KINONIK

MASCULIN-FEMININ (1966)

Directed by Jean-Luc Godard

WEDNESDAY September 8th 7PM



Godard began shooting in November 1965 without a script — a spiral notebook of dialogue and ideas, a small crew, available light, real rooms. He had agreed to adapt two Maupassant stories and then threw them out, keeping a name. What he made instead was a survey.

That's the film's actual form. Jean-Pierre Léaud's Paul, freshly out of the army and in love with a yé-yé singer (Chantal Goya, an actual yé-yé singer), spends the picture at café tables, the rooms where young Paris in 1965 does its arguing, asking questions: about Vietnam, about contraception, about socialism, about what they want. The centerpiece is an interrogation of a magazine beauty-contest winner, Miss Nineteen, who is asked whether she knows what "reactionary" means. Godard took the apparatus of market research and aimed it at the young, and one of his fifteen chapter cards supplies the line everyone remembers: this film could be called The Children of Marx and Coca-Cola.

In 1966 that was a diagnosis. French censors then banned the film to anyone under eighteen, locking out precisely the audience it was made about, while Berlin gave Léaud the Silver Bear. Two years later the students Godard interviewed were building barricades in the Latin Quarter: May 1968, ten million workers out on a general strike, de Gaulle briefly fleeing the country.

Sixty years on, the polling has stopped being an exposure and become the medium. We are all interviewed continuously and monetized on the answers, and asking young people what they think is no longer an avant-garde gesture; it's the business model. What survives is smaller and more damning. Paul asks and asks and never arrives anywhere near Madeleine. He mistakes interrogation for intimacy. The masculine and the feminine of the title don't oppose each other so much as fail to make contact: two vocabularies in the same café, in the same bed, describing different countries.

Nobody in this film is short of questions. Godard doesn't pretend to know the answers either; he just holds the camera on their faces while they try.