

# Jean-Luc Godard

## 2 INTO 3

October 1980 yielded a rich harvest for Jean-Luc Godard's English admirers. In a feat of co-ordination which it will be difficult to reproduce, the opening of his new film, *Sauve qui peut (La Vie)*, coincided with a full-scale retrospective at the National Film Theatre and with the publication of *Godard: Images, Sounds, Politics* in which Colin MacCabe, with contributions from Laura Mulvey and Mick Eaton, has provided what is the first systematic attempt to present and defend Godard's post-1968 work.

The new film is Janus-faced: it is a *summa* and a recapitulation of what has gone before, gathering together many of the themes which have preoccupied Godard since he made his *début* more than twenty years ago. But it also looks forward and is more properly described as a 'second first work' than as a remake—which was what *Numéro deux* purported to be—for it is as innovatory as was *A bout de souffle* in its day, especially and characteristically in tone and in the attention given to technical experimentation. The implications of the title *Sauve qui peut (La Vie)* (the English title *Slow Motion* points up different aspects of the film) force a reassessment of the structure of the Godardian *oeuvre* in which 1968 is usually treated as a

---

### Jill Forbes

---

watershed: connotations of catastrophe ('devil take the hindmost') are juxtaposed with the (ironic) blandness of *Tout va bien* ('everything's all right') but offer a reprise of the dynamic of *A bout de souffle* ('breathless'). Godard, it might be said, 'keeps on running'. No one would suggest that 1968 was not of overriding importance, but other structures are possible.

With a *première* at the NFT and the London opening preceding that in Paris, it would appear that Godard has finally

gained the esteem of the London film-going public. But it is not certain that he has finally shaken off the 'nouvelle vague' tag which has so inappropriately continued to associate him with former friends such as Truffaut and Chabrol. Truffaut's thoroughly disobliging remarks about Godard in the September issue of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, or Godard's unfavourable comparison of *La Nuit américaine* with *Le Mépris* in *Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma* (the transcript of a series of lectures given at the Cinémathèque in Montreal in 1978), underline personal divergences which have not always been apparent from the two film-makers' recent work. This is because in the decade following 1968 Godard disappeared from public view while Truffaut continued to turn out films of varying quality whose common feature was the regularity of their appearance on French screens.

Of course, as Colin MacCabe emphasises, Godard's 'disappearance' was not an abandonment of film-making or a withdrawal from the world, but an evasion of habitual production and distribution circuits. Nevertheless, with the exception of *Tout va bien* (1972), and the possible exception of *Numéro deux* (1975)—both of which received limited

commercial distribution—there is a huge gap between *Weekend* (1967) and *Sauve qui peut* in the minds and memories of all but a few privileged viewers. The admiration, even reverence, which Godard arouses is more an act of faith than a considered point of view, when what MacCabe calculates as the twelve films and eighteen hours of television programmes Godard has made since 1968 are less in need of rehabilitation than of being made visible to enough people.

To use the notations employed in *Sur et sous la communication* (made for French television in 1976), the distance travelled between *Weekend* and *Sauve qui peut* might be succinctly described as 'two becomes three'. Here, probably for the first time, the problematic of the couple is decentred in the structure of the film, a movement which was foreshadowed in *Tout va bien* with the politicisation of marital relations and in *Numéro deux* when the couple was framed in a more extended family and their children's roles were emphasised. This is not so much a question of a head count of protagonists—*Une femme mariée* involved three people in an 'eternal triangle'—as a question of the organisation of the film. Godard's trio in *Sauve qui peut* form a circle rather than a triangle and their interactions offer a point of entry into the film.

Jacques Dutronc plays Paul Godard, and the section or chapter in which he is most visible is entitled 'Fear' ('La peur'). Is Paul Godard the self-portrait the name would seem to suggest? He works in television, and aspects of his life, notably his exclusion by the women he knows, about whom he nurtures obsessive and unsatisfied interests, conform to one

popular image of Godard as a paranoid voyeur. Paul Godard might be considered a low-key version of Ferdinand in *Pierrot le fou* (whose dying words he echoes at the end of *Sauve qui peut*), but Dutronc, with his shambling refusal to look at the camera, is more obviously a close relation of many of Godard's other male protagonists who are somehow incapable or incapacitated, whether because they refuse the traditional function of fathering children, as in *Une femme est une femme*, or because, as in *Une femme mariée*, they are literally or metaphorically absent from the preoccupations of the women. *Sauve qui peut* ends in female complicities: Nathalie Baye agrees to let the apartment Godard might have lived in to Isabelle Huppert (Isabelle Rivière), while Godard's ex-wife and daughter leave him to die after he has been knocked down by a car which contains Isabelle's sister.

'La peur' is framed by 'L'imaginaire' (the imaginary) and 'Le commerce' (trade/intercourse) whose conjunction completes the circle and is equivalent to the 'production' of 'images'. 'L'imaginaire' centres on Nathalie Baye as the journalist Denise Rimbaud who is about to abandon her job in television to work for a local community newspaper in the country. She is also working on a 'project' of her own and is intermittently seen in the characteristic posture of the Godardian creator, sucking a pencil and making notes. *Sauve qui peut* represents the culmination of a process, in Godard's films, whereby writing is transformed from an object into an activity and is increasingly associated with the imaginary as it becomes decreasingly 'motivated'. The process begins with episodes such as the famous sequence of conver-

sation through the titles of books in *Une femme est une femme* ('motivated' because the books are part of the set) and the habit, throughout Godard's early films, of framing parts of the inscriptions on hoardings so as to reveal their hidden meanings. By *La Chinoise* it is the act of slogan-writing which has become important, while the process ends with *Sur et sous la communication* where a frenzy of writing erupts on the screen.

In *Sauve qui peut* this is an artistic event. We never see what Baye writes, only that she is writing, something which, Godard asserted as long ago as 1962, is only quantitatively and not qualitatively different from making a film. Denise Rimbaud also shares a surname with the poet Arthur, and her flight from the city parallels Rimbaud's earlier renunciation of the Paris world of letters, and a relationship which had become oppressive, for the existence of a colonial entrepreneur far from the metropolitan centre. Baye's departure is less radical—a train still links her with Dutronc—but as she rides her bicycle along the open roads with the mountains rising behind her, the freedom of the wide spaces is established as a contrast to the gadget-ridden hotel which is Dutronc's home.

It is difficult, too, not to see the similarities between Rimbaud's trajectory and J.-L. Godard's—at least in the myths which have grown up around them. Remarks Godard has made over the past few years (most coherently via *Avant et après*, the programme which concluded the *Sur et sous la communication* series) suggest that by moving first to Grenoble and then to Rolle in Switzerland he was striking a blow against centralisation and the traditional divisions of labour in the film industry. In *Introduction à une*

*véritable histoire du cinéma* he adds that his moves have had an effect on the content of his films, which must now be such that he is not embarrassed to go into the local café. But for all Godard's assertions, and his clear efforts to discover new relations of production, the mythical version of his life holds that, like the poet Rimbaud, Godard after 1968 abruptly became silent, exchanging his artistic activities for those of a businessman.

This is, of course, Isabelle's activity in *Sauve qui peut*. Her chapter, 'Le commerce', reveals her as the latest in a long line of Godardian prostitutes whose emblematic nature is evident, from 'Nana' in *Vivre sa vie* to the film-maker who sold out played by Yves Montand in *Tout va bien*. But Isabelle gives a different emphasis to the profession: *Vivre sa vie* suggested that economic constraints impair Nana's emotional freedom, whereas by *Deux ou trois choses* prostitution has become the exemplary condition of women under capitalism (this is extended to all workers in *Tout va bien* and applied, with shocking violence, to the family in *Numéro deux*).

As MacCabe suggests, a central point of *Deux ou trois choses* is the elision of the distinction between criminal and legal money, a point which is taken up in *Sauve qui peut* and treated comically. Isabelle Huppert walks through the part with splendid unconcern: so natural is her activity that she emerges unscathed when two pimps rough her up in a car, and simply passes their extortionary tactics down the line to her sister from whom she demands 50 per cent in return for an introduction to clients. Isabelle's business is the pretext for a number of comic set pieces, the most elaborate

being her participation in a foursome ('partie carrée') which includes a businessman (Roland Amstutz), his (male) assistant and another (female) prostitute. Amstutz disposes them in a chain reaction which is a sequence of sexual penetrations and accompanying exclamations that run full circle. In communications technology this would be described as a feedback system while in the Godardian bestiary it is the equivalent of the fish eating its tail which, in *Leçons de choses*, we are informed is the image of the capitalist system. In *Sauve qui peut* the scene is also a *mise en abîme* since Isabelle's business is what permits the trio's circle of relationships to be closed.

She assumes the prostitute's (narrative) function—traditional since Zola's *Nana*—of crossing social barriers and linking characters whose association would otherwise be arbitrary, when she picks up Dutronc/Godard just after he has had a serious quarrel with Denise. But she also concludes a deal with Denise at the end of the film which is both a perfectly legal commercial transaction and a specific means of excluding Paul Godard. Thus when Isabelle operates 'legitimately' she is also naturalised. Colin MacCabe makes a number of interesting observations on the relation between the 'order of money' and the 'order of the image' which will be referred to below, but a provisional reading of the deal between Baye and Huppert is as the conjunction of business and the imaginary which expels the male.

However intriguing the film-maker's personal history may be, it would do less than justice to the richness of *Sauve qui peut* to assume, as some critics have wished to do, that the film is an essay in

self-presentation, a portrait of the artist as a man of fifty. It is already clear that each of the three main characters embodies aspects of the film-making activity—a fragmentation which has perhaps always been present in Godard's thinking but which has recently become more insistent. At one level, fragmentation is more appropriately considered as group activity, particularly in the case of the strength which derived from collaboration with like-minded professionals during the 'nouvelle vague' period (cf. *Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma* p. 101). After 1968, the notion is inflected to embrace new forms of organisation, first with the Dziga Vertov group and Jean-Pierre Gorin—of whom Godard says: 'There had to be at least two of us, and after that we had to try to be three. But I never managed that'—and later with the foundation of the Sonimage Company in Grenoble.

Collaborative activities and less hierarchical work practices seem to have found partial achievement on the shooting of *Sauve qui peut* and the work of Sonimage in general, and the need for greater flexibility is a thread which runs through Godard's remarks in the conversations with MacCabe printed in *Godard: Images, Sounds, Politics*. On the other hand, some of the things Godard has said about fragmentation are considerably more gnomic. In the episode of *Sur et sous la communication* entitled *René(s)*, where he talks with the mathematician René Thom, Godard remarks that unlike most people he considers himself not as a whole number but as a fraction. He reiterated this notion before an audience which had viewed *Sauve qui peut* at the 1980 Avignon Festival (see *Cahiers du Cinéma*, Oct. 1980), where he implied

that it was a simultaneous approach to the problem of work practices and to the problem of identity. If this is so, it would appear to be a departure from what he calls the Maoism of *René(s)* in which he attempts to summarise catastrophe theory as a version of Mao's 'one is transformed into two and two into one', and more broadly, a departure from the Manichean underpinning of so much of his work, including to some extent *Sauve qui peut*.

Like *Le Mépris*, *Tout va bien* and certain episodes of *Sur et sous la communication*, *Sauve qui peut* is a film explicitly about the institution of cinema (the 'politics of the image'), but one which sees fragmentation as affecting the material which can be experimented with. There is a scene in which Dutronc/Godard is invited to say something to a film club about the work of Marguerite Duras when he places himself in front of a blackboard on which is written 'Cain and Abel Cinema and Video'. Both *Numéro deux* and *Sauve qui peut* are limited examples of work in both film and video, and freedom of passage between the two is the kind of step forward Godard is concerned to make. However, in *Sauve qui peut* the most obvious experiments occur in the lyrical passages which have to do with women's movements and women's voices. The English title *Slow Motion* makes sense of some of the most painterly scenes, notably when as Nathalie Baye climbs the hill on her bike, her movements are decomposed and the landscape dissolves into points of colour and light.

Similar attention is drawn to the soundtrack by the periodic repetition of the phrase 'what's that music?', but most

of all in the homage to Marguerite Duras, who is present only as a voice in the film (she refused to appear as, fictionally, she refuses to take part in Denise Rimbaud's programme), a voice that is accompanied by snatches of the music from *India Song* and by the comment that 'a lorry is a woman's voice going by'. The reference, which explains the large number of shots of women passing by heavy lorries, is to Duras' *Le Camion (The Lorry)*—a film about a film which exists only as a soundtrack, and it may help to account for the title and incident of the last chapter of *Sauve qui peut*: 'La Musique'. Godard has occasionally described his ambition as that of 'making music in the country', which is undoubtedly an oblique way of saying that attention must be drawn to the relation between sound and image through the creation of incongruity. It will be recalled that just such an episode was, literally, inserted into *Weekend*, and similar moments are encountered in *Sauve qui peut*: a stray accordion player and his family (twice) and a string orchestra which has set up in the middle of the city and serenades Dutronc/Godard's daughter as she walks away from her dying father.

It would appear that the distance Godard has covered over the last decade and more, notionally between *Weekend* and *Sauve qui peut*, is immense—both because the concerns of the period 1968–80 have fed in to *Sauve qui peut* and because the viewing public has simultaneously evolved. *Sauve qui peut* does not take up where *Weekend* left off—far from it. On the other hand, a brief comparison of the two films does allow the specific originality of *Sauve qui peut* to emerge more clearly.

*Weekend* already introduced a range

of heterogeneous elements into what was a highly organised structure in much the same way as *Sauve qui peut*. It is particularly interesting that both films open with an overpoweringly loud soundtrack (to the point of parody in *Sauve qui peut*, where Jacques Dutronc is bedevilled in his attempts to speak by an opera singer rehearsing in the next room) which frustrates the spectator's immediate attempts to follow a narrative. Each film also begins as the narrative of a couple's relationship and degenerates/develops into something rather different (this relationship is much more obliquely narrated in *Sauve qui peut* but it is nevertheless there). The two films share moments of visual humour, absurd or surreal juxtapositions: the piano in the farmyard in *Weekend*, an overdressed woman (prostitute?) walking down a country lane passing by a browsing cow in *Sauve qui peut*, or a futuristically shaped sports car, with 'Marlboro' painted all over it, drawing up in a village square. These last two examples point up a marked difference, however, since *Sauve qui peut* poses the problem of the relation between the rural and the urban, the 'country and the city' in a way that *Weekend* did not (the country was then a place for city-dwellers to overrun). For Godard, and no doubt for all those who work in France, this is partly a problem of centralisation and regional autonomy, and for Godard in particular it is exacerbated by his origins in a linguistically and culturally satellite State.

It is also true that *Sauve qui peut*, like *Numéro deux*, but unlike all the earlier films, is unusual in not being firmly rooted in the immediate social and political concerns of France. *Alphaville*, *Deux ou trois choses*, *Weekend*, *Une femme*

*mariée*, in all these films Godard seizes on the topics of interest to contemporary sociology—urbanisation, affluence, the embourgeoisement of the working class; while the ‘foresight’ of *La Chinoise* is, by now, legendary. Godard has been a notorious intellectual magpie, but *Sauve qui peut* has little of his earlier frenetic modishness except, occasionally, in the character of Denise Rimbaud, whose move to the country is perhaps representative of the aspirations of a certain social group or generation. It is, however, a film in which the inconsequential narrative cannot easily be made to signify without an understanding of the way in which political concern has been broadened from the specific issues evoked in the earlier films, a process which is most apparent in the television programmes Godard made in the intervening years.

Two recent series of television programmes (in addition to the commissioned works such as *Le Gai Savoir* and *British Sounds*) are of particular importance: *Six Fois deux/Sur et sous la communication* (Six times two/On and under communication, 1976) and *France/Tour/Détour/Deux/Enfants* (France/Tour/Détour/Two Children, 1978). Both were Sonimage/Institut National de l’Audiovisuel co-productions, but if this was seen as a potentially encouraging sign that after the reform of the ORTF in 1974 French television was prepared to adopt a more dynamic production policy, it also turned out to be the proof that the division of the old broadcasting corporation into a number of quasi-autonomous companies was a device to emasculate it—specifically by divorcing production from distribution. In fact, the exhibition history of these two series is an exemplary instance of indirect censorship. *Sur et sous la communication* was programmed on the Third (‘minority’) Channel, FR3, on Sunday evenings between 25 July and 29 August 1976—precisely, in other words, over a period when every French town is closed up and half the population is on the beach. The adventures of *France/Tour/ Détour* were similar, since it languished for two years before being programmed in the late-night art cinema slot on Fridays in March and April 1980.

Being exhibited in this way was particularly unfortunate, since both series set out to enquire into the state of the nation—*France/Tour/Détour* because it was freely inspired by G. Bruno’s celebrated didactic work *La Tour de France par deux enfants*; and *Sur et sous la communication* in the opportunity it offered to people who do not normally appear on television (an unemployed charwoman, a semi-catatonic bachelor, a mountain farmer, a watchmaker) to express themselves at some length. But even under ideal conditions, reception of

these series poses difficulties. Clearly each was designed as a ‘serial’, though this is more evident in the repetitiousness of *France/Tour/Détour*, which carries structure and actors over from one week to the next, than in the apparent inconsequentiality of *Sur et sous la communication* (indeed, *France/Tour/Détour* turned on internal repetitions, since three ‘movements’ were programmed each Friday night). However, seeing this series ‘in context’, that is week after week on Antenne 2, was no easier (though this is a personal reaction) than seeing *Sur et sous la communication* in two six-hour periods at the National Film Theatre. The programmes truly become pleasurable when the viewer can watch with tapes and a monitor, outside the normal ‘flow’ of television or the inappropriately theatrical atmosphere of a cinema. To some extent, therefore, Godard has made programmes for the kind of television which does not yet exist.

Aside from Godard’s somewhat unsuccessful attempts to get René Thom to place communications theory in a broader scientific context, *Sur et sous la communication*’s explicit reflection on television is contained in the penultimate programme *Avant et après* (Before and After). Thoughts on the nature of the medium are communicated in exemplary fashion from unseen transmitter (Godard?), through the headphones worn by the young man on screen who receives the prompted messages and retransmits them. Television, it is asserted, is a vast swindle, a mystification: though it is ‘just a screen on which things are written’, there are actually ‘three of us in TV, the transmitter (speaker), the receiver (citizen), and the set (screen)’ so that TV becomes ‘a family affair’ and intervenes ‘between’ ‘you’ and ‘me’. There follows an attack on the *ancien régime*: Godard considers the process of transmission to be as cumbersome and inappropriate as communications in pre-revolutionary France which necessitated innumerable passages through internal customs barriers. Television, it is asserted, needs a SECAM passport to travel in France, when what is required is a communications system which will allow Godard to address his neighbour without passing through Paris—in short, a utopian revolution (*rêve-évolution*).

Thus *Sur et sous la communication* is placed at the intersection—or the interface—where ‘two becomes three’, as is suggested by *Nous trois* (Us Three), the first half of the fifth programme, in which a pair of lovers ‘communicate’ not through speech (there is no soundtrack) but ‘through’ television as their changing relationship is expressed in the decomposed and recomposed forms generated by vision-mixing. The idea is reinforced by innumerable witty developments of the principle of a chain of communica-

tion. In *Leçons de choses*, for example, we see a shot of a man taking his dog for a walk (or a dog taking his man for a walk) which we are then told is ‘two telephone calls’. The reason is that the man and the dog—or the dog and the man—are linked by the lead which travels in both directions! As well as constantly forcing us to revise our visual apprehension of the world, *Sur et sous la communication*, as the man and the dog also suggest, lays particular emphasis on what lies ‘between’, on the links which exist across a strongly marked binomial structure.

*Avant et après* comments on and interprets the structure of the series as a whole, which consists of ‘Six fois deux’ (Six times two) programmes, each approximately 50 minutes long, in which, at least theoretically, ‘the first section examines a problem theoretically and conceptually and the second, in the form of an interview, holds some of the concerns of the first half in tension with the particular experience of an individual life’ (MacCabe p. 141). In fact this principle of organisation is not altogether carried through and tends to break down towards the end of the sequence, where the relationship between the first and second sections appears to be more tenuous. However, one of the achievements of *Sur et sous la communication* is its apparent lack of formalism, normally so characteristic of Godard, and its apparent approximation to the supreme inconsequence of what passes on television, whereas *France/Tour/Détour* is a visible effort to structure television.

*Avant et après* suggests, in fact, that the programmes should be read across the horizontal axis (as proposed by MacCabe), which gives *Y a personne, Louison // Leçons de choses, Jean-Luc // Photos et cie, Marcel // Pas d’histoires, Nanas // Nous trois, René(s) // Avant et après, Jacqueline et Ludovic*, but also down the vertical axis which, notably, would allow all the so-called personal programmes to be juxtaposed (the intersection of axes, it should be noted, is a figure which is frequently inscribed on the screen throughout the series to explain or reinforce points). Alternatively, says *Avant et après*, one might think of the first sections as the programmes of the day, and the second sections as those of the night (day follows night as night follows day), as inevitable as the sequence of day and night and as long as the six days of the creation!

Is *Sur et sous la communication* merely an attempt to organise the everyday, to structure the banal? It is true that, with the exception of the programmes where he himself is interviewed (*Jean-Luc*), and the possible exception of *René(s)* (since René Thom is a famous mathematician), Godard has gone out of his way to invite the participation

of 'ordinary people'—for example, the charwoman and the metalworker whom he interviews in *Y a personne* were recruited through the small ads in a Grenoble newspaper. On the other hand, the programmes offering a clear attempt to give a voice to people who are odd or different and therefore usually excluded from television (cf. *Jacqueline et Ludovic*), or to examine categories of people ignored or ill-treated by society (the unemployed in *Y a personne*, the peasants in *Louison*, the retired and women in *Nanas*), these overtly political concerns must be set in relation to those programmes—*Leçons de choses*, *Marcel*, *Photos et cie*, *Pas d'histoires* and *Avant et après*—which offer a more consistently interpretative approach to the heterogeneity of the world and a reflection on the composition of sound and image.

*Godard: Images, Sounds, Politics* contains a particularly interesting discussion of *Marcel* and *Photos et cie* in the section on 'Technology' where many of the concerns of *Sur et sous la communication* are related to developments from the early days of 'direct cinema' through more recent films such as *Far from Vietnam* and *Prawda*. It is especially important that for many of the things Godard wished to do, notably 'complicate the relation between sound and image', video technology offered possibilities which are simply not available on film or, if they are, remain prohibitively expensive. *Sur et sous la communication*, like *Numéro deux*, makes particular use of the capacity to write directly on to the screen when video is being used, and this is an essential element in the richness of the series. But a slightly different emphasis is appropriate here if the relevance of the series to Godard's work in general, and especially to *Sauve qui peut*, is to be brought out.

*Leçons de choses* is one section which might be taken as exemplary of much of Godard's recent work. The title refers to the positivist 'object lesson', the technique employed here to make the evidence of our hearing contradict the evidence of our sight: 'this', we are told over a shot of a winding river, 'is a long story', and 'this', over a shot of a baby, 'is a civil war'. What occurs is, therefore, a characteristic fusion of the didactic and the artistic, the school exercise and the painting (or 'the pro-filmic event' and 'montage'): the work is a 'composition' as in school-composition according to *Avant et après*, or 'a film composed by Jean-Luc Godard' according to the credits of *Sauve qui peut*.

Godard's recent work is also closely concerned with the problems of sound in ways which are not often discussed: experiments with volume are, of course, characteristic of Godard and recur in *Sauve qui peut*. But *Lotte in Italia*, for example, interestingly disturbs the

balance between two tracks in different languages (French and Italian) in a way that is quite common on French television but rare (for cultural reasons) on British television. In *Introduction à une véritable histoire* Godard declares the ambition to use post-synchronisation in order to mix a number of voices to achieve the one he wants (and drily observes that most actors would refuse to lend themselves to such experiments), while at the Avignon Festival he explained that for *Sauve qui peut* he had attempted (and failed) to avoid sound mixing entirely and to record straight on to a single track. A much more systematic investigation of Godard's practices with sound would be extremely interesting, and *Leçons de choses*, with its emphasis on the contradictory possibilities of sound, might help to point the way.

Finally, *Leçons de choses* offers a crucial advance on the Manichean oppositions which have always seemed so central to Godard's cinema because, no doubt, fundamental to cinema itself: black and white, night and day, landscape and factory, before and after, stories about men, silence from women. *Sauve qui peut* has a poetic version: hair of ebony (*cheveux d'ébène*) and face of ivory (*face d'ivoire*) said, respectively, of Nathalie Baye and Roland Amstutz. But *Leçons de choses* makes clear, in a witty and economical image, that such oppositions are merely a question of *point of view*: children are seen behind a wire-netting fence in a school playground but 'for them they're in front of the fence' and 'what's important is between', the third element, the interface, the communication.

It is to be hoped that *Sauve qui peut* will achieve at least a limited commercial success. But all Godard's films, or all those since about 1965, are slow burners: they are so various, so crammed with detail, they start so many hares, they require so much attention from a number of our faculties simultaneously, that several viewings are always necessary before the bits and pieces even begin to fall into place. Two recent books, however, offer a wealth of interesting material for the viewer concerned to understand what Godard is now trying to do.

The first is *Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma* (Albatros, 1980), which publishes the transcript of Godard's remarks in response to questions put to him on the occasion of a series of screenings at the Cinémathèque in Montreal, screenings which juxtaposed one of his own films with one or more others in some way related to it (eg., *A bout de souffle* and Preminger's *Fallen Angel*). This event took place at monthly intervals over a period in 1978, and the book is ostensibly the text which replaces the film that Godard would have liked to

make, and may still make, on the history of the cinema.

The second book, *Godard: Images, Sounds, Politics* by Colin MacCabe with Laura Mulvey and Mick Eaton, is an excellent introduction and handbook to the post-1968 Godard, the least known but perhaps most significant and interesting period of his career. In what is a relatively short space it offers the fruit of considerable research, a wealth of factual information and the record of a series of interviews with Godard in which MacCabe asked him to comment on the material of the various chapters (these, like all interviews with Godard, are intermittently interesting).

Such compression has the effect of bringing out more strongly the need for work of greater length on the whole of Godard's *oeuvre* and, in particular, the need for a more detailed study of his television work, since what is proposed here is, as MacCabe himself says, extremely incomplete. Compression also has one other slightly unfortunate result in the chapter entitled 'Money and montage', which is intended partly as an investigation of a cryptic phrase in the script of Godard's forthcoming film *The Story*—Let the money flow faster than the images!—and partly an account of the themes of criminal and legal money as explored in Godard's earlier films. This chapter is also about the relation between money and the image, which according to MacCabe is a question of the congruence and incongruence of looks. The only objection to this, in a book which is otherwise so lucid and so concerned to fill in the intellectual and political background to many of Godard's films, is that the ideas put forward here do presuppose some knowledge of MacCabe's own earlier work, and especially his articles on *Klute* and *Tout va bien* in *Screen*.

Otherwise, the central sections on 'Politics', 'Images of women' and 'Technology' explore what must be recognised as the three central concerns of Godard's films, the chapter on 'Politics' being especially valuable since the author has actually seen the 'invisible' films produced in the late 1960s and early 70s and is able to use them to show how, throughout Godard's work, the crucial preoccupation has been the 'politics of the image', the fact that 'politics is a question of signification'. This is a splendid start to the BFI's new publications series and a well-timed complement to *Sauve qui peut*: the two together may help to give Godard a much needed thrust back into the forefront of our preoccupations. ■

*Godard: Images, Sounds, Politics*, by Colin MacCabe with Laura Mulvey and Mick Eaton. Macmillan/BFI, £12.00, £4.95.

*Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma*, by Jean-Luc Godard. Albatros, Paris.