



JEAN-LUC GODARD

Histoire(s) du cinéma

Moments choisis

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MUSÉE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN DE MONTRÉAL

Québec

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Histoire(s) du cinéma – Moments choisis

2000, 80 min

PRESENTED THREE TIMES DAILY

AT 12:30, 2 AND 3:30 P.M.

TWO ADDITIONAL SCREENINGS

ON WEDNESDAY EVENINGS AT 6:30 AND 8 P.M.

Moments choisis is a poetic work, full of nostalgia. The “moments” in question have been selected by Jean-Luc Godard from his monumental essay *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, created between 1987 and 1998, which brings together his thoughts on cinema. The parenthetical “s” in the title is important. Godard composed his *Histoire(s) du cinéma* by juxtaposing and superimposing countless film sequences. The result is at once History with a capital H (although minus any real historical chronology) and all the other (hi)stories that cinema recounts — frequently love stories but also adventure and war stories, stories of horror and mystery, desires and dreams.¹ “I would say that in films there is the spectacle of History, History that is almost alive; in fact that’s what cinema does, create a living image of the unfolding of History and the time of History.”²

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“They suspected they were part of a (hi)story, and they wanted to know which (hi)story it was — their own in the larger one and the larger one in theirs ...”

It is with this desire to understand both the (hi)story into which he had projected himself and the (hi)story that had projected itself into him that Godard begins *Moments choisis* — which he could, in fact, have called *Seul le cinéma* (Only Cinema). This is the title of the third chapter of *Histoire(s)*, but it reappears in each of the seven others and overlays the images of *Moments choisis* from the start, repeated again and again like an incantation. For Godard, *Seul le cinéma* means “only cinema has done this,” but also “only cinema can do this.” And “this,” the “this” that is unique to cinema, what Godard calls “this thing that remains strictly within cinema,” its difference and its originality, is *montage* — editing. “My idea as a practitioner, as a ‘gardener’ of cinema, was that one of the goals of cinema was to invent editing.” For Godard, (hi)story



emerges with the connecting of two images, it materializes during editing. "And (hi)story is *only* there. It is connection. It is editing. "Editing, my wonderful concern" he calls it in *Moments choisis*, reiterating the title of an article he had published in all "innocence" (his word) in 1956 ("Montage, mon beau souci," *Cahiers du cinema*, no. 65). "If directing is a gaze," he wrote there, "editing is a heartbeat." < < <

Editing is the very essence of Godard's aesthetic. Superimposed images, film fragments, extracts from paintings and photographs, news clips, inscriptions of words and syllables on top of the images, disjointed snatches of writing, collages of ideas and texts read or recited follow one upon the other at a sometimes breakneck speed. Only the most informed cinephile could possibly spot all the references, many and various as they are. The edifice Godard builds is extraordinarily dense. It is impossible to assimilate all of *Moments choisis* at a single screening. We are swept along by the filmmaker, his ideas, his fifty years of cinema. < < <

In *Moments choisis*, Godard reaffirms all the power of the image and of image sequences. He has brought together *The Night of the Hunter*, Julie Delpy reading from Baudelaire's *Le Voyage* and Sabine Azema reciting an episode from *The Death of Virgil* by Hermann Broch. He has also retained Malraux and the female gaze in Manet's painting, Van Gogh's crows, Hitchcock, a study that he titled *Fatale Beauté* in honour of Siodmak's film *Passion fatale* (*The Great Sinner*), starring Ava Gardner, and a close-up of Elizabeth Taylor, "who radiated a kind of dark happiness" in George Stevens' *A Place in the Sun*. If, speculates Godard, Stevens had not been the first person to use the first-ever 16 mm colour film at Auschwitz, "then Elizabeth Taylor's happiness would probably never have found a place in the sun." By juxtaposing cinematic (hi)stories and the great tragedies of the 20th century, driving this idea firmly home in *Moments choisis*, Godard gives us a work that sometimes seems to be

Projections is the title we have chosen for the ongoing film and video program presented at the Musée. Recent output is rich and diverse. Many artists from a wide variety of backgrounds — video makers, visual artists, photographers, playwrights, choreographers and composers — are drawn to the poetic power of the image projected on the big screen. *Projections* also refers to the energy of a thrust forward, toward the future of the moving image.

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more about war and death, suffering and pain, than about cinema. When Godard's *Histoire(s)* first appeared, some said that he was prophesying the death of cinema. When challenged, he answered: "No, not the death — the disappearance. Just like the disappearance of the Italian Renaissance." What disappearance does he mean? What absolute, what basic truth of cinema has disappeared? What was the cinematic paradise that once existed for Godard but that is gone? Ending with a quote from Borges, the filmmaker leaves us to decide for ourselves. < < <

"If a man had travelled through paradise in a dream, if he had been given a flower as proof of his presence there, and on awakening found he was grasping that flower in his hand — what would one make of it? I was that man." <

LOUISE ISMERT

1 Translator's note: The translation into English of Godard's title poses a problem, for it plays upon two different (but related) meanings of the French word *histoire*: "history" and "story." By adding a parenthetical "s" Godard has simultaneously captured the notions of "History" as the more or less systematic account of past events and the multiple "stories" told both by and about cinema. An appropriately Godardesque solution when discussing the work in English is to place parentheses around the "hi" with each use of the word "history."

2 Jean-Luc Godard in Jean-Luc Godard and Youssef Ishaghpour, *Archéologie du cinéma et mémoire du siècle. Dialogue* (Tours: Farrago, 2000), p. 41. All the other Jean-Luc Godard quotes, the biographical notes and the film references have been taken from *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard* (Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma, 1998), vols. 1 and 2, and from the film *Moments choisis*. The words of Jorge Luis Borges are spoken by Godard in *Moments choisis*.

Jean-Luc Godard was born in Paris in 1930 and has lived in Switzerland since the 1970s. He first entered the film world as a critic, writing under the pseudonym of Hans Lucas. In 1950 he founded *La Gazette du Cinéma* with Jacques Rivette and Eric Rohmer, who at that time was signing his articles Maurice Scherer. In 1952 Godard began working for *Cahiers du cinéma*. He directed his first film, a short entitled *Opération béton*, in 1954. A few years later, his first feature film — *À bout de souffle* (1960), starring Jean Seberg and Jean-Paul Belmondo — met with huge critical and popular success and became the flagship work of New Wave cinema, of which Godard and Truffaut were two of the leading proponents. In the over eighty films to his credit he has tirelessly explored the nature of cinema and reinvented the narrative form. His filmography includes: *À bout de souffle* (1960), *Le Petit Soldat* (1960), banned by the censors until 1963, *Le Mépris* (1963), *Bande à part* (1964), *Alphaville, une étrange aventure de Lemmy Caution* (1965), *Pierrot le Fou* (1965), *Made in USA* (1966), *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle* (1966), *La Chinoise* (1967), *Week-End* (1967), *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* (1979), *Passion* (1981), *Prénom Carmen* (1982), which won the Golden Lion at the 1983 Venice Film Festival, *Je vous salue Marie* (1983), *Nouvelle Vague* (1990), *Allemagne neuf zéro* (1991), *For Ever Mozart* (1996), *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988-1998), *Moments choisis* (2000) and *Notre musique* (2004). <