

1

The Politics of Violence and the End(s) of Art

Speaking (for) the Other in *La Chinoise* (1967)

—Ethics are the aesthetics of the future.

—V. I. Lenin

—*La Chinoise* is a queer film.

—J.-L. Godard

With its explosive style, frenetic action, and inflammatory talk of revolution, *La Chinoise*, a study of Maoist activists in training shot in Paris in 1967, is generally considered a uniquely prescient film forecasting “*les événements*” of May ’68.¹ As Colin MacCabe has stated, no major artist was more closely linked to May ’68 than Godard, and *La Chinoise* dealt directly with the anarchist/situationist and Maoist movements just as they were coming into full political being in de Gaulle’s France (MacCabe 2003: 180). Yet although the film won the Special Prize at the 1967 Venice Film Festival, it was pilloried on its release as excessive and unrealistic. For those Marxist-Leninist students in particular whom Godard had consulted while preparing it, *La Chinoise* constituted both personal and political betrayals. If one of the filmmaker’s intentions had been to inform his audience of the increasing impact of Maoist ideology and thinking on the student population, those same students believed he had caricatured them as “irresponsible terrorists” by making it appear that individual terrorism was their primary and absolute concern, as opposed to mass mobilization and class struggle.

Godard himself acknowledged there were fundamental problems with *La Chinoise* and much later, in January 1969, while downplaying its prophetic value, castigated himself for having produced a “reformist” film, that is to say, the work of a “solitary poet,” rather than a collaboration with those that mattered. Clearly still reeling from the collective feelings of failure and disappointment at the shattering of the utopian dreams of May (the Pompidou government won the June parliamentary elections with an increased majority), he lamented that *La Chinoise* was nothing more than a film made in the lab about what people were actually doing in practice (Bergala 1985: 335). Godard was seeking here, typically, to reassess and redefine his original aims for *La Chinoise*, which included, as he had proposed in a brief “manifesto” for the 1967 Avignon Theater Festival where it was unofficially premiered, a form of aesthetic and economic counterattack (“two or three Vietnams”) against the imperialistic might of the film industry (Hollywood, Cinecittà, Pinewood, Mosfilms) in order to create free, “fraternal,” national cinemas. One aspect of the film he never questioned or retracted, however, was precisely its depiction of violence extending to terrorism. This was of particular personal interest and concern to Godard and formed part of his ongoing enquiry into the workings of violence at both the individual and social/political levels.

What I would like to do in what follows is to examine the various processes of violence in *La Chinoise*, at once thematic and formal, in the light not only of the events of May '68 but also of Godard's work both immediately before and after. It is a question that assumes all the more urgency in the context of the recent fortieth anniversary of the crisis and the fiftieth now just around the corner—a date that is certain to provoke yet more postmortems of its legacy (we recall that during the May 2007 presidential election campaign Nicolas Sarkozy dismissed the entire period of May '68 as nothing more than an “immoral” blip that needed to be “liquidated” from the national consciousness). I will attempt to argue that *La Chinoise* has never really been taken seriously enough as a far-reaching interrogation of the political limits of emancipatory violence and terrorism, and of cinema's very capacity to represent that process. For the film engages with something far more permanent and universal than can be accounted for by any one political crisis, however disruptive, and puts into question the very possibility of revolutionary agency promoted in the words of its jaunty, satirical theme song “Mao Mao,” specially composed by Gérard Guégan and sung by Claude Channes. By examining how the militants attempt to speak on behalf of others, *La Chinoise* forces us to consider what form political action and activism should take and whether, with its latent potential for violence, language can ever help to effect change. But it also asks more generally whether one can ever hope to engage mutually with the real other at all. As we shall see, the answers to these related ethico-aesthetic questions about language, representation, and alterity require us to establish not only who is included in the radical cinematic frame and extended history of *La Chinoise* (a story that has still to be fully told), but also those others who are deliberately left out and consigned to silence.

Prehistory of *La Chinoise*

During the 1960s, the Vietnam War had begun to make itself increasingly felt in Godard's work, with odd references and allusions in films like *Pierrot le fou*, where Ferdinand (Jean-Paul Belmondo) suffers brief torture before quickly divulging the information required and eventually blowing himself up, and then *Masculin Féminin*, where Paul (Jean-Pierre L aud) sprays a car with the words "Paix au Vietnam." Yet it is the ostensibly "minor," cartoon-style film, *Made in USA* (1966), that reveals most where Godard stood politically by the mid-to-late 1960s, for it is informed by a new understanding that politics had irrevocably changed with the infamous Ben Barka affair of October 1965, explicitly mentioned in the film. This crisis involved the bogus arrest and kidnapping in Paris in broad daylight of the exiled leader of the left-wing Moroccan opposition leader, Mehdi Ben Barka. The French secret police was eventually revealed to have conspired with both the CIA and the criminal underworld to deliver Ben Barka to Moroccan agents and then stage an elaborate cover-up (the tortured body was never found, and the file still remains open).² What the affair revealed for Godard was that the most important American influence was no longer simply popular culture or Coca-Cola but rather geopolitical terrorism and international conspiracy "made in USA." Indeed, Cold War France appeared now to be directly infiltrated by Richard Nixon and Robert McNamara and terrorized by a secret police force. The film, which includes the close-up of a book cover proclaiming *Gauche ann e zero* (Left year zero), ends with Paula Nelson (Anna Karina) responding to journalist Philippe Labro's comment that the Left and Right were now essentially the same with an open question: How then does one engage politically?

This question, and with it the issue of what new form politicized art should take, seems to have provided the intellectual starting point for *La Chinoise*. On one level it couldn't be simpler: the American-inspired capitalist democracy of de Gaulle's Fifth Republic was encouraging state terrorism, which contaminated the symbolic order itself. The film Godard made at the same time as *Made in USA*, *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle*, linked, for example, the destructive regeneration of Paris by the new technocrats to the social alienation experienced by wife and mother Juliette (Marina Vlady), living in the new housing project of La Courneuve, who finances her craving for consumer goods with part-time prostitution. So intense would become Godard's disgust with French society and its contempt for its own citizens, in particular through its ossified education system and repressive forms of censorship, that when the culture minister, Andr  Malraux, banned Jacques Rivette's film *La Religieuse* (*The Nun*) in April 1966, Godard published an open letter in *Le Nouvel Observateur* in which he described himself as "submerged in hate" and accused Malraux, a Resistance hero, of being a "collaborator." At one point in *La Chinoise* V ronique suddenly turns to the camera and takes a pot shot at Malraux with a snarling reference to his 1957 essay on the transcendence of art: "La m tamorphose des dieux, M. Malraux!" ("The metamorphosis of the gods,

Mr. Malraux!”). In Godard’s thinking, institutional acts of cultural and political “terrorism” demanded decisive counteracts of terrorism at every level. He quickly became alert to what he saw and heard on the Nanterre campus when he drove his new young partner and student Anne Wiazemsky there for classes. For in France, as in other Western countries, Maoist cells had been slowly forming since 1966. The Union des jeunesses communistes marxistes-léninistes (UJCML) sought to transform into Marxist rhetoric and gestures the radical philosophy of Louis Althusser, who emphasized Marxism as a science and promoted a return to the doctrinal purity of early Marx. The group published a theoretical review, the *Cahiers marxistes-léninistes*, founded by militants of the Union des étudiants communistes (UEC) based at the École Normale Supérieure, where Althusser taught philosophy. Among the ranks of the UEC were Robert Linhart, Jacques Rancière, Pierre Macherey, Alain Badiou, and Étienne Balibar, all of whom endorsed in 1966 the Great Cultural and Proletarian Revolution in China. Affecting the same idealist fervor as the young officers of the Red Guard, they fancied that they were now the political new wave in France. In fact, by the mid-to-late 1960s Mao was seen by many on the left as the sole guarantor of Marxism-Leninism. Another dissident extreme left group, the Parti communiste marxiste-léniniste de France (also mentioned in *La Chinoise*), similarly called itself Maoist although claimed allegiance to Stalin and refused Khrushchev-style *détente*. Godard was put in close touch with the UJCML by a young journalist working for *Le Monde*, Jean-Pierre Gorin, who, while not a Maoist himself, began to influence the tone and direction of Godard’s new film and even inspired him to visit the Chinese Embassy while on tour in Algiers.

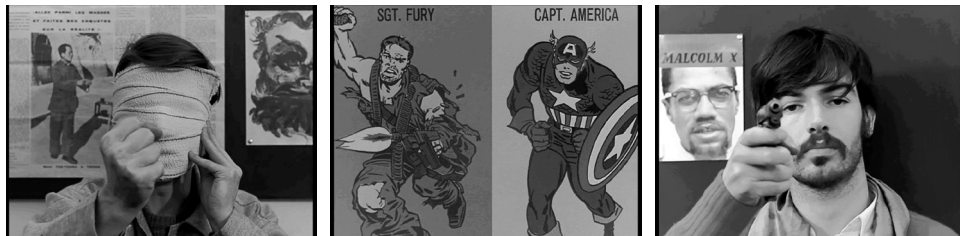
Reprendre à zéro: Revolutionary Rhythms

La Chinoise was thus conceived as a strategic raid on prevailing reactionary aesthetics. Its “Aden-Arabie” cell (named after the communist writer Paul Nizan’s violent 1931 essay, which included a famous preface by Sartre in the 1960 edition) is composed of five major characters whom Godard considered comparable to the five different levels of society established by Maxim Gorky in his play *The Lower Depths* (1902). They are: Véronique (played by Wiazemsky), a philosophy student at Nanterre and the only “bourgeois” as such; her boyfriend and actor Guillaume (Léaud); a working-class economist Henri (Michel Séméniako); a nihilist painter Kirilov (Lex de Bruijn) (his name borrowed from Dostoyevsky’s *The Devils*); and finally Yvonne (Juliet Berto), originally from a peasant background and working as a maid for Véronique’s parents (in an ironic comment on the rhetoric of class struggle, she will continue to polish the shoes of her fellow revolutionaries). When Yvonne warmly embraces Véronique in the first five minutes of the film, it is as if Godard were quickly referencing Louis Malle’s 1965 film, *Viva Maria!* (a comedy western romp set in nineteenth-century Mexico where two feisty Marias [Jeanne Moreau and Brigitte Bardot] wage a terrorist war on a corrupt priest) in order to transport the problematics of terrorism in film into new and more difficult territory.

A transient member of the cell who arrives seventeen minutes into the film to deliver a short lecture on new perspectives of the European Left is the student Omar Diop playing himself. Introduced by Véronique as a fellow philosophy student at Nanterre and sporting a vermilion (Chinese red) jumper, Omar (Blondin) Diop was, in fact, a brilliant Senegalese student whom Godard had met at Nanterre through Wiazemsky while scouting for ideas for *La Chinoise*. A leading figure among pro-Chinese Marxist-Leninist students, he was the one authentic Maoist in the film and would later work closely with Daniel Cohn-Bendit in the *Mouvement du 22 mars*, founded at Nanterre on March 22, 1968, when students occupied the university's administration building.

In the absence of the owners (the parents of one of Véronique's friends) and thus with the rule of authority temporarily suspended for the summer, the secluded apartment functions as a crucible for revolution. It is mapped out as a series of different spaces, from the classroom to the lecture theater, and is centered visually around the display of two red books: the *Little Red Book* and the *Cahiers marxistes-léninistes*. As Rancière has put it in perhaps the most compact account yet of the film, it is as if we were witnessing here an exercise in Marxism *with* Marxism, that is, the "matter" of Chinese Marxism infused by the "principle" of Althusserian Marxism (outlined in *Reading Capital* [1965]) of learning to "see, listen, speak, read."³ This is only half the story of *La Chinoise*, however, for it also represents Marxism in the process of becoming cinema. The cell's motto, written over the wall, is expressed in virtually cinematographic terms: "We must confront vague ideas with clear images" ("Il faut confronter les idées vagues avec des images claires"). One of the film's many formulas and refrains is the "unity" of art and politics, as well as of form and content, and Véronique even utters at one point the Sartrean mantra that aesthetics is the realm of the imaginary.⁴ The film's original full title, *À la chinoise, un film en train de se faire* ("In the Chinese way, a film in the process of being made"), the second part of which is presented, as the first title in the film, against a black background in first blue ("Un film"), then yellow ("en train/de se"), then still larger red ("**FAIRE**"), underlines that this is an instance of self-consciously performative, materialist cinema. Godard had even intended to use the newly available Philips video cameras so that the students could record their own conversations and provide their own critique, yet this proved too difficult and costly to obtain. Devoid of any initial or final credits, the film simply arrives, suddenly and dynamically, on the screen, its antirealist, "degree zero" style conveying a raw and pulsating energy and urgency. Organized around blocks of primary color (red for Maoism, blue for the workers' overalls, yellow for the Chinese race, to be contrasted with the briefly glimpsed neutral green of the countryside), it has a scattershot, pop-art feel due to its intensive collage of multiple gadgets and false revolvers, intertitles, intermittent black spacing, sudden rapid inserts, tricks of stage lighting, comic-strip images, dialogues, slogans denouncing the hypocrisy of American foreign policy and imperialism, provocations, fragments of interviews (mostly responses to Godard off-screen), assorted minihappenings, covers of magazines (notably one of Malcolm X), graffiti, a barrage of citations and dogma from journals and books by

authors such as André Gorz, allusions to topical events, and *agit-prop* skits about Vietnam (the characters mime at one point Mao's assumption of power and act out those Chinese being killed by evil "revisionists"). On the soundtrack we hear newsflashes from Radio Peking, quick snippets of Stockhausen, and odd bursts of the title song "Mao Mao" based on certain formulas culled from Mao's *Little Red Book*.



Figures 1.1–3. Subversive rhythms: Guillaume (Jean-Pierre Léaud), a cartoon diptych, and Kirilov (Lex de Bruijn) in *La Chinoise* (1967).

The composite sonic and chromatic effect of this extraordinary work of montage (Godard claimed the film took one month to shoot and three months to edit) is of a modern symphony of sound and noise in three "movements" that, typically for early Godard, has a distinctly Brechtian ring. Indeed, Brecht is explicitly mentioned in the film and the only name to remain on the blackboard when all the other now outmoded European writers and dramatists (from Sophocles and Shakespeare to Giraudoux and Pinter) written up in chalk by Guillaume have been wiped away one by one in a silent and systematic purge. As Adrian Martin has indicated, *La Chinoise's* formal construction was effectively dictated by one of Althusser's articles on Brecht, "Le 'Piccolo' Bertolazzi et Brecht (Notes sur un théâtre matérialiste)," the conclusion to which, a paean to a new type of spectator, Guillaume reads out at length.⁵ Didactic and dialectical to the point of virtual parody, the film passes through many Brechtian levels of distancing, self-criticism, and *mise en abyme*, including shots of the cameraman, Raoul Coutard, plus camera and clapper-board. In short, *La Chinoise* destroys any pretension of a "truthful" representation of reality. Indeed, the image may be said to create its reality, since, as Kirilov expresses it chiasmically: "L'art n'est pas le reflet du réel, mais le réel de ce reflet," literally: "Art is not a reflection of the real, but the real of what's reflected." Godard is thus countering with the calculated disorder of montage the proclaimed "despotism" of global capitalist imperialism rampant in the Third World (one staggered intertitle in red reads: "The imperialists are still alive / They continue to wreak despotism [*l'arbitraire*] in Asia, Africa / and Latin America"). Yet in the very same moment he is also ironizing the supercharged drills and hyperagitation of the film's militant characters whose imperative to "speak" and "do" and "act" becomes an all-consuming, almost tyrannical need (the worst insult in the cell is to be called, like Henri, a reactionary "revisionist" willing to listen to others and compromise with the Parti Communiste Français (PCF)).

The Words of Others

Towards the end of *La Chinoise*, as the narrative of terrorism eventually takes over, we finally leave the hot-house atmosphere of the cell. With Henri summarily excluded for objecting to the collective call for special combat and terrorist action, there is a drawing of lots, and Véronique is charged with the task of assassinating the revisionist soviet minister of culture Sholokov visiting Paris. As the abbreviated title *La Chinoise* had always led us to expect, our attention is now fully focused on this individual female Maoist as the vehicle of “real” violence. We follow her in her bungled mission, for she mistakes room 23 for 32 while attempting to read the reception register upside down and thus shoots the wrong man, an error which she quickly rectifies by returning to the building and accomplishing the deed. Yet if terrorist violence marks the conclusion to the cell’s debates, we are not witnesses to Véronique’s actions, which remain deliberately abstract (a fact underlined by the extraordinary framing of the diplomatic building behind closed gates). Instead, the film’s key set-piece sequence is the slightly earlier impassioned dialogue Véronique pursues with the political philosopher Francis Jeanson on a train moving, we assume, from Nanterre to the end of the line at Saint-Germain-en-Laye (the episode is initiated by a still-frame of a station called appropriately enough La Folie-Complexe Universitaire, since renamed Nanterre-Université). Jeanson was a model of the politically engaged intellectual and a bona fide man of action. As France’s leading activist for the Algerian Front de Libération National during the Algerian War, he had been put on trial in 1960 for being head of a network (the Réseau Jeanson) that supported Algerian terrorists. Found guilty of high treason, he was condemned to ten years solitary confinement though was amnestied in 1966. He now finds himself in 1967 working as, among other things, Wiazemsky’s “real” philosophy teacher.



Figure 1.4. Véronique (Anne Wiazemsky) and Francis Jeanson as himself talking violence on the train from Nanterre in *La Chinoise* (1967).

Véronique explains to Jeanson that the only solution to the current blockage in the French education system and prevailing political stagnation (even renowned committed writers and thinkers like Sartre and Louis Aragon, she claims, are hopelessly out of touch) is to start again from zero by forcing students to perform manual labor (a comment greeted ironically on the soundtrack by romantic strings) and, above all, by bombing the universities. Jeanson calmly rebukes Véronique for daring to compare her fantasies of mass murder with his own defense of terrorists during the Algerian War, for he was motivated by the will of the Algerian people to emerge from colonial rule, whereas her plans represent the will of only a handful of people. “We think on their behalf,” she declares brutally and fascistically, illustrating just how quickly the language games of militancy can create their own terrorism, especially if we compare it to the first dialogue between Véronique and Guillaume, which culminated in a casual invocation of alterity: “We are the words of others.” Jeanson argues further that the whole populace was united in the Algerian quest for independence, or at least sympathetic to it, and thus terrorism had a particular moral force as well as realistic chance of achieving something. Since no such unity of political purpose or indeed community existed any more in France, there was instead a need, according to Jeanson, to restore in people the idea they could change the world by reinstalling a sense of creation and communication. In his own case he was seeking new forms of “cultural action” and “experiments” in the provinces, such as bringing theater to working-class audiences. His utterly reasonable if patronizing advice to Véronique is to work with friends at creating new Maisons de la Culture in the working-class *banlieues*.⁶ Véronique will have nothing of this, of course. She wants action now and remains unwilling to consider the consequences. Her mission to assassinate Sholokov will not be derailed.

Throughout this entire scene Coutard’s camera remains neutral, filming the two figures from the side as they sit facing each other. It is up to the viewer to assess their arguments and decide which is correct. Yet granted that Godard was whispering through an ear-piece Véronique’s replies to Jeanson, who expressed his own thoughts *extempore*, which side was Godard really on here? In a long interview for *Cahiers du Cinéma* in October 1967 he declared that he was in favor of Véronique’s call for mass violence and lack of compromise (Bergala 1985: 303). Although he doesn’t elaborate further on this, we might add that terrorism forms a key part of the Leninist heritage, its use at any particular time to be determined by tactical, not moral, considerations. Some years later, however, Godard declared Jeanson’s arguments to be more persuasive, a shift he attributed to the difference between his conscious sympathies at the time with Véronique’s terrorist position and his own, more lasting, if unconscious, allegiance with peaceful kinds of political action, notably cultural.⁷ Yet Jeanson’s emphasis not simply on the right course of action but also on the most appropriate *form* of action takes us to the heart of the film, which began with Henri pondering socialist tactics and the feasibility of mass revolutionary force in the right “subjective and objective conditions,” since the working-class no longer seemed ready to embark on a general strike or

mount the barricades for higher wages (real events would, of course, soon prove such pessimism dramatically wrong). Significantly, neither Véronique nor Jeanson has the last word in *La Chinoise*, which goes instead to Guillaume, who finally realizes the promise of his name, a homage to the eponymous hero of Goethe's novel, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. He strolls through an urban wasteland, where a man paints in red the words "théâtre année zéro" (a link back to *Made in USA*, and before that, no doubt, to Roberto Rossellini's influential neorealist film, *Germany Year Zero* [1947]), in an attempt to pursue his "theatrical vocation" and goal, expressed at the beginning of the film, of achieving a socialist theater. We see him relearning the value of the essential ritual in French theater of "*frapper les trois coups*" ("striking three blows"), a sequence featuring seminaked women knocking on panes of glass, and at the end practicing door-to-door theater by consoling an emotionally distraught female neighbor with slightly altered lines from Racine's *Andromaque*. He concludes with an energetic flourish: "You need only to become Marxist-Leninist."

Is this to say that the political can solve, or simply dissolve, the problems of the personal? Such a seductively neat and simple prospect is left deliberately floating. Rancière is right, however, to regard *La Chinoise* as ultimately staging here a moral opposition not between Véronique and Jeanson, but between Véronique as a misguided militant and Guillaume as an enlightened actor who, with the force of his own body, articulates ("*interprète*" in the double sense in French of "interpret" and "perform") the discourse of politics and the words and gestures of revolution.⁸ Earlier he had "performed" the statement "Il faut de la sincérité . . . de la violence" ("We have to have sincerity . . . violence") by shouting out the words and clenching his fist, thus engineering a self-reflexive, double performance of mind and body. Hence, *La Chinoise* could be said to reveal itself finally as a meditation on the theater, as it had always, in fact, promised to be (in one early mime sequence Guillaume had slowly taken off bandages around his head to illustrate that an actor, like a political militant, seeks to show what cannot be seen). Indeed, Guillaume arguably functions as Godard's ideal alter ego, representing a compromise between terrorism and the old guard as well as paving the way for a possible resolution of theory and practice. Certainly, of all the members of the cell who are confronted with their destiny at the end, it is only Guillaume who achieves a fundamental clarity and radical sense of purpose, for Yvonne is left to sell *L'Humanité Nouvelle* (the Communist newspaper), Henri announces he will return to the relative calm of Besançon or maybe East Germany to work as a chemist, Kirilov kills himself off-screen after earlier holding a gun to his head and simulating death (an apparent act of identification with the Bolshevik poet, artist, and playwright Vladimir Mayakovsky, who took his own life in 1930 and whose ideas on the unity of art and politics Kirilov freely quotes), while Véronique coolly reflects in the final frame that her murderous summer break was a detour into "fiction" that put her in touch with "reality," thereby marking her first step in a long process of personal and political transformation.



Figure 1.5. Véronique (Anne Wiazemsky) and Guillaume (Jean-Pierre Léaud) testing the discursive limits of love in *La Chinoise* (1967).

Yet more is at stake in the theoretical opposition between Guillaume and Véronique, that is to say, between the two different modalities of engaged artistic practice and militant terrorism. It comes to full light in the sequence where they speculate on the language of the future, and as Susan Sontag puts it, they submit to the impossible “arch-romantic wish to make oneself entirely simple, altogether clear” (Sontag 2009a: 187). Véronique answers Guillaume’s rhetorical question “How can one do two things at once?” by suddenly declaring she is dumping him for a range of reasons, most of them petty. When he tries to reason with her she repeats virtually the same words impassively, but this time with music, playing an extract of Schubert on the record-player. Her act is merely a pretense, however, and intended as a lesson to Guillaume on how one can do two things at once, that is, with language and music, and so “combat on both fronts” (a key axiom of both the cell and the film). He claims to understand but admits to being very afraid, as does Véronique—it’s not easy, after all, being a committed militant 24/7. Yet within the context of the film as a whole, this act of creating an illusion is revealed as a distinctly false strategy of subversion, staging as it does an imaginary scenario with the precise aim of achieving an effect through its affective impact. In this sense Véronique is working contra Godard, for she is composing and assembling a “reality” in order to elicit terror, while the film itself pursues an aesthetic “terrorism” through the disjunctive practice of montage—the antimimetic, deconstructionist collage that puts sound and image into constant question, and that Rivette aptly called Godard’s “intertextual terrorism.”

Hence, while Godard as artistic terrorist subverts aesthetically the symbolic/imaginary axis, Véronique, as an over earnest, literal terrorist, attempts to produce “real” images and the spectacle of murder. Put a little differently, militant action

proves here intrinsically deficient since it leaves untouched the imaginary structure of reality (the true site of subversion), as well as the essential terror linked to the very production and holding together of the realist image. As Luca Bosetti has argued in her study of the transformative potential of terror as a subversive strategy in Godard's (and also Jacques Lacan's) work on May '68, with particular reference to *La Chinoise*, so long as militant action leaves the image intact, subversion will fail and the space of subversive agency remain elusive.⁹ While Godard's film, which announces the central theme of Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (published just a few months later) of the domination of images and the replacement of social life by its representation, becomes a privileged space for symbolic displacement of the social, Véronique, as her misreading of numbers during the assassination exemplifies, lies at the mercy of the image and trapped within its fixed logic of simple inversion. Yet Véronique's blind belief in the abstract worth of terrorism is, as I have already suggested, not directly condemned by the film, and indeed, putting aside Kirilov's wild and empty declaration that he "believes" in terror ("Revolutionaries are made of terror. Give me a bomb!" he declaims), there is no agonizing moral discussion here on the validity of revolutionary violence, of the kind, for example, that propelled Albert Camus's 1949 play, *Les Justes*. Instead, with its intricate game of Chinese boxes, *La Chinoise* may be said to be firing a clear warning shot to the new generation of student agitators and imminent revolutionaries: go down the path of terrorism at your peril, for you may quickly find yourself caught in a web of illusion, error, duplication, and catastrophe.

By Any Means Necessary?

The story of Godard's own subsequent transformation into a fully fledged Maoist filmmaker, when in 1968 he renounced his unique status as film *auteur* and formed with Gorin (along with Armand Marco, Nathalie Billard, and Gérard Martin) a small film collective, the Dziga Vertov Group, is well-documented.¹⁰ It is a story marked by his active participation in the large street protests in February and March 1968 against Malraux's attempted sacking of Henri Langlois as curator of the Cinémathèque Française which, in a curtain-raiser to the events of May, were met with an unheralded show of force and extreme violence by riot police (the CRS); his co-creation during the *événements* themselves of silent, one-reel "ciné-tracts" by which he attempted directly to unite theory and practice;¹¹ and his contribution to the "Estates General of Cinema" that took place in May and June, which united (at least temporarily) all sections of the film industry. This narrative sounds already far more smooth than it actually was, for Godard also found himself the object of much hostility from students during May '68, as evidenced by some of the slogans and street graffiti such as: "Godard le plus con des Suisses pro-chinois" ("Godard the biggest dick of the pro-Chinese Swiss," originally articulated by the Situationist Guy Debord), and: "L'art est mort. Godard n'y pourra rien" ("Art is dead. Godard can do nothing about it"). By this stage, however, Godard, like many other intellectuals

and *gauchistes* of the period, including Sartre, now identified fully as a Maoist and even hit the streets to sell *La Cause du Peuple*, organ of the hard-core Gauche Prolétarienne (GP). I don't intend to rehearse here the complex and sometimes highly ambivalent story of Godard's move to political extremism and activism, nor do I wish to examine in any great detail the numerous films produced by the Dziga Vertov Group. I will, though, simply emphasize that Godard now intensified the politics of form and representation developed in *La Chinoise* by problematizing every aspect of the relationship between the political and the aesthetic in terms of voice, address, discourse, and image, and by devising multiple mechanisms (technical, semiotic, discursive) to unmask the creative process. The camera was made now to function explicitly as a weapon to subvert Western forms of representation from within and prevent any easy co-option and appropriation by the prevailing political system. The strategy worked: once films such as *Vent d'est* (1969) and *Lotte in Italia* (1970) were made, they were either rejected or banned by the television companies and media networks that had commissioned them.

One particular Dziga Vertov Group project stands out due to its repercussions for Godard's subsequent work. In 1970 he left with Gorin and Marco for Amman to shoot *Jusqu'à la victoire*, a propaganda film for Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement recording the activities of the Palestinian freedom fighters in Jordan and the Lebanon, specifically the preparations underway in 1970 in the refugee communities on the West Bank to reclaim the land occupied by Israel in 1967. Godard regarded this film as a kind of "political brochure" offering a political analysis of the Palestinians in their struggle against imperialism and providing "real," revolutionary images. The film was also intended to show didactically how the Palestinians had first to conquer a language, hence the many scenes of refugees delivering speeches, reciting poetry, pamphlets, and so on, although the project was directly hampered by the very problem of language (neither Godard nor Gorin spoke Arabic). Production was halted with only two-thirds of the film complete because many of the Palestinians filmed were suddenly killed in Amman during the Black September massacres of 1970 perpetrated by King Hussein's Jordanian troops. The recorded footage, which included Palestinian children engaged in commando exercises, was subsequently salvaged in *Ici et ailleurs* (1974), the highly confessional film essay Godard later made with Anne-Marie Miéville that worked through the collapse of the revolutionary project by addressing head-on the problems and contradictions of militant filmmaking and confronting *ici* (a white, working-class French family) with *ailleurs* (not merely the lost territory of Palestine but also the destroyed dream of collective revolutionary life). Imaging the Palestinian resistance became now a matter of restituting the speech of absent or dead Palestinians to whom, as Godard admits self-critically in the film, he had never really listened.¹² With its overlapping soundtracks and video editing techniques (multilayered superimpositions, multicolored intertitles), *Ici et ailleurs* looked very different from the original film Godard and Gorin had in mind, that is, a political analysis about history in the making, and instead appeared more an acutely personal study in self-reckoning and self-accountability (the theme of counting and figures, both of money and the dead, is omnipresent in

the film). Indeed, in one sequence Godard directly implicates himself as a politically engaged filmmaker trapped in Western binary thinking and blindly splitting the world into two since he kept silent while filming fighters as they were planning a doomed maneuver (“The tragic thing is they’re talking about their own death, but no-one said it”). As Miéville puts it damningly: “We wanted to make the revolution for them; in their place, we craved victory.” Nevertheless, *Ici et ailleurs*, which Gorin refused to co-sign, would inspire further extensive collaboration and dialogue between Godard and Miéville across film and television during the 1970s as well as for a long time after.

Despite their serious and often noble political aims, Godard’s stripped-down and deliberately rebarbative Dziga Vertov Group films never fulfilled the revolutionary function they were designed for and appear now chiefly as private period pieces, notably the violent, ideological posturings and sadomasochistic-style high jinks acted out by Godard and Gorin in their burlesque staging of the Chicago 8 trial in *Vladimir et Rosa* (1970). Indeed, some of the methods they selected as the tools for social change (images and themes of brutality, terrorism, coercion) seemed merely to replicate the very abuses of human dignity the group found so appalling in bourgeois society, like the repeated and largely gratuitous use of naked female flesh in *British Sounds* (1969) (co-directed by Jean-Henri Roger). It was a case of ever-decreasing artistic circles for Godard, who, with the fanaticism of a religious convert, seemed to be squeezing himself dry in an entirely alien political logic: the praxis of Marxist/Maoist dialectics. This creative and political dead-end was the result of an inevitable double-bind: Godard was attempting to effect change through the medium of film even though he knew profoundly that neither sound nor image had any major direct influence on the behavior of people (a fact that explains why he could never understand the need for censorship) (Bergala 1985: 308). As Bosetti puts it well, Godard’s “creative nihilism,” that is to say, his authentically subversive and transformative form of terror capable of liberating subjectivity from the sway of structural terror that founds the social link,¹³ could never advance very far since it remained confined within the narrow limits of a creative process.

The problem remained for Godard how to take forward the creative promise embodied by Guillaume at the very end of *La Chinoise*. For the result of Godard’s self-confessed “leftist trip” was an artistic impotence that one might argue was already latent in the film when Guillaume is pelted masochistically with vegetables by townspeople who pay for the privilege. Indeed, for Richard Brody, *La Chinoise* is essentially the work of a self-abasing and self-excoriating filmmaker on the verge of a political and aesthetic breakdown who applied his own attributes to Guillaume, then filmed the young man’s private chastisement by Véronique and subsequent public self-humiliation in an attempt to purge himself of them. Hence, for all its daring technique, *La Chinoise* was “something of an intellectual suicide” on Godard’s part.¹⁴ This, I think, is an overly pessimistic reading of *La Chinoise*, encouraged by an overreading of the putative links between Godard and his fictional characters and by Godard’s own propensity to castigate himself, sometimes even physically as we shall shortly see, whenever he appears in front of his own camera.

The theme of terrorism continued to remain very much alive for Godard, however, and he returned to it directly in *Tout va bien* (1972), one of the last films of the Dziga Vertov Group before it disbanded in early 1973. *Tout va bien* was Godard's attempt with Gorin to reach the mainstream by employing politically engaged stars such as Jane Fonda as an American radio correspondent and feminist falling out with her husband played by Yves Montand, a filmmaker now reduced to making commercials (a clear stand-in for Godard himself). Based around a wildcat strike at a factory and the sequestration of its boss by the workers (a familiar *gauchiste* tactic after '68), this work about class struggle, influenced more by Brecht than Althusser, is explicitly framed in terms of the fallout of May '68 and includes a flashback sequence reenacting the death of Gilles Tautin, a student who drowned while fleeing the riot police during the riots in June of that year near the Renault car factory at Flins. The general mood of blockage and elegy for a lost historical and revolutionary moment is eventually superseded by the spectacle of anarchic violence in the Carrefour supermarket where *gauchistes* (including Wiazemsky) first harangue the PCF salesman selling discounted copies of the latest party publication in the aisles like vegetables, then begin looting and encouraging all shoppers to do so as well—a pale version of spontaneous social revolt and solidarity within the gates of capitalism. *Tout va bien* underlines Godard's ambivalence towards violence: at once fascinated intellectually by its idea and aura, happily sharing the Maoist notion of the ideal cleansing powers of political violence in the name of the “dictatorship of the proletariat,” yet also profoundly suspicious of its spectacle due to its hold on the emotions and potential for indiscriminate destruction. He claimed, even as late as 1980, that the real “inheritors” of '68 were “the terrorists” (left undefined),¹⁵ although we note for the record that Godard himself never contemplated terrorist activity.

The Reality of Terrorism in France

To return to the particular specter of French revolutionary terrorism raised by *La Chinoise*: the powerful call for social violence and terrorism made by Véronique never translated itself into reality in France. Indeed, despite the impressive mobilization of millions of people during the events of '68 and the belief by many post-'68 revolutionaries that the shocking power of violence would force the masses to consider the prospect of revolution, no group embarked on a concerted campaign of terrorist violence in France until the emergence of Action Directe in 1979, which perpetrated over fifty attacks in the early 1980s, followed in the 1990s by the advent of Islamist terrorism (notably the 1995 bombings carried out by the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) that sought to extend the Algerian Civil War to France). The GP itself, although the most radical group post-'68, refused to kill anyone and renounced all forms of armed struggle in 1973, the same year that incontrovertible evidence reached the West of the brutal reality of Mao's China. It is also the case that separatist movements in Corsica and Brittany never committed acts on the scale of ETA or the IRA, and neither Palestinian nor other transnational terrorists struck French targets with the same ruthlessness they displayed in the Munich

massacre of 1972, the OPEC ministers' kidnapping in 1975, or the more notorious skyjackings of the 1960s and 1970s. In short, France escaped the kinds of terrorism that afflicted other Western European countries such as Germany, Italy, Spain, and the UK during the 1970s. The most obvious reason for this is that de Gaulle, the focus of so much venom and hatred during '68, had already engineered his own exit from the political stage (he resigned the presidency in April 1969 and died a year later). His solidly conservative successors Georges Pompidou (who died in office in 1974) and Giscard d'Estaing (president 1974–1981) were certainly objects of scorn and caused much rancor and disarray across the Left, leading some to turn dramatically to the Right by the end of the decade like the “Nouveaux Philosophes” André Glucksmann and Bernard-Henri Lévy, yet they were far from being dictators, and France, despite various warning signs, never became a police state. Perhaps, too, the very spontaneity and vertiginous “performance” of May (what the GP derisively referred to as a “dress rehearsal” because it seemed divorced from proper contact with French workers) had effectively preempted and “preexhausted” the need for full-scale terrorist violence. Certainly, the events had initiated a genuine social and cultural revolution (increased workers' rights, women's rights, gay rights, and so on), which many were now keen to build on.

At least some of the reason for this relatively peaceful outcome can, I think, be attributed to *La Chinoise* itself, a work by one of the most visible artists of the period and universally known. For if, in retrospect, the film appeared to get it so wrong about Maoist terrorism, and if it didn't *effect* anything as such (a fact impossible to prove, of course, although it played a clear role in inciting political action and revolts on American university campuses when screened in April 1968, notably at Columbia where rioters included future members of the Weathermen), nevertheless it made possible a much sharper awareness of the lure of political violence, as well as of the more general “hidden violence” without obvious agent that subtends, and maintains, the prevailing political and economic system. Indeed, in the way it allows us to think through—and above all see through—violence and militant activity/activism without mystifying it, *La Chinoise* may usefully be compared with Slavoj Žižek's important contemporary analysis of the subject in *Violence* (2008). Žižek argues convincingly here that subjective violence is just the most visible portion of a triumvirate that also includes two objective kinds of violence: “symbolic” violence, embodied in language and its forms, and “systemic” violence, or the often catastrophic consequences of that smooth functioning of our economic and political systems (Žižek 2008: 1). “Invisible,” objective violence is precisely the violence inherent in the “normal” state of things that sustains the very zero-level standard against which we perceive something as subjectively violent. Hence, according to Žižek, we need to step back from the fascination and attraction of this directly visible “subjective” violence. Acknowledging the vital difference between the utopian events of May '68 and the apparent “irrational” senselessness of the more recent riots in the French *banlieues* during the autumn of 2005, which had no political agenda as such, Žižek speaks of an impulsive, blind “acting out,” or *passage à l'acte*, that leads to (self-)destructive violence directed against one's own and which cannot be translated into speech or thought. For

Žižek, the 2005 riots need to be placed in the same context as terrorist attacks and suicide bombings, for in both cases violence is an implicit admission of impotence. The crucial difference, however, is that unlike the riots “which wanted nothing,” “terrorist attacks are carried out on behalf of that *absolute* meaning provided by religion” (Žižek 2008: 69; original emphasis). If “outbursts of impotent violence are fundamentally *reactive*” (ibid.: 179; original emphasis), the clear political challenge is to produce an authentic, active gesture that both imposes and enforces a *vision*.

Whether we can ascribe finally an overarching value and status to the events and clashes of May '68 in France (for example, that of an act of pure, “divine” violence that strikes out of nowhere and instantiates what Žižek calls, employing the vocabulary of Alain Badiou, the Event) is a question requiring a longer and separate discussion. What can be said, however, is that before, during, and after *les événements*, *La Chinoise* served as an indisputable point of political reference, implicit when not explicit, by providing a compelling picture of the implications of violence and the responsibilities of revolutionary activism. Indeed, part of the film’s particular force and agency is the brilliant way it problematizes the very notion and efficacy of action, from the lyrics of the title song that blur the logic of action and reaction (“Vietnam burns and I yell out Mao Mao/ Johnson laughs and I blow away Mao Mao”), to the narrative fact of the cell’s abrupt dissolution. By operating, unlike the Dziga Vertov Group films, always *between* art and politics, *La Chinoise* denies any “amortization of the heart and soul” (Mayakovsky) and performs a strategic intervention in cinema, stimulating the viewer into further critical reflection and enquiry. For this reason it may be said to “impose” a vision, that of the precariousness of all political action and discourse (including cinematic), yet hardly to “enforce” it. Rather, it insists with its final title card “Fin d’un début” (“End of a beginning”) on the contingent and provisional; the rest is now up to “us.” That is why it is so important to stop fetishizing retroactively the film’s mysterious prescience, a critical approach that has served to obscure its potent and still urgent message about both the impossibility of simple solutions and change through the practice of terrorist violence, and, just as crucially, the potential for terrorism within language and discourse itself, even that of love. (We shall come back to the specific question of political engagement and the fantasy of simply dissolving the word in “pure” action in chapter 6.) The particular history of Godard’s cinema that we have traced post-'68 confirms that the notion of a revolutionary active cinema may be intellectually desirable, yet it is ultimately impossible in practice. A failed political experiment, certainly, but *La Chinoise* remains a searing and profound experience of cinema—one that will inspire Godard to take to the limit the potential of montage as an instrument of thought and direct means of engaging with the world.¹⁶

Missing in Action, or the Burden of the Political

Yet where does this leave ethics? Is it simply enough to say that Godard’s aesthetic violence and terrorism, as we’ve defined it, subvert and deconstruct militant violence

and terrorism? Put differently, is the ethical question posed by *La Chinoise* of how to speak for, and represent, the other while avoiding the delusion of “being the words of others” adequately resolved by the endless recombinations of montage that appear like object lessons in becoming “other” due to the fact that each individual image and sound loses itself in juxtaposition with another and is thus left unformulated and “open”?¹⁷ Is there not perhaps something more concrete, more fundamentally “real” missing here? One crucial fact not readily acknowledged by critics is that in all the publicity images for *La Chinoise*, and even for the title song “Mao Mao,” one name is curiously absent: that of Omar Diop. It could be immediately countered that since Diop is not strictly a member of the Aden-Arabie cell and is simply playing himself, there is no automatic reason for him to be presented on equal terms with the other actors. Yet Diop is not even mentioned in the detailed two-page article Godard wrote explaining his political intentions for the film, despite being so crucial to the film’s elaboration of Maoism.¹⁸ Critics follow Godard’s lead and barely mention him, although his eloquent lecture is one of the film’s showpiece set-sequences. In fact, his role and value will only be fully recognized by Godard much later in *Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma* (1980), a transcription of the improvised talks he gave in the spring and autumn of 1978 at the Conservatoire d’art cinématographique in Montreal where he pays tribute to Diop as the film’s one “real character.” By this time, however, Diop was dead. Expelled from France in 1969 at the age of twenty-six as a political troublemaker, he returned to Senegal where he was openly critical of the president, Léopold Sédar Senghor, and eventually detained by the authorities for planning terrorist acts. He was condemned in 1972 as a threat to state security and died in a prison cell in Dakar on May 11, 1973. The official version is that he hanged himself. However, Diop’s death still remains a mystery and in all probability he was murdered.

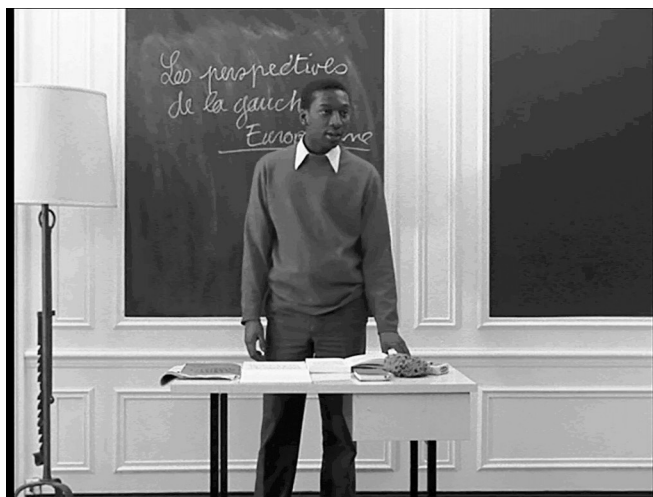


Figure 1.6. Omar Diop as himself delivering a lecture in *La Chinoise* (1967).

I wish to stay with the idea of Diop as a real character and consider the implications of his special “realness” for Godard, since it raises some vital ethical questions about Godard’s method and rhetorical engagement with the other. Godard expanded a little further in Montreal on his intentions for Diop: “I wanted him [Diop] to be the one to give the others lessons, precisely because he was black.”¹⁹ Hence, Godard positions Diop directly as the foreign (racial) other telling the indigenous white French where they are going wrong and what needs to be done politically in present-day France. Enlisted as the “real” voice and “new” image of revolutionary politics, preaching that “the road to socialism leads to revolution,” Diop functions as nothing less than—yet also in Godard’s ratiocinations no more than—a political philosopher, as opposed to the other members of the cell who are able to display other facets of their character, whether artistic or scientific. For this reason he is a monodimensional figure of the kind Godard will consistently expose as a limited and potentially flawed model precisely because not informed and inflected by the poetic and aesthetic. In actual fact, and highly ironically, Diop was not only a political militant but also deeply concerned with contemporary “outsider” aesthetics. He had already published a year before a probing article on Andy Warhol’s *Chelsea Girls* (1966), and in addition to his work for Godard featured in a short experimental film by the late Simon Hartog, *Soul in a White Room* (1968).²⁰ Hence, Diop personally embodied a rare combination of radical art and politics, the very unity presented in the film as desirable but impossible and misguidedly “resolved” by the militants through their commitment to terrorism and violence.

In short, Diop is “framed” by Godard in *La Chinoise*: set up as the voice of truth and the real on the basis of his color and political creed, he is in the very same moment dispossessed of his true presence and identity and ultimately excluded from the film and its paradiscourse. That is to say, he pays the aesthetic price for being too *real* politically. This corresponds, of course, to a familiar scheme in Godard’s thinking and practice of cinema, which attempts always to negotiate the extremes of Lumière (documentary) and fiction (Méliès) and craft a new and progressive compound of the two—a complicated and delicate balance. This is partly because film is a medium firmly of the present, as opposed to politics which, as Godard often states, always involves both the present and the past (Godard 1972: 225). The art of cinema requires therefore a special effort to negotiate aesthetically the irreversible present and to prevent it from becoming too real and overwhelming. To take just one brief but instructive example of this process from Godard’s early work: the solid aesthetic foundations and “classic” framework of *Vivre sa Vie* (the twelve-tableaux structure and the explicit, stylized use of Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Oval Portrait,” C. T. Dreyer’s silent classic, *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928), and Jean Ferrat’s working-class song “Ma Môme”) are created precisely to control and mediate, and ultimately off-set, the density of raw contemporary reality and real sound recorded within its frame. This basic working method and approach means that even when Godard reviews in 1959 a film like *Moi, un noir* (1958) by the ethnographic filmmaker Jean Rouch, he must first compliment Rouch on

a “stunning” poetic work proving conclusively he is longer merely a purveyor of ethnographic documentaries in thrall to reality. It is notable that Godard has very little indeed to say here about the film’s African setting beyond a mock-romantic comment about “Abidjan of the lagoons on the other side of the river” (Bergala 1985: 182). Indeed, Godard proposes in the article in the form of a truism that all great fiction films tend towards documentary and vice versa—a distinction he formalizes further in terms of “ethics” and “aesthetics,” which, he claims, are not mutually exclusive and “necessarily find each other at the end of the path” (ibid). In other words, an ethical commitment to the real and the other must always be counterbalanced by an aesthetic filter. *Jusqu’à la victoire* is an object lesson in the mortal dangers of attempting to get too close to real historical events at the moment of their unfolding, and in the concomitant need to maintain a healthy distance from the clamor of the present. On this point Godard’s project has always been nothing less than consistent, though the difficult art of finding the right formula for cinematic realism has to be learned all over again with each new film.

In his retrospective account of *Le Chinoise* in Montreal, Godard directly suggests that the film suffers from an overdose of reality and even bears the scars of ethnographic documentary. Indeed, he fully acknowledges the film’s ethnographic basis and “documentary aspect,” rationalizing pseudoscientifically that he “filmed it [May ’68] before it really took form [. . .] cinema can be used for this, to see the creation of forms, their embryology. Embryology is something extremely mysterious” (Godard 2014: 273). So oriented towards the real, in fact, was *La Chinoise*, and so immersed in the moment with its use not only of Diop but also of Francis Jeanson, the Marxist-Leninist students he consulted, his then partner Wiazemsky and the apartment they shared together (used for all the interior scenes), that Godard even calls it here a “queer [*drôle*] film” (ibid). Yet it is Diop who bears the brunt of this queer excess of realness by being singled out by Godard as the film’s “real” character. Which is to say, Diop is made to represent personally both the negative outcome of Godard’s “detour” into political reality during the *longue durée* of May ’68 (which, by the late 1970s, he was now keen to distance himself from) and the fundamental cinematic mistake of erring too much on the side of the real.

Hence, the story of Diop in the extended history of *La Chinoise* reveals the stark reality of Godard’s strategies of exclusive otherness which can all too quickly flip over into forms of negative projection and exclusion through selective misrepresentation and occlusion. I am not suggesting for a moment, of course, that Godard’s authorial “terrorism” towards the black other (the eclipsing of Diop in his very realness) can be equated with Senghor’s act of state terrorism through the murderous silencing of a political undesirable. However, Godard’s aesthetic violence towards the black other, whereby he inscribes Diop into *La Chinoise* as a slab of authentic otherness only then to write him out of it and, five years after his actual death, ultimately abject him as the very personification of the film’s queer shortcomings, is not too dissimilar in its dizzying contradictions and *chinoiserie* from that of the naïve young terrorists who commit murder in the name of the Other. Moreover, it is symptomatic of a larger process of formal violence in

Godard's representation of the nonwhite other that cannot simply be explained as a temporary blip or blind-spot, and which, in fact, appears more like a gaping black hole in his work. For not only is there a consistent lack of genuine and sustained engagement by Godard with black characters (even when, as in *La Chinoise*, they are visible and iconic, such as Diop and Malcolm X, and when the theme of the Third World is directly sounded), but also, more troublingly, the black other is almost always rhetorically configured to perform a fixed role defined in the delimited and highly limiting terms of political realism.

I wish for the remainder of this chapter to explore the possible reasons both for the paucity of fully fledged black characters in Godard's cinema and for his acute ambivalence towards this particular instance of the real other. I begin with a brief typology of the major functions of the black African and African American figures in his work from the mid-1960s to the present.

The Face of the Black Other

The Immigrant

In the middle of *Masculin Féminin* Paul (Jean-Pierre Léaud) and his journalist friend Robert (Michel Debord) take the Paris metro where they find themselves sitting opposite two black men and one white woman engaged in a progressively more tense personal exchange that touches on issues of race and racism. We see the angry conversation unfold mainly from Paul's side of the carriage. The woman (Chantal Darget) remarks that all "Negroes" are "political assassins in the making," and one of the black men, played by the Mauritanian actor and director Med Hondo, agrees, stating: "She [Bessie Smith] is shouting kiss my big, black ass, that's what. Charlie Parker's the same [. . .] If you told Charlie, throw away your sax, and you can kill the first ten whites you see, he'd do it. He'd never play another note." In response, and to the aghast surprise of Paul, who shouts "Beware!," the woman draws a gun out from her raincoat and shoots the man dead.

The scene is, in fact, a restaging (with lines slightly altered) of the climactic scene in the 1964 play *Dutchman*, by the African American playwright LeRoi Jones (later Amiri Baraka), a political allegory depicting black/white relations in New York during the period of the black civil rights movement (the French version had just opened in Paris, and Godard used the same French cast, though neither Hondo nor Darget is credited in the film).²¹ Yet Godard uses this emblematic scene less for what it actually says about race relations in the United States than for what it reveals of native French attitudes towards the immigrant other (shock, confusion, horror). Indeed, Godard is essentially co-opting the play's raw force and anger for his own personal critique of the solipsism of the new youth generation. Presented off-camera as a sound effect, the murder is passed off in the following intertitle as: "Nothing just a woman / and a man / and an ocean / of spilt blood." Indeed, apart from odd glimpses of recent immigrants eking out a shadowy existence in French