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Everything Is Cinema: The Working Life Of Jean-Luc Godard



Synopsis

A landmark biography explores the crucial resonances among the life, work, and times of one of the most influential filmmakers of our age. When Jean-Luc Godard wed the ideals of filmmaking to the realities of autobiography and current events, he changed the nature of cinema. Unlike any earlier films, Godard's work shifts fluidly from fiction to documentary, from criticism to art. The man himself also projects shifting images--cultural hero, fierce loner, shrewd businessman. Hailed by filmmakers as a--if not the--key influence on cinema, Godard has entered the modern canon, a figure as mysterious as he is indispensable. In *Everything Is Cinema*, critic Richard Brody has amassed hundreds of interviews to demystify the elusive director and his work. Paying as much attention to Godard's technical inventions as to the political forces of the postwar world, Brody traces an arc from the director's early critical writing, through his popular success with *Breathless*, to the grand vision of his later years. He vividly depicts Godard's wealthy conservative family, his fluid politics, and his tumultuous dealings with women and fellow New Wave filmmakers. *Everything Is Cinema* confirms Godard's greatness and shows decisively that his films have left their mark on screens everywhere.

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Customer Reviews

Jean-Luc Godard's output has been prodigious, and this massive book by Richard Brody manages to cover most of Godard's films up to 2004 and how they relate to the auteur's life. Brody, who first came to prominence as a writer for *The New Yorker*, has seen every one of Godard's films, and not

only does he take us from Godard's early life and first feature *A BOUT DE SOUFFLE* up to his then most-recent feature *NOTRE MUSIQUE*, but he also describes Godard's many short films and television works, some of which are little known. Proceeding chronologically through Godard's life, Brody first describes the context for how each film was made: Godard's personal relationships with the actors or screenwriters involved, where the money for the shoot was coming from, and how the shoot itself proceeded. Without getting too in-depth -- this is fundamentally a work of biography, not of very close analysis -- Brody describes the general plot and main episodes of each of the films. Brody sometimes claims that events on screen reflect events in Godard's private (usually romantic) life, and from other reviews here these claims seem to be contentious. However, that Godard's early films mirrored his relationships with Anna Karina and Maria Vlasto was noted even in the 1960s by people close to Godard, and Brody is often basing himself on published sources. (Nearly all factual claims in the book are sourced, and the book ends with a lengthy section of endnotes). Brody finds Godard's work to be interesting and often rewarding overall, but he does not believe that every film that Godard has made is of equal value, and he sometimes mentions his preferences. He feels that Godard was at an artistic nadir in the late 1960s and early 1970s with his politically radical films (the Dziga Vertov years).

"(Richard Brody's) *Everything is Cinema*", famous French philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy is quoted as commenting on the back cover, "is better than a biography, it is a novel". Fiction, in other words. I prefer to invoke the title of a Charles Mingus composition, viz "All the things you'd be by now if Sigmund Freud's wife were your mother": Over nearly 600 pages, page by page, precisely and adoringly, emerges the profile of a total neurotic, a misogynist misanthrope, a miser. A bit of a private life component may be the spice of a biography, but if nothing else but his private (ie off-screen) life is advanced to determine and explain all of Godard's films and video activities, the reader tires rather quickly: In the end, *Le mÃ©pris* (1963) is an excellent and intelligent film because Alberto Moravia's underlying novel is great (sociological rather than psychological) analysis, and Godard a skilled and innovative *metteur en scene*. Some things are irrelevant, like his failed alliance with a relatively more mature Marina Vlasto - Anne-Marie MiÃ©ville, the author rightly remarks, will be the first and only of Godard's women of equal caliber. And whether Godard held hands with Brigitte Bardot walking up the stairs of Curzio Malaparte's avant-gardist villa is about as irrelevant as his "accusation" of FranÃ§ois Truffaut of having had a candid affair with Jacqueline Bisset during the turning of *La nuit amÃ©ricaine* (1973), and not showing it in that movie... ("how come only the director has no affair in that film?"). Brody's method of endless narration makes it difficult for him,

and subsequently the reader, to in any defined way assess the weight/quality of Godard's individual films. This is perhaps the main weakness of the book.

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