

Even if there is no genuine intention on the part of any Western government to use nuclear weapons in any circumstances, the maintenance of the credibility of the deterrent demands that the governments concerned should demand from their servants (e.g., the officers on a missile range) a readiness to operate these weapons on receipt of orders to do so. But an intention to operate a murderous weapon in certain circumstances is immoral. No government therefore may exact such an intention, and no citizen may support a policy which involves such exaction.

ANTHONY KENNY

Heard and Seen

THE STYLE AND THE MAN

It was as a critic that Jean-Luc Godard began his work in the cinema, but all the time that he was criticizing the work of other men he thought of himself primarily, he once said in an interview, as a director who would one day make his own pictures. Eventually he started to make shorts, and after completing five of these he launched himself with something of the insolent ease of a trapeze artist into his first full-length feature, the dazzling *A Bout de Souffle*, which was first shown in France early in 1960 and came to London this summer where it had a long and successful run at the Academy. After this he made *Le Petit Soldat*, which was promptly banned on political grounds, and still remains in cold storage for, although it never specifically mentions North Africa and the terrorists in this film could belong anywhere and to any side, the controversial and—to judge by the excerpts from the script and the stills published in *Les Cahiers du Cinema*—horrifying torture sequences could only too easily be fitted into an Algerian context. Undaunted by this blow and the expense of time and money to no purpose, and showing a remarkable absence of bitterness, he turned briskly to make another quite different kind of film, with which he won first prize at the Berlin Festival this year. This was *Une Femme est une Femme*, a comedy starring the two most interesting and provocative young actors on the French screen today, Jean-Paul Belmondo and Jean-Claude Brialy, who play the masculine sides of a triangle which is completed by the exquisite Danish girl, Anna Karina, now Godard's wife.

Though he got his chance later than Chabrol and Resnais, Godard is perhaps the director who most neatly epitomizes the new school of French cinema. His sense of style is so acute, his confidence in his professional capacity so solid that he really does make films in the same way as one might embark upon a novel,

and the phrase 'film-stylo' describes precisely that absolute control over the medium to produce a result that is an integrated whole in a way that a British picture, for instance, is very rarely allowed to achieve. To make a film with the same fluidity with which a fountain pen covers a blank sheet of paper demands an unusual intelligence and flexibility as well as that massive confidence in one's own authority that I have already mentioned. 'A director', Godard has said, 'should be the sole creator of a film. I'm only sorry that I don't know anything about music'. He may not know all that much about music, but in *Une Femme est une Femme* he uses it as if he knew quite enough; as for instance in those sequences in which it is almost wantonly impressed into drowning the dialogue and, as it were, to take the place of the words it is shouting down—a trick that only a man with very clear ideas would have dared to risk.

A stylist then, and perhaps a deliberate exploiter of style on occasion. He was not displeased when some critics described his technique in *A Bout de Souffle* as 'cubist', because, as he explained, he had meant to make a film which dislocated the accepted way of making action thrillers as Picasso had dislocated the iconography of the nude. In spite of the originality of both form and content in this picture, he still felt that its effect was more a demonstration of the break-up of established cinematic form, whereas *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, for example, marked the beginning of quite a new kind of cinema. The data of *A Bout de Souffle's* plot could have been picked from any newspaper column; a rootless, amoral but intelligent young man (Jean-Paul Belmondo) steals a car, kills a policeman, sleeps around, partly because the occasions offer, partly because he feels obscurely that such violent inconsequence gives some point to his existence. Involved with him is an equally rootless but less intelligent girl (Jean Seberg), an American on her own in Paris. There is a kind of fatality about their relationship which he will not, and she cannot, explain and in the end she betrays him almost idly to the police; his futile death leaves her foundering in a confusion that we can see will never be resolved. The story may be rudimentary, but the way in which it is told is highly sophisticated. Godard started with a three-page treatment, and improvised the dialogue and the action from day to day. This, and the extraordinary, arbitrary cutting give the film a physical speed and a psychological urgency which leave one feeling as breathless as the title. We are given no explanations; we are shown Michel taking his stupid potshot at a policeman, and almost before the man falls we cut to a long shot of Michel disappearing at speed into the fields. Again, we see Patricia get up to join him in the car which draws up beside her but the next shot shows them already driving far down the street. We leave Michel at another point, and cut to Patricia on her way back to her flat and are as surprised as she is to find Michel already in her bed. The emotional climate of the film is determined by the technical expertise. All the film was shot on location, because Godard could not afford to hire studios at the time, and most of it with a hand-held camera because he gets bored waiting around for a camera crew to position itself; the result is a wonderful fluency that perhaps reaches its climax

with the film's end; Michel has been shot by the police and we see his dreadful progress down the street, past real passers-by who show the same studied lack of interest that people always do when trouble is around. The boy, lurching, tripping, recovering and falling finally, to shudder to a death surrounded by people who neither care nor understand. It is perhaps necessary to say that the story, like that of Frankie and Johnnie, has no moral and no end, and that the language is very coarse.

It is, however, wonderful cinema and so, in quite a different fashion, is *Une Femme est une Femme*. This is in colour—ravishing colour, too—and tells the story of a girl (Karina) and a boy (Brialy) living together in a very unglamorous quarter of Paris; she wants a baby and he does not. We see them quarrelling over this and over the other boy who loves her (Belmondo); in the end she gets her way and Brialy crossly says to her 'Tu es infame' and in her charming Danish accent she replies complacently 'Je ne suis pas *un* femme, je suis *une* femme'. Ingredients that may sound crude in cold print are whipped with speed, economy and fantasy into the lightest of soufflés, and the end result is something like a Restoration comedy, with all Millamant's inherent toughness and decorum in the girl's character. It is treated with extreme artifice and yet, oddly enough, conveys perfectly the feeling of a real and honest relationship. The dialogue is full of private jokes as well as the obvious visual or conversational ones. Particularly appealing is a newspaper vendor who changes voice from baritone to falsetto over *Figaro* or *Marie-Claire*, and just once transposes them; or the shots of Brialy riding a bicycle sulkily round and round a table to annoy his girl; or the splendid non-sequiturs of a conversation between Belmondo and a man to whom he owes money, carried on through passing traffic as he crosses the road. The décor is highly important, with a pillar in the living room taking on almost the importance of a character as it interposes itself aggressively into an argument; the cutting makes the actual spatial element in the lives of these people vividly apparent to us, and the colour, the interchange between dark and light scenes, all play a part in the development of the story. Recurrent images and unexpected, even inexplicable, changes of costume keep one on the jump all the time. Witty, fast, with beautiful camera-work and a direction that betrays an arrogant disregard for slower members of the audience who cannot keep up, may well exasperate the British audience but no one can deny that it is a fascinating exercise in the possibilities of the medium.

Godard's moral attitude may seem more than ambiguous by Catholic standards, but to those who hold that the greatest moral danger of the cinema is not sensual temptation but a kind of voluntary anaesthesia he is clearly on the side of the angels; there is no chance of succumbing to daydreams in one of his films, the speed is too great and surprise too frequent. Shock therapy has surely proved more effectual than homoeopathy in cases of depression before this:

MARYVONNE BUTCHER