

Jean-Luc Godard interviewed by Jean-Marc Lalanne about *Film Socialisme* in the French cultural magazine *Les Inrockuptibles* (18 May 2010), published daily during the Cannes Film Festival.

“The Right of the Author? An Author has only Duties”

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The filmmaker received us at his home in Switzerland for a provocative, and intimate, interview. Welcome to Rolle.

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LALANNE: Why the title *Film Socialisme*?

GODARD: I always have titles in advance. They give me some indication of films that I could make.

A title preceding any idea for a film, it's rather like the 'A' in music. I have a whole list of them. Like titles of nobility, or share titles. More like share titles. I started out with *Socialisme*, but as the film started taking shape, the title became less and less satisfactory. The film could just as well have been called *Communisme* or *Capitalisme*. But there was a funny coincidence: In reading a little brochure I had sent him, in which the name of the production company Vega Film preceded the title, Jean-Paul Curnier [*philosopher*. —JML] read "*Film Socialisme*" and thought it was the title. He wrote me a twelve-page letter telling me how much he liked it. I thought to myself that he must be right, and decided to keep *Film* in front of *Socialisme*. It made the word sound less naïve.

LALANNE: Where does the idea of the cruise through the Mediterranean come from? Homer?

GODARD: At first I was thinking of another story that would take place in Serbia, but this did not work. Then I had the idea of a family in a garage, the Martin family. This didn't work either for a feature-length film because the people would have become characters, and whatever took place would have turned into a story. The story of a mother and her children, a film like some of those made in France, with lines of dialogue, and moods.

LALANNE: In fact, the family members here almost resemble characters in ordinary fiction. This has not happened in your cinema for a long time...

GODARD: Yes, maybe... Not totally though. Scenes are interrupted before anyone turns into a character. Instead, they are more like statues. Statues that speak. If we speak of statues, we think 'it comes from another time'. And we say 'another time', then we go on a journey, we set sail on the Mediterranean. Thus the cruise. I had read a book by Léon Daudet, the early twentieth-century polemicist, called *Le Voyage de Shakespeare* [*Shakespeare's Journey*, 1927]. It followed the young Shakespeare's journey on the Mediterranean. He hadn't written anything yet. All these ideas came bit by bit.

LALANNE: How did you go about arranging all this?

GODARD: There are no rules. It stems from poetry, or painting, or mathematics. Especially traditional geometry. The desire to compose figures, to put a circle around a square, to draw a tangent. It is elementary geometry. If it is elementary, there are elements. I therefore show the sea... That's it, it can't really be described, these are associations. And if we are saying association, we can then say socialism.

LALANNE: If we say socialism, we can speak about politics. The HADOPI laws [*set of French laws against illegal downloading*], for example, or the matter of prosecuting illegal downloads, or the property of images...

GODARD: I am against HADOPI, of course. There is no intellectual property. I am against inheritance, for example. That the children of an artist might enjoy the rights of their parents' body of work, why not, until they come of age. But afterwards, I don't find it obvious that Ravel's children get the royalties from *Boléro*...

LALANNE: You don't claim any rights over the images that artists lift from your films?

GODARD: Of course not. In fact, people do it, put their work up on the Internet, and in general it's not very good... But I don't have the feeling that they're taking something away from me. I don't have the Internet. Anne-Marie [*Miéville, his partner and a filmmaker —JML*] uses it. In my film, some images come from the Internet, like the images of the two cats

together.

LALANNE: For you, there's no difference in status between those anonymous images of cats that circulate on the Internet, and the shot from John Ford's *Cheyenne Autumn* that you're also making use of in *Film Socialisme*?

GODARD: Statutorily, I don't see why I should be differentiating between the two. If I had to plead in a court of law against charges of pinching images for my films, I would hire two lawyers with two different systems. One would defend the right of quotation, which barely exists for the cinema. In literature, you can quote extensively. In *Miller [Genius and Lust: A Journey Through the Major Writings of Henry Miller, 1976 —JML]* by Norman Mailer, there's 80% Henry Miller, and 20% Norman Mailer. In science, no scientist pays a fee to use a formula established by a colleague. This is quotation, and cinema does not allow it. I read Marie Darrieussecq's book, *Rapport de police [Police Report: Accusations of Plagiarism and Other Modes of Surveillance in Fiction, 2010]*, and I found it very good because she traces the history of this issue. The author's right - it's really not possible. An author has no rights. I have no rights. I have only duties.

And then in my film, there's another type of borrowing, not a quotation, but an excerpt. Like a blood test, when a sample gets taken for analysis. This would be my second lawyer's plea. He would defend, for example, my use of the shots of trapeze artists taken from *The Beaches of Agnès*. This shot is not a quotation, I am not quoting Agnès Varda's film: I am benefiting from her work. I am taking an excerpt, which I am incorporating somewhere else so that it acquires another meaning, in this case, symbolizing peace between Israel and Palestine. I did not pay for this shot. But if Agnès asked me for money, I think we could offer her a fair amount of money. In other words, a price in proportion with the economy of the film, the number of spectators it reaches...

LALANNE: In order to metaphorically express peace in the Middle East, why do you prefer to divert one of Agnès Varda's images instead of shooting your own?

GODARD: I found the metaphor in Agnès' film very good.

LALANNE: But the metaphor is not in her film...

GODARD: No, of course not. I am the one who builds it by displacing the image. I don't think I have harmed the image. I found it perfect for what I wanted to say. If the Palestinians and the Israelis put on a circus and did a trapeze act together, things would be different in the Middle East. For me, this image strikes a perfect chord, exactly what I wanted to express. Thus I am taking the image, since it exists.

LALANNE The film's socialism consists in undermining the idea of property, starting with that of cultural works...

GODARD: There shouldn't be any property over artworks. Beaumarchais only wanted to enjoy a portion of the receipts from *The Marriage of Figaro*. He may have said "*I am the one who wrote Figaro.*" But I don't think he would have said, "*Figaro is mine.*" This notion of property over artworks came later on. Today, a guy installs lighting on the Eiffel Tower — he gets paid for it; but if you film the Eiffel Tower, you also have to pay this guy something.

LALANNE: Your film will be available online via FilmoTV [French VoD site] at the same time as we'll be able to go see it in a cinema...

GODARD: That wasn't my idea. When we made the trailers, trailers being the whole film speeded-up, I suggested putting them up on YouTube because it's a good way of getting things to circulate. Putting the film up online was the distributor's idea. They gave money for the film, so I do what I am told. If it were up to me, I would not have released it in the cinemas this way. It took us four years to make this film. In production terms, the film is very atypical. There were four of us shooting it, myself, Battaglia, Arragno, and Grivas. Each one would go on his own and bring back images. Grivas went to Egypt alone and brought back hours of footage... We gave ourselves a lot of time. I think the film could have benefited from a similar relationship to time in its distribution.

LALANNE: What does that mean, in concrete terms?

GODARD: I would have liked a young man and woman to be hired, a couple who would have the desire to show things, who would be linked to cinema a little, the sort of young people you meet in small festivals. They are given a copy of the film on DVD, then asked to train as skydivers. Then, places are randomly picked on a map of France and they are parachuted down into these locations. They have to show the film wherever they land. In a

café, at a hotel... they manage. They have people pay 3 or 4 Euros to get in, not more. They can film this adventure, and sell it later on. Thanks to them, you investigate what it means to distribute such a film. Only then can you take decisions, can you know whether or not the film can be screened in regular cinemas. But not before having investigated it for a year or two. Because beforehand, you are just like me: you don't know what the film is, you don't know who might be interested in it.

LALANNE: You've deserted the media a bit. In the 1980s, you were more visible in the press, on TV...

GODARD: Yes, it bores me now. I am no longer looking to subvert a certain process of television. At the time, I believed in that, a little. I didn't think that it would change anything, but that it might get other people interested in doing things differently. It interests them for three minutes. There are still things I am interested in on television: programmes about animals, history channels. I like *House* too. Someone is injured, everybody gathers around him, the characters express themselves in hyper-technical jargon, I like it. But I could not watch ten episodes in a row.

LALANNE: Why did you invite Alain Badiou and Patti Smith to be in your latest film, to end up filming them so little?

GODARD: Patti Smith was there so I filmed her. I don't see why I should have filmed her for any length of time greater than I would have, say, a waitress.

LALANNE: Why did you ask her to be there?

GODARD: So that there would be one good American. Someone who embodies something other than imperialism.

LALANNE: And Alain Badiou?

GODARD: I wanted to quote a text about geometry by Husserl and I wanted someone to develop something of his own from that. It interested him.

LALANNE: Why film him in front of an empty auditorium?

GODARD: Because his lecture did not interest any tourist on the cruise. We had announced

that there would be a lecture on Husserl, and no one showed up. When we took Badiou into this empty room, he liked it a lot. He said: "*Finally, I get to speak in front of nobody.*" [laughs] I could have framed him closer and not filmed the empty room but it was important to show that it was a speech in the desert, that we are in the desert. It makes me think of Jean Genet's sentence: "*You have to go looking for images because they are in the desert.*" In my cinema, there are never any intentions. I did not invent this empty auditorium. I don't want to say anything, I try to show, or to get feelings across, or to allow something else to be said after.

LALANNE: When you hear: "*Today the bastards are sincere, they believe in Europe,*" what else is there to say? That one can't believe in Europe without being an asshole?

GODARD: It's a sentence that came to me while reading some passages from *Nausea*. In those times, the bastard was not sincere. A torturer knew he was not being honest. Today, the bastard is sincere. As for Europe, it has existed for a long time, there is no need to make it as we are making it. I find it hard, for example, to understand how someone can be a member of its parliament, like Dany [Daniel Cohn-Bendit —JML]. It is odd, isn't it?

LALANNE: Ecology shouldn't be at the heart of a political party?

GODARD: You know, parties... Parties are always biased. Even their names, sometimes. De Gaulle was against parties. After the Liberation, he nevertheless brought the parties to the Resistance Council [*Conseil de la Résistance*] in order to show some weight to the Americans. Even the National Front was there. Except it was not the same thing as it is today. It was, at the time, an endeavour of the Communist Party. I don't really know why the other ones held onto that name afterward. A bias...

LALANNE: The second-to-last quotation in the film is: "*When the law is unjust, justice precedes the law...*"

GODARD: It refers to authors' rights. Every DVD starts off with a warning title from the FBI that criminalizes copying. I looked for Pascal. But you might understand something else in this sentence. You can think, for example, of Roman Polanski's arrest.

LALANNE: What do you think of the fact that Polanski's arrest took place in your country, Switzerland?

GODARD: Me, I am Franco-Swiss. I pass for Swiss, but I am a French resident, I pay my

taxes in France. In Switzerland, I like certain landscapes that I would find hard to do without. And I have some roots here. But politically speaking, I am shocked by lots of things. In relation to Polanski, Switzerland did not have to submit itself to the United States. They should have discussed, not accepted. I would have like filmmaker going to Cannes to rally around Polanski, to affirm that Swiss justice is not just. Just as they have done to support the imprisoned filmmaker Jafar Panahi. Just as we have said: "The Iranian regime is a bad regime," we should say "the Swiss regime is not good."

LALANNE: The ban on minarets?

GODARD: That's pointless... As far as Switzerland is concerned, I think like Qaddafi: French-speaking Switzerland belongs to France; German Switzerland belongs to Germany; Italian Switzerland belongs to Italy; that's it, no more Switzerland!

LALANNE: The Greek crisis resonates strongly with your film...

GODARD: We should thank Greece. It is the West that has a debt toward Greece. Philosophy, Democracy, Tragedy... One always forgets the links between tragedy and democracy. Without Sophocles no Pericles. Without Pericles no Sophocles. The technological world in which we live owes everything to Greece. Who invented logic? Aristotle. If this and if that, then this. Logic. This is what the dominant powers use all day, making sure that there is no contradiction whatsoever, that we stay within the same logic. Hannah Arendt herself said that logic leads to totalitarianism. As a consequence, today, everybody owes Greece money. Greece could ask the contemporary world for one thousand billions in royalties, and it would be logical to pay them. Right now. The Greeks are also accused of being liars... It reminds me of an old syllogism that I learned in school. Epaminondas is a liar, yet every Greek is a liar, thus Epaminondas is Greek. We haven't made much progress since.

LALANNE: Did Barack Obama's election alter your perception of American international politics?

GODARD: It's funny, Edwy Plenel [*in a recent Mediapart video-interview*] asked me the same question. Obama's election left me neither warm nor cold. I have been hoping that no-one (NOBODY) would assassinate him too soon. That he embodies the United States, it's not exactly the same thing as when it was George Bush. But sometimes things are clearer when they are at their worst. When Chirac found himself facing Le Pen on the second round

of the presidential election, I think that the Left should have abstained and not voted for Chirac. It is better to let the worst happen.

LALANNE: Why? That's dangerous...

GODARD: Because for a moment, everyone pauses to think. Like with tsunamis...

LALANNE: What are we supposed to think about, with tsunamis?

GODARD: About what we call nature, of which we are a part. There are times when it has to take its revenge. Meteorologists only speak a scientific language, they don't speak about philosophy. We do not listen to the way in which a tree philosophizes.

LALANNE: Are you still interested in sports?

GODARD: Yes, but I regret that today football only offers a defensive game. Aside from Barcelona. But Barcelona cannot play two matches in a row at the same level.

LALANNE: It depends. They won against Arsenal.

GODARD: Yes, but not against Milan. Why can't they succeed? When you don't succeed you get fewer matches.

LALANNE: This past winter, you made a very short film in homage to Eric Rohmer...

GODARD: *Les Films du Losange* asked me to. I felt like using titles from his articles, like evoking things that I had seen or done with him when we were young at the *Cahiers* in the 1950s. I find it hard to say anything else about him. You can only talk about people from what you've shared with them. This is not the method of Antoine de Baecque, of course...

LALANNE: Have you read the biography by Antoine de Baecque devoted to you?

GODARD: I've flipped through it.

LALANNE: Do you care at all that it exists? does it bother you?

GODARD: It bothers me for Anne-Marie's sake [*Miéville*]. Because there are mistakes in it. It also bothers me that people in my family handed docume him. It's bad form. I have not, however, done anything to prevent its release.

LALANNE: Did you keep in touch with Eric Rohmer?

GODARD: A little bit because he was living in the same buildin us in Paris. We spoke from time to time.

LALANNE: Have you seen his last films?

GODARD: Yes, on DVD. *Triple Agent* is a very strange film. I have a passion for espionage, but I wouldn't have imagined that such a subject could interest him.

LALANNE: Is the idea of accomplishing a body of work, one which life grants you the time to complete, a matter that weighs upon you?

GODARD: No. I don't believe in the body of work. There are works, they mig be produced in individual instalments, but the body of work as a collection, the great oeuvre, I have no interest in it. I prefer to speak in terms of unfolding. Along my course, there are highs and there are lows, there are attempts... I've cast my line a lot. You know, the most difficult thing is to tell a friend that what he's done isn't very good. I can't do it. Rohmer was brave enough to tell me at the time of the *Cahiers* that my critique of *Strangers on a Train* was bad. Rivette could say it too. And we paid a lot of attention to what Rivette thought. As for François Truffaut, he didn't forgive me for thinking his films worthless. He also suffered from not ending up finding my films as worthless as I thought his own were.

LALANNE: Do you really think that Truffaut's films are worthless?

GODARD: No, not worthless... Not any more than anything else.. ny more than Chabrol's... But this was not the cinema we had dreamt of.

LALANNE: Posterity, leaving a trace behind — does this concern you?

GODARD: No, not at all.

LALANNE: But has it weighed upon you at some point in your life?

GODARD: Never.

LALANNE: It is hard to believe you. You can't make *Pierrot le fou* without having the urge to make a masterpiece, to be the champion of the world, to take your place in history forever...

GODARD: Maybe you're right. I must have had that pretention in the beginning. I came back down to earth rather quickly.

LALANNE: You think about your death?

GODARD: Yes, inevitably. With the health problems... I have to take care of myself much more than I used to. Life changes. In any case, I broke away from social life a long time ago. I would really like to play tennis again, which I had to stop due to knee-problems. When you get old, childhood starts coming back. It's good. And I don't get particularly distressed about dying.

LALANNE: You seem very detached...

GODARD: On the contrary, on the contrary! I am very attached [*laughs*]. In fact, Anne-Marie told me the other day that if she outlives me, she will have 'On the contrary' written on my tombstone.

Translation Diane Gabrysiak