

GODARD ON “MASCULINE FEMININE”

Would you say Masculine Feminine is film about youth?

GODARD: No, it's more a film on the idea of youth. A philosophical idea, but not a practical one – a way of reacting to things. It's not a dissertation on youth or even an analysis. Let's say that it speaks of youth, but it's a piece of music, a “concerto youth.” I have taken young signs, signs that have not yet been deformed. My signs haven't already been used a thousand times. I can talk about them now, afterward, because when I made this film, I didn't have the least idea of what I wanted.

One gets the feeling that you started with a band of young people, and that as you went along you conducted the surveys, letting yourself be more or less guided by them.

That's true. The film was a way for me to approach them.

To approach them as someone who is older than they are?

I think that I'm as young as they are. I noticed that I was both older and younger than they were.

What's most striking to was that this is a film not about youth, the way that films on the same subject by Carné or De Sica are; it's a film with youth.

True. At the same time I chose young people because I no longer have any idea where I am from the point of view of cinema. I am in search of cinema. It seems to me that I have lost it. Talking with young people was an easier way to find myself than talking with adults. I have the impression that, if a person is young, he must give of himself, and he does so willingly, without ulterior motives, and if he gives himself away, he's not unhappy. For me these were people who had not been conditioned. Conditioned by their life, certainly, but not morally conditioned. Even when they react badly, or when they don't want to come right out and say something, there's a certain spontaneity, a

certain innocence. I wanted to use cinema to speak of youth, or else I wanted to use youth to speak of cinema.

Have you had any reactions to your film from young people, outside of those who have worked in it?

No. Since the film is prohibited to people under eighteen¹ I have no idea whether it interests them. I think there should be a good twenty films like it, from different

backgrounds – in the provinces, in the North, in the South. Films that television ought to do but doesn't, because television only fills up a schedule. Which are often hours well spent, but are not genuine works. They don't think like painters or novelists; they forget works of imagination. And works of imagination are nonetheless what lie closest to people's hearts.

I believe that if young people could see it – young people the same age as Léaud – the film would go on in their heads after the movie had ended.

The three or four young people who played in it could have experienced what went on in the film rather than something else. There is no difference between what they did during the day and what they represented in the film; it was exactly the same.

You disturb the traditional relationship between the director and his actors.

I'm sure of one thing, that this is what cinema means to me, and that this is what it has never been; it went off track immediately. When Lumiere first invented cinema, the last thing he had in mind was a spectacle. One day a guy said to him, "Come show your gimmick in my neighborhood and we'll make people pay." But Lumière was an artist, not a showman. I know very well that cinema is a sort of industry, one that's got to make a profit and that's part show business. But in my

¹ "The very audience it was intended for," griped Godard. Ironically (or perhaps because of the restriction), the Berlin Film Festival awarded Godard the festival's Youth Award for the best film for young people.

work there's always a part that's not a show at all and yet it comes through quite nicely, like an informal lecture, or a course at the Sorbonne, or a concert. The theater is pure show; it's magnificent. Cinema – a film by Jacques Demy or [Max Ophuls'] *Lola Montes* – can be pure spectacle. Other films are both, and still others that have absolutely nothing to do with this. They can be bad – that's another question entirely – but they're searching for something.

Do you think cinema as an art is in good health?

From the point of view of images and sound alone, I think cinema is in better health than ever. People need it, above all in France where the population is getting younger. It's young people who go to the movies, and they haven't found their films, their television shows. They've found their music, but they haven't really found the image that goes with it.

**Excerpted from an interview by Pierre Daix
Originally published in *Les Lettres Françaises* (June 1966)**