

Alphaville Notes

St. Stephens Film Society August 2020

“Alphaville,” an eclectic sci-fi film by Jean-Luc Godard (“sci-fi without special effects”), is overstuffed with ideas about technology and wildly romantic allegory. Below are some of the key dialogues and their literary and academic references.

- *Sometimes reality is too complicated for oral communication. But legend embodies it in a form which enables it to spread all over the world.* (Alpha 60)
- *Men of your type will soon become extinct. You'll become something worse than dead. You'll become a legend.* (Prof. von Braun)
 - Reference: “Reality may be too complex for oral transmission; legends recreate it in a way that is only accidentally false and which permits it to travel through the world from mouth to mouth.” Jorge Luis Borges, “*Forms of a Legend*”
- *Your voice, your eyes, your hands, your lips. Our silences, our words. Light that goes, light that returns. A single smile between us. In quest of knowledge, I watched the night create day while we seemed unchanged. O beloved of all, beloved of one alone, your mouth silently promised to be happy. Away, away, says hate; closer, closer, says love. A caress leads us from our infancy. Increasingly I see the human form as a lover's dialogue. The heart has but one mouth. Everything by chance. All words without thought. Sentiments adrift. Men roam the city. A glance, a word. Because I love you. Everything moves. We must advance to live. Aim straight ahead toward those you love. I went toward you, endlessly toward the light. If you smile, it enfolds me all the better. The rays of your arms pierce the mist.* (Natasha von Braun)
 - Reference:
“Because I love you, everything moves
We must advance to live
Aim straight ahead toward those you love

I went toward you, endlessly toward the light
If you smile, it enfolds me better
The rays of your arms pierce the mist”
--Paul Elouard, *Mourir de ne pas mourir* (“*Dying of Not Dying*”)
- *Time is the substance I am made of. Time is a river which sweeps me along, but I am the river; it is a tiger which destroys me, but I am the tiger; it is a fire which consumes me, but I am the fire.* (Alpha 60)
 - Reference: “Our destiny is not frightful by being unreal; it is frightful because it is irreversible and iron-clad. Time is the substance I am made of. Time is a

river which sweeps me along, but I am the river; it is a tiger which destroys me, but I am the tiger; it is a fire which consumes me, but I am the fire. The world, unfortunately, is real; I, unfortunately, am Borges." Jorge Luis Borges, "A New Refutation of Time"

- *Something that never changes with the night or the day, as long as the past represents the future, towards which it will advance in a straight line, but which, at the end, has closed in on itself into a circle.* (Alpha 60)
 - Reference: Likely Nietzsche (eternal recurrence)
- "What is your religion?" (Alpha 60) "I believe in the immediate data of consciousness." (Lemmy Caution)
- *No one has lived in the past; no one will live in the future. The present is the form of all life. Time is like a circle which turns ceaselessly, the descending arc, the past; the rising arc, the future.* (Alpha 60)
 - Reference: *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*. Bergson defines the immediate data of consciousness as being temporal, as the duration (*la durée*) where there is no juxtaposition of events and therefore no causality. Bergson says that it is in the duration that we can speak of the experience of freedom.
- *Is it not obvious that someone who customarily lives in a state of suffering requires a different sort of religion from a person habitually in a state of well-being?* (Alpha 60)
 - Reference: "The systematic cultivation of healthy-mindedness as a religious attitude is therefore consonant with important currents in human nature, and is anything but absurd... We divert our attention from disease and death as much as we can; and the slaughter-houses and indecencies without end on which our life is founded are huddled out of sight and never mentioned, so that the world we recognize officially in literature and in society is a poetic fiction far handsomer and cleaner and better than the world that really is." William James, "Varieties of Religious Experience"
- "Do you prefer I pass through the North Zone or the South?" "What's the difference?"
"There's snow in the North and sun in the South."
"Anyway, it's my journey to the end of the night."
 - Reference: "Dreams rise in the darkness and catch fire from the mirage of moving light... Hurry hurry, cram yourself full of dreams to carry you through the life that's waiting for you outside, when you leave here, to help you last a few days

more in that nightmare of things and people. Among the dreams, choose the ones most likely to warm your soul.” Louis-Ferdinand Celine, *“Journey to the End of the Night”*

- *“What transforms darkness into light?”* (Alpha 60) *“La poésie.”* (Lemmy Caution)
- *Men have become the slaves of probability.* (Lemmy Caution)
 - Reference: “We shall be right in refusing to admit him [a poet] into a well-ordered State, because he awakens and nourishes and strengthens the feelings and impairs the reason” (Plato, 1892: 320)
- *The essence of the so-called capitalist world or the communist world, is not an evil volition to subject their people by the power of indoctrination or the power of finance; but simply the natural ambition of any organization to plan all its actions.* (Alpha 60)
 - Reference: Marx, or a liberal arts major at Yale