't quote so much as he appropriates outright. He has often said that he never borrows but steals, riffing on both Picasso and Eliot—the latter of whom in turn quotes John Dryden's description of Ben Jonson: "He invades authors like a monarch; and what would be theft in other poets, is only victory to him."³⁸ Jacques Rivette once called Godard an "intertextual terrorist,"³⁹ and Jean-Pierre Gorin has summed up Godard's entire career as an "assault on the notion of intellectual property."⁴⁰ Indeed, the French courts have more than once found Godard in violation of copyright laws, leading him to argue publicly for a legal distinction between "quotations" and mere "extracts." In a 1997 interview with Alain Bergala, he maintains that while an "extract" involves the unaltered use of existing property, a "quotation" involves creativity in its own right and should therefore require no fees or duties.⁴¹

Still, Godard's use of quotations remains open to whatever possibilities might be carried by the "original." Over the past three decades, he has cultivated a videographic style that densely combines sonic and visual fragments taken from a wide array of sources. In this "historical montage," as he calls it, Godard creates new rhythms and new relations while letting the fragments conjure up the wholes of their original contexts.⁴² The video mixer allows him to achieve extremely precise superimpositions, among other techniques that have only loose filmic equivalents, such as jagged speed alteration and a strobing effect of iris-ins and iris-outs between two or more overlapping images (though of course some of these techniques take their cues from early cinema conventions). As the layers retain a hard-edged feel, never coalescing into seamless whole, Godard's montage allows for the co-presence of multiple and seemingly disparate histories. Far from the play of surfaces that some have seen as characterizing his early work, Godard quotes in his later stages as a means of reckoning with the past as it intrudes on the present. To return to our earlier point, these quotations are never quite complete: Godard opens the original and brings it into an "always-taking-place." He samples, modulates, re-adapts, not repeating the original as it was but reworking the conditions of possibility attached to it.

For our purposes, the first significant quotation of *Contempt* occurs in *Soft and Hard* (1985), a video essay codirected by Godard and his partner Anne-Marie Miéville. As the two filmmakers talk about their different attitudes toward creative production in the comforts of their own apartment in Rolle, the video continues *Contempt's* unsettled exploration of image-text relationships. Godard, aligning himself with the visual and the cinematic, tells Miéville that what he values in the image is precisely what she seems to find "inaccessible" and "obstructive." He refers to himself as a father of images instead of children and at one point claims he could make a film out of something as meager as a box of matches. As for Miéville, who comes

down more firmly on the side of the verbal and the literary, she throws doubt on the image's ability, whether filmic or televisual, to provide any sort of truth, and she implies that Godard's image-based approach would do well to explore the possibilities she locates in the cinema's "voice."⁴³ In spite of his self-confidence, Godard ultimately entertains the idea that he might be neglecting something crucial in his overemphasis on the image. It would be a stretch to suggest that he adopts a position that sets image and text on equal footing, but his hostility toward the text is significantly softened by the dialogue's end.

Soft and Hard strikingly concludes with a quotation of *Contempt* that enables Godard and Miéville to reconcile, if for the moment only, some of their differences. In the midst of their discussion regarding television's inability to "project," we see *Contempt's* opening sequence playing on a television monitor. Then Godard and Miéville's camera—as if to mimic Coutard's pan toward the audience, or Godard's ultimate pan toward an unseen Ithaca—turns from the image to focus on an adjacent white wall, where Godard *projects* the same sequence. We see the silhouetted arms of Godard and Miéville superimposed on the images. We hear Godard ask, "All those projects to grow, to be enlarged into subjects . . . Where has it all gone?" And Miéville replies with, "It is hard to say," a statement that carries multiple meanings. Throughout *Soft and Hard*, the filmmakers have associated the term "soft" with Miéville, femininity, and the verbal, and "hard" with Godard, masculinity, and the visual.⁴⁴ "Hard to say" implies both an uncertainty about cinema's future and an alignment of opposing terms. Though the plight of cinema is difficult to address in words, the rapprochement of the verbal and the visual, of "soft" and "hard," might offer a place to begin.⁴⁵

Soft and Hard thus revisits *Contempt* in a moment shot through with anxieties related to the vitality of cinema and the "fraternity" of image and text, concerns which register with greater emphasis in *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, Godard's eight-part history of cinema and of the twentieth century as filtered through cinema. One of the ironies of the project is that not much film was used in its making—the clips are taken primarily from VHS cassettes. Versions of the first chapters, which Godard substantially revised, aired on French television in the late 1980s, then the series as a whole was projected theatrically ten years later. In a testament to the confusion regarding its exhibition, *Histoire(s)* was even displayed in Dan Graham's *New Design for Showing Videos* at Documenta X in 1997, a glass-based, multi-screen construction which, in its superimpositions, subjected Godard's series to its own critical methods.⁴⁶ We might also note that *Histoire(s) du cinéma* is not a singular object—its title also refers to the VHS tapes (1998) and DVDs (2007) released by Gaumont, to the four art books published in Gallimard's esteemed Blanche Collection (first in 1998, then re-issued in 2006), and to the box set of audio

CDs released by ECM in 1999. Godard says he regrets that *Histoire(s)* was not received as a multimedia work, as an art object dispersed across these different formats. Perhaps overstating his case, he has said that the art books, which consist of reworked stills from the videos and snippets of commentary, are the centerpiece of *Histoire(s)* inasmuch as they place image and text “strictly on equal footing.”⁴⁷ Of course, in the video “version,” Godard keeps the visual and the verbal in tandem, whether quoting literary and philosophical texts to advance his thoughts on cinema, or balancing images with an elaborate system of titles.

Nearly all of the key quotations of *Contempt* occur in 1B: “Une Histoire seule” (“A Solitary [Hi]Story” or “Only One [Hi]Story”), a chapter that continues to sketch out the aims and concerns of the entire series. Shortly after stating that cinema has become part of “the cosmetics industry . . . the mask industry, which is itself a minor branch of the lies industry,” Godard’s voiceover reflects on the phrase “poor B.B.” uttered by Fritz Lang in *Contempt*, a reference both to Bertolt Brecht and Brigitte Bardot. We see a grainy, black-and-white photo of Brecht and titles declaring, “I make jewels for the poor.” We hear the revving engine and screeching tires of *Contempt*’s car wreck, but instead of a track across Camille’s letter, we see an irised shot of Camille/Bardot reading the book on Lang in her bathtub, superimposed with a film strip speeding through the bobbins of Godard’s editing station. The irised image flashes between photos of the young and old Bardot, ultimately stopping on *Contempt*’s car accident (which is now pasted onto one of the most repeated images in *Histoire(s)*, a single frame from Bergman’s *Prison* [1949] of a man and woman seated behind a film projector, absorbed by what they see, and arguably standing in for Godard and Miéville). As such, Godard reinscribes *Contempt* as a work concerned with artistic disappointment (through Lang and Brecht), while exploiting the shot of Prokosch and Camille’s crash as a figuration of death and tragedy.

But more significant are the quotations that immediately follow. After a flashing montage of a still of Fritz Lang from his German period and an insert of the nude Bardot in *Contempt*, we see an image of Godard in 1988, lighting a cigar in slow motion in front of his bookshelves. This image is superimposed with the closing moments of *Contempt*, where Lang, his crew, and his assistant (played by Godard) shoot the scene in which Ulysses spots his homeland. A languid cue from *Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960), Bernard Herrmann’s “The City,” mixes with the opening bars of Béla Bartók’s *Third Piano Concerto* (1945), a melody of strings that calls to mind Delerue’s music for *Contempt*. We track in to see the vast emptiness of the Mediterranean, and though we abruptly cut to a scene from *The Magnificent Ambersons* (Welles, 1942), we still hear the young Godard shout, “Silence!” Here again Godard entwines his personal *histoire* with the larger *histoire* of cinema.

As Roland-François Lack remarks of this sequence, “the mere contrast in tone between the phrases muttered in 1988 and the ‘silence’ shouted in 1963 gives his voice a history, just as what we are watching tells the history of an image, in the superimposition of Godard’s face now [in *Histoire(s)*] on his body then [in *Contempt*].”⁴⁸

The closing shot of *Contempt* takes on additional meanings as it enters into the figurative economy of *Histoire(s)* and rhymes with other images of water and shore—a leitmotif in the series and a recurring figure in Godard’s other works over the past three decades.⁴⁹ Whether it functions as a site suggestive of death and potential renewal as in *King Lear* (1987), a place for solemn reflection as in *JLG/JLG: Autoportrait de décembre* (1995), a stimulus for remarks on memory and resistance as in *Éloge de l’amour* (2001), or a U.S. Marine-patrolled border of “Paradise” as in *Notre musique* (2004), the water’s edge has become a prominent and especially charged element in Godard’s cinema. Waves pervade much of his late work—sonically as well as visually. In her sensitive description of *Nouvelle Vague* (Godard, 1990), Claire Bartoli, a blind critic, suggests that lapping waves are a central expressive figure in Godard’s sound design—its polyphonic surges that build, overlap, disperse, and then resurface anew. As Bartoli puts it, “Little waves in a large sea, unfolding and subsiding: it’s the same water, but not the same wave.”⁵⁰ Her words could well extend to the image track in Godard’s late films and videos, the ebbing and flowing in constant variation.

In *Histoire(s)*, imagery of waves often alludes to the New Wave, which Godard specifically engages and revises in chapter 3B: “Une Vague nouvelle” (“A New Wave” or “A Vague Piece of News”). There Godard soberly rethinks the late 1950s, early 1960s artistic school by changing its roster of directors, stressing the *politique* over the *auteurs* (“not the authors, the works”) and atoning for its historical amnesia in the wake of World War II.⁵¹ Shorelines and breaking waves and rippling currents abound in the episode, in images sampled from *The River* (Borzage, 1949), *Napoleon* (Gance, 1927), *By the Bluest of Seas* (Barnet, 1936), and *India* (Rossellini, 1958). We see a stunning image reworked from Godard’s own *King Lear*, Cordelia in a white robe, lying flat and motionless on a large rock, Don Learo at her side with a rifle, gazing toward the water (“I know when one is dead and when one lives”); in *Histoire(s)*, the image is interwoven with a photograph of Virginia Woolf, the titles “Nouvelle Vague,” and a female voice reciting the next-to-last line of Woolf’s 1931 novel *The Waves*: “Against you I will fling myself; unvanquished and unyielding, O Death!” At one level, these quotations reinforce Godard’s remarks in voiceover that the New Wave filmmakers were mistaken to consider their breakthrough as a beginning instead of a last gasp. Godard gives us a condensed account of this *histoire* midway through the chapter, using one of the most iconic scenes at his disposal. As we hear

Shostakovich's score for *Hamlet* (Kozintsev, 1964)—tense strings and horns for the young prince's last duel—Antoine (Jean-Pierre Léaud) runs along the beach at the end of *Les 400 coups* (Truffaut, 1959). His path to the surf takes him through and across three other images that appear in successive, pulsing superimpositions: the ill-fated couple on the lam in *You Only Live Once* (Lang, 1937), Joan of Arc (Ingrid Bergman) in flames in *Giovanna d'Arco al rogo* (Rossellini, 1955), then Scottie (James Stewart) swimming to retrieve Madeleine (Kim Novak) from the bay in *Vertigo* (Hitchcock, 1958). Breaking up this stream of images are staggered intertitles in national accents—"égalité... et fraternité... entre la réel... et fiction"—and then a throbbing alternation between a black-and-white photo of a middle-aged Godard and documentary footage of combat.⁵² With two crashing piano chords we return to Antoine on the beach, and Godard revises Truffaut's freeze frame by superimposing a static close-up with a long shot of Antoine turning back from the waves. In this complicated sequence, Godard shows us the New Wave emerging from its intense critical interaction with Neorealism and popular American cinema, with Lang, Rossellini, and Hitchcock figuring here as something like a Holy Trinity; and he reasserts his 1962 claim that "fiction is interesting only if it is validated by a documentary context," which he initially offered as a way of defining the movement.⁵³ At the same time, the segment works to suggest that the aims of the New Wave, as embodied in the figure of Truffaut's Antoine, were as doomed from the start as Lang's lovers, and that their apparent rescue of French cinema was no more genuine than Scottie's rescue of Judy/Madeleine. Their revolution is subsumed within a larger *histoire* in which French film culture moves from its military occupation by Nazi Germany to its commercial occupation by Hollywood—a trajectory already mapped out in *Contempt*.

Toward the end of 1B in *Histoire(s)*, Godard again quotes *Contempt* in a manner suggestive of cinema's deaths. His voiceover declares: "Not a technology or even an art, an art without a future as immediately the [Lumière] brothers had urbanely warned." We then cut to the screening-room sequence in *Contempt*, where Lang defends his adaptation by telling Prokosch that "motion pictures" automatically depart from their written scripts. In the original film, the "death of cinema" already imbues their quarrel in the form of the Lumière quote that lines the wall beneath the blank screen (in untranslated Italian): "The cinema is an invention without a future." In *Histoire(s)*, Godard highlights this prophecy by superimposing onto *Contempt's* empty screen a photo of Louis Lumière standing next to his Cinématographe. As Prokosch hurls a film canister like a discus, the words "*erreur tragique*" flash on screen, and Godard states: "Not even a hundred years later we can see that [the Lumières] were right and that if television has achieved Leon Gaumont's dream of bringing spectacles from all over the world into the

simplest bedrooms, it was done by shrinking the shepherd's giant sky to Tom Thumb's level."

In a sense, what emerges from Godard's re-adaptation of *Contempt* in his video essays is an elaboration of the signs and warnings already visible in the 1963 film. The aging Godard affirms retrospectively what the young Godard had just begun to realize—that without the popular stability of Old Hollywood, the New Wave could only muster a short-lived aesthetic revolution; that the kind of cinema that had inspired Godard to make films in the first place had slipped into irreversible decline; that an embittered Rossellini was right to announce, as he did at an Italian press conference in 1962, that despite being singularly equipped to "spread ideas," cinema had become part of the problem, the *crisis* facing modern civilization (which for Rossellini was a crisis of public education⁵⁴). Still, it would be too neat to conclude on this note. We shouldn't overlook the irony that each time Godard mourns the death of cinema, his discourse is outstripped by his own formal inventiveness. Even as he revisits *Contempt* to reprise its grim assertions, his manner of quotation tries to open and explore what is still thinkable. And even as *Contempt* leaves us with a downbeat FIN title, its shot of sea and sky, as it echoes and permutes across his body of work, doubles as a site of potential renewal. To miss this regenerative aspect of his late work is to miss how Godard tirelessly adapts existing materials, how he animates an archive of cinematic pasts, a living archive under constant revision.

NOTES

1. Jean-Luc Godard, interview by Serge July, in *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard, tome 1: 1950–1984*, ed. Alain Bergala (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1998), 416. My translation.
2. Godard, *Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma* (Paris: Albatros, 1980).
3. Godard, *JLG/JLG: Phrases* (Paris: Éditions POL, 1996); *For ever Mozart: Phrases* (Paris: Éditions POL, 1996); *Allemagne neuf zéro: Phrases* (Paris: Éditions POL, 1998); *Les enfants jouent à la Russie: Phrases* (Paris: Éditions POL, 1998); *2 × 50 ans de cinéma français: Phrases* (Paris: Éditions POL, 1998); *Éloge de l'amour: Phrases* (Paris: Éditions POL, 2001).
4. Godard, interview by Jean Collet et al., in *Godard on Godard*, ed. Jean Narboni and Tom Milne, trans. Tom Milne (New York: Da Capo, 1972), 171–96.
5. Marie-Claire Ropars, "The Graphic in Filmic Writing: *A bout de souffle*, or the Erratic Alphabet," *Enclitic* 5–6 (1982): 147–61. "Cinescriptural" is an imperfect translation of Ropars's *ciné-écriture*.
6. See Tom Conley, "Language Gone Mad," in *Jean-Luc Godard's Pierrot le fou*, ed. David Wills (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 81–107.

7. Philippe Dubois, "The Written Screen: JLG and Writing as the Accursed Share," in *For Ever Godard*, ed. Michael Temple, James S. Williams, and Michael Witt (London: Black Dog, 2004), 232.
8. Colin MacCabe, *Godard: A Portrait of the Artist at Seventy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 155. This is not to say that the literary sources have little significance in these films—they often supply the only vestiges of plot.
9. Titles in *Grandeur et décadence* declare "based on an old novel by J.H. Chase." But Godard's made-for-television video about the pre-production of a made-for-television video shows no interest in the James Hadley Chase novel, *The Soft Centre*, that Godard had been commissioned to adapt, beyond playing with atmosphere and plot conventions vaguely suggestive of *Série noire* crime fiction. Jean-Pierre Léaud is cast as a director struggling to cast performers in a work that is to be an adaptation, but the source text is yet to be decided, or committed to, because Léaud's character does not like the pulp crime story he is expected to adapt. In one extended scene, a procession of actors auditioning for a part in the production file one-by-one past a video camera, pausing momentarily to speak line-fragments that are not from Chase's novel but from William Faulkner's short story, "Sepulture South: Gaslight."
10. I should note here at the outset that my concerns depart somewhat from those of other contributors to this volume. While *Contempt* is in some ways Godard's only legitimate adaptation—the script went through four rewrites, a rather un-Godardian process of fine-tuning at the behest of his producers—the end result alters its source in such a way as to make a sustained comparison impossible. If fidelity has a place in Godard's work, it is where he works to establish a broader sense of "fraternity or equality between the image and the text," between the audio-visual and the verbal. Godard, in dialogue with Youssef Ishaghpour, *Cinema: The Archeology of Film and the Memory of a Century*, trans. John Howe (New York: Berg, 2005), 49.
11. François Truffaut, "A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema," in *Movies and Methods*, vol. 1, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), 224–37.
12. Godard, *Godard on Godard*, ed. Narboni and Milne, 200.
13. Godard, *Godard on Godard*, ed. Narboni and Milne, 200.
14. Alberto Moravia, *Contempt* (London: Prion, 1999), 1. This more recent translation again changes the title of *Il disprezzo* to *Contempt*, but for the sake of clarity I will refer to Moravia's novel by its Italian title.
15. As Jonathan Rosenbaum points out, it is quite possible that Godard misattributes this quote to Bazin, and that the actual passage comes from one of Michel Mourlet's articles in *Cahiers du cinéma* in 1958: "Since cinema is a gaze which is substituted for our own in order to give us a world that corresponds to our desires, it settles on faces, on radiant or bruised but always beautiful bodies, on this glory or devastation which testifies to the same primordial nobility, on this chosen race that we recognize as our own, the ultimate projection of life towards God." Rosenbaum, "Trailer for Godard's *Histoire(s) du Cinéma*," *Vertigo* 7 (Autumn 1997): 13–20.

16. It is also worth noting that Godard thinks of the screenplay as a blueprint for producers who rely on the document for scheduling and budgetary purposes. This view appears in the parenthetical note Godard attached to early drafts of the script to explain the shortage of pages. See Peter Lev, *The Euro-American Cinema* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 85. Godard reiterates this notion in *Scénario du film "Passion"* (1982), where he expresses the desire to "write" a script while creating the film simultaneously, and where he claims that the first script came about when producers of a Mack Sennett film wanted to account for payroll.
17. Harun Farocki and Kaja Silvermann, *Speaking about Godard* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 46.
18. Godard, *Godard on Godard*, ed. Narboni and Milne, 201.
19. See, for instance, Paul Coates, "Le Mépris: Women, Statues, Gods," *Film Criticism* 22, no. 3 (Spring 1998): 38–52. Coates writes that despite the film's investments in Brecht, it ultimately assumes a classicist stance in its "un-Romantic" embrace of Lang as a father figure and its longing for an art form untouched by consumer capitalism.
20. Gilberto Perez, *The Material Ghost: Films and Their Medium* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 87–91, 367–416.
21. On the film's equivocal relation to classicism, see Marc Cerisuelo, *Le Mépris* (Chatou: Transparence, 2006); Joe McElhaney, *The Death of Classical Cinema: Hitchcock, Lang, Minnelli* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 1–3.
22. MacCabe, *Godard*, 146. See also Colin MacCabe, "On the Eloquence of the Vulgar," in *The Eloquence of the Vulgar: Language, Cinema, and the Politics of Culture* (London: BFI Publishing, 1999), 151–53.
23. MacCabe, *Godard*, 146; see 80–82 for a broader positioning of the *Cahiers* gang in terms of classicist and modernist outlooks.
24. See Lev, *Euro-American Cinema*, 83–89.
25. For a different take on Lang's rushes that notes the possible influence of Fritz Lang's lesser known Indian films, as well as of Jean-Daniel Pollet's *Méditerranée* (1963), see Jonathan Rosenbaum, "Critical Distance: Godard's *Contempt*," in *Essential Cinema: On the Necessity of Film Canons* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 182–83.
26. Godard, *Godard on Godard*, ed. Narboni and Milne, 200. For an interesting take on Moll's role in the film, see Jacques Aumont, "The Fall of the Gods: Jean-Luc Godard's *Le Mépris* (1963)," in *French Film: Texts and Contexts*, ed. Susan Hayward and Ginette Vincendeau (New York: Routledge, 2000), 175.
27. Roberto Rossellini, "Ten Years of Cinema," in *Springtime in Italy: A Reader on Neo-Realism*, ed. and trans. David Overbey (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1978), 96, 111–12. For an interesting overview of the subtitling versus dubbing debate, see Mark Betz, "The Name Above the (Sub)Title: Internationalism, Coproduction, and Polyglot European Art Cinema," *Camera Obscura* 16, no. 1 (2001): 1–44.
28. See Michael Witt, "The Death(s) of Cinema According to Godard," *Screen* 40, no. 3 (Autumn 1999): 331–46; and Witt, "Qu'était-ce que le cinéma, Jean-Luc Godard?":

- An Analysis of the Cinema(s) at Work in and around Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma*," in *France in Focus: Film and National Identity*, ed. Elizabeth Ezra and Sue Harris (New York: Berg, 2000), 23–42.
29. Godard, interview by Collet et al., in *Godard on Godard*, ed. Narboni and Milne, 192.
 30. The source of this quote is actually the character of Thiemann in Hanns Johst's 1933 play *Schlageter*: "When I hear the word culture... I release the safety on my Browning."
 31. For more on the film's complex relation to fascism, see Robert Stam, *Literature Through Film: Realism, Magic, and The Art of Adaptation* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2005), 279–99.
 32. Peter Wollen, "Godard and Counter Cinema: *Vent d'est*," in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, 6th ed., ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 525–33.
 33. Robert Stam, "Introduction: The Theory and Practice of Adaptation," in *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation*, ed. Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2005), 4.
 34. Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, *Forms of Being: Cinema/Aesthetics/Subjectivity* (London: BFI Publishing, 2004), 64.
 35. Bersani and Dutoit, *Forms of Being*, 64–65.
 36. For more on the analogous relation of adaptation to translation, see Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 16–17. Hutcheon's description of adaptation is fairly close in spirit to the process-based model I am attributing to Godard: "a derivation that is not derivative—a work that is second without being secondary. It is its own palimpsestic thing" (9).
 37. For a fascinating study of quotation that applies to Godard's work and that could valuably inform adaptation studies, see Mikhail Iampolski, *The Memory of Tiresias: Intertextuality and Film*, trans. Harsha Ram (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998).
 38. John Dryden, *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1668), in *Critical Theory Since Plato*, 3rd ed., ed. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle (Boston: Thomson Wadsworth, 2005), 272. I refer to this text not only to trace the origins of this celebrated notion of artistic appropriation, but to highlight its political underpinnings. In addition to Dryden's provocative use of the term "monarch," his essay immediately emphasizes the context of the commercial and colonial competition between the warring British and Dutch empires. The implication is that there is something violent and *militaristic* about Jonson's conquest and appropriation of other authors' material.
 39. Jacques Rivette, quoted in Jean Narboni, Sylvie Pierre, and Jacques Rivette, "Montage" [*Cahiers du cinéma* March 1969], in *Rivette: Texts and Interviews*, ed. Jonathan Rosenbaum, trans. Amy Gateff and Tom Milne (London: BFI Publishing, 1977), 74–75.
 40. Jean-Pierre Gorin, quoted in MacCabe, *Godard*, 123.
 41. Godard, quoted in *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard, tome 2: 1984–1998*, ed. Alain Bergala (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1998), 32–33.

42. Some critics have attacked *Histoire(s) du cinéma* on the grounds that its montage is ultimately disinterested in the content of the quotes and their original contexts. See, for example, Jacques Rancière, *Film Fables*, trans. Emiliano Battista (Oxford: Berg, 2006), 171–88. As I hope to show in this essay, the series is frequently haunted by original contexts—to varying degrees, the force of the original survives and either conflicts or resonates with Godard’s own designs. In other words, the logic that motivates Godard’s quotation isn’t purely one of surface affinity and metaphor.
43. This trope resurfaces in *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, chapter 4A, which begins with a recitation, in a female voice, of Paul Valéry’s “Psalm on a Voice” (“In a soft voice and a faint voice saying great things: Important, astonishing, profound, and true things . . .”) and a succession of photographs of women, Miéville among them.
44. This is one of Kaja Silverman’s points in “The Dream of the Nineteenth Century,” *Camera Obscura* 17, no. 3 (2002): 14. However problematic these gendered terms might seem, it is important to remember that the production company “Sonimage” established by Godard and Miéville in the early seventies was romantically conceived as the montage of her “sound” and his “image”; or together “his/her image.”
45. Whereas *Contempt* originally tied the end of a certain kind of cinema to the end of a certain kind of couple—by implication Godard and Anna Karina—here the film as quoted and reworked poses a chance of cinematic renewal and also allows for a reconciliation within a different kind of couple—Godard and Miéville.
46. Trond Lundemo, “The Index and Erasure: Godard’s Approach to Film History,” in *For Ever Godard*, ed. Temple, Williams, and Witt, 434n4.
47. Godard, quoted in Godard and Ishaghpour, *Cinema*, 45–52.
48. Roland-François Lack, “Sa Voix,” in *For Ever Godard*, ed. Temple, Williams, and Witt, 320.
49. “Figurative economy” is a phrase and concept I borrow, somewhat loosely, from the writings of Nicole Brenez. See Brenez, *De la figure en général et du corps en particulier. L’invention figurative au cinéma* (Bruxelles: De Boeck Université, 1998); Brenez, *Abel Ferrara*, trans. Adrian Martin (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007).
50. Claire Bartoli, “Interior View: Jean-Luc Godard’s *Nouvelle Vague*,” trans. John M. King, included in the booklet to the sound recording Jean-Luc Godard, *Nouvelle Vague* (Munich: ECM Records, 1997), 89.
51. While Godard articulates these ideas in chapter 3B in *Histoire(s)*, he takes them up at length in a dialogue with Alain Bergala in *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard, tome 2*, ed. Bergala, 24.
52. The documentary footage is difficult to make out given the speed of the montage, but it appears to be of the Algerian War, which adds another important layer to this sequence. While Godard repeats his earlier definition of the New Wave as a new sort of relationship between fiction and documentary, he suggests that the New Wave directors didn’t engage sufficiently with the pressing realities and social issues of their own moment. Within the framework of *Histoire(s)*, this failure stands in contrast to the Italian Neorealists, whom Godard addresses in the preceding chapter,

claiming that they “won back a nation’s right to look itself in the eye.” This, it seems, is why Godard includes a photo of himself taken after the New Wave had dissolved, when he had entered a period of militant filmmaking.

53. Godard, interview by Collet et al., in *Godard on Godard*, ed. Narboni and Milne, 192.
54. Rossellini, quoted in Tag Gallagher, *The Adventures of Roberto Rossellini: His Life and Films* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), 554. See also Adriano Aprà, “Rossellini’s Historical Encyclopedia,” in *Roberto Rossellini: Magician of the Real*, ed. David Forgacs, Sarah Lutton, and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (London: BFI Publishing, 2000), 126–48. Adrian Martin has suggested that Godard “in his own, eccentric way, renews Rossellini’s ‘televisual project’ and the ‘grand plan’ to unite art, research, information, science and history, in works from *Je vous salue, Marie* (1985) to the *Historie(s) du cinéma*.” Martin, “Always a Window: Tag Gallagher’s Rossellini,” *Screening the Past* 9 (2000): <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/screeningthepast/shorts/reviews/rev0300/ambr9a.htm>.