



BORDERLINES FILM FESTIVAL

ALPHAVILLE (12A)

Director: Jean-Luc Godard

Starring: Eddie Constantine, Anna Karina, Akim Tamiroff

France, 1965, 1 hour 39 minutes SUBTITLES

'Reality is too complex. What it needs is fiction to make it real,' intones the computer at the film's beginning. *Alphaville* exaggerates reality. Godard and cinematographer Raoul Coutard did not flood Paris with light. Instead, they photographed at night on real Paris locations in order to make a film with the creepy feel of a nightmare.

Alphaville - "a science fiction film without special effects" **Andrew Sarris**

As a young critic in the 50s, Godard spent long days at the French Cinematheque sampling every possible genre. Like his colleagues at the Cahiers du Cinema, critics-turned-filmmakers Francois Truffaut, Eric Rohmer and Jacques Rivette, Godard was able to look back on decades of Hollywood movies that hit his generation all at once. They discerned patterns and themes and started to organize and champion their faves.

Yes, like everyone else, the French New Wave adored Orson Welles and John Ford. From a distance, the French outsiders were able to see American films in a new light. (For more, see Tom Milne's "Godard on Godard," Jean Collet's "Jean-Luc Godard," Studio Vista's "The Films of Jean-Luc Godard," and Richard Roud's "Godard.")

I especially admire Godard's essays on Hitchcock and Hawks. Godard brings into the discussion philosophy, Charlotte Bronte, Carl Dreyer, Abel Gance, Andre Malraux, Goethe, Luis Bunuel, Dostoevsky, and German Expressionism. He was the first to put Hitchcock in the same class with Fritz Lang and F.W. Murnau. His review of Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train* takes off beyond analyzing the film to a discourse on what film is, and how the filmmaker achieves his effects: "Certainly the camera defies reality, but does not evade it; if it enters the present, it is to give it the style it lacks."

When it came to his own filmmaking, Godard was always playing with ideas. He saw his films as works of criticism: to him, art criticizes itself. Godard went on to make films in every genre—like Hawks—from gangster, science fiction, musicals, war films, confessionals and social essays. But unlike Hawks, the filmmaker quickly left conventional narrative to intrude on his films in various ways. He started with jump cuts in *Breathless*, then a revolutionary technique, now perfectly common on television. He went on to juggle a heady mix of ellipses, media materials, posters, book covers, titles, signs and meanings, moving effortlessly from cinema verité interviews and his own philosophical narrative discourses to fiction and back again. The films reference comic books, Hollywood stars, filmmakers, and of course other films. *Breathless*, *Alphaville*, *Pierrot le Fou* and *Made in USA*, while inspired by American gangster pictures, don't fit into that genre as much as they riff on it. *Alphaville* is packed with references: Dick Tracy, Henry Dickson, Flash Gordon, and most especially, *Underworld USA*, Sam Fuller's masterpiece of malevolent dark-street ambience. Fuller's quote from Godard's next film *Pierrot le Fou* could easily apply here: "The film is like a battleground. Yes...love...hate...action...violence...death...in one word, emotion." **Anne Thompson – (INDIEWIRE)**

Notes compiled by Rachel Lambert