

## OUR SCREENING ROOM

### Masculin-féminin: 15 faits précis

by Paul Schrader

I saw *Masculin-féminin* at a defining moment in my young creative life because I had read a review by Pauline Kael in *The New Republic* in 1966 - I don't know which was more influential, the film or the review. It was a defining film and a defining review. Pauline got it. (Kael later stated that this review was responsible for her selection as film critic for *The New Yorker*.) And I, a sophomore at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, motivated by her review, tracked the film down in New York.

Midpoint between the two determining events of French political life in the Sixties, the withdrawal from Algeria in 1962 and the May '68 protests, Jean-Luc Godard, the most political of French directors, stepped back and looked into the future. The future was not ideology. The future was the consumer culture of youth.

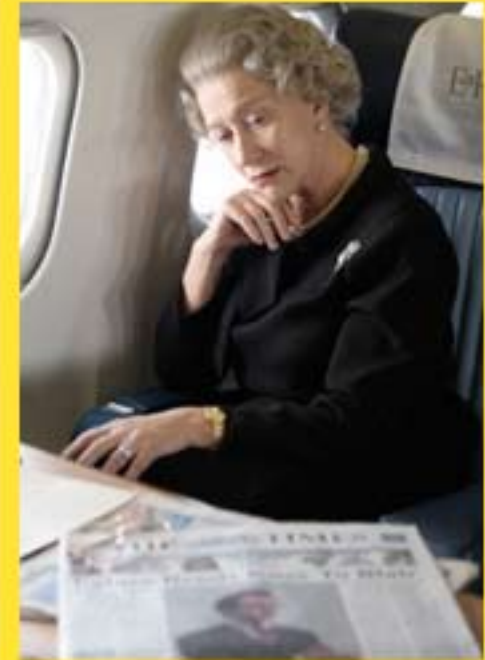
*Masculin-féminin* captures a sensibility driven by short attention span, consumer gratification and superficiality: a sensibility where print and image, artifice and realism, dialectic and documentary, improvisation and established script, montage and mise-en-scène have equal value. It's a film about the moment and a film about ideas. The characters themselves are not intelligent (intentionally so: the boy's a poll-taker, the girl a pop star wannabe); but once strung together, the fifteen episodes which comprise the film have weight and cohesion. There were immediate antecedents for *Masculin-féminin* - *A Hard Day's Night*, Andy Warhol - Godard took Lester's pop culture and Warhol's superficiality and jacked it up to the next level.

It took forty years for the bullets Godard fired in the Sixties to find their mark. In his time, there were those who thought Godard had changed filmmaking forever. That there was no going back. That was not the case. The conventions of screen narrative and the box office resisted change. But the change came nonetheless. *Masculin-féminin* looks like a film which could be made today. Godard's deconstructed sensibility is our sensibility.

Kael's review points out that *Masculin-féminin*, unlike Godard's previous films, does not rely on a comfortable stereotype, the anti-hero in *A bout de souffle*, the whore with a heart of gold in *Une femme est une femme*, and therefore was not similarly embraced by critics and audience. In *Masculin-féminin* superficiality is not a metaphor. As a result of Kael's review, the *New Yorker* Cinema, which had closed the run of the film, reopened it to a successful run. That, to a college boy in Michigan, was not just a lesson in cinema; it was a lesson in the power of film criticism to open minds and sustain art.

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**The Queen**  
**Mrs Henderson Presents**  
**The Merchant of Venice**

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