

## Introduction

Franco-Swiss director Jean-Luc Godard's latest film, *Notre Musique* (2004) most directly aims at impacting its younger generation of viewers, as it is the younger generation whose future decisions will affect the world affairs brought up in the film. And yet, for those of the younger generation to whom the name 'Jean-Luc Godard' summons any association at all, that association is typically a fetishized image of Paris in the sixties characterized by Godard's first film, *A bout de souffle* (1960), the film that subsequently catapulted the director, then a member of the young generation himself, and his New Wave<sup>1</sup> cohorts to international fame, effectively changing the way cinema was conceived. Inspired by the improvised aesthetic characterized by outdoor shooting (rather than shooting in studios) of Italian Neo-realists such as Roberto Rossellini, Godard and his colleagues took to the streets with their cameras, breaking the fourth wall between characters and spectators, in short, engaging with the heated political atmosphere of their time through the aesthetics and content of their films. For this reason precisely, the *A bout de souffle* association is a bit troubling: Godard's latest film, *Notre Musique* uses today's global context to engage with the spectator, but the spectator in question would rather watch his artifact-like films of the sixties which strove to do the same thing, though for a generation and an epoch that is long past. Indeed, though Jean-Luc Godard's films were box office successes in the 1960s, it is now taken for granted that his films will not reach (or, alas, appeal to) a large audience. This, and the fact that *Notre Musique* does not appeal to today's youth in the way that *A bout de souffle* did, could clearly be explained by the disjunction between Godard's age and the generation he is trying to reach. After all, much time and many works separate the two films. The Godard chronology is separated into three main parts: the early work of the New Wave (1959-1967); the Dziga Vertov Group/Political Films (1968-1972); the blatantly anti-commercial period between 1972 and 1982 (characterized by films such as *Ici et ailleurs*); the spiritual phase that began with *Passion* (1982); and finally, the latest period, that of *Notre Musique*. At the time of my first viewing of the film, I abstractly considered Godard to be a director who militantly engaged with subjects and urged his spectators to do so as well. However, I had never felt particularly moved by his films, perhaps because they did not feel immediate or relevant to my life. And yet, by the end of my first viewing of *Notre Musique*, I sensed a strong and new engagement.

According to film critic Serge Daney, Godard's "own utopia is to demand that people open themselves up to the possibility of doing things 'differently' even while continuing as before. This utopia is less about doing something different than about doing the same thing, differently."<sup>2</sup> This claim is corroborated by Godard's advising to a room of students in *Notre Musique*: "*Cherchez à voir quelque chose, cherchez à se représenter quelque chose. Dans le*

---

<sup>1</sup> The New Wave (or Nouvelle Vague) is a cinematic movement that started in France in the late 1950s. Many of its informal members also wrote critiques of cinema in the Cahiers du cinema publication.

<sup>2</sup> Serge Daney. "The Godard Paradox," in *Forever Godard*, ed., Michael Temple, James S. Williams and Michael Witt (London, Black Dog Publishing, 2004), 71.

*premier cas, on dit, regardez-là. Et dans le second, fermez les yeux.*”<sup>3</sup> Another Daney claim about Godard is that he is “interested in radical reformism, because reformism concerns the present.”<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Godard has always been an arbiter on the state and shape of things in politics and cinema. His latest film, *Notre Musique*, is a lucid expression of the capacity of the film medium as a medium of activism. In it, he argues that a film’s aesthetic make-up embodies its ethics.

Whereas the mainstream film today serves as an escape for the viewer into a formulaic arena of problems and solutions, Godard’s latest film stubbornly eschews this format, replacing it instead with a philosophy of looking at the visible to see the invisible. To this end, this study will consist of two parts. The first will provide a deconstruction and analysis of the three sequences of the film, *Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise*. The second part will focus on the concepts introduced by Godard in the film’s core, self-reflexive portion: the lecture in Sarajevo. The ideas of montage, metaphor, and the fallibility of the image will be discussed with reference to Godard’s citations of certain authors and works. In *Notre Musique*, Godard insists through his words and images that we, viewers, look and listen attentively to all he projects, and that we take into consideration and mull over the philosophies and dualities he shares with us. Thus, I will strive to be as active and open a viewer as Godard seeks, to look deeply at the images and faces projected.

The primary focus of this paper will be the implications of Godard’s blending of documentary footage with staged footage. Among the examples of documentary and narrative blurring, Godard stages an interview with an internationally known poet, Mahmoud Darwish, and though the pretext is completely false, the exchange that takes place is honest and potent. Next, the poet Juan Goytisolo speaks his words in an empty library in Sarajevo; it appears as a monologue and has no narrative link to the rest of the film. Aside from the famous personages who play themselves, the film’s other main characters are actors. They insert themselves seamlessly through events that actually took place in Sarajevo (i.e. that were not planned for the shooting of the film). I believe this technique echoes Godard’s belief that people have faith in the imaginary, and doubt reality. Even though the narrative curve is atypical—there is no climax, and the two main characters never meet—it offers that which the spectator needs in order to submit himself or herself to a film: the imaginary. Thanks to the lens of narrativity, the varied documentary subjects (the Israeli/Palestine conflict, the symbolic rebuilding of the Mostar Bridge, the Native American plight, the future of digital filmmaking) whose philosophical links would otherwise not be considered are conjoined into a field where realities point to imaginaries and vice versa. Throughout the film, the characters acknowledge the inability of images and words to represent certain atrocities, and strange way by which imaginary representations are at times more believable than the truth.

---

<sup>3</sup> *Notre Musique*, DVD, directed by Jean-Luc Godard (Wellspring Media: 2004). Translation (my own): “*Seek to see something, seek to represent something to yourself. In the first case, we say, look at it. In the second case, we say, close your eyes.*”

<sup>4</sup> Daney, 71.

## Part One: Sequence analyses

The film is separated into three parts, loosely but symbolically echoing the structure of Dante's *Inferno*. The opening sequence, *Hell*, lasts about ten minutes long, as does the closing sequence, *Paradise*. *Purgatory*, comprising most of the film, takes place in sixty minutes. The most potent of the sequences is the beginning and, indeed, as the title *Purgatory* suggests, the majority of the film is spent dealing with the opening sequence, reconciling with it, and learning from it. *Hell* brings into stark appearance the mechanisms of cinema and war. It is a shocking sequence that illustrates urban specialist Paul Virilio's assertion that images have turned into ammunition.<sup>5</sup>

### **HELL**

To be denied gratification for watching a shot of violence is an antithetical experience to that offered by the shot-reverse-shot of violence. In placing the images in a sequence not structured by cause and effect, Godard insists that the spectator see the images and look at them for what they are: repetitions of themselves. The actions take place in disparate locations, times, and zones of reality and fiction, but once the costumes and weaponry used are ignored, the movements amount to equals: conquest, destruction, and victim hood. The jarring and urgent piano music in the background is not necessary to create this effect, but it does serve the purpose of reminding the viewer that he or she is watching a *film*, that he or she is subjecting him or herself to a “[brûlure] de l'imaginaire pour réchauffer le reel.”<sup>6</sup> The philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis was the first to elaborate on the notion of the *imaginaire*:

history is impossible and inconceivable without the productive or creative imagination, without the *productive* or *creative* imagination, without what we have called the radical *imaginaire* as it is manifested, simultaneously and inseparably, in both historical *action* and in the constitution, in advance of any explicit rationality, of a universe of meanings.<sup>7</sup>

Historian Paul Veyne further elaborated on the notion, asserting that “‘instead of speaking of beliefs one has to speak simply of truths’ but ‘truths themselves are imaginations.’”<sup>8</sup> Next, the philosopher Gilles Deleuze's definition of the *imaginaire* is: “the *imaginaire* is not the unreal, but the inability to distinguish the real from unreal.”<sup>9</sup> In light of these notions of the imaginary, a “[brûlure] de l'imaginaire pour réchauffer le réel” becomes a complicated task, as the complexities between the imaginary and the real, the fiction and the documentary, are multiple.

The first shot of the film consists of a quivering camera striving to capture a diagonally leaning woman on the ground. We cannot see that which is pushing her to the ground, nor can we decipher what is her plight. The bleached quality of the second half of the image is pushing her body to the ground, as she holds her arm up in protection. The following image implicates

---

<sup>5</sup> Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception* (London: Verso, 1989).

<sup>6</sup> *Notre Musique*. Translation: “a burn of the imagination to warm the real.”

<sup>7</sup> Cornelius Castoriadis, *L'Institution imaginaire de la société* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), 204.

<sup>8</sup> Jean-François Bayart, Steven Randall, & Jonathan Derrick, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005.), 133.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

the spectator to be in the driver's seat of a tank-like automobile, swiftly zooming above the cars that drive in the opposite direction. This automobile in motion could certainly also be interpreted as a cinematic apparatus (a camera). A black screen appears next, through which we are introduced to the names of the actors we have not yet met. The flashing and subsequent disappearance of white block letters make their procession onto the screen. In the midst of this procession of names, the title *Notre Musique* flashes, accompanied by what sounds like an ending to a song—an incomplete, searching but pregnant bit of music. The opening credits are brought to an end by mesmerizing, abstracted flashes of silver light. A female voice-over begins delivering philosopher Baron de Montesquieu's words: "*Ainsi, dans le temps des fables [saturated image of ship exploding], après les inondations [Royaume 1-Enfer] et les déluges, il sortit de la terre des hommes armés qui s'exterminèrent [grainy shot of landscape and sky panorama].*"<sup>10</sup> A penguin approaches the screen; behind him, a wave of saturated blue water (identical to the color of the pirate ship) splashes. He keeps waddling along. A black screen separates this shot from the next: that of monkeys leaping in a forward-rushing river. This image is placed in parallel to that of armed soldiers slowly moving forward through the blue water, such that it appears that the soldiers and monkeys are moving towards one another. This shot-pair is paralleled by the next one, in which the first set is a black and white image of a group of people in a barren field walking forward, and the next is a color-shot (notably with the same saturated blue sky) walking in the opposite direction. Found-footage of soldiers aiming and firing follows, resulting in a counter-shot: a bright red explosion. Another effect is subsequently depicted: heaps of dead bodies in a black-and-white ditch. Close-ups of corpses follow, as we see shadows moving above them—shadows that are moving forward, leaving them in the dust. More shooting and burning follows, ending in another black screen. A Native American chieftain shot in Technicolor lifts his arm; his existence has become fully saturated in the mythology of the victor. A black screen subsequently obscures them. A swastika and a flame are interposed over a female face. Again, a black screen obscures him. Another famous film character points his arm forward. Ku Klux Klan fighters prepare for attack. Gloved hands wave, and are obscured by a black screen. Caped horsemen move forward through a body of water, and are then... obscured by a black screen. A desert landscape is overtaken by a black car waving a big American flag, and then by a black screen. A Palestinian fighter shrouded in a *keffiyeh* (symbol of Palestinian nationalism and solidarity) stands in front of barbed wire; a close-up reveals he is firmly holding a gun and slowly, carefully moving forward. He is obscured by a black screen. Next, a bulldozer overturns a pile of corpses; the camera lingers on a woman's blood-soaked, decapitated head. As we see a couple running away from a burning house, we hear the voice-over again: "*Ils sont terribles ici, avec leur manie de trancher la tête des gens. Ce qui m'étonne, c'est qu'il puisse encore y avoir des survivants.*"<sup>11</sup> Visions of fire, depicted in color and in black and white, on land and on water, follow as the piano excitedly plays. Horsemen fall off their horses; planes drop bombs. The initially abstract flashing silver lights return, and we perceive them differently now. A slowed-down image of figures in the saturated blue mist grappling with one another begs the question, are they dancing or wrestling? Children play a game of 'war' with sticks, in a piercing show of how humans imitate the images

---

<sup>10</sup> Translation: "Thus, during the time of fables, after the floods and the deluges, emerged from the earth armed men who exterminated each other."

<sup>11</sup> Translation: "They are horrible here, with their decapitating obsession. What surprises me is that it is possible for there to be 'survivors'"

represented around them. The murmuring piano stops and the screen darkens blackens. The voice-over continues in a religious tone: “*Pardonnez-nous nos offenses, comme nous les pardonnons à ceux qui nous ont offensés [black and white footage of a woman pleading with a soldier]. Oui, comme nous les pardonnons, pas autrement [a black screen, then a close up grainy shot of a woman’s face, mouth agape].*”<sup>12</sup> A corpse is dragged on the ground. Little children beg on the street; its cement is stained by a pool of blood. A camera captures a blonde woman reading a new story; she is in the process of representing the plight of victims. Her very ability to wield a camera and represent points to the fact that she is a ‘victor,’ that she is not oppressed. An African boy collapses after being fed water. “*Oui, comme nous les pardonnons, pas autrement,*”<sup>13</sup> the voice over emphasizes. A row of women on bicycles make the ‘Heil Hitler’ gesture before taking off. Nuns place their bodies face down on the ground, seemingly begging pardon. As children sled down a snowy hill, the voice over continues: “*On peut envisager la mort de deux façons: l’une, comme étant l’impossible du possible. L’autre [bloody face scowling], le possible de l’impossible [lynched bodies]. Or, “je” est un autre [grainy, purple shot of baby huddled].*”<sup>14</sup> At this point, the music lightens, as we see smiling men, a petrified hand, and smoke (a residue of fire). An abstracted red form appears on the black screen, and turns out to be the fire in one of the Twin Towers, which is shown next, saturated in the omnipresent blue. A shot reading, “Do you remember Sarajevo,” follows.

It is necessary to recount the opening ten-minute sequence, as it is so chock-full of images, symbols and signifiers that it must be unpacked if it is to be understood. Its location at the very opening of the film ascribes it the important role of forming the lens through which we perceive the next parts. There are several ideas worth exploring in this sequence: 1) the use of documentary footage and cinematic footage, 2) the use of quotations from well-known philosophers like Montesquieu, 3) the invocation of Native Americans, Bosnians, Palestinians and the Twin Towers, 4) the use of the black screen to separate certain shots, 5) the use of montage as a technique to instill neutrality in the spectator. What initially strikes the viewer most is that the devastating and relentless footage onscreen is not all non-fictional. Indeed, documentary footage is mixed with scenes from famous Hollywood films such as *Kiss me, Deadly* and John Ford’s Westerns. Why do the images work so seamlessly together? The fact that real-life images and filmic images follow the same actions and movements asserts the notion that film is a reflection of our human tendencies and habits. It is as if all we can see is visible through a mirror; the films reflect that which we already know and are. Thus, we are inexorably trapped in a box in which all we see is our baseness, but we do not necessarily realize it. The instance during which we realize this, indeed, is when the footage is compressed into ten minutes of film time, devoid of a distracting narrative. Through this mechanism, Godard forces us to see the violent movements for what they are. After a few minutes of the footage, the spectator feels numbed, horrified, or hopeless, all of which are common reactions to the state of affairs in the world. Still, the provocation of these reactions in the viewer is essential for the success of the rest of the film, as the entire center portion of the film, aptly entitled *Purgatory*, offers a similar

---

<sup>12</sup> Translation: “*Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them those who have offended us. Yes, as we forgive them and no differently.*”

<sup>13</sup> Translation: “*Yes, as we forgive them and no differently.*”

<sup>14</sup> Translation: “*One can imagine death in two ways: one, as being the impossible of the possible. The other, the possible of the impossible. In fact, ‘I’ is an other.*”

mirror: it shows people trying to understand conflicts and acting for positive change in their own ways. Thus, the opening sequence is analogous to an anxiety attack, to a moment during which everything combines and combusts. After an explosion, shards must be collected, cleaned, and reassembled.

Godard is famous for citing writers and artists in his film and though it is stylistically divergent from much of his older work, *Notre Musique* consistently follows this practice. Indeed, the opening quote is by Montesquieu, the eighteenth century French philosopher: “*Ainsi, dans le temps des fables, après les inondations et les déluges, il sortit de la terre des hommes armés qui s’exterminèrent.*”<sup>15</sup> The incisive sentence essentially implies that the human instinct to kill has existed from the very beginning. The next quote is: “*Ils sont terribles ici, avec leur manie de trancher la tête des gens. Ce qui m’étonne, c’est qu’il puisse encore y avoir des survivants.*”<sup>16</sup> Again, the killing instinct is treated as an obsession. It is important that “ici” is used, as it creates an idea of a ‘somewhere else,’ somewhere where the state of affairs is or can be different. It is also important to note the idea of the ‘survivor,’ as the characters soon to be introduced to us are ‘survivors.’ Next: “*Pardonnez-nous nos offenses, comme nous les pardonnons à ceux qui nous ont offensés. Oui, comme nous les pardonnons, pas autrement.*”<sup>17</sup> This quote is important as it highlights the idea of collective responsibility and complicity: it implies that if we have been hurt by some entity, it is likely that we too have hurt some other entity. Violence is implicated as a reciprocal, cyclical gesture. The last quote is “*On peut envisager la mort de deux façons: l’une, comme étant l’impossible du possible. L’autre, le possible de l’impossible. Or, je est un autre.*”<sup>18</sup> “‘Je’ est un autre” is the famous Rimbaud quote that inspired the Surrealist and Dada movements. To understand the phrase as it is used in the film’s context does not necessarily require a deep understanding of Rimbaud’s work. In its very grammar, the phrase invokes the absurdity of the concepts of “je” and “autre.” The fact that the phrase rings falsely to the ear corroborates the notion that humans are unwilling to consider themselves as part of a greater whole, a whole that transcends class, ethnicity, and geography. In Western society, and particularly in American society, there is a strong and prevalent insistence on individuality; this insistence superficially frees a person from a sense of implication in events occurring beyond their sense of themselves and their community.

In the first ten minutes of the film, the topics of discussion are introduced through symbolic images that have come to represent much larger realities. Signifiers such as the *keffiyeh* (in conjunction with a gun), the Twin Towers, the swastika, and Native American dress carry meanings before even being brought into discussion or debate. One of the reasons they are flashed so quickly and so brightly in the opening sequence is that they are placed on the same level when treated so swiftly and in such close conjunction. Though it is clear that they are

---

<sup>15</sup> Translation: “*Thus, during the time of fables, after the floods and the deluges, emerged from the earth armed men who exterminated each other.*”

<sup>16</sup> Translation: “*They are horrible here, with their decapitating obsession. What surprises me is that it is possible for there to be ‘survivors’.*”

<sup>17</sup> Translation: “*Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them those who have offended us. Yes, as we forgive them and no differently.*”

<sup>18</sup> Translation: “*One can imagine death in two ways: one, as being the impossible of the possible. The other, the possible of the impossible. In fact, ‘I’ is an other.*”

manifestations of brutality, we tend to see different horrific historical events as separate entities. The neutralizing of the flashing montage enables the spectator to consider these events in a similar way, shedding their individual contexts in the same way that shedding the “je” individual(ism/ity) enables an opening to a different consideration of other people. Next, this flashing of violent signifiers also reveals that because of their prevalence, we have become numb to them: we take them for granted. Finally, by providing us with mostly documentary images of these events, Godard offers us a view of how the journalists, poets, and characters of which the cast is comprised feel and perceive them.

The use of the black screen to separate shots has long been a Godardian staple, and it figures prominently in *Notre Musique*: alongside the footage of documentary and fiction, there is the black screen. Indeed, Godard’s films have been marked by a systematic (if constantly varying) disjunction of sound and image.<sup>19</sup> On the most basic level, the black screen inhibits the shots’ ability to create a logical link amongst themselves. Were there no black screen between the images, the spectator would assume her<sup>20</sup> position as such and form linear narrative clauses between the images. At the same time, the black screen also stands for a gap in the film’s ability to expose or comment on the visions of violence. Indeed, “Godard has famously denounced cinema—notably in *Histoire(s) du Cinéma*—for its failure to bear visual witness to the horror of the Second World War and the Final Solution.”<sup>21</sup> Thirdly, the color black is a signifier in itself: of death, mourning, and ash, for example. Interestingly, death, mourning, and ash are exactly the kinds of images depicted in the sequence. Instead of reenacting historical or filmic moments of violence, is Godard inserting his own interpretation between the shots? After all, were he to stage his own literal reenactment, he would be participating in the propagation and recycling of violent images, putting his work in danger of becoming just another piece of dramatized propaganda.

Indeed, the filmic footage of violence in *Hell* comes from works that glorify war and imbue it with feelings ranging from patriotism, brotherhood, and heroism. These sentiments are not apparent in any of the documentary footage included. Why is it that what is so horrid and gruesome in reality is digested and literally projected as something clear, logical and admirable? This is one of the questions implicitly addressed in the film, and that I will explicitly address throughout this study. Films such as *Saving Private Ryan* employ traditional filmic and narrative techniques to prohibit questioning and encourage patriotic and plainly put, pro-war sentiment. The success of the mass output of similar films attests to this ‘illusory world’s’ *reality*. Ways of seeing differ, surely. Within *Saving Private Ryan* lies *Notre Musique*, and within *Notre Musique* lies the (thankfully untapped) potential for *Saving Private Ryan*. Finally, the divergent guiding philosophies of the films are already apparent in their titles. *Notre Musique* implies responsibility and collectivity; *Saving Private Ryan* outlines the importance of a protagonist from the start, and the action verb ‘saving’ foreshadows the narrative progression, obstacles, and solutions conveniently combined for consumption. Furthermore, the title *Notre Musique* invokes

---

<sup>19</sup> Keith Reader, “Godard and Asynchrony,” in *Forever Godard*, ed., Michael Temple, James S. Williams and Michael Witt (London, Black Dog Publishing, 2004), 72.

<sup>20</sup> There are obviously both female and male viewers, but for the sake of simplicity I will refer to the female viewer throughout this study.

<sup>21</sup> Reader, 79.

the French expression, “C’est toujours la même musique,” (“It’s always the same song/refrain”), a sentiment that echoes that of Montesquieu’s prior quote: the human predisposition for violence is cyclical and never ending.

In the introduction to his book *War Cinema: Hollywood on the Frontline*, Guy Westwell writes that traditional Hollywood war movies “lend shape and structure to war, establishing objectives, and allowing audiences to vicariously experience the danger and excitement of the front line” and that “for America, the war movie was central to the global propaganda campaigns waged during World War I and World War II.”<sup>22</sup> Indeed, such films promote a way of thinking about war that would support and sustain an aggressive foreign policy stance. He continues thus, “...in the immediate aftermath of 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks, Karl Rove, senior adviser to President George Bush Jr, met with several top Hollywood executives to discuss how the film industry might contribute to the ‘war on terror.’”<sup>23</sup> Films such as *Black Hawk Down* and *We Were Soldiers* were supplied with artillery from the Pentagon in exchange for their positive portrayal of the military, such that what the spectator sees on the screen is the *actual apparatus of war*. Beyond the films’ being blatant propaganda, then, they are creating a cultural imagination of war, that is, a wholly fantastical vision of its realities and implications. “Hollywood movies tend to show war as necessary, if not essential, and present the armed forces as efficient, egalitarian, and heroic institutions,” writes Westwell.<sup>24</sup> Given the realities of the depiction of war in mainstream cinema, Godard’s blending of glorified Hollywood footage spanning the ages with painful, raw images is a clear call to the spectator to question the disjunction between the two.

Montage is not typically used to instill an open, if not neutral, perspective and a sense of collectivity in the spectator. To be sure, montage has been used in the past to arouse the spectator’s inner revolutionary, by Sergei Eisenstein, for example, or to precipitate narrative closure, as in myriad plot-driven films. Out of these two practices, the former is more comparable to Godard’s employment of the technique in *Notre Musique*, but it remains fundamentally different, being that Eisenstein used montage as a tool to incite his spectator to physical action, whereas the action to which Godard incites his spectators is different; it is one of contemplation and reflection. Furthermore, he is clearly not in favor of Eisenstein’s conception of action, for even if violence is enacted by the oppressed in revolt, it is nevertheless propagating an aggressive mindset, which Godard would rather replace with dialogue.

## PURGATORY

*Royaume 2-Purgatoire* appears next. A tram moves towards the back of the screen. The music is much smoother now. A Stella Artois beer advertisement on an opposite-moving tram reveals that we are now situated in the present. Cars move simultaneously to the tram, creating a strangely soothing feeling of synchronization. The *Purgatory* sequence is notable for the following reasons: 1) its insistence on technologies of mobility, 2) its mix of real-life authors (Mahmoud Darwish, Juan Goytisolo, and Godard himself) and fictional characters, 3) the

---

<sup>22</sup> Guy Westwell, *War Cinema: Hollywood on the Frontline* (London: Wallflower, 2006), 1.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 3.

Judith/Olga characters' duality, and 4) the self-reflexive lecture on cinema that is the heart of the film, which, in its richness, demands its own section.<sup>25</sup>

The technologies of mobility serve as symbols and metaphors for the state of globalization we presently find ourselves in. The myriad references to transportation are not restricted to modes of transportation, but include the resting points of transit. Notably, the airport is the location at which many of the characters, including Godard, meet each other. One shot in particular, which is captured from an aerial view and reduces Godard and his castmates' figures to practical anonymity, strikingly reflects the philosophy of the film. It asserts that there is always both a larger filmic frame and a larger frame of mind. Also, it again subtly degrades the idea of individual(ity/ism); even the *great* Godard is humbled to the size of an ant. Next, the string symphony that accompanies the opening of *Purgatory* (it consists of trains and automobiles gliding gracefully) evokes the notion of 'our music'. People are comparable to the trains that cross paths and go along their ways, to the cars stuck in traffic, to the planes' abrupt landings. 'Our music' is, furthermore, a technological and compulsively traveling one, in the twenty-first century. When considered in conjunction with the Mostar Bridge, which is an important symbol in the film (discussed at length below), one begins to see how the modes of transportation also represent interaction, exchange and communication. The bridge enables a physical and metaphorical unity, whereas a train and plane enable an expansion of physical and intellectual horizons. Perhaps the insistence on images of mobility also serves as a reminder to the audience that a shifting of gears is possible in terms of an opening onto new cities as well as new ways of seeing.

The casting of famous authors in dialogue with fictional characters follows in this vein: the alchemy between the documentary and fictional characters creates new ways of seeing old topics. Mahmoud Darwish is a well-known Palestinian poet. Juan Goytisolo is a well-known Spanish writer. Jean-Luc Godard stars as himself, a world-famous director attending a conference on the text and the image. The two primary fictional characters are Judith Lerner (Sarah Adler) and Olga Brodsky (Nade Dieu). The rest of the cast consists of unknown actors, with the exception of the famous filmic figures that appear in *Purgatory*. The combination of the beguilingly earnest and convincing fictional young ladies and the 'established' older men creates an undeniable chemistry. Perhaps it is because the avid and engaged young ladies elicit accessible responses from personages who would otherwise be intimidating. The blend is also notable because it creates an amorphous new genre: *Notre Musique* is as direct and potent as a documentary is, while carrying the weight of narrativity and character identification. It is, furthermore, no accident that the female characters are good-looking and look strikingly alike.

The Judith/Olga duality forms the heart of the film and fits squarely into Godard's tried and true usage of iconographic images of women. In the most basic terms, Judith is drawn to the 'light' while Olga is drawn to the 'darkness'; Judith is optimistic, while Olga is less hopeful. Both are Jews of Russian origin. Judith Lerner is introduced first, as an Israeli who spends most of her time in New York, and is writing an article on Sarajevo because it is a place "*where reconciliation seems possible.*" She hopes to get it published in *Haaretz*, but fears that because of aspects such as her interview with famous Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, it will not.

---

<sup>25</sup> See Part Two of this study.

However, she simultaneously considers her journey to be a personal one, and she does not equate a failure to publish with an overall failure of the journey. It is also worth noting that though Godard uses an aesthetic of deconstruction throughout the film, his creation of the Judith/Olga duality is a Structuralist move. In fact, it seems that Judith stands for the text (she is a journalist) and Olga stands for the image (she offers Godard a film she made). In the same way that text and image often deal with identical thoughts and ideas, Judith and Olga *share* a mindset, but project it differently.

Olga's figure is ushered in by the residual voice-over by Juan Goytisolo, which strategically states: "*light is the first animal of the invisible.*" The simultaneity affirms the theme of light and darkness, but what is truly interesting is that Olga is typically characterized as the "darker" of the two 'animals'. Are we perhaps to read the fact that Judith appeared first as her representing the light-- and does this imply that Olga's 'darkness' is just a more blatant way of referring to the 'invisible' and the obscure? This theme, which coincides with the searching process of all of the characters in the film, is also materialized visually. Figures are often shown as dark shadows; half of their face is obscured; images appear blurry; several characters (the translator, Godard, the Native Americans, and Olga) enter the shot with their backs to the spectator. This alludes to the dualities presented in the film; there are two sides to the proverbial coin. It further reminds us that we are spectators to a staged performance, albeit one that is largely a 'documentary'. I would venture to say that *Notre Musique* is a film *that is trying to prove itself wrong*. Its characters assert that between fiction and documentary, documentary connotes death, but the film itself interweaves documentary footage and facts with narrative, revitalizing it and bringing it into a more palatable form. This thought is presented during Godard's lecture, where he tells the students the story of the physicists Borg and Heisenberg, who pass a mediocre-looking castle and realize that only when it is referenced as Elsinor castle (made famous by *Hamlet*) is it regarded as something of note. This reveals the fallibility of the text and the inability of the image to speak for itself. At the same time, it could be argued that it was Shakespeare's imaginary *Hamlet* that rendered the already-significant Elsinor castle famous. It was through an imaginary text that the reality of Elsinor was rendered significant to the masses. It may have otherwise become obscured with the passing of time.

When Olga first appears, she is running down a street, rushing to Godard's lecture. After this introductory shot, we see Judith taking pictures of the Mostar Bridge with her digital camera ("Can they save cinema?" a student later asks a solemnly silent Godard). She interviews Darwish, who asks: "Is the absence of poetry sufficient reason to defeat them? Is poetry patriotic? Can a nation be strong without having its own poetry?" His statement corroborates the idea that imagination, narrative, in short, art, are not only important in the flourishing and unifying of a culture, but their very creation is a sign of the culture's existence and vitality. It is no accident that Godard lingers on the bombed Sarajevo library, which has its books in piles and is in a miserable condition. Goytisolo stands on a piece of scaffolding and muses: "*As our age of endless destructive force, it now needs a revolution of a comparable creative force that reinforces memory, clarifies dreams, and gives substance to images.*" He is literally infusing the hall with culture and new ideas, in the same way that Godard's lecture is infusing a new Sarajevo generation with his ideas. Mostar is not the only bridge being reconstructed.

Olga listens to Godard's lecture with her eyes closed. Her uncle, Ramos, is the translator who has been communicating the words of Goytisolo and Darwish to the other characters and to

the spectators. In a brief and unemotional café scene, she tells him that she wants to commit suicide. Later, she approaches Godard and tells him she made a film. He tells her to give it to someone to hand him and walks off exclaiming, “Champagne!” Champagne was a prop in an earlier scene: at the French Consulate in Sarajevo, a waiter methodically approached each distinguished-looking guest with glasses of champagne. The scene looked absurd when taken in with the images of a decrepit, struggling Sarajevo. The image is apt: the figure of the Frenchman represents a proud and luxurious history. Godard’s inclusion of his champagne moment is thus important, as it symbolizes his acknowledgment that though he is waxing rhapsodic about this subject, he can never truly understand it, because he is in a privileged, an altogether different position. Indeed, as one of the consulate members states, writers do not know what they are talking about. Those who do have firsthand experience in what writers muse on cannot write about the experience, because it oppresses them. Silence equals eradication, death. When the voice is not heard, the opinion is not propagated; it is assumed that the *visible* opinion is the truth. The invisible is not necessarily its opposite, but the unseen and unheard.

It is unclear whether Godard ever sees Olga’s film. He opens the CD case and sees her image (which is on the jacket cover) reflected in the shiny disc itself. It is the materialization of the duality she speaks of throughout, of the other person or part she knows exists (presumably Judith) but has never met. The vision of duality is literally in Godard’s hands. The disc is entitled, *Notre Musique*. Godard later learns of Olga’s death when he is tending to his garden. He receives a call from Ramos, who tells him that a young woman held a movie theater hostage in Jerusalem, threatened to blow it up, and asked if anyone would stay with her in the name of peace. She was shot by the police, who upon opening her satchel found not a bomb, but books. If Olga did not intend on blowing up the theater, it is certain that all she wanted was proof that someone else actually believed in peace. Though I find it realistically improbable for a person to spontaneously agree to blow herself up even if she has faith in peace, the moment clearly demonstrates Olga’s desperation. The un-depicted image of her being shot is striking: the embodiment of peace and hope being gunned down, rendered invisible. It is a moment of violence that could have been included, but Godard lets the spectator imagine it instead. Perhaps this is because it would be rendered too crude and less symbolic if it were portrayed. Next, the venue Olga chose is of note. The cinemagoers’ reluctance to stay in the name of peace and their rush to exit demonstrates that they went to the cinema not to be inspired or enlightened, but for entertainment or escape. They went for sedation, and were aroused to leave their seats only by the sentiment of fear.

The Judith/Olga duality takes place as a procession. Close-ups of Judith appear at the beginning, and once she has gotten her interview with Darwish and taken pictures of the Mostar Bridge, she disappears from sight. As stated above, Olga is introduced from afar so that the two women’s paths cross in screen time, if not in the space of the action. Then, Olga attends Godard’s lecture, meets with her uncle, arranges the DVD drop-off for Godard, and disappears (until the *Paradise* sequence, of course). Judith was shown taking pictures, but Olga possesses the materialized result, the DVD. Thus, Olga completes Judith’s path. Does Olga then represent the next step of Judith’s journey, the step she will reach once she has digested her new knowledge and once her interview has been rejected from *Haaretz* (i.e. once she has experienced firsthand the systematic maiming of her beliefs)? Neither woman’s behavior is coded as the ‘proper’ or ‘right’ behavior, as that would be too simplistic. Yes, Judith is optimistic, while Olga

is pessimistic. Her optimism could be linked to the fact that everything from her name to her ability to speak English and live in the United States codes her as ‘Western,’ and thus more *removed* (and naïve?). She has been granted access to interviews with Darwish, whereas Godard slightly snubs Olga’s DVD. Judith is attached to an Elsinor-like name, ‘*Haaretz*,’ while Olga is the essence of the lone character; in the sea of students at the Godard lecture, she appears separated, closing her eyes constantly as if she cannot bear to witness the reality around her. Still, the women’s similarities are undeniable. They are even reflected in their faces, like mirrors.

Judith and Olga are linked through the use of the close-up. As Béla Balázs wrote, “close-ups are often dramatic revelations of what is really happening under the surface of appearances.”<sup>26</sup> He also wrote that “facial expression is the most subjective manifestation of man, more subjective even than speech, for vocabulary and grammar are subject to more or less universally valid rules and conventions, while the play of features [...] is a manifestation not governed by objective canons, even though it is largely a matter of imitation.”<sup>27</sup> This rings true, in a film that grapples with the fallibility of words and of images of *places*. Godard, Levinas and Balázs see the face as the most honest entity. The close-ups of the women’s faces reveal their physical likeness, but also the essence of attentiveness and engagement. Philosopher Emmanuel Levinas’s *Le visage de l’autre* is the book Judith carries throughout; Godard’s filming style is in accordance with Levinas’s belief that the face symbolizes “ce que tu ne tueras pas,”<sup>28</sup> that which you shall not kill. It must be noted that Godard also includes a close-up of the beautiful and similarly symmetrical-faced Native American woman as she utters some thoughts on her people’s condition. As he famously has throughout the ages, he chooses attractive women as his icons. The camera hails to them, inciting the spectator to do so as well. Is his use of beautiful women problematic? Does it matter? I choose to understand it as such: that he is relating the notions of beauty with spirituality and transcendence. It brings up the question: if humans are so receptive to beauty (and they are), why are they so receptive to violence?

The appearance of the Native Americans does not make sense; they do not belong in Sarajevo. This is precisely the point, because it leads the spectator to ask: “where *do* they belong?” They once had a homeland (for which they showed respect) and were relegated to its poorest reservations, without reservation. Their appearance adds yet another dimension to the film, as it reminds us of how we perceive the distant past. Sarajevo is too close in history, the reconciliation still too possible, for us to know how we will think of it in the future. Furthermore, this is an example of Godard’s use of the Brechtian device of *distanciation*.<sup>29</sup> He deliberately inserts the Native Americans in scenes such as the Judith/Darwish interview, as a reminder of their non-existence in an international dialogue. On a side note, the fact that Darwish and Judith are engaged in a dialogue, then, is a positive thing, although Darwish asserts that the

---

<sup>26</sup> Béla Balázs. “The Close Up and The Face of Man,” in *The visual turn : classical film theory and art history*, ed. Angela Dalle Vacche (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 118.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 120.

<sup>28</sup> Jean-Luc Godard, *Notre Musique*.

<sup>29</sup> Brecht’s *distanciation* theory aims at liberating the viewer of passive identification with fictional worlds through methods such as defamiliarization.

international community only cares about Palestinians because they care about Israel. The United States has succeeded in eradicating the Native Americans to the point that such a dialogue would be unheard of, or ignored. Hence their depiction on the fringes of *Notre Musique* is realistic despite its seeming absurdity. Next, the fact that Judith later sees the Native Americans by the Mostar bridge, dressed in Western clothes and loading a pick-up truck (an all-American symbol, ironically) and then ‘imagines’ a vision of them standing in traditional Native American garb proves that they are not just being inserted as documentary. The fact that Judith cannot see them without conjuring their ‘traditional’ image communicates that their culture has been frozen in time. As conveyed by their clothing, much has changed, but no one can quite understand because their voice has not been heard and their new image has not been seen in the mainstream. No one wants to see the new image in the mainstream, furthermore, because it unpleasantly re-inserts the occulted past into the present.

## PARADISE

Lush green vegetation encompasses Olga as she walks through a lakeside paradise, her back turned to the screen. The leaves make their own music, a hushed and relaxing sound. She turns her body towards the screen, and though she does not address the spectator, we hear her voice-over whisper: “*Ils sont deux, côte à côte [looking around]. A côté d’elle, c’est moi. Elle, je ne l’ai jamais vu. Moi, je me reconnais. C’est comme une image. Mais qui viendrait de loin.*”<sup>30</sup> The camera cuts to a babbling brook; in the distance, we perceive Olga climbing through the greenery to the water. This is an interesting moment, as it offers us an image that Olga herself cannot see (reminiscent of the aforementioned aerial airport shot). The playing of music facilitates the cut to the next shot. The camera slowly pans over moss-covered rocks, clear water and fresh leaves, while classical music plays; the sound of water flowing complements the orchestrated music. The camera’s tentative, exploratory motion gives the spectator the impression that he or she is seeing the greenery through Olga’s eyes. The mounting and descending music echoes Olga’s emotions as she witnesses the site. A new shot reveals an African man in a Marines costume, fishing by the water; Olga does not seem to notice him. Next, we see a barbed wire fence covering this beautiful bit of land. Behind it, two Marines are engaged in a conversation. One walks off, gun in hand. Olga enters the shot, and we hear an indecipherable but unsurprisingly patriotic US Marines chant. Dumbfounded, Olga approaches the spot where the Marine sits, listening to the radio, next to a child reading a book. He motions for her to hold out her arm, and upon the confirmation that she has no pulse, lets her pass beyond the barbed wire and into the lush paradise. Young people play with strands of leaves; a young man reads the book *Sans espoir de retour* by noir fiction author David Goodis; a dog grazes on grass. Bikini-clad girls giggle as they play ball with their male counterparts. The water begins flowing at a more hurried pace. Olga places herself alongside a young man by a solitary edge of the water. They share an apple, like Adam and Eve. The reference to the narrative ‘beginning of the world’ as we know it comes poignantly at the end of the movie. It reminds us of the initial Montesquieu quote that describes the appearance of Man and the subsequent exterminations. Is this meant to be a clue of cyclicity? A close-up of Olga reveals her eyes closed, as she had closed them during Godard’s lecture. Her face is pale, her gaze is grave. The voice-over notably

---

<sup>30</sup> Translation: “*They are two, side by side. Next to her, it is me. I have never seen her. I recognize myself. It is like an image. But one that would come from afar.*”

reminiscent of the voice-over in *Hell* states, “*Il faisait assez beau et clair. On voyait très loin, mais pas jusqu’où Olga était partie.*”<sup>31</sup> Who is speaking, Olga or Judith? Her eyes well up a bit and she closes them again. The final credits for photography and production begin rolling, signaling the end of the film.

The final ten minutes, though the most placid and lovely of all the moments in the film, are almost more perplexing and complex in their suggested meanings and proposed questions. The following components of the sequence beg exploration and elaboration: 1) Olga is in a paradisiacal venue, but it is guarded by the U.S. Marines, 2) Olga bites into an apple, à la Adam and Eve, suggesting one version of the *beginning* of the world’s ‘narrative’ and not the end of a film, 3) the problematic voice-over (is it Judith narrating as in the opening sequence?), and 4) the ambiguity of the locale’s signifiers.

In *The Nation*, Stuart Klawans writes that Godard’s *Paradise* represents also a Bazinian<sup>32</sup> abandoned paradise of “long takes and unforced meanings—a paradise that remains accessible to anyone who cares to enter.”<sup>33</sup> This quote draws the notion of the ethics of montage further. It is no accident that *Hell* is characterized by a manic use of montage, whereas *Paradise* is characterized by long, lingering tracking shots. The camera movements are the second layer of meaning to the content: violence versus ‘pure’ nature. And yet, Godard uses different styles of montage *ethically*. The Post Structuralist method by which every reference in the film points to another reference is at play in his use of different camera techniques. The goal is not to submerge the spectator into a new world of escapism, but to offer different worlds, words, and camera styles to them in a manner so as to encourage thought and pondering.

*Paradise* is an unsettling ending, for reasons both obvious and hidden. Clearly, the fact that it is guarded by the United States Marines invokes the ‘reality’ of America’s hegemony and of its control over natural resources. Furthermore, a man hands Olga an apple in a clear, but subverted, reference to the biblical narrative. The apple is an omen for negativity to come. Is Godard perhaps suggesting that such negativity is linked to patriarchy? However subtle these discrepancies may be, they still make it clear to the spectator that there is more to the story than the charming, idyllic facade. The image of paradise is beautiful, at first, and the spectator is inclined to sigh in relief that Olga has been rewarded for her morality. And yet, when we take the above factors into account, we realize that the so-called paradise is controlled by an army and by men, in particular. Since I have spent time discussing signifiers during this analysis, I must mention that certain aspects of the paradisiacal setting are reminiscent of the Greek mythological ‘after-life.’ The flowing water could equal the river Styx, the aforementioned dog could represent Cerberus, and the Marine could stand in for Hades. This reference invokes a less-than-pleasant after-life. Furthermore, it is interesting that elements of Christian mythology and Greek mythology were inserted into this final scene. This blending of *imaginaries* (which to those ‘imagining’ them are ‘truths’) reveals yet again that there is no single ‘truth,’ but different ways

---

<sup>31</sup> Translation: “*It was rather pretty and clear out. We could see very far, but not so far as to see to where Olga had left.*”

<sup>32</sup> André Bazin, the father figure of the *Cahiers du cinema*, had faith in the cinema to represent ‘reality’ through the tracking shot.

<sup>33</sup> Stuart Klawans, “Godard’s Inferno,” *The Nation*, December 20, 2004, 40-43.

of representing stories. Indeed, we seek to create representations in order to understand our world.

### Part Two: Godard's lecture

In what moments does the individual separate from the group? In the heart of the film, Godard lectures a group of students at a colloquium in Sarajevo. The footage documents an event that actually took place. Godard lectures on icons and of the fallibility of images. Then, the camera pans over the students' faces. Bodies shift and some eyelids droop; some eyes are closed in contemplation. Immediately, I was inclined to interpret that the majority of the students were bored. After all, the space is coded as claustrophobic and dark, and no one looks particularly alert. And yet one cannot know what each person is thinking, and how the images and words being transmitted to them are affecting them. How does one interpret this scene in relation to its sequence, to the greater film as a whole, to the movement of lecturing and receiving, to the individual and collective existence?

The conference, as aforementioned, introduces us to the character of Olga, who sits in the audience. The rest of the film follows her path; the lecture inspired her, incited her to some sort of action. As stated above, Olga makes a film and gives it to Godard. We are never shown Godard watching the DVD. At the end of the film, though, as he tends to his garden, he receives a call during which he is informed that Olga threatened to take a theater hostage in Israel, asking if anyone would join her in the name of peace, rather than for the propagation of violence. There is an ongoing question about the effectiveness of books (and all that they represent) throughout the film. This *mise en question*, or putting-into-question, is interesting, being that Godard claims that the field of the text has taken over the field of vision-- that the text has won, and no one truly pays attention to the image anymore. Is there not an implication here, though, that books are analogous to weapons? The line, "*Humane men don't start revolutions, they create libraries*" and the echo ("*cemeteries*") further abstracts the role of books and of their power. "*Tuer un homme pour défendre une idée, ce n'est pas défendre une idée, c'est tuer un homme*"<sup>34</sup> brings into dialogue the tense relationship between ideas (whose home could be said to be books) and violence.

Perhaps Godard's answer to this is the notion of "*juste une conversation*," of a dialogue between people and peoples. The result is an aperture, an opening. Ideas of opening and dialogue have a clear tie to the term 'colonization'. Colonization of a landscape, or a mindscape, is liable to occur when the 'attacking' party perceives of openness, an opportunity for some gain. This gain is certainly not intended to be mutually beneficial, but concentrated in the hands of those wielding the power, who also happen to be the ones writing the historical narrative afterwards. A dialogue is not encouraged. To the contrary, the weaker party's mind, mouth, or body is vulnerable to maiming. One person, or nation, speaks and silences the others. They are thus robbed of their ability and freedom to act, live, and think.

The mid-sequence is an opportunity for a different opening, for a dialogue. In questioning the integrity of certain images, Godard is pleading with the viewer to re-consider

---

<sup>34</sup> Translation: "*To kill a man to defend an idea is not defending an idea, it is killing a man.*"

them, to see them differently-- or simply to look at them in the eye, deeply. The danger of not looking or listening deeply is being carried away by the surface appearance of sounds, of being visually or intellectually colonized. Colonization has become a trendy term by now, in reference to the Western control over so-called indigenous regions. However, this is hardly a new concept. As Godard's opening sequence, *Hell*, forcefully implies, violence is an integral component of the human being, individually and collectively; it is part of the vocabulary and language of humans. The advantage of analyzing a recently-released film that probes into current or contemporary phenomena in the history of the world is that I can feel some sense of relation to the situations, by virtue of the fresh imprints they have left and are leaving on the world. Godard includes the Native American plight, the Israel-Palestine plight, and the Bosnia-Sarajevo plight in his film. Each plight is treated differently, explicitly or implicitly. Godard manipulates text and image into incongruity (asynchrony) to reveal meanings that are better off being felt than stated. This is because, colonization (intellectual) implies desensitization to words and images that have been reduced or exploited into a rhetoric and iconography devoid of depth. The richness of the issue lies in the fact that words and images can be used to conceal and reveal; and they can be concealed and revealed, susceptible to manipulation as they are.

The characters in the film are 'victims' or 'victors' in one way or another (simple example: Darwish, as a Palestinian, is a 'victim'). Together they undertake the task of challenging their prescribed identities. For example, as an Israeli Jew, Judith could be seen as both a 'victim' and a 'victor'. Is our victimhood arbitrary and can we reclaim it somehow (by being intellectually--or otherwise-- active)? Does Judith feel guilt as an Israeli or has she gained some sort of transcendent meaning seeing that she is both the result and the cause of unjust situations? She is both the fiction and the documentary, in Godard's words.

The parallel between the editing process and the rebuilding of the Mostar Bridge is astutely brought up in *Artforum International*:

The movie takes as its ruling metaphors the ruined Sarajevo library and Mostar's stari most, the sixteenth-century stone bridge that outlived the Ottomans and the Communists and withstood two World Wars before being pulverized by Croatian artillery in 1993. Godard observes the French engineer Gilles Pequeux rebuilding the Mostar bridge: The process, which involves painstakingly labeling and reassembling every stone salvaged from the river, suggests old-fashioned editing.<sup>35</sup>

This metaphor is striking being that the film relies on dualities to create meanings; it does not see dualities as opposites, but as spaces between which new meanings arise from tensions. Thus the stones of the Mostar Bridge are the pieces of our fragmented and flawed existence, and remnants of our ability to build connections and bonds, rather than literally 'burn' bridges. The filmmaker's task, then, is to build a bridge between himself and the spectator, as well as between the jagged lived life and a more refined, thought-provoking reflection thereof. This is another example of Godard's 'ethics of montage'. The way in which the stones and shots are placed determines the effectiveness and integrity of the final endeavor. Furthermore, it is notable that

---

<sup>35</sup> J. Hoberman, "C'est la guerre: J. Hoberman on Cannes and the contemporary war film," *Artforum International*, September 2004, 43.

Gilles Pequieux refers to the rebuilding process as “learning a new language,”<sup>36</sup> as *Notre Musique* is preoccupied with the notion of dialogue. The bridge and the film are thus metaphorically designated as catalysts for dialogue and communication. Furthermore, throughout the film, Judith Lerner conspicuously carries a copy of Emmanuel Levinas’s *Entre nous*, and his philosophy palpably guides her (and the film’s) quest.

The lecture sequence is also important because it is the most self-reflexive section, one that discusses the potential of cinema and its future, topics dear to the director. Godard describes how the shot-reverse-shot is the essence of film grammar. Rosalind Russell mirrors Cary Grant in *His Girl Friday*, setting up a false opposition, rather than a real dialogue. In much the same way, Palestinians are made into the false mirror of the Jews, he believes. Next, the lecture focuses attention on the use of the tracking shot: the camera depicts a real-life audience. The image is then placed within the fictionalized narrative. The camera pans to the right and then to the left of the audience, which is comprised of college-aged Sarajevo students. The tracking shot is used in other parts of the film: first, with the myriad shots of trams that serve as connectors between each sequence of the film; next, the shots of the central market, which is full of people; thirdly, the camera pans over Godard’s garden in the final scene of *Purgatory*; the most obvious tracking shot takes place in *Paradise*, where the camera moves in smooth accord with the water flowing in the river. These moments depict faces, machines, masses of bodies, and placid landscapes. In the same way that the close-up signifies transcendence and potency in the film, the tracking shot seems to imply varying degrees of connectivity or collectivity. The lake shot is the culmination of this connectivity because it represents a positive natural harmony that can only be found in nature. The students’ faces, on the other hand, are all separate entities; the students are in their own worlds, they do not interact, but they are together. This could be said of our society today: we do the same things, we imitate each other’s behavior, but separately. There is a tension between the humans’ separation during the lecture and the liquidity of the tram’s motion. The camera’s insistence on showing the tram (with lovely background music, no less) grants texture and even humanity to what is so obviously inanimate. Furthermore, Godard’s plane landing and its departure are also shown in the film. The visibility of these moments (and of other moments of journey and arrival) speaks to the film’s insistence on eschewing popular cinematic standards of illusory seamlessness in favor of a deconstruction aesthetic, which equates our personal complexities with those of filmmaking and of political affairs. The planes, cars, and trains are not just methods of getting around; they are characters in our existence, members of our communities. In that vein, as proper transportation is a sign of movement, communication, the inclusion of so many images of transportation devices could also be read as a sign of the budding regeneration of Sarajevo.

## Conclusion

This paper strove to demonstrate how *Notre Musique*’s aesthetic make-up embodies its ethics. In Part One, I provided sequence analyses of the three sections of the film: *Hell*, *Purgatory*, and *Paradise*. In *Hell*, I unpacked the rich ten-minute montage of violent scenes from footage real and fake and analyzed the implications of their pairing. I argued that by usurping the satisfaction provided by a shot-reverse shot of violence (ending in some form of

---

<sup>36</sup> *Notre Musique*.

resolution) and instead replaying violent movement after violent movement, Godard revealed both the prevalence of the violent instinct in humankind as well as its endless depiction and glorification in cinema. In *Purgatory*, I introduced the characters, both fictional and real, that would spend the bulk of the film discussing some of the political and human rights issues pictorially depicted in the opening sequence. Whereas in *Hell*, documentary footage of violence and fictional footage of violence that were paired, in *Purgatory*, the characters themselves were both documentary and fictional. Significantly, their coexistence was not at all as troubling as in *Hell*. To the contrary, in *Purgatory*, the richness resulting from the blending of documentary and narrative became clear.

*Notre Musique*'s ethics are characterized by Godard's aesthetic choice of clinging onto two important elements of a narrative (fictional character and scenarios) when dealing with documentary topics. In blending documentary footage with staged footage, Godard states, he is encouraging the philosophy of looking at the visible to see the invisible. Indeed, it is often the case that what is not or misrepresented in the cinema (and media in general) is an essential piece of the truth and reality. Therefore, the *imaginaire* of fiction sometimes more successfully communicates an idea than does documentary footage. One example of a fertile *imaginaire* is the staged interview between the internationally known poet, Mahmoud Darwish, and the fictional character of a journalist, Judith Lerner. The honest and potent exchange between the two characters demonstrates Godard's belief that people have faith in the imaginary, and doubt reality: the spectator needs the imaginary in order to submit himself or herself to a narrative.

In the final section of Part One, *Paradise*, I discussed the irony of the title *Paradise*, being that the beautiful lake depicted in the sequence is guarded by US Marines. The fact that the paradise itself is the resting place of one of the intelligent and young fictional characters, Olga Brodsky, adds to the irony. Yet again, Godard refuses to provide clarity or solutions, preferring instead to encourage complexity and contradiction; it provides more fare to dialogue with, after all. Next, in Part Two, I focused on Godard's lecture to a group of cinema students in Sarajevo. During the lecture, Godard explicitly discusses the ethics and implications of montage, summoning up the memory of *Hell* and adding a self-reflexive dimension to the film, with reference to his cinema. On a wider level, the film is about the relationship and responsibility that an art form has to events in the world.

In writing this paper, I hoped to participate in the activity to which Godard summons his students and spectators throughout the film: a dialogue. The film's theme is to dialogue with the fiction, with the documentary, and even with the perceived enemy. When something lacks representation, it is forgotten; when violence is endlessly depicted as triumphant, it will become embedded in the minds of many as such. It is therefore vital to dialogue, on levels both individual and international, as the act itself keeps ideas alive, creating openings for growth and change. The fact that the motivating force for the reconstruction of the Mostar Bridge (the film's most explicit symbol) was the physical and symbolic reattachment of two territories is quite potent: it is for the sake of a *dialogue* that the bridge is being remade.

## Bibliography

- Balázs, Béla. "The Close Up and The Face of Man." In *The visual turn : classical film theory and art history*, edited by Angela Dalle Vacche, 118-120. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2003.
- Bayart, Jean-François. *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005.
- Castoriadis, Cornelius. *L'Institution imaginaire de la société*. Paris: Seuil, 1975.
- Daney, Serge. "The Godard Paradox." In *Forever Godard*, edited by Michael Temple, James S. Williams, and Michael Witt, 68-71. London: Black Dog Publishing, 2004.
- Eisenstein, Sergei. "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form." In *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, edited by Jay Leyda. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1949.
- Histoire(s) du cinéma*. DVD. Directed by Jean-Luc Godard. France: Gaumont DVD, 1998.
- Hoberman, J. "C'est la guerre: J. Hoberman on Cannes and the contemporary war film." *Artforum International Magazine*, Sept. 2004: 43-45.
- Klawans, Stuart. "Godard's Inferno." *The Nation* (Dec. 20, 2004): 40-43.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. *Le visage de l'autre*. [S.I.]: Seuil, 2001.
- Notre Musique*. VHS. Directed by Jean-Luc Godard. New York, NY: Wellspring Media, 2005.
- Reader, Keith. "Godard and Asynchrony." In *Forever Godard*, edited by Michael Temple, James S. Williams, and Michael Witt, 72-93. London: Black Dog Publishing, 2004.
- Saving Private Ryan*. DVD. Directed by Steven Spielberg. Universal City, CA: Dreamworks Home Entertainment, 1999.
- Virilio, Paul. *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*. London: Verso, 1989.
- Westwell, Guy. *War Cinema: Hollywood on the Front Line*. London: Wallflower, 2006.

## Sources Consulted

Callahan, Vicki. "Gravity and Grace." In *Forever Godard*, edited by Michael Temple, James S. Williams, and Michael Witt, 188-199. London: Black Dog Publishing, 2004.

*La Chinoise*. DVD. Directed by Jean-Luc Godard. Koch Lorber Films, 1967.

Ferro, Marc. "Les oublis de l'Histoire." In *La mémoire et l'oubli*. Paris: EHESS, 1989.

*Forever Mozart*. VHS. Directed by Jean-Luc Godard. New York: New Yorker Video, 2005.

Godard, Jean-Luc. *Histoire(s) du Cinema*. Paris: Gallimard, 1998.

———. *Jean -Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard / edition établie par Alain Bergala*. Paris: Editions de l'Etoile, 1985.

———. *Son + Image, 1974-1991*. New York: Museum of Modern Art: Distributed by H.N. Abrams, 1992.

Lapierre, Nicole. *La mémoire et l'oubli*. Paris: Seuil, 1988.

*Le Petit Soldat*. VHS. Directed by Jean-Luc Godard. Fox Lorber, 1960.

*Pulp Fiction*. DVD. Directed by Quentin Tarantino. Miramax International, 1994.

Silverman, Kaja and Harun Farocki. *Speaking About Godard*. New York: New York University Press, 1998.

Skoller, Jeffrey. *Shadows, Specters. Shards: Making History in Avant-Garde Film*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005.

Sontag, Susan. "Godard." In *Styles of radical will*, edited by Susan Sontag, 147-189. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969.

Temple, Michael, James S. Williams, and Michael Witt. *Forever Godard*. London: Black Dog Publishing, 2004.

Veyne, Paul. *Les Grecs ont-ils cru à leurs mythes? Essai sur l'imagination constituante*. Paris: Seuil, 1983.

*Week-end*. VHS. Directed by Jean-Luc Godard. New York: New Yorker Video, 1967.

Wollen, Peter. "Godard and Counter-Cinema: *Vent d'Est*." In *Readings and Writings: Semiotic Counter-Strategies*. London: New Left Books, 1982.