qualities missing in Godard’s film are those which would have sunk his project. The least concession would have risked looking good on screen.

Les Carabiniers is the representation of ignominy. The film is unbearable because it is so badly tied together and because it explodes the misunderstandings and ambiguities that make war films bearable. Stupid because of its intelligence, revolting because of its honesty, disjointed because of its intellectual rigour — in the end Les Carabiniers proves that a successful war film is morally impossible. In truth Jean-Luc Godard has sacrificed himself: he’s the first director of a war film who dared make himself unbearable.”

Michel Courtin, L’Express, June 13, 1963

LE FEU FOLLET
Louis Malle

“YOU ARE YOUR OWN WORST ENEMY”

I no longer recall who wrote the following (Godard?), “Tragedy is a lot like the close-up.” I don’t know if Louis Malle has read it. But I know that, thanks to his use of close-ups, he’s succeeded in giving Le Feu Follet’s tragic intensity. The film opens (without credits) with a series of close-ups: the face of a man, and the face of a woman, talking after making love. There are circles under their eyes, their mouths look deflated, and already there is a great distance between this man and this woman, the distance associated with ordinary polishness. The film ends with a close-up: a close-up of a revolver going off, followed by this disembodied, almost indifferent face, fixed in the glint of the image. Between the opening close-up—the solitude of love—and the final close-up—death as the final form of solitude—Alain’s destiny is played out. There are close-ups of objects, faces, to whom he offers his own face, Close-ups of objects toward which he extends his hand—in vain. Occasionally there is a long shot: a street, a dinner, other people, life, noises, automobiles, gestures, words, the world outside. But it’s impossible to breathe. Once again we are confronted with a close-up of the hero obsessed with himself, prisoner of himself: his head, heart, and ears occupied by his own voice to the point of nausea. “You are your own worst enemy.” Rarely have the formal properties of a film (especially the use of voice-overs, here readings from Drieu la Rochelle) appeared as essential as they do here. Le Feu Follet never gives the impression of virtuosity. You only notice it afterwards, the sign of true elegance.”

Jean-Louis Bory, Ann. October 23, 1963

ANGUISH, DESPAIR, AND A REFUSAL TO GO ON

It’s not easy to forget the voice of Maurice Ronet playing Alain, “I’m clumsy, I’m heavy. I’ve worked hard to make it easy. There was sensitivity in my heart, but not in my hands.” Later on he says, “I wanted to be loved so badly that it seems like I love myself.” Drieu la Rochelle has often been accused of writing an apology for suicide. Maybe Louis Malle will have succeeded in making his film clearer than the book ever was, since it is continuously interpreted on the basis of Drieu la Rochelle’s life and politics. In Le Feu Follet, anguish, despair, the refusal to live, belong neither to the right nor the left. They express only the questioning of an extremely sensitive individual in the face of existence.”

Henry Chapin, Cimeli, September 3, 1963

CONTEMPT
Jean-Luc Godard

THE SHIPWRECKED
OF THE WESTERN WORLD

Mortav’s novel is a vulgar but amusing popular novel, filled with conventional but old-fashioned sentiments, in spite of the modernity of the situation. But from such novels beautiful films are often made.

I kept the basics and simply transformed some of the details, starting from the premise that anything that’s filmed is automatically different than what is written, and thus original. There’s no need to try to make them different, adapt them for the screen. You simply need to film it as it is. Just film what’s written, more or less, for if cinema wasn’t primarily about film, it wouldn’t exist. Meliss is the greatest director, but without Lumière, he would have been completely unknown.

The subject of Contempt revolves around people who observe and judge themselves, and who are in turn examined and judged by cinema, here represented by Fritz Lang playing himself. He’s the film’s conscience, its honesty. (I shot the scenes for The Odyssey, which Lang shoots in Contempt, but since I play the role of his assistant, Lang would say that those scenes were shot by his second unit.)

Aside from the psychological story about a woman who feels contempt for her husband, Contempt is like the story of the outcasts of the western world, the survivors of the shipwreck of modernity, who, like the heroes of Verne and Stevenson, suddenly discover a deserted and mysterious island, whose mystery is inevitably the absence of mystery, or truth. The odyssey of Ulysses was a physical phenomenon; I filmed a moral odyssey. The way the camera examines the characters looking for Homer replaces the way the gods looked down on Ulysses and his companions.
YOU SHOULDN'T MEDITTE WITH SIMPLE EMOTIONS

J.-L. G. You know that, roughly speaking, Contempt is the story of a woman who stops loving her husband because she discovers that the man is weak. To make money, he agrees to rewrite the screenplay of The Odyssey, which Fritz Lang is supposed to shoot. Lang is arguing with his American producer, Jeremie Prokosch, played by Jack Palance. The screenwriter, who really shares Lang's opinion of The Odyssey, sides with the producer, to show off and to neutralize his wife's anger.

The couple's disagreement is represented as an intellectual conflict that appears distinct from the argument. But Prokosch, the screenwriter, makes the mistake of looking for interference between fiction and life. This conjunction exists, since it's the motive for the film, but he's wrong to consciously mix two worlds as different as this. His efforts lead to all sorts of catastrophe.

This "duel of opinions" about The Odyssey contains something extremely important. To get at this, I modified Moravia's novel by giving the producer ideas that the novelist attributes to the director. I wanted Fritz Lang to represent classicism. Thus, in the film, the producer has his own theory about The Odyssey. He thinks that Ulysses waited so long to get back to Ithaca because he didn't get along with his wife. Fritz Lang disagrees with this Freudian interpretation. He feels that Homer and his heroes were simple people, without any "modern" complications, and that it's important to keep The Odyssey's purity, preserve the incomparable harmony of the ancient world.

The producer is crazy, like all producers. Paul, the screenwriter, only agrees with him because he's opportunistic and because he's looking for a fictional image of the difference that separates him from his wife.

M. M. Prokosch may be crazy but he's not completely wrong, since life has confirmed the accuracy of his concept of the screenplay. There's definitely a break between Paul and Camille, the screenwriter and his wife.

J.-L. G. Naturally, the producer is comfortable within his system, and he's always right since he never stops outside it. The drama involving the others arises because they try to belong to two worlds. They make the mistake of muddling with simple emotions, which can't be transplanted. Culture and intelligence change nothing. The contemporary world has lost the secret of the ancients. Recall the well-known serenity of antique statuary. Our smile is forced. We look for complications.

M. M. Your vision is a contemporary vision of this ancient world, after 25 centuries have elapsed.

J.-L. G. The problems may have been the same. There were punks in Athens. But our outlook isn't the same. Contempt is conceived on that other point of view. It's based on a few essential things: the sea, the earth, the sky. My characters are no longer in harmony with nature as the ancients were. Yet I treated this landscape as a character, giving it as much presence as the actors.

My primary goal was this return to classicism and serenity. Contempt was filmed using very long takes (there are barely 150 shots), and the long shots, where the actors are "lost" in the background, were very important during the editing.

My concern for color was similar. I used only primary colors: red, blue, white, green. And always very pure, unadulterated tones. You can't imitate a painting by playing with color, it's pointless. You have to find things with simplicity.

Interview with Jean-Luc Godard conducted by Michel Mardou, Le Lutteur Français, December 25, 1963

EMPTY, STUPIDLY PRETENTIOUS, AND INTELLECTUALLY VAPID

Upon leaving the Vendôme, where Contempt is playing, I hurried to a late-night bookstore to buy a copy of Moravia's novel. It seemed inconceivable that the book would be as empty, as stupidly pretentious, as intellectually rapid as what I had just seen. Upon reading it, I found that it included the story of a psychological analysis (a genre for which Godard has about as much talent as his left foot) and that the "additional" dialogue, as it's referred to, in the film, amounted to such immortal phrases as, "Get in your Alfa, Romeo." Without being a partisan of fidelity (which would be something new), I'm amazed that Godard's Contempt would, by some strange mechanism, involve Moravia.

What he's produced is easy to understand. For the first time in his career, the director of Le Petit soldat was faced with a story and characters with realistic motivations. All he could do with this was superimpose his own bluescoting taste for citations (Brecht, Hölderlin, Louis Lumière, and André Bazin), his adolescent facetiousness, his fuzzy and complacent direction. In Contempt excerpts from a number of books are read aloud, Hindu fables are related, Bardot is given a string of profanity to repeat, Michel Piccoli and his bat are filmed in a bathtub, but not for a single moment does anyone behave as if they were in a film. Jack Palance, who plays the part of a producer and speaks English, is left to his own devices and is as fatuous and as obnoxious as he is in real
life. Fritz Lang, who is supposed to play himself, passes through the film like the survivor of a one-act play, left with nothing but the dignity of his monologue. It required (long live America) repeated requests on the part of the producer, Joseph E. Levine, before the director consented to film Bardot in the long introductory nude scene, the shot in the film and the only one to provide a brief glimmer of hope. Bardot unclad is an ever-renewing, always inspiring spectacle, that changes color like the sea and transforms the grumpy viewer into a grateful pup. I'm afraid that Burden's presence, as sublime as it is, won't save Contempt. The nude scenes come at too high a price, resulting in a vague uneasiness resembling the discomfort of insomnia.

Robert Benayoun, France-Observateur, December 24, 1963

INTENTIONAL OBSCURITY

An average writer named Alberto Moravia once wrote a story (a first person) about a poor intellectual, consumed by doubt, stuck in the labyrinth of an Italian film production, who is despised by his wife, an intrepid but rather conventional and "unducated" (if not brainless) woman. Jean-Luc Godard felt there was enough here to make a film.

But a film by Godard is generally nothing more than the argument of an intrepid autodidact, unable to make up his mind about cinema, the world (ancient or modern), or any of his concerns no matter how varied: from looking for an apartment to the anguish of "aesthetic creativity." In this sense Contempt is no more successful than Godard's direction. Even Vadim's Report du guerrier looks good in comparison. The most astonishing lapses don't bother me overmuch and I'm not very good at logic, but I'm still trying to figure out why Michel Piccoli is supposed to write the script for a film whose rushes Lang has already screened. At the start of the film, when Palanc (the producer) asks him to write the script, Piccoli questions him about whether Lang will go along with it. Is it the missing how that bothers me or the why? Behind the name of Hans Lucas, Godard once wrote scholarly elegies, obscure but peremptory, on "classic directing." No matter what he claims, however, the uncertain pleasure of complicating matters purely for the sake of complication, reveals him to be a man increasingly dependent on the mannequins of an armchair director.

Gerard Legrand, Prisif, May 1964

CUBA SI

Chris Marker

THE METAPHORIC EXISTENCE OF CROCODILES

Cuba Si has been waiting two years for its censorship license. It was rejected in 1961 by Mr. Terroire, a long forgotten Minister of Information. Like Joseph Pudhomme and his reference to the sword used to defend it, if need be, "combat" the government, Mr. Terroire wanted to be remembered by posterity for declaring that any film containing "ideological propaganda" could not be shown on screen.

Although he never censured the filmed speeches of Hn General, Terroire made it understood that Cuba Si would be authorized only on condition that its narration contain no "ideological content." Chris Marker had been out of Cuba for several months when the anti-Castro forces landed in the Bay of Pigs and were turned back. Such an event had to appear in Cuba Si. Another documentary filmmaker would to edit a sequence using the abundant current news footage of the event. Chris Marker selected from his negatives a sequence about the life and habits of crocodiles in Cuba's swamps, and used these images to evoke the Bay of Pigs and the defeat of the anti-Castro forces.

The words of his narration give a new (metaphoric) meaning to those crocodiles. Tomorrow, we may discover the failure of a new anti-Castro attack, and those who have seen Cuba Si will mentally view the assailants not as parachutists or legionnaires, but as caimans in the swamps. What would Cuba Si have been with a Terroirean commentary? Many crocodiles can still be found in this tropical island. Their skin is greatly valued by the leather goods industry, which produces handbags and shoes that are coveted by tourists, etc.

Georges Sadoul, La Lettre Francaise, September 20, 1963

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