

# "Slow Motion" (Sauve qui peut ! la vie): A new start at another speed for Jean-Luc Godard

"Slow Motion" is the English title of Jean-Luc Godard's new film, the first to be screened at the Cannes Festival. Cinema, according to Godard, is life in slow motion. He talks about his vision of filmmaking, his long exile, and how it feels to be back.

At the age of 50, Jean-Luc Godard, the rebel, the renegade filmmaker comes to Cannes for the first time since 1968 when he and other New Wave directors interrupted the Festival. Times have changed. Although unshaven and unrepentant, Godard too has changed. The oblique references still surprise, his language is as provocative and paradoxical as ever, but the difference is that Godard wants to win now. He calls "Slow Motion" his first film, made for the second time.

"I am 50 years old; I had 30 years to rehearse, and now I'm ready," he says. "In order to consider the public, you have to have flopped — look at Hitler, he only had hits. Luckily, I had a lot of flops, but it's too bad I had so many. Now I'm like a 12 year old making his first feature film — any child could make it, but nobody would give him the funds. I had a lot of trouble getting them myself."

"Slow Motion" also has to do with three characters, played by Isabelle Huppert, Nathalie Baye and Jacques Dutronc. "One moves a little, one normally, and the third not enough" "Slow motion" also has to do with Etienne Marey's analysis of movement, and the technical term.

"Everybody films in slow motion today," says Godard, "even Sylvester Stallone. I do mine in the lab, and I prefer to call it decomposing because, like music, it's a question of different rhythms. Cinema is life slowed down: once we pin down the picture, we can look at what happened and tell the story."

For the first time Godard abandons screenwriting credits: Anne Marie Mieville and Jean-

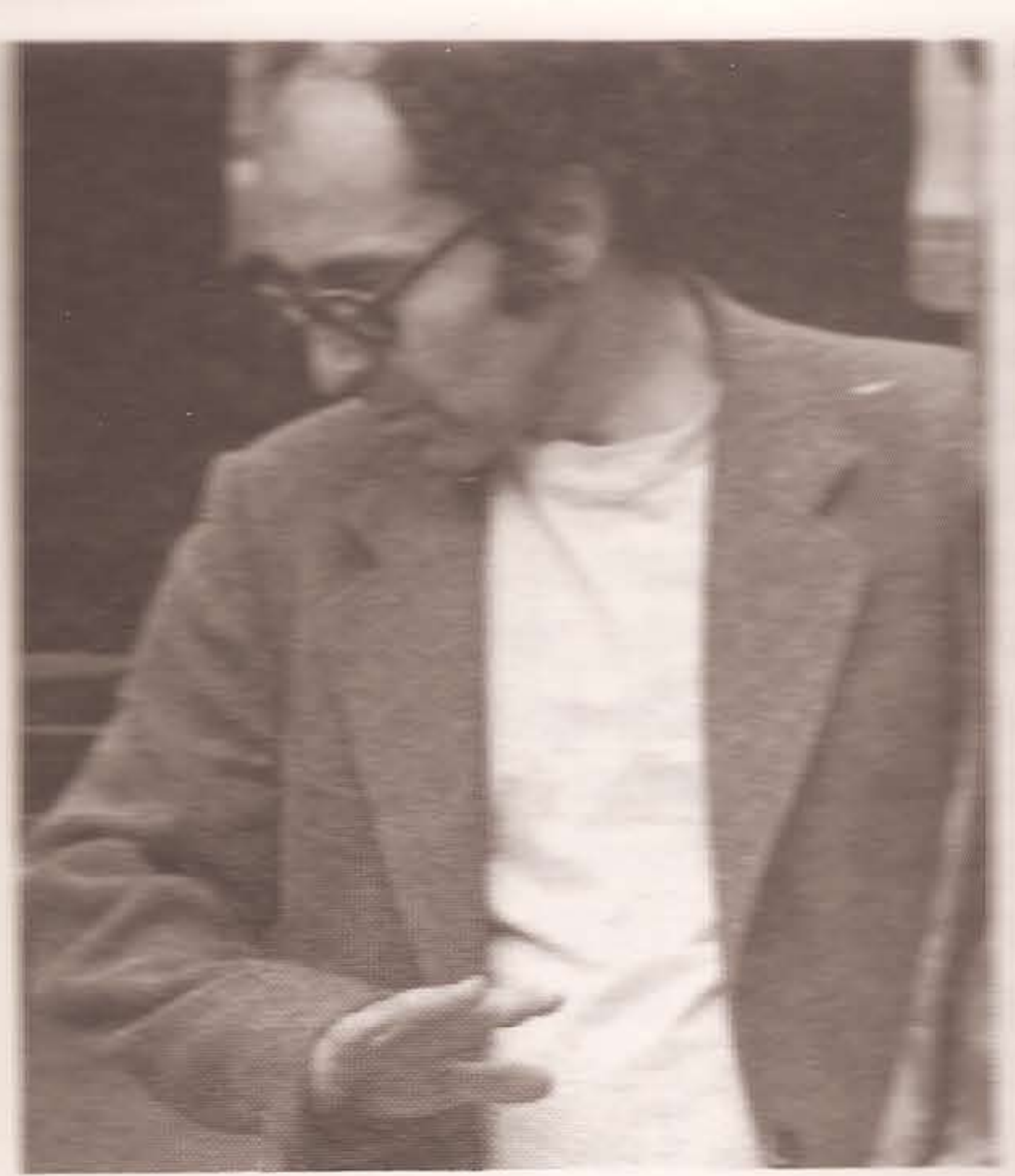
Claude Carrière are credited. "I am listening to more people than I used to," he admits with a smile. "In the early days people used to work together more. Our insistence on the "auteur" concept was our way of existing. After Liberation, cinema was as closed as a typical French Protestant family — not just anyone could get in, so in order to exist, we had to exaggerate. That's why we said Hitchcock is as great as Chateaubriand. But today it's clear that the "auteur" of "Being There" is not Hal Ashby, it's Lorimar and Lorimar's bankers."

He is not shy about describing his own skirmishes with U.S. companies. "I discussed my American project (Bugsy Siegel) with Columbia. They asked if I had a script, and I said, what do you mean by a script? They said, something you can budget. Well, that's frank at least."

He describes his project as being about Hollywood, the story of a mafia man: "It's called "L'Histoire", "The Story", about how we see our lives in story terms." After Diane Keaton turned it down, he returned to Europe and started his Franco-Swiss coproduction, "Slow Motion" because he wanted to make a film fast and bring it to Cannes.

Godard talks about how passion has gone out of film criticism and filmmaking. "The strength of the New Wave was that we found writing about cinema as intense as the act of movie making. There was a lot of passion then. I don't have it any more either, but I can invent it again. It's not like something you have in you — it's like work, or love."

He has lost sight of the others



of his generation, "or they lost sight of themselves — except for Rivette." The big advantage of U.S. cinema is that it moves, "simply because there is more than one center: people commute between New York and the Coast," and he is convinced that he has survived, "at least I haven't committed suicide," because he moves between two centers too, and maintains his Franco-Swiss double identity.

He is appalled at the sloppiness in filmmaking today: "If dentists and pilots worked the way movie people work, we'd all walk around with tooth aches and planes would crash every day," he says, adding, "I think that even kings and princesses used to work harder for their living than today's big stars." Famous for struggles on the set over lighting and camera work, he denies that he is difficult. "I'm sensitive and meticulous," he says. For all that, he is pleased with the results of "Slow Motion": "If there is a better film, I won't be too jealous, and if it is better than others, I won't feel too superior — that's a big change for me."

When asked to comment on his years of exile, he says that he has always lived in exile: "I left my family, and, for a while, I left cinema because it became too much like a family — I don't like family reunions and that's why I am not liked. If I had been in the mafia, I would have been wiped out long ago," he says.

Joan Dupont

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