This is an extract from the article referred to by Agnès Guillemot in our conversation where Godard says ‘If direction is a look, montage is a heartbeat’. Considering that when he wrote this piece he had yet to make a full-length film, it is a surprisingly elegant insight.

'We'll save it in the cutting-room' ; true of James Cruze, Griffith, Stroheim, this maxim hardly applied at all to Mumau, Chaplin, and became irremediably false with all sound films. Why? Because with a film like October (and even more with Que Viva Mexico!), montage is above all an integral part of mise en scene. Only at peril can one be separated from the other. One might just as well try to separate the rhythm from a melody. Elena et les hommes and Mr Arkadin are both models of montage because each is a model of mise en scene. 'We'll save it in the cutting-room' : a typical producer's axiom, there fore. The most that efficient editing will give a film otherwise without interest is precisely the initial impression of having been directed. Editing can restore to actuality that ephemeral grace neglected by both snob and film-lover, or can transform chance into destiny. Can there be any higher praise of what the general public confuses with script construction?

If direction is a look, montage is a heart-beat. To foresee is the characteristic of both : but what one seeks to foresee in space, the other seeks in time. Suppose you notice a young girl in the street who attracts you. You hesitate to follow her. A quarter of a second. How to convey this hesitation? Mise en scene will answer the question 'How shall I approach her?' But in order to render explicit the other question, 'Am I going to love her ?', you are forced to bestow importance on the quarter of a second during which the two questions are born. It may be, therefore, that it will be for the montage rather than the mise en scene to express both exactly and clearly the life of an idea or its sudden emergence in the course of a story. When? Without playing on words, each time the situation requires it, each time within a shot when a shock effect demands to take the place of an arabesque, each time between one scene and another when the
inner continuity of the film enjoins with a change of shot the superimposition of the
description of a character on that of the plot. This example shows that talking of mise
en scene automatically implies montage. When montage effects surpass those of mise
en scene in efficacy, the beauty of the latter is doubled, the unforeseen unveiling
secrets by its charm. In an operation analogous to using unknown quantities in
mathematics.

Anyone who yields to the temptation of montage yields also to the temptation of the
brief shot. How? By making the look a key piece in his game. Cutting on a look is
almost the definition of montage, its supreme ambition as well as its submission to
mise en scene. It is, in effect, to bring out the soul under the spirit, the passion behind
the intrigue, to make the heart prevail over the intelligence by destroying the notion of
space in favour of that of time. The famous sequence of the cymbals in the remake of
The Man Who Knew Too Much is the best proof. Knowing just how long one can make
a scene last is already montage, just as thinking about transitions is part of the problem
of shooting. Certainly, a brilliantly directed film gives the impression of having simply
been placed end to end, but a film brilliantly edited gives the impression of having
suppressed all direction. Cinematographically speaking, granting the different subjects,
the battle in Alexander Nevsky is in no way inferior to The Navigator. In other words, to
give the impression of duration through movement, of a close shot through a long shot,
is one of the aims of mise en scene and the opposite of one of those of montage.

Invention and improvisation takes place in front of the movieola just as much as it does
on the set. Cutting a camera movement in four may prove more effective than keeping
it as shot. An exchange of glances, to revert to our previous example, can only be
expressed with sufficient force - when necessary - by editing. In Balzac’s Une
Tenebreuse Affaire, when Peyrade and Corentin force the door of the Saint-Cygne
salon, their first glance is for Laurence: 'We'll get you my girl' - 'I shan't tell you
anything.' The proud young woman and Fouche’s spies have discovered their most
mortal enemy in a single look. A simple reverse shot, in its very sobriety, will render this
terrible exchange of glances more forcefully than any carefully worked out pan or
tracking shot. The thing to be conveyed is how long the struggle will last and on what
ground it is to be fought. The montage, consequently, both denies and prepares the
way for the mise en scene: the two are interdependent. To direct means to scheme,
and one says of a scheme that it is well or badly mounted.

This is why saying that a director should closely supervise the editing of his film comes
to the same thing as saying that the editor should also forsake the smell of glue and
celluloid for the heat of the arc-lamps. Wandering on the set he will discover exactly
where the interest of a scene lies, which are its strong and weak moments, what demands a change of shot, and will therefore not yield to the temptation of cutting simply on movement - the ABC of montage, I admit, provided it is not used too mechanically in the manner of, say, Marguerite Renoir, who often gives the impression of cutting a scene just as it was going to become interesting. In so doing, the editor would be taking his first steps in direction.

'If direction is a look . . .' : Michel Subor and Anna Karina in *Le Petit Soldat*