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Wrestling with God and humans: Godard's view of gender relationships as illustrated in his film *Hail Mary*

Revisiting the film *Hail Mary* directed by Jean Luc Godard (France, 1984), this paper sketches some reflections on the artist's view of the close yet conflicted relationship between Mary and God; a relationship that invokes Mary's proud consciousness of being a woman. In the French director's gender-conscious eyes, womankind is seen in poetic terms, as a mystery of strength and vulnerability that overcomes the logic of gender roles considered as cultural constructions. In her relationship with God, Mary is increasingly emancipated, and when she is in the presence of God – a presence imbued with a tension that reflects the sense in which she is less and less the real owner of her life and body – her acceptance of what happens is deeply marked by the perception of otherness. But once she has fulfilled her duty, giving birth to the son of God, and the child has grown away from her and from Joseph, she seems to feel free to be and live much more in accordance with conventional human expectations. Yet, is this really freedom or, rather, a new obligation to conform to social expectations, as seems clearly reflected in the movie's ending? Arguably, in the end, Mary's autonomy in relation to God is paid for precisely in terms of her adaptation to these social claims and standards. At this point, Mary's way of living gender relationships becomes a simple renegotiation of the seductive feminine stereotype. Her proud autonomy and self-consciousness is channelled back into how she plays the ordinary sexual game, as if there is no other way for her to assert control.

1. *Hail Mary*: the Gospel as Archetype of the Ordinary

It is widely known that on its 1985 release, Godard's film *Hail Mary* not only ignited controversy in a sector of the Catholic audience strong enough to involve the film in a veritable holy war of critical controversy,¹ but was also

¹ Cf. Maryel Locke, "A History of the Public Controversy," in: Maryel Locke / Charles Warren (eds.), *Jean-Luc Godard's Hail Mary: Women and the Sacred in Film* (Southern Illinois University Press: Carbondale – Edwardsville 1993), 1-9.

subjected to assorted, often conflicting, interpretations in regard to both its value as a cinematic work and its meaning.

Now, some twenty-five years after its debut, the film has undoubtedly lost some of its significance as an iconoclastic work, but it remains provocative. It is still an enigmatic work due to its complex, yet cohesive, structure. In fact, despite its title, this film was not conceived as any kind of attempt to confront the mystery of Mary's virginal conception or of the Incarnation as an event in salvation history. The focus of the film was rather the intimate, private exchanges and interactions between a woman and a man coming to terms with an event as unexpected and profoundly traumatic as that which befell Mary and Joseph.

As Godard explains in an interview, the movie emerged from questions concerning what Mary and Joseph could have said to each other before having a child, noting that for him, "that is the major problem, because from the Bible we know of only two or three words that Mary spoke, and from Joseph absolutely nothing."²

However, attempting to justify the weight given to these questions requires a hermeneutic choice that calls for a change of theoretical perspective: a shift from Biblical, soteriological notions based in theology to mythological, archetypal ones (although in Biblical texts the two are often correlated). This choice is one mediated by Françoise Dolto's celebrated *L'Évangile au risque de la psychanalyse*, a text often quoted word for word in the film and one that could be considered as the primary source of Godard's psychological depiction of the main characters.³

If examined solely as mythological elaborations of archetypal dynamics and themes, the Gospels might appear to give a very incomplete picture of Mary and Joseph's characters in a psychological sense. However this becomes unimportant if one instead concentrates on the OT background of the Gospel in terms of history and salvation. Against this background that which is soberly reported about the reactions of Mary and Joseph becomes quite revelatory.

Otherwise, the intimate exchanges between Mary and Joseph can only be translated, as they are in the film, into conflicting and painful expressions of our human need to come to terms with events imposed upon us regardless of

² Cf. Katherine Dieckmann, "Godard in His 'Fifth Period': An Interview," in: *Film Quarterly* 39.2 (Winter 1985-1986), 224-232.

³ Cf. Sandra Laugier, "The Holy Family," in: Locke – Warren (eds.), *Jean-Luc Godard's Hail Mary*, 27-38.

our wills or expectations. Once again, Godard states that the film is not about the Virgin Mary, but only “about a woman named Mary who ... finds herself part of an exceptional event that she never would have wished for herself.”⁴

And it is precisely this void that the film attempts – by means of a filmic construction that is as complex as it is glossy – to fill by providing us with the occasion to immerse ourselves in the psychological context of two people who are implicated in the gender dynamics underpinning the business of welcoming a new, unexpected, life.

If we can understand *Hail Mary* as an apocryphal text,⁵ searching to record and describe what the evangelical texts do not tell us (i.e. what happened between Mary and Joseph after the Annunciation), the composition works on a number of different levels making reference to topics of the Marian tradition such as the Eve/Mary parallelism,⁶ but also proposing that conflict is the basic and inevitable model of gender relationships. The insertion of sequences concerning natural events, symbolizing nature as feminine fertility, directs the viewer's attention to the cosmic rhythms that regulate the universe, in spite of the law of sexual conflict governing the human world.

In this light, Mary's conception appears to be mysterious – a mystery derived from the same mystery that governs life. Mary's virginal character, rather than indicating a lack and the dependency of human beings on God that is typical of the Biblical world, is the symbol of acquiescence to a natural law that transcends human desire for power and control. It is also the mark of the reciprocal recognition of intangibility and inaccessible intimacy between those who find themselves involved in any kind of relationship, particularly in the case of a conception. The transcendence of the world as a living whole, and of people as co-agents reveals itself on two levels: on a cosmic one as immanent rule, and on a human level as separateness.

⁴ Cf. Giuseppina Marin, interview with J.-L. Godard, *Corriere della Sera* (25 april 1985); quoted in: Locke, “A History of the Public Controversy,” 5.

⁵ Elena Giannarelli, “Intorno alla Vergine: Je vous salue Marie di Godard”, in: Sandra Isetta (ed.), *Il volto e gli sguardi: Bibbia, letteratura, cinema. Atti del convegno “E la Parola si fece film” (Imperia – Porto Maurizio, 17-18 ottobre 2008)*, (Edizioni dehoniane: Bologna 2010), 357-369.

⁶ This seems to justify the insertion of the subplot relating the unhappy relationship between a student (Eve) and a Czechoslovakian professor who is teaching a series of classes on the origin of life. Cf. Laura Mulvey, “Mary/Eve. Continuity and Discontinuity in J.L. Godard's Iconography of Women,” in: Locke – Warren (eds.), *Jean-Luc Godard's Hail Mary*, 39-53; Vlada Petric – Geraldine Bard, “Godard's Vision of the New Eve”, in: Locke – Warren (eds.), *Jean-Luc Godard's Hail Mary*, 98-114.

2. Ordinary and Extraordinary

At the end of the film, the intimate relationship between God and Mary seems intended to teach Mary and Joseph the deeper meaning of being involved in the welcoming of life, giving a very different meaning from the way in which we usually understand it.

The “exceptional event” being reenacted in the film – despite all, in conformity with how it is told in the Gospels – because of the mythological connotations already mentioned,⁷ comes across as nothing more than the *exemplum* of all conceptions, or more particularly, of the male idea of conception,⁸ an idea characterized by the male temptation toward paternal doubt.⁹

The ordinary and the extraordinary – the one entangled in the other – illuminate each other. The intent of the film is twofold; it is, as Sandra Laugier notes quoting Dolto’s *Évangiles*:

“...to show the ordinary character of the life of the ‘little people’ that were Joseph and Mary and to show, conversely, the extraordinary character of every encounter, every birth. That is, according to Dolto, the truth inscribed in this story, which

⁷ In the film, Mary and Joseph seem to be not represented, as the NT, facing the mystery of God’s design of salvation, but as figures of every woman and man facing the mystery of becoming parents. The tales of the Gospels are in some sense mythologized. They lose their historical roots in the OT mind.

⁸ Cf. Gayatri Chatterjee, “A Failure to Make Contact,” in: Locke – Warren (edd.), *Jean-Luc Godard’s Hail Mary*, 82-85. Notably she asks: “Isn’t the requirement of a virgin a male demand?”

⁹ Cf. Laugier, “The Holy Family,” 35; cf. also, Stanley Cavell, “Recounting Gains, Showing Losses: Reading *The Winter’s Tale*,” in: Id., *Disowning Knowledge in Six Plays of Shakespeare* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 1987), 193-221. The male imaginary has been haunted from the uncertainty of the fatherhood until very recent times, when biotechnologies have provided undoubted evidences. Among the outcomes of this ancestral and deeply rooted fear, two are here relevant: the obsession for female virginity, and the imagination of a male conception (an archetypal example of this fantasy is the birth of Athena from the head of Zeus). It is significant that in the Gospels both are traceable, the second one especially in the Prologue of the Gospel of John related to the ancient idea (cf. Aristotle) of the merely passive, receptive feminine role. On this see Turid Karlsen Seim, “Women and Negotiations of Gender in the Gospel of John,” in the volume dedicated to the Gospels and to the Acts of Apostle, edited by Marinella Perroni and Mercedes Navarro Puerto, forthcoming in the series *The Bible and Women: An Encyclopaedia of Exegesis and Cultural History*. On the attitude against otherness implied in the male conception fantasy, from a philosophical point of view, cf. Agnese Maria Fortuna, “Il figlio fondatore: reminiscenze bibliche e letterarie in *Experience* di Ralph Waldo Emerson a margine della lettura di Stanley Cavell,” in: *Vivens homo* 20 (2009) 2, 335-361.

makes it at once a myth and a quite ordinary story. 'The human destiny of every couple is thus found in the story of the couple composed by Joseph and Mary. But, in return, this extraordinary couple helps us discover the depth of any encounter between an ordinary man and woman'. (...) Dolto talks about an 'impossible encounter', but she conceives of this deficiency as positive, constitutive of the true relationship. Therein lies the teaching of her text. 'These Gospels describe how, in a couple, the other never fulfills his or her partner, how there is always a rending, a deficiency, an impossible encounter, and not a relationship of possession, of phallocracy, of dependence.'¹⁰

3. Transcendence: Separateness and Corporeity

The impossibility of the encounter, which may be read as the condition of not being able to be owned or possessed, could also be attributed to the otherness of the irreducible beings in question. Rather than belonging to one or the other, the substance of the transcendence, as it is revealed by the film, is in fact the separateness which in the fabric of day-to-day life is always *entre nous*: between us and ourselves, between us and the other, between us and the things, between us and the events, between us and God.

However, the *entre nous* is not only the place of coexistence, wherein anybody can see him or herself and can be as he or she is in the interrelationship with the other, but the *entre nous* is also the space of welcoming, the space where the new appears and takes shape. In this sense, transcendence becomes a void, an empty space, an absence. What happens within this void is always the impossible, that is to say "the new," which we are forced to realize is independent from us, although it involves us as subjects of multiple forms of responsibility and of responsiveness. Mary finds this space in her body: it is her body.

4. The Body of Mary

Through the male gaze of Godard, not only is the fascination and the elusiveness of the female body¹¹ restored to us but, most of all – and in an impeccable manner – we are given back what is most characteristic of this body; its being both an "instrument" of expressions and a "place" of reception. Perhaps the self-conscious masculinity of the director has never before been

¹⁰ Laugier, "The Holy Family", 33-34.

¹¹ As Laura Mulvey notes in "Mary/Eve: Continuity and Discontinuity in J.-L. Godard's Iconography of Women", 39: "this film draws attention, from a new and illuminating angle, to the long zig-zag path of Godard's struggle with the meaning of the feminine."

so respectful of the female unknown as in this film, giving us back, in all its complexity, the relationship that women have with their own bodies, bodies that act and are acted upon, flaunted and withdrawn, possessed and denied, abused and cared for.

In the film, faced with everything that is happening to her beyond her control, Mary finds herself engaged in an exhausting battle as she struggles against God, against herself, against human inability to understand her situation, and even against the “other” that we are to ourselves. This struggle is constantly somatized, both in word and gestures: what happens to Mary forces her to take a stand and each of these stands takes the shape of an impact on the body.

The place of contention is the body of Mary; a body which she increasingly understands as being her own and, at the same time, a body she comes to understand, she is being dispossessed of, because she is pregnant with the son of God. This is a body that she experiences as inaccessible even to herself while at the same time she realizes it’s as if she has been given to this body to care for, a body of which she is protective, although she exposes it, offering it to the care of others.

Experience sharpens her perception, not always a conscious one, of the deceptive demarcation between interiority and exteriority. While attempting to preserve her autonomy, Mary is forced to reason in terms of body and soul: “Let the soul be body, then no one can say the body is soul, since the soul shall be body”,¹² she says to herself. But the relation between the images and the words – their expressive and evocative quality which transforms words into images and images into words – even more than the disquieting somatization of feelings into the reflexes of the body, seems to contradict this dualism. According to this interpretation the object of the film could be understood as incarnation taking shape, as we are exposed to the light of every thing (be it an idea or a film), or every person (a baby, but also in the sense of the acquisition of one’s one individuality, Mary or Joseph).

That we are our own bodies more than our subject position and all that we relate to it (expectations, fears, values, our own experiences, and collective experience – all that falls under our own control), and that we *are* our body

¹² “Je veux que l’âme soit corps, et on ne pourra pas dire que le corps est âme, puisque c’est l’âme qui sera corps”. The French quotations are derived from “Repérage Cinétitres – The French Dialogue,” in: Locke – Warren (eds.), *Jean-Luc Godard’s Hail Mary*, 185-228; the English translation, provided by John Gianvito and Maryel Locke (cfr.: “Shot Breakdown,” *ibid.*, 131-183), has been diffusely revised according to the French dialogues.

and we do not merely live *in* it is an often painful realization which, as time goes by, becomes more and more difficult to accept. But the film does not address this issue, it limits itself to showing that what should be natural for us, in reality is not.

Mary discovers her body has unexpected receptive abilities. By means of her mysterious virginal pregnancy, she finds out about these capacities, conforms to them, and even teaches others to conform to them; she experiences them in their functional aspect, the only manner that she is allowed to come to terms with the task that she has been charged with by God. "Being a virgin should mean being available, or free, not doing evil",¹³ she tells the doctor: an availability that is docility, meaning being malleable, receptive, and responsive. But, in no way is it a passive subservience.¹⁴ Quite the opposite: Mary shows a fuller awareness of her free individuality during the time that she becomes aware of the fact she is consigned to God than at any time before that. Possessed, she finds herself put back in charge, and she never surrenders.

5. In Between Rules of the Game and *Confiance*

Regardless of appearances that emphasize the traits of very youthful femininity, stylized according to the canons of an aesthetic taste that reflects the male stereotype of the Virgin Mary, Mary is a fighter. Her appealing youthfulness seems to have bloomed in the ordinary, healthy soil of a small town setting (in Switzerland in fact), in the present, suspended time made eternal by the evangelical expression "*en ce temps là*" (at that time) which reoccurs throughout the events of the film. In this context, Mary's life has the same qualities as the body of water shown in the first sequence. A pond is penetrated without rupturing by the fall of a weight that seems to allude to the unexpected event that will befall her. A mirror image of great emotional impact, in the second half of the movie, makes clear the meaning of this image: one sees Mary with the naked baby in her arms emerging from the same body of water; a double birth?

Mary knows the rules of the competition and of team work. It is not by chance that we see her for the first time while she is busy in a game of basketball; she asks herself if anything will ever happen to her that will change

¹³ "*Être vierge, ça devrait être... être disponible, ou libre, pas faire mal.*"

¹⁴ On the relationship between the moral evil and subservience cf. Agnese Maria Fortuna, *Il contagio del male: un commentario a The Addiction di Abel Ferrara* (Aleph editrice: Montesperoli 2006).

her life. It is as if, at this point, she feels her life has simply been a training for a similarly predictable game of life, wherein the unforeseeable is reduced to the uncertainty of a result that is quite irrelevant.

This insistence on rules and on teamwork returns throughout the film, in particular in relation to the skeptical behavior of Joseph who, facing Mary and her pregnancy and her requests for respect, would prefer to follow his *own* rules, which are basically those of his own desires, and those shared by society. To enter the game of life means, in this new sense, to abandon self-referential logic while experiencing how much more difficult it is to restrain one's own desire than to conform to the normative values of society, and do it together with the others, directly and as personally committed. "I didn't used to think before basketball was like that: exhaustion, winning, exhaustion,"¹⁵ Joseph confesses to Mary, commenting on what she writes to him in a letter.

But this is not enough (in fact, Joseph continues: "but what did you mean by: 'That's not enough'? You said you could see I loved you."¹⁶). It is necessary to enter the game with an attitude of *confidence* (again, like the necessary collaboration between players in a team), an attitude that, aside from being incompatible with skepticism, raises the question of reciprocity, a question that both will have to confront, and Mary specifically both toward Joseph and toward God.

Differently from Joseph, Mary seems to understand from the beginning that what this situation requires from her is *confidence*: trust and faith, but also confidence, all of which are aspects of love as the little girl, who accompanies Gabriel throughout the film in his duty of announcement and oversight, points out to the "blind" Joseph as she is scolding him. This confidence gives Mary back to herself, freeing her from social conditioning (the necessity of being as others – and ourselves – expect us to be and to act in conformity with accepted beliefs). The first effect of this confidence, not by chance in the central sequences of the movie, is her refusal to buy herself a lipstick, immediately followed by a scene of her going to Joseph to bring him back to himself as well by teaching him the right attitude through her own and his own body, literally making him touch with his hand what he obstinately continues to doubt, her pregnant belly, almost quoting John 20:24-28 so that he, like Thomas, would cease to be "unbelieving and become a believer" (John 20:27).

¹⁵ "Je pensais pas que le basket c'était ça, la fatigue, la victoire, la fatigue".

¹⁶ "Mais qu'est ce que tu voulais dire? Faudra autre chose, tu disais que tu voyais bien que je t'aimais", Joseph says revealing his present difficult to understand what love means.

In the sequence in which Mary takes off her clothes, in response to Joseph's request, one notes that the tension between them is resolved in the moment in which *she* declares her love for him – as if it is only at this point that she has managed to overcome, not only the difficulty at the root of Joseph's skepticism, but the difficulty that underlies her own skepticism. It seems that at the very moment in which she realizes that she herself has been “convicted of doubt and insufficient love”¹⁷ and finds out that this was one of the causes of the inadequacy of Joseph's attitude, she finally comes to accept their being involved together by God's will for the same purpose (her words: “we can't escape one another anymore than we can escape him”¹⁸).

However, Mary still feels conflicted when it comes to satisfying Joseph's request to see her naked. As the story unfolds, Mary finds herself sharing Joseph's desires and starts to feel the weight of the chastity imposed on her by God. “To be chaste is to know every possibility, without ever straying,”¹⁹ she says to herself while thinking about how to teach Joseph also to be chaste: it is an exercise of retreat starting from contact, as is indicated in the film when Joseph takes his hands from Mary's naked body.

6. The Unexpected: the Word Taking Shape

The unexpected event happens and the reverberations of its impact on Mary's existence spread to Joseph's existence in concentric waves around the space opened up by the irruption of a life that depends exclusively on God. But what life doesn't depend on it?

At the moment of the annunciation by the girl who accompanies the angel, Mary is told exactly the goal she has to achieve by challenging the unexpected, “Be pure, be rough. Follow your way.”²⁰ To the question asked by Mary (“my way, my track or the sound of my voice?”²¹), the little girl replies with an enigmatic phrase²² that we can perhaps read as, “I have and I am delivering the word that is addressed to you and you will soon find the word that is your own and that you will find as received.”

¹⁷ It is what Gonzalo recognizes about himself in Wistan Hugh Auden, *The Sea and the Mirror: A Commentary on Shakespeare's The Tempest*, Arthur Kirsch (ed.) (Princeton University Press: Princeton 2003), 17.

¹⁸ “*Nous n'échapperons pas plus les unes aux autres que nous ne lui échappons*”.

¹⁹ “*Être chaste, c'est connaître toutes les possibilités sans s'y perdre*”.

²⁰ “*Sois pure, sois dure, ne cherche que ta voie*”.

²¹ “*Ma voie, mon chemin ou le son de ma voix?*”.

²² “*Ne fais pas l'imbécile, j'ai ta parole et tu trouveras bientôt la tienne*”.

Mary will proceed along this path with determination, facing Joseph's painful frustration,²³ the affectionate disbelief of the doctor, her own reluctance to comprehend fully, and especially, the presence of God, inescapable as much as elusive, active yet obscure. A presence of omnipotence that cannot be described but only perceived as Mary herself acknowledges.

The presence of God materializes, even before the son, in the allocution of the Word. In front of the Word pronounced by God and delivered by the angel to Mary stands the word of Mary which she herself needs to find. But Mary will find out soon enough, by continuing on the path that was shown to her, that this word is not part of the vocabulary of everyday life. The unexpected operates within her on the level of language, the same way that it operates on the level of the body: the generation of the novel, of the still not come to light (unborn).

The estrangement of ordinary language is superimposed on the expropriation of the body: "It's been ages since I've had a normal conversation. Yet nature prevails. I want to talk, like others. Because, though I hide it, I'm in pain, like others. Even a bit more,"²⁴ Mary tells herself in the course of a night full of self-questioning. And during a moment of peace, in the words of Scripture she confirms her own *confidence*: "Let it be with me according to your word." (LK 2:38)²⁵

Although this expropriation and estrangement are experienced by Mary in a deeply dramatic way – she translates her experience of the overpowering imposition of the will of God in her in terms of actual violence²⁶ – they bring

²³ By the way, Joseph stubbornly remains by her side, accepting the undeniable on his own terms.

²⁴ "*Il y a long temps que je ne sais plus ce que c'est qu'une conversation ordinaire, et pourtant la nature l'emporte, je voudrais parler comme tout le monde, parce qu'en dépit des apparences je souffre, comme tout le monde.*"

²⁵ "*Qu'il me soit fait selon votre Parole.*"

²⁶ Remarkable are the words of Mary during the last nocturnal conflict, words that seem to register a true internal experience of catharsis. Due to space, we quote her words only in their English translation: "What makes a soul is its pain. He'll be the first to hear my pain for them. And he told me: Daughter, I'm suffocating to see you suffocate. God's a creep, a coward who won't fight, who counts on ass alone, that is, on a quiet heart, for existence, an excess of ingress. I want no joy. I don't want to wear out my heart in one go, or my soul, in one go. Even pain won't get me in one go, and I won't disappear into it. It will disappear with me. It will always be frightening and horrible for me to be the Master, but, there'll be no more sexuality in me. I'll know the true smile of the soul, not from outside, but from inside, like a pain that's always deserved. It's not a matter of experience but of total disgust, total hatred, and not of morality or dignity. The Father and Mother must kiss to death over my body. Then

into being her generative capabilities: creative capabilities in the responsive sense that is proper to human beings. Violated, she appears strong: subjected to God, she appears able to respond to events.

The measure of difference between the Word of God and the human words, becomes – almost obsessively – a focal center of Mary's attention: it's the creating Word that always comes before the words of the creatures, that summons them into being. And it is on this Word that their capacity for creativity must turn: "We're speaking His Word. How else can we be close to His Word than by speaking it? We're speaking, and we're speaking of the Word. What we're speaking of, the Word, is always ahead of us".²⁷

7. The Word of Mary

What is the word of Mary? If the Word of God is the son, represented in the scene in which he emerges from the waters of the lake, the word of Mary is her self, or better, herself in relation to the son. The fact that this relationship is of paramount importance in the establishing of Mary's autonomous individuality is evident in the closing scenes.

Once her task is completed with the child's exit from her life ("I must tend to my Father's affairs,"²⁸ he says to Mary and Joseph while saying goodbye), Mary, who up until that point had experienced her own femininity in a total and consuming autonomy in regard to external social rules, strongly opposing herself to the expectations of others and also inviting others to do the same, now begins to adopt a persona that begins, instead, to conform to their stereotypical images and expectations.

Lucifer will die, and we'll see, we'll see who's weariest, him or me. Earth and sex are in us, outside there are only stars. Willing isn't expanding by force. It's recoiling into oneself from level to level, for eternity. We don't need a mouth hole to eat with and an asshole to swallow infinity. Our ass must go in our head, and so descend to ass level, then go left or right to rise higher. God is a vampire who wanted me suffered in him, because I suffered and He didn't, and He profited from my pain. Mary is a body fallen from a soul. I am a soul imprisoned by a body. My soul makes me sick at heart, and it's my cunt. I'm a woman though I don't beget my man through my cunt. I am joy. I am she who is joy, and need no longer fight it, or be tempted, but to gain an added joy. I am not resigned. Resignation is sad. How can one be resigned to God's will? Are we resigned to being loved? This seemed clear to me. Too clear."

²⁷ "Nous parlons Sa Parole. Comment pouvons-nous être autrement proches de Sa Parole qu'en la parlant? Nous parlons, et nous parlons de la Parole, cela, de quoi nous parlons, la Parole, est toujours déjà en avance sur nous."

²⁸ "Il faut que je m'occupe des affaires de mon père."

In place of the shy, withdrawn and protective girl, there now stands a woman determined to flaunt, in her clothing and gestures, her own femininity as a weapon of seduction. The slit skirt, the heels, and the styled hair: men now follow her down the street, even to the parking lot.

As Mary sits in her car and lights a cigarette, we see her reluctantly applying lipstick. The closing shot focuses on her open mouth, a strong evocation of feminine sexuality displayed in all her materiality.²⁹

The final ironic note is the “Hail Mary!” of the angel who turns to her just as she is about to get into the car and drive away (I take the car as something *she* finally can drive).

Could it be that Godard did not want – or did not know how – to show in this one woman anything other than the two classic stereotype of the feminine that we know well as typical of male consciousness: that of the pure virgin and that of the shameless seducer, resolving the difference between the two in terms of dependence/independence of the maternal role? Is the notion of feminine sexuality unmanageable other than in terms of a strong opposition between sensuality and fertility? At a first glance it could be. But, we should perhaps examine more closely the importance that the relation to the son (the son that she had to learn to recognize as her own, not in terms of his biological origins, but in terms of her sense of responsibility for him³⁰), has in the dynamics of the emancipation of Mary. We should keep in mind the importance that this relationship takes on in the process of Mary’s emancipation, a process which happens not only to Mary but to those connected with her.

If we pay attention to the theme of embodiment as the coming into being of the creative Word, and we consider it as the paradigm of the artistic enterprise – at least in the sense in which it could be considered paradigmatic of any human endeavor of collaboration in bringing to life that which has never been before, be it a thing or a person, an event or a relationship, an endeavor that is considered in all of its risks and all of its implications – Mary emerges as representative, not of woman but of the feminine, creative, expressive and receptive side of the artist and of each of us, male or female.³¹

²⁹ One cannot help but draw a parallel with the wide-open mouth of Eve preparing to bite the apple in the subplot.

³⁰ It is the same thing Joseph had to learn[1].

³¹ Here “feminine” is meant as a cultural construct: relative to the conceptual content or meaning, “feminine” or “masculine” could be seen as sort of labels.

The outcome of the story of Mary, which could be taken as having been dictated by the anxiety of conformity and acceptance and by the exhaustion caused by being exposed to the new and to the other, seems to warn us of the same risk about which W.H. Auden warned us at the close of *The Enchanted Flood or the Romantic Iconographic of the Sea*³² the risk of prostituting and forsaking one's self in submitting to the rules of the game of the "mendacious city." The exhortation of Rom 12:2, appears particularly appropriate: "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will."

Dieser Artikel unternimmt eine Re-Lektüre des Films *Je vous salue, Marie* von Jean Luc Godard (F 1984). Dabei wird die Sicht des Künstlers auf die enge, konfliktreiche Beziehung zwischen Maria und Gott kritisch als Beziehung untersucht, die Marias Selbstbewusstsein als Frau einbezieht: Der gender-bewusste Blick des französischen Regisseurs entwirft in poetischen Formen das Frausein als ein Mysterium der Stärke und Verletzlichkeit, das die Logik der Rollen in den Beziehungen zwischen den Geschlechtern überwindet. Von Anfang der Beziehung an emanzipiert sich Maria immer mehr. Wenn sie in der spannungsvollen Gegenwart Gottes ist, wenn sie nicht länger die wirkliche Eigentümerin ihres Körpers und ihres Lebens ist, ist ihre Akzeptanz dessen, was geschieht, instinktiv voll von Wahrnehmung des Unbekannten. Aber wenn ihre Pflicht dann erfüllt ist, scheint sie sich frei zu fühlen (fraglich ist, ob dies Freiheit ist, oder eine neue Verpflichtung, diesmal gegenüber gesellschaftlichen Erwartungen!?) das zu sein und so zu leben, wie andere Männer (und Frauen) es von ihr erwarten: Ergebnis ist, dass ihre Autonomie im Verhältnis zu Gott mit ihrer Anpassung an gesellschaftliche Erwartungen und Normen bezahlt wird. Ihre stolze Autonomie und ihr Selbstbewusstsein sind nur die Wurzel der Vermessenheit im sexuellen Spiel. Nach einer kurzen Darstellung der kontroversen Interpretationen des Films diskutiert die Autorin in einer Analyse der Verbindung zwischen Bild und Wort und auf den unterschiedlichen Erzählebenen folgende Fragen: Welche Haltung von Maria gegenüber Gott und Joseph wird vorausgesetzt? Ist diese Haltung eine Art Skeptizismus (S. Cavell)? Wie verhält sich diese Form von Skeptizismus zum Paradigma des Konflikts zwischen den Geschlechtern? Inwiefern scheint der Konflikt von gesellschaftlichen Erwartungen abzuhängen, bzw. auf einer tieferen, inneren Ebene, vom Gegensatz zwischen Seele und Körper?

Reconsiderando la película *Yo te saludo, María* de Jean Luc Godard (Francia, 1984), esta exposición examina críticamente la idea del artista sobre la estrecha

³² Random House: New York 1950.

interrelación, basada en el conflicto entre María y Dios, como una relación que incluye la orgullosa conciencia de María de ser mujer: la mirada del director francés, consciente del género, esboza en términos poéticos el sexo femenino como un misterio de fuerza y vulnerabilidad que vence la lógica de los papeles en las relaciones entre los sexos. Desde el principio de la relación, María se va emancipando cada vez más. Encontrándose en la presencia de Dios, una presencia llena de tensión porque ella ha dejado de ser la verdadera dueña de su cuerpo y de su vida, su aceptación de lo que pasa está llena de la percepción de lo desconocido. No obstante, una vez que ha cumplido con su deber de dar a luz al hijo de Dios, ella parece sentir la libertad (¿es ésta la libertad, o es otro deber, esta vez en el ámbito de las expectativas sociales?) de ser y de vivir como lo espera de ella la sociedad: la consecuencia de lo que a ella le pasó es que la autonomía de María en su relación con Dios la paga con su adaptación a las exigencias y las normas sociales. Su orgullosa autonomía y conciencia de sí misma no van a ser más que la raíz de la atrevimiento del seductor en el juego sexual. Mediante un análisis de la interrelación entre la palabra y la imagen y entre diferentes esquemas narrativos, voy a discutir preguntas como éstas: ¿Cuál es la presupuesta actitud de María ante Dios y José? ¿Es una especie de escepticismo (S. Cavell)? ¿Cómo se relaciona esta forma de escepticismo con el paradigma del conflicto sexual? ¿Cómo parece depender de las expectativas sociales? Y a un nivel más profundo, interior ¿del contraste entre cuerpo y alma?

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