SCREENING THE IMPOSSIBLE:
THE POLITICS OF FORM AND FEELING IN SECOND WAVE
REVOLUTIONARY CINEMA

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ABSTRACT

SCREENING THE IMPOSSIBLE: THE POLITICS OF FORM AND FEELING IN
SECOND WAVE REVOLUTIONARY CINEMA

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Screening the Impossible explores how the new revolutionary ideologies that emerged in
the various global articulations of the "long 1968" produced new forms of revolutionary
cinematic practice – what I collectively refer to as a second wave of revolutionary filmmaking.
The project focuses on films largely from the 1960s and 1970s that engage the revolutionary
energies of the period to examine the relationship between emotion, aesthetics, and political
theory in an international cinematic context. Drawing on the claim that the global rebellions of
the 1960s mark the denunciation of early 20th century revolutionary narratives, it traces the
connections between filmmakers who are similarly preoccupied with the limits, failures, and
counter-revolutionary appropriations of orthodox revolutionary thought and yet remain
committed to the necessity of revolutionary transformation. Through a comparative analysis of
films from various national traditions, the project examines how the political cinema of this
period develops a new understanding of revolutionary process and the role that cinema can play
in it. At its core, the project lays out the aesthetic and affective contours of this emergent genre,
arguing that second wave revolutionary cinema is characterized by its rejection of the
teleological narratives and didactic political messages embedded in earlier first wave
revolutionary cinematic production. In order to overcome the limits of Marxist orthodoxy where
revolution is understood as an end goal, second wave films radicalize the concept. Returning to
the root of the word "revolution," they reimagine it as a non-teleological, repetitious, and
"uncompletable" practice that emphasizes process, circularity, and perpetuity.

Screening the Impossible begins by examining this alternate form of revolutionary process through the motifs of repetition and everydayness in Guy Debord's *Critique de la séparation* and *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni* and in Ousmane Sembène's *Borom Sarret*. From here, the project takes up the impact of this alternate conception of revolution on the aesthetics of revolutionary cinema in Jean-Luc Godard's *Tout va Bien* and Glauber Rocha's *Terra em Transe*, arguing that the second wave rejection of a didactic politics results in a cinema that refuses to affirm what revolution is or how it should be enacted. Rather, these films develop a cinematic aesthetic that troubles linearity and refuses clear and direct articulation, instead privileging ambiguous, connotative, polyvalent, contradictory, and open-ended forms. Furthermore, it argues that this new revolutionary ideology leads to a concomitant shift away from optimism and the Grand Passions towards negative and unpleasant feelings. Focusing on the films of Dušan Makavejev, it argues that this negative emotional register diagnoses the affective experience of a revolutionary ideology that no longer has faith in the optimism inspired by the teleological certainty of revolutionary transformation. At the same time, these negative feelings at once mark the possibilities of a revolutionary cinema and this cinema's recognition of its own political limits. The project concludes with an examination of Godard's *Ici et ailleurs* and John Abraham's *Amma Ariyan* as two films that critique the '68 moment by looking back upon its failures. These films lay out a spectral relation to the past that puts the failures of revolution to work against an ideology that would bury them, thus prompting a retheorization of revolution as a history of suffering. This alternate historical orientation expands representations of revolution to include images of violence, trauma, and loss, thus reinstating suffering and melancholia as fundamental parts of any attempt to think a revolutionary politics and cinema.

To Hugh

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Revolution's New Wave

<u>Preludes</u>

Cinema legend claims that the May 1968 uprisings in France were precipitated by an

argument about film. In February 1968, the affairs of the Cinémathèque Française, an

internationally renowned cinema and archive, became of significant interest to the French

government which, claiming the neglect of film stock, interceded by removing its much admired

founder Henri Langlois from his position as director. It is certainly true that Langlois's dismissal

caused an outrage among the film community and within days of the incident, protesters

numbering in the thousands took to the Parisian streets while a cadre of famous French directors,

headed by Jean Renoir, organized a boycott of other theaters and established a Committee for the

Defense of the Cinémathèque.[1] The matter soon became an international concern as filmmakers

from the rest of Europe as well as the Americas joined the protest, sending telegrams and letters

in support of Langlois's reinstatement. Over the next three months, demonstrations increased in

size and number while numerous playwrights, actors, and directors continued to petition the

Gaullist government to reinstate Langlois. Finally, on April 21, the government announced its

intentions to create a separate facility dedicated to film preservation, effectively divesting from

the Cinémathèque so that it became a fully autonomous institution free to reinstate Langlois as

head. The day after Langlois reopened the Cinémathèque, students occupied the Sorbonne, thus

setting in motion the series of events that have come to be collectively known as May 1968.

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[1] Sylvia Harvey offers a detailed history of the Langlois Affair in *May '68 and Film Culture* (14-16).

The claim that these protests were the catalyst for the May movements involves some conceptual and intellectual massaging, not least because it effectively ignores the March 22 Movement at the University of Nanterre, where the occupation of campus buildings was motivated by a series of political concerns that came to characterize the larger '68 movement. However, whether the legend is true or not is of less importance than the fact that it exists. While the story may be nothing more than cinematic romanticism, that it came to be at all implies the fundamental importance of cinema to the '68 movements, serving to cement the popular and academic association of the politics of '68 with developments in the visual and cinematic arts. This centrality was expressed in more than just the sympathies of the cinema community with the ideals of the protestors; the film medium itself was vital as a means of documenting the events, of disseminating ideals and fomenting radical consciousness, and of expressing the creative energies and utopian visions that fuelled the events. While the Langlois affair may have been nothing more than a coincidental prelude of things to come, its legendary status gestures towards the vitality of cinema as the expression of radical politics and the significant place that cinema would come to occupy in the cultural imagination of the movement.

Screening the Impossible: The Politics of Form and Feeling in Second Wave Revolutionary Cinema unpacks some of the key elements of this relationship and explores how the revolutionary ideology that ran through various global articulations of the long "1968" produced new forms of revolutionary cinematic practice, what I collectively refer to as a second wave of revolutionary filmmaking. The project focuses on films largely from the 1960s and 1970s that engage the revolutionary energies of the period to examine the relationship between emotion, aesthetics, and political theory in an international cinematic context. At its core, the project centers on films that articulate the failures of revolution yet remain committed to its

necessity. Drawing on the claim that the global rebellions of the 1960s mark the denunciation and disintegration of early 20th century revolutionary narratives, it traces the connections between different filmmakers that are similarly preoccupied with the limits, failures, and counter-revolutionary appropriations of orthodox revolutionary thought. Given their critique of revolution, this project examines what remains for a politics and a cinema of radical social transformation and explores how various filmmakers of this period differently articulate a new understanding of the nature of revolutionary process and the role that cinema can play in it. This introduction, then, lays out some of the basic political parameters of the '68 movements and the contours of second wave revolutionary cinema, before offering a more detailed summary of the project's constituent chapters.

Demanding the Impossible

Given the scope and influence of events in France, as well as the wealth of film theory and cinematic experimentation that they produced, it seems necessary to begin a discussion of the politics of 1968 in Paris. Given the nature of the '68 movement in France, if one can call such an amorphous conglomeration of ideals and actions a movement, it remains a challenge to unpack its (at times contradictory) political, theoretical, philosophical, and sociological foundations. Attempting to work though the "apparently irreducible diversity of the existing interpretations" of 1968 in search of some "guiding principle or thread," Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut identify eight categories of historical interpretation, ranging from conspiracy to adolescent rebellion to a crisis of civilization (34-38). Similarly, Kristen Ross, borrowing the term from Sylvain Lazarus, refers to May 1968 as an "obscure event," one whose principles and significance have been difficult to delineate given that "in the last thirty years [it] has been

buried, raked through the coals, trivialized, or represented as a monstrosity" (3). Generally

speaking though, however chaotic and disparate its actions may have been, the demonstrations in

France did coalesce around a few key propositions: opposition to the Viet Nam war, a critique of

the stultifying routines of consumer capitalism that perpetuated a passive state of social

alienation, and a condemnation of the inherent bureaucracy and authoritarianism of all

institutional structures, in particular the university system and the *Parti Communiste Français*

(PCF). Against what was seen as the fundamentally repressive nature of institutional

organizations that manipulated individual needs and desires as a means of economic, social, and

psychic control, the '68 movement advocated the complete liberation of desires from these forms

of collective repression. Questions of public and private space, leisure, entertainment, sexuality,

and consumption all became, alongside those related to work and labor, potential sites of

revolutionary transformation. Protestors called for a spontaneous and self-directed revolution

that would at once transform economic, political, and especially social relations to fully liberate

individuals, freeing their bodies and minds from the nefarious machinations of capitalism to

recreate the world according to individual desire.

This rebellion against institutional forms of authority meant that protestors turned their

backs on the very idea of a party or a centrally organized resistance movement, embracing

instead the radical individualistic possibilities of a spontaneous revolt. As Daniel Cohn-Bendit,

one of the major voices of the movement puts it, "we are not revolutionists because we don't

have a well-defined program of action. The category that would certainly fit us the best is

revolted. Yes, we are in a revolt. Yes, we have had enough" (qtd. in Kovács 353). Rather than

affiliate themselves with traditional party models, protestors organized themselves as

groupuscules – non-partisan temporary collectives without a determinate structure or ideological

axioms. As the Situationist Raoul Vaneigem describes it, the movement was "a manifestation, bearing no *appellation d'origine controllée*, of a type of behavior that breaks utterly with the old mass movements: a coming together of individuals in no way reducible to a crowd manipulable at will" (13).

At its core, the '68 movement was a fundamentally Marxist revolution, although it bore little resemblance to the kind of proletarian stagist revolution advocated by the Central Committee; the PCF, in fact, sided with de Gaulle, condemning the protests, and encouraging strikers to return to work. Indeed, the rebellion was as much against the bureaucratic authoritarianism of Soviet-style Communism as it was late capitalism. As such, it separated what Sartre called the "social (that is, true) Left" from the "political left" (qtd. in Ferry and Renaut 40) in its attempt to rethink the processes of revolution outside of the hierarchical power structures of Lenin's vanguard or the alienating system of party politics. In a certain sense, the '68 movement marked the revolutionizing of revolution as the old categories of struggle – the vanguard, the party, the proletarian, stagism – gave way to the new concepts of occupation, antipower, spontaneity, and self-direction.

As a result of the profound impact that May 1968 had on French politics and culture, there is a tendency in the criticism of 1968 to privilege France as the epicenter of these revolutionary movements, with the events in America the principle aftershock. Even among books that position themselves within a global framework, there persists a marked tendency towards favoring these familiar geographic touchstones. George Katsiaficas's *The Imagination of the New Left: A Global Analysis of 1968* (1987) is emblematic of this trend, dedicating the vast majority of its analysis to France and the USA and offering only a brief mention of the student revolts in Pakistan, Mexico, Japan, and the Eastern Bloc countries. Similarly, Ingo Cornils and

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Sarah Waters's edited collection, *Memories of 1968: International Perspectives* (2010) is predominantly Euro- and Americentric, with just three of its chapters given over to non-Western events (two on Mexico, one on China). What such books fail to communicate is the truly global scale of such revolutionary energy; beyond France and the USA the 1960s saw uprisings across the rest of Europe, most notably in Italy, England, Sweden, and Germany, but also in Spain and Portugal against Franco's and Salazar's right-wing regimes. Protests calling for a revolutionized Marxism took place in Eastern Europe with the Prague Spring, but also in Poland and Yugoslavia. Revolution fermented across Latin America with mass student protests in Mexico and populist uprisings in Bolivia, Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, while in Africa Ethiopia and Senegal experienced student protests. Similarly, India, Pakistan, and Japan all saw both militant student rebellion and guerilla armed struggle. This is all in addition to the wave of independence movements that spread across Africa during the decade, arguably setting the terms for the revolutions in the former metropolitan centers.

Recently, a number of books have attempted to redress this imbalance: the Norton Casebook, *The Global Revolutions of 1968* (2007) includes speeches and political documents from revolutionary leaders across the five continents, while Philipp Gassert and Martin Klimke's edited collection, *1968: Memories and Legacies of a Global Revolt* (2009) includes discussion of revolutionary events in over thirty countries. Similarly, the forthcoming collection *The Third World in the Global 1960s,* edited by Samantha Christiansen and Zachary Scarlett (2012), positions the global south at the center of discussions concerning youth protest and rebellion during the decade. Perhaps the most well-known articulation of this kind of global engagement with the politics of the 1960s, however, is Fredric Jameson's seminal essay "Periodizing the 60s" where he claims that the origins of revolution in the west can be traced back to the third world.

At its most simple, Jameson's essay argues that this relationship can be seen in the adoption of non-western revolutionary ideology and the west's opposition to wars being fought it the third world: "Politically, a first world 60s owed much to third world-worldism in terms of politicocultural models, as in a symbolic Maoism, and moreover, found its mission in resistance to wars aimed precisely at stemming the new revolutionary forces of the third world" (180).

On a deeper level, however, Jameson argues, as does Irmgard Emmelhainz (who is discussed in more detail in chapter four) that the crisis of national identity brought about by the decline of the old colonial order prompted the radical questioning of the nature of western society and its imperial and capitalist foundations. As such, the Viet Nam War became the rallying point for revolution in the west as an expression of these twin systems of oppression. Thus, for the editors of the issue of *Social Text* in which Jameson's influential essay appears, the 1960s is defined by a burgeoning global perspective: "it was the first time in this century that anti-imperialist protest came to dominate the overall political agenda of the nation; the global domination of capital was challenged from within on a more serious scale than ever before" (7). As a result, the various articulations of 1968 responded to an economic exploitation that was global in scope and which was fundamentally bound to a totalizing system of cultural domination, both domestic and imperial. Thus, as the *Social Text* editors maintain, the various calls for liberation, were "in this sense [about] something more than political and economic independence: while stressing international solidarity, it was simultaneously a denunciation of homogeneity as such" (7). In this light, the basic tenants of 1968 take on a fundamentally international dimension that runs through both the proliferation of protests across the globe and the global nature of the systems against which these various rebellions mobilized.

One of the aims of this project, then, is to present a more globalized engagement with the politics of 1968 and examine how these anti-authoritarian ideas found expression in countries outside of France (namely Senegal, Brazil, the former Yugoslavia, and south India). As such, I tend to use the year 1968 as shorthand for denoting what was in fact a longer and much broader period of revolutionary investment from the early 1960s to the mid 1970s (what is known in France as *les années 1968*). The period discussed in this dissertation, however, extends a little further to encompass films that reflect back upon the politics of the period, one from 1976 (Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville's *Ici et ailleurs*) and another from 1986 (John Abraham's *Amma Ariyan*). While other national iterations of 1968 share some of the basic tenants of the French movement – most clearly a suspicion of political parties and a sense of the perpetuity of revolutionary struggle – they also developed their own nationally specific revolutionary investments. In the third world, one of the most prominent concerns was the legacy of national liberation and the mutation of colonial domination into the tightening grip of neoimperialism. In Brazil, for example, this anti-imperial politics took a particularly populist form and the neobaroque cinema discussed in chapter two formulates a specific response to the rise of this ideology. Alternatively, debates about revolutionary transformation in India privileged the role of violence given the wave of Naxalite activity that spread across the nation during the late 1960s and early 1970s. What remains consistent through all these different national and cinematic movements, however, is a commitment to a radicalized Marxism that differentiates itself from the teleology and determinism of orthodox revolutionary thought. As chapter one discusses in more detail, these various movements rejected the stagist revolution advocated by Soviet-style Communism and its fixed and predetermined categories of struggle, its reliance on party leadership and institutionalized authority, and its teleologically assured victory. In its place,

radicals imagined revolution as an incompleteable process, one that was fluid, self-determined, and open-ended.

From the First to the Second Wave

While this dissertation spends significant time with the theory of revolutionary transformation that emerges in this period, it is, most fundamentally, a project about cinema. Thus, as much as it explores how various filmmakers develop an alternate theory of revolution that overcomes the authoritarian impulses of orthodox revolutionary thought, it does so through an analysis of how their films take up the history of revolutionary filmmaking. The dominant historical formulation of revolutionary cinema to which these films respond – what I've termed its first wave – is the Soviet cinema of the 1920s.

The enduring influence of earlier revolutionary films is evidenced through the repeated allusions to and citations of films and theories by Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Kuleshov, and Vertov that litter the films of the later period (*Soy Cuba*, *Terra em Transe*, *Sweet Movie*, to name but a few) and through Godard's *Groupe Dziga Vertov* and Chris Marker's *Groupe Medvedkine,* both of which named themselves after Russian revolutionary filmmakers. The significance of the Soviet filmmakers in the annals of film history is beyond question, and for the filmmakers dealt with in this project, their attempts to think cinema as a fundamental part of the revolutionary process position them as a vital and inspirational body of films. Indeed, even Godard, who roundly criticized *Battleship Potemkin* and famously called Eisenstein a fascist for what he saw as Eisenstein's predilection for retelling historical epics at the expense of an engagement with the here and now, later included the Odessa Steps sequence in the first chapter of *Historie(s) du Cinema.* However, while the first and second waves share a certain set of revolutionary

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sympathies and aesthetic investments, the notions of revolution that underscore their respective cinemas are profoundly different as are their concomitant ideological positions. A quick outline of the general revolutionary principles operant in first wave revolutionary cinema throws into relief the differing ways in which these two distinct yet inter-related periods imagine a cinema in service of revolution.

The revolutionary framework for early Soviet cinema derives in large part from Anatoly Lunacharsky's argument that film should operate as a form of agitation capable of educating the public. In 1919, Lunacharsky, the Soviet Peoples Commissar in Charge of Enlightenment (and thus responsible for culture and education in the newly formed Bolshevik state), argued that "the main task of cinema in both its scientific and feature divisions is that of propaganda […] the dissemination of ideas among minds that would otherwise remain a stranger to them" (47). Indeed, since the Bolshevik revolution was essentially a revolution from above, cinema became a fundamental means of socialist education in the post-revolutionary state. As such, the films from this period tend to adhere to the definition of their purpose as the dissemination of a specific revolutionary consciousness that validates the new regime.

This goal was accomplished through the affirmation of specific Communist values; peasants and laborers were typically presented through typage as hardworking and noble, imbued with a selfless sense of solidarity despite their hardships. This was in profound contrast to the representatives of aristocratic and capitalist forces who were shown to be decadent, selfish, greedy, and merciless. This Manichean division between the classes was aimed at prompting audiences to form the appropriate sympathies and identifications that would reinforce the class-based politics of orthodox revolution. Such sympathies were also aroused through the attempt to evoke a sense of righteous anger at the profound injustices that the proletariat experienced at the

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hands of the capitalists. This anger, coupled with the optimistic assertion of a brighter tomorrow, became the dominant affective register of Soviet narrative films, more and more so as the doctrine of Socialist Realism began to take effect.

Pudovkin's *Storm over Asia* (1928) is a primary example from the first wave period that presents the classes in this typified binary opposition and that attempts to evoke a sympathetic yet outraged emotional register aimed at swaying its audience towards the revolutionary cause. At the same time, the linear narrative structure of the film reflects the teleological understanding of revolutionary process that typically underscores the first wave. The film tells the story of a young Mongolian peasant who rises up against the British military to lead a rebellion against the occupying forces and the unfair trading system they practice. The Mongolian is forced to leave his trading post after he fights with a capitalist fur trader who tricks him out of a valuable fur. The Mongolian then joins with the Soviets in their fight against the occupying British Army, only to be captured by the military and installed as the head of their puppet regime. After witnessing the brutal execution of a prisoner, however, the Mongolian is subsequently transformed into an active revolutionary subject who then leads his own army to victory against the British.

The Mongolian thus moves from a position of political ignorance to one of awareness, and from here to revolutionary consciousness, rebellion, and victory. Significantly, it is witnessing the brutality of the capitalists that leads the Mongolian to this new subject position, much like the "witnessing" of their brutality by the audience similarly encourages them to sympathize with his newfound political consciousness. Moreover, this transition to radical consciousness on the part of the Mongolian is carefully situated as part of a larger revolutionary struggle as the iris that frames the Mongolian as he charges towards the camera on horseback

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expands outward to reveal a group of peasants riding behind him. Here, then, his actions become the force that leads the revolutionary charge against the British military.

This climatic confrontation between the peasantry and the capitalists is intercut with images of a brewing storm. The rapid galloping of the peasants' horses is crosscut with shots of trees blowing and dust blustering across the ground to suggest that this revolutionary force is the new "storm over Asia." Indeed, the British soldiers cannot advance against these strong headwinds and are thus blown backwards by the wind, which all the while appears to be coming from the advancing horses. This natural imagery serves a double function; first, it links this revolutionary charge with the film's reference to Genghis Khan in its opening moments. The tumbling rocks and cloudy skies of this opening sequence are echoed in the final fight in order to link the "ancient strength" of the peasantry with Genghis Khan's own legendary military force. Second, and perhaps more importantly, these images suggest that this revolution is itself natural, that it inevitably swells from the conditions on the steppes, just as the wind does.

What *Storm over Asia* offers, then, is a narrative of the development of revolutionary consciousness where the birth of one peasant's political sensibility grows into a radical and powerful revolutionary force, this force evolving from lone individual to collective might. This consciousness is presented as innate and thus something to be awakened; the Mongolian is a passive puppet of the ruling classes until he sees something that jars him from his stupor. Moreover, this awareness is folded into a teleological narrative of struggle – from one to many, from many to war, from war to victory. As such, the formulation of struggle in this kind of revolutionary film reflects the predetermined revolutionary categories familiar to orthodox Marxism; the proletarian class is structurally determined as the class proper to struggle and it is the role of film to awaken in it this radical consciousness. Indeed, the narrative of a film like

Storm over Asia is the narrative of revolutionary process itself, which it reproduces lockstep for the spectator; just as the Mongolian in the film develops a revolutionary sensibility in response to the brutality that he witnesses, so too will the audience which, having also witnessed these events, will become similarly sensitive to the revolutionary cause.

First wave revolutionary cinema can thus be understood primarily in terms of education and the communication of a didactic and unambiguous revolutionary message. In Eisenstein's writing (at least in his most canonical essays), this kind of education is elevated to the level of psychically violent indoctrination. Film is conceived as a "cine-fist" that will succeed in molding the spectator to the director's political will: "we must cut with our cine-fist through to skulls, cut through to final victory" (59). In this way, first wave revolutionary film is positioned as a powerful tool of political training; it is the infamous "tractor over the psyche" that will produce the correct revolutionary consciousness in the audience by force. From this cursory sketch of Pudovkin's film, then, first wave revolutionary cinema is characterized by a fairly traditional revolutionary ideology where victory is teleologically assured and arrived at through a series of clear stages and the proletariat is the historically determined class proper to revolutionary struggle. Revolutionary films, therefore, should affirm these ideas; they are a means of disseminating this knowledge to the masses.

Soviet film history is, without doubt, a lot more complex than this cursory reading suggests[2] and while the more avant-garde films of the period like Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* clearly do not conform to this teleological narrative structure, even within the theoretical

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[2] Richard Taylor's *The Politics of Soviet Cinema* remains one of the most detailed historical engagements with this wave of revolutionary filmmaking and explains in much more detail the propagandistic traits of Soviet cinema that I have simply gestured to here.

work of someone like Eisenstein, it is possible to trace lines of thought that point to a more fluid and open-ended engagement with spectatorship than the "cine-fist" allows for. Consequently, recent work on early Soviet cinema, including Jacques Rancière's discussion of Eisenstein in *Film Fables* and Justus Nieland's reading of *Strike* in *Feeling Modern,* has gone a long way towards recovering some of this complexity and eccentricity. Indeed, it is not my intention to claim that Soviet cinema should be considered as unilaterally bound to a conservative Communist orthodoxy; any involved analysis of its politics would be forced to confront the complex political and historical factors embedded in the formation of this first wave and the resultant heterogeneity of its revolutionary philosophy. Rather than present a unilateral interpretation of *all* early Soviet cinematic production, I simply wish to demonstrate that these orthodox tendencies are undeniably present in early Soviet cinema and function as the signifiers of a certain kind of revolutionary cinematic practice that second wave filmmakers would come to oppose.

Second wave revolutionary cinema, then, is perhaps best characterized by its rejection of the teleological narratives and didactic political messages embedded in early revolutionary cinematic production. While second wave filmmakers maintained a comparable desire to develop a cinema that could play a fundamental role in revolutionary transformation, at the same time this cinema was conceived outside of what were considered the dogmatic assertions of a predetermined politics. For these filmmakers, the challenge was to develop a film form that expressed the period's radical antipower philosophy. In order to overcome the limits of Marxist orthodoxy where revolution is understood as an end goal, second wave filmmakers radicalized the concept. Returning to the root of the word "revolution," they reimagined it as a non-

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teleological, repetitious and "uncompletable" process, one that emphasized process (over ends), circularity (over teleology), and perpetuity (over eschatology).

As chapter one more fully theorizes, this alternate conception of revolution anticipates many of the traits that comprise the New International that Derrida outlines in *Specters of Marx*. In this way, *Screening the Impossible* aligns itself with other recent attempts to rethink the Marxist revolutionary project in the contemporary moment. The majority of these works have been published as part of Verso's Communist Hypothesis Series, which began with the publication of Alain Badiou's *The Communist Hypothesis* (2008), which itself includes articles on and from the 1968 moment, and has expanded to include Costas Douzinas and Slavoj Žižek's edited collection, *The Idea of Communism* (2010), Boris Groys's *The Communist Postscript* (2010), and Bruno Bosteel's *The Actuality of Communism* (2011), among others. To this list we could also add Andy Merrifield's *Magical Marxism* (Pluto 2012). These recent publications are all similarly characterized by their attempt to rejuvenate Marxist critical theory and reengage Communism as a legitimate political possibility, taking stock of its failures while also honing its specific critical edge. For its part, this dissertation lays out an alternate conception of Marxism that leaves behind some of its most well-worn notions, perhaps most significantly the idea of the working class as the class proper to revolution, and rethinks its more orthodox understanding of history, progress, and transformation. In returning to what has often been heralded as the highpoint of the radical Left, its last great hurrah before the advent of the ultra-conservative 80s, this project aims to recover a sense of transformative possibility and praxis in light of what Merrifield describes as contemporary Marxism's obsession with capitalism's contradictions and crises and its willingness to solely "monitor a failing global system, to soberly and coolly analyze capitalist machinations, to revel in clinical critical negativity" (146). While Merrifield's

"Magical Marxism" is certainly more affirmative than the one laid out here, they share a common interest in reuniting theory and praxis.

The main work of this project, however, is to examine the series of aesthetic and affective problems generated by the desire to formulate a revolutionary cinema outside of the deterministic assertions of orthodox Marxism. Generally speaking, this desire leads to the production of a cinema that troubles linearity and refuses clear and direct articulation, and instead privileges ambiguous, connotative, polyvalent, contradictory, and open-ended forms. At the same time, these new ways of conceiving the processes of social transformation mean that revolutionary cinema turns away from optimism (be it the optimism implied in the teleological assurance of revolutionary victory or the enforced optimism of Socialist Realism) and the Grand Passions to embrace negative, unpleasant, "ugly" feelings, as Sianne Ngai sees them. The ideological foundations of these new aesthetic and affective forms entail a rethinking of the concept of revolutionary cinema as a practice no longer defined according to its ability to produce revolutionary consciousness. This second wave form relinquishes its ability to communicate a specific political position or express any concrete definition of what constitutes revolutionary action on the grounds that this would reassert the filmmaker in a position of dominance, thus undermining the second wave's antipower foundations. Propelled by the self-emancipatory politics of the period, second wave film develops a complex and indirect aesthetic that implies revolution without ever fully articulating what forms it should take. Indeed, since its categories of struggle do not preexist as part of some larger historical truth, it is the work of revolutionary cinema to bring these things into being. However, these are not stable or permanent categories; much like the theory of revolution that underscores it, this is a process of perpetual negotiation and interpretation. Thus, in refusing to articulate or affirm any such

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revolutionary content, second wave cinema becomes a profoundly ambivalent cinema, one that operates without expectation of its results. In this way, it is a cinema characterized as much by the absence of revolution as it is by its desire to incite it.

The Project

Screening the Impossible brings together of some of these various attempts to rethink revolution and revolutionary cinema under the appellation "second wave revolutionary cinema." Focusing on a roughly twenty year period from 1963 to 1986, the project concentrates on a group of filmmakers whose work is often positioned in relation to revolution but rarely in relation to each other. The various filmmakers under discussion here all share Marxist sensibilities and are similarly committed to a reconceived version of Marxism revolution. This does not mean that second wave revolutionary cinema is a monolithic film practice and throughout this project I have tried to remain attentive to the differences between its various articulations. However, my main aim here is to draw points of connection between films; to think through the larger shared investments of this period and tease out the revolutionary ideologies, aesthetics, and feelings that characterize this revolutionary conjuncture on a global scale. Since these filmmakers are rarely considered concomitantly as comprising a shared cinematic purpose, my focus in this project is on developing the connections between these various national cinemas and opening up new transnational avenues of enquiry. As such, perhaps the primary work of this dissertation is its attempt to develop an historical understanding of these various revolutionary cinemas as an international movement or genre.

Chapter One, "Revolutionary Forms," examines the alternate form of revolutionary process that develops during the '68 moment through the motif of repetition as particularly

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expressed in Guy Debord's *Critique de la séparation* (1961) and *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni* (1978) and in Ousmane Sembène's *Borom Sarret* (1963). Drawing on Lefebvre's understanding of everydayness and Derrida's theorization of the New International, this chapter examines how repetition is used to articulate the growing expansiveness of capitalist alienation into the realm of the social. Here, repetition signals the oppressive and exploitative structures of capitalism that have become naturalized as the rhythms of everyday experience. The repetitious nature of the everyday in these films thus presents a critique of capitalism while simultaneously rendering the everyday a site of potential resistance. As such, the proletarian class-based ideology of orthodox revolutionary struggle is undone since revolution is no longer strictly an economic concern to be taken up by the working class. In addition to undermining the idea that there is a class proper to revolution, this chapter argues that the sense of perpetuity embedded in the idea of repetition also metaphorically expresses the reformulation of revolution as a necessarily incompleteable process. Grounded in a critique of the fundamental inadequacy of existent systems of political representation, Debord's cinema, which circulates thematically and stylistically around the trope of repetition, and Sembène's *Borom Sarret,* the conclusion of which carries with it an urgent call for another revolution in the wake of decolonization, mark a significant shift in radical political thought away from the teleological narrative of orthodox Marxism towards an alternate politics of self-directed and perpetual struggle.

The second chapter, "Revolutionary Aesthetics," examines the impact of this alternate conception of revolution on the aesthetics of revolutionary cinema. With reference to Jacques Rancière's *The Emancipated Spectator,* it argues that the theory of political modernism that developed in the 1970s breaks down in light of the antiauthoritarian and self-directed impulses of this kind of revolutionary thought. As such, it argues that second wave revolutionary filmmaking

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is characterized by a crisis of representation where the very processes of representation are critiqued for their propensity to reify both action and process in ways that undermine the non-teleological and self-emancipatory goals of the period. From here, the chapter takes up Jean-Luc Godard's *Tout va Bien* (1972) and Glauber Rocha's *Terra em Transe* (1967) as two films that attempt to work through this impasse and formulate an aesthetic capable of representing revolution, but in a profoundly nondeterministic fashion. Central to both Godard's ever-evolving political modernism and Rocha's neobaroque aesthetic is the refusal to lead the spectator or to affirm what revolution is or how it should be enacted. Rather, in tracing out the idea of revolution through a proliferation of signifiers which are complex, vague, and at times intentionally contradictory, these films imply revolution as an urgent and necessary action, but they ultimately leave the formation of its content in the hands of the spectator. In a certain sense, then, revolutionary cinema undermines its ability to achieve its own ends: to raise consciousness and inspire action. In maintaining such ambiguity, second wave films remain faithful to their revolutionary ideologies but at the expense of expressing the ideological coherence that political movements are typically founded on. As a result, this chapter argues that the way we conceive revolutionary cinema must be rethought outside of this ends-oriented definition. Instead, revolutionary cinema becomes the attempt to continually bring different forms and contents of revolution into being as part of a perpetual process of negotiation and interpretation. However, in doing so, revolutionary film cannot guarantee its ends and is thus defined in this period by an aesthetic that carries no expectation.

Chapter Three, "Revolutionary Feelings," takes up the negative affective register of second wave revolutionary cinema and examines the significance of disgust in Dušan Makavejev's oeuvre, most notably *Sweet Movie* (1974). Arguing against the familiar claim that

emotions are nefarious and manipulative and thus not suited to a revolutionary cinema invested in a critically conscious spectatorship, the chapter proposes that second wave revolutionary cinema turns to negative feelings as part of its larger political project, laying out two distinct ways in which negative emotions work. First, it argues that this negative emotional register diagnoses the affective sensibility of this revolutionary period, characterizing the affective experience of this new revolutionary ideology that no longer has faith in the optimism inspired by the teleological certainty of revolutionary transformation. Simply put, the repetitiveness of "uncompleteable" revolution inspires negative feelings that index the transformation of hope necessitated by the change in revolutionary thought. Second, the chapter maintains that these negative feelings at once mark the possibilities of a revolutionary cinema and this cinema's recognition of its own political limits. On one hand, negative feelings disrupt the process of communication to trouble the status of revolutionary representation; *Sweet Movie* expresses anti-fascist liberation through the grotesque antics of Otto Műehl's Vienna Therapy Commune and uses physiological disgust to disrupt any affirmation of this representat ion as "correct" revolutionary action. In this way, negative feelings work in tandem with the aesthetic forms discussed in chapter two. On the other hand, disenchanted by the failures of revolution and cinema's seeming inability to engender action, negative feelings articulate the frustrations and disappointments of a cinema that must come to terms with its own suspended agency as a tool of political transformation.

The last chapter, "Revolutionary Remainders," takes up Godard's *Ici et ailleurs* and John Abraham's *Amma Ariyan* as two films that critique the '68 movement by looking back upon its failures. In both films this engagement with failure is oriented around dead bodies – in *Ici et ailleurs* it is the dead bodies of Palestinian rebels killed in the Black September Massacre while

in *Amma Ariyan* it is Hari, a former Naxalite revolutionary who has committed suicide. Working against the teleological undercurrents of martyrdom, where violence and suffering are instrumentalized in the name of a future that will retroactively legitimate them, the dead bodies in these films refuse to stay buried, thus interrupting this teleological process by insisting on the recognition of their loss. Drawing on Derrida alongside Raymond Williams's theory of revolution as tragedy and Walter Benjamin's angel of history, this chapter reads these films as presenting an alternate revolutionary temporality of history as hauntology. This spectral relation to the past puts the failures of revolution to work against a revolutionary ideology that would bury them, thus prompting a retheorization of revolution as a history of suffering. In both films, this process results in the expansion of representations of revolution to include images of violence, trauma, and loss, thus reinstating suffering as a fundamental part of any attempt to think a revolutionary politics. For Godard, the return of history as suffering simultaneously marks the return of possibility whereas for Abraham its concomitant melancholia becomes the foundation for the formation of new revolutionary collectives.

Rather than developing an abstract definition of revolutionary cinema, then, *Screening the Impossible* examines how an international group of filmmakers similarly invested in revolutionary cinematic production not only represent the politics of the long 1968, but also engage in the formation of revolutionary theory, and thus of revolution itself. As such, it doesn't so much critique these movements or determine which are more appropriately revolutionary than others. Rather, it attempts to think through the idea of revolution that underwrites these disparate engagements with revolutionary cinematic production and to examine their theoretical and aesthetic foundations in an international context. Thus, the project is best understood as a critical

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history of a specific period of revolutionary filmmaking that insists on rethinking and

reformulating our understanding of both revolution and revolutionary cinema.

CHAPTER ONE

Revolutionary Forms: Repetition and Everydayness

> In a revolution, as in a novel, the most difficult part to invent is the end
> - Alexis de Tocqueville

<u>Introduction</u>

In the wake of the events of 1968, Jean-Luc Godard definitively broke with the cinema of

the New Wave to form the Dziga Vertov Group with Jean-Pierre Gorin. In a 1970 interview with

the *Evergreen Review* on the formation of the group, Gorin explains that he and Godard joined

forces in order to "break all the old chains" and make "revolutionary movies that will promote

revolutionary change" (qtd. in Carroll 51). As such, the pair set about making nine overtly

political films where it was hoped that the infusion of revolutionary theory would lead to a new

revolutionary film practice. In their attempt to rethink the foundations of cinema – to "return to

zero" as *Le Gai Savoir* suggests (the filming of which Gorin was, at least in part, present for) –

the Dziga Vertov Group decried films that combined Leftist ideals with a traditional narrative

structure, arguing that the latter was politically bankrupt. Instead, they explored alternative

aesthetic models in order to develop a film style that was itself politically revolutionary. Their

aim was, as one of the slogans adopted by the Group famously asserted, not to make political

films, but to "make films politically" (McCabe 19). As such, the pair's experimental aesthetic

imagined itself as its own kind of revolutionary expression. In adopting the name "Dziga

Vertov" Godard and Gorin sought to draw a connection between their political cinema and that

of the Soviet filmmaker whose name they assumed – a filmmaker who similarly argued for an

anti-narrative cinema that could foster a revolutionary way of thinking. Significantly, the name

"Dziga Vertov" is also an assumed name; Vertov, born Denis Kaufman, changed his name to

Dziga Vertov after becoming active in cinema, his new appellation evoking the cranking of the camera's handle. Loosely translated, Dziga Vertov means "spinning top."

In these two moments of renaming, then, a sense of circularity and return is prevalent, arising in the meaning of the name itself as well as in Godard and Gorin's return to it some forty years later. In assuming this name, a connection between Godard, Gorin, and Vertov is established which operates, again, as a kind of return, this time through the repetition and restatement of the question of developing a cinematic expression of revolutionary politics for which Vertov's films are so famous. Moreover, Vertov's most well-known film, *Man with a Movie Camera,* itself draws attention to the systems of repetition that structure cinema, employing what Raymond Bellour refers to as "serial repetition" developed to the point of "generalized exasperation of alternation, recentered on the metaphor of cinema which it underpins all the better for being one if its fundamental aspects" (70). While Bellour makes it clear that repetition is implicated in the very processes and technologies of cinema as a medium,[3] Vertov's preoccupation with the circular motion of the camera's handle and Godard and Gorin's return to and restatement of his name and his politico-cinematic investments suggest that repetition is somehow, then, also directly imbricated in the project of revolutionary cinema specifically. As this chapter argues, repetition and its attendant notions of reappearance, return, and circularity establish themselves at the intersections of revolution and cinema as concepts through which we can understand both a new revolutionary philosophy and the philosophy of a new revolutionary cinema.

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[3] Bellour's "Cine-Repetitions" identifies six different levels where repetition is operative and "presid[es] over [… cinematic] production, its products themselves and the understanding of cinema" (65).

Historically speaking, the connection between revolution, circularity, and repetition is fundamental. The etymology of the word "revolution" shows that the term itself carries with it a sense of repetition through its origins in the fourteenth century as an expression for the revolving motion of the planets. As Raymond Williams points out, the emergence of the political usage of "revolution" to indicate an action against an established political order also finds its roots in "rebellion," a term that similarly implies repetition through its development from the Latin for "renewal of war" and in "revolt" which derives from the Latin "*revolutare*" which means to roll or revolve. As Williams claims, "the development of the two words *revolt* and revolution, from the sense of a circular movement to the sense of a political uprising, can hardly be simple coincidence" (*Keywords* 270). Williams' analysis of the changing usage of these terms reveals how the shift from a circular movement to a political uprising is related to the way in which revolutionary process is understood:

> On the one hand there was the simple physical sense of the normal distribution of power as that of the high over the low. From the point of view of any established authority, a revolt is an attempt to turn over, to turn upside down, to make topsy-turvy, a normal political order: the low putting themselves against and in that sense above the high […]. On the other hand, […] there was the important image of the Wheel of Fortune, through which so many of the movements of life and especially the most public were interpreted. In the simplest sense, men revolved, or were revolved, on Fortune's wheel, setting them now up, now down. […I]t was the reversal between up and down that was the main sense of the image: not so much the steady and continuous movement of a wheel as the particular isolation

of a top and bottom point which were, as a matter of course, certain to change

place. (*Keywords* 271)

What emerges from this history is an idea of revolution not as forward progress – this would be

the "continuous movement of a wheel," which implies direction and a linear movement from one

point to another – but instead as a circuitous cycle of oppression and rebellion. While the

etymological history of revolution may represent its sense of repetition as simple "reversal" or

inversion, for Godard and his contemporary revolutionary filmmakers, repetition implies both

sameness *and* difference. In the *Evergreen Review* interview*,* Godard, when asked why he and

Gorin decided to call themselves the "Dziga Vertov Group," explained that it was to align

themselves with Vertov's project as a "Marxist moviemaker" (qtd. in Carroll 50). However,

while returning to Vertov as an historical example, Godard also marked the differences between

his project and Vertov's Soviet one: "we have to realize that we are French militants dealing with

the movies, working in France, and involved in the class struggle. We are in 1970 and the

movies, the tool we are working with, are still in 1917" (50). Thus while the citation of Vertov's

name on one hand implies a repetition in the 1970s of an earlier revolutionary cinematic project,

the shift in historical conditions means that what is repeated cannot be identical with that which

came before, which is itself a particularly Marxist axiomatic (the move to historicize concrete,

material conditions and not idealize merely theoretical or idealist narratives). What emerges,

then, is an image of repetition as difference, as a return to the question of revolutionary cinema

in order to reexamine its principles for a new struggle. In this way, what repeats is struggle itself,

and repetition subsequently comes to mark the very incompleteability of revolution as every

revolt brings with it new challenges, problems, and limits; as Gorin states in the same interview,

"Revolutionary art […] is a sensation of movement […] that, like political revolution itself, will

never stop" (54). Thus if we think the revolutionary politics of filmmakers from the late 1960s and early 1970s – what I'm referring to as second wave revolutionary cinema – through the idea of repetition, we are confronted with a model of social change that privileges a sense of indebtedness *and* incompleteness, a continual unfinished process without the full presence of a Utopian afterwards or a squaring of the revolutionary circle.

Significantly, these properties posit a sense of revolution that orthodox Marxist theory often elides: process (over ends), circularity (over teleology), and perpetuity (over eschatology). The motif of repetition in these films, then, underscores the break with traditional leftist politics that the social upheavals of the period are thought to mark and consequently posits the development of a new revolutionary politics. Repetition thus becomes a radicalizing gesture; returning to the root of the word, revolution is reimagined through repetition as a non-teleological, open-ended, and indistinct process that seeks to overcome the oppressive limits of Marxist orthodoxy where revolution is understood as the endpoint of a linear, stagist progression. This chapter examines how the idea of repetition structures this new understanding of revolutionary struggle through its relationship to everydayness.

Debord's Repetitions

Against a uni-linear teleology, motifs of circularity, return, and repetition can be traced across numerous second wave revolutionary films. These motifs are variously articulated and implied through a range of repetitious gestures, including the return of the dead (in *Sweet Movie, Amma Ariyan,* and *Ici et ailleurs* dead bodies return and haunt the present moment), the citation and recreation of shots, scenes, or characters from earlier revolutionary films (characters from *Battleship Potemkin* reappear in *Sweet Movie*; *I am Cuba* and *Terra em Transe* recreate the

Odessa Steps sequence and the scene with the pince-nez and the rotting meat from the same film), the repetition of lines of dialogue or segment titles within individual films (as in *Hour of the Furnaces*), and circular narratives that end where they began (*La Chinoise* ends on a slight variation of its opening image). While it is not my intention to draw straightforward equivalences through every instance of repetition (each one of the aforementioned examples certainly operates according to a unique logic that merits its own particular analysis), it remains that a significant number of films from the period carry with them, on some level, a sense of circularity or repetition.

Within this group of films it is Guy Debord's Situationist cinema that perhaps most strongly incorporates such motifs. The Situationist International (SI) officially existed from 1957 to 1972 but it was amidst the upheavals of 1968 that it developed what are generally considered to be some of the most radical and unyielding critiques of both consumer society and what was then called "actually existing socialism" (see, for example, Debord's *The Society of Spectacle* and Raoul Vaneigem's *The Revolution of Everyday Life,* both published in 1967, and René Viénet's *Enragés and Situationists in the Occupation Movement* in 1968). Responding to the scientism of bureaucratic Marxism and the totalitarianism of Soviet Communism, the SI rejuvenated the problem of alienation, a concept that had fallen out of favor with the rise of Althusserian structuralist Marxism, and restored it as a central category of revolutionary struggle. For the SI, the epochal shift in postwar capitalism from production to consumption has extended the experience of alienation beyond the boundaries of the workplace so that it now infects every

aspect of daily life.[4] As a result, consumer capitalism has succeeded in reconstructing society as

a series of spectacles where every labor, action, thought, and desire has become mediated. In

consequence, lived experience is increasingly supplanted by images and action replaced with the

passive gaze of the spectator. Individuals thus become ever more isolated, alienated and passive;

no longer able to participate in the construction of their own lives, they are instead reduced to the

status of passive objects brought solely under the control of the spectacular economy. In

response to this, the SI reconfigured the task of revolutionary struggle as the need to dismantle

the spectacle, to break the bonds of alienation and restore participation, activity, and a sense of

self-determination to people's lives. Thus, in "For a Revolutionary Judgment of Art," the SI

argues that the aim of revolution is not to "show" life to people but to bring them to life: "A

revolutionary organization must always remember that its aim is not getting its adherents to

listen to convincing talks by expert leaders, but getting them to speak for themselves in order to

achieve, or at least strive toward, an equal degree of participation" (216).

It is indeed true that cinema stands as one of the primary technologies through which the

spectacular economy operates (as Debord satirically asserts in the voiceover to *In girum imus*

nocte et consumimur igni, "When one loves life, one goes to the movies"), and, as Thomas Levin

makes clear, "to the extent that cinema is synonymous with spectacle – a spatialization of time, a

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[4] Alex Murray argues that the SI's rejuvenation of the question of alienation as a fundamental
structuring principle of consumer society was a response to the Althusserian rejection of the
commodity fetish as "an unfortunate trace of Hegelianism" ("Beyond" 165). Murray cites
Luckács' preface to the 1967 edition of *History and Class Consciousness* where he dismisses the
emphasis in the 1923 version on alienation, arguing now, alongside Althusser, that alienation, as
"a natural means by which man masters the world," could not be so easily transcended and the
fantasy of a non-alienated existence was trapped inside the logic of idealism. The SI's return to
the problem of alienation thus marks, in addition to those detailed below, another means by
which it rejected the principles of scientific Marxism.

staging of separation, a fostering of passivity, alienation, and so on – it is simply unacceptable and must be eliminated" (325). However, at the same time cinema stands as the perfect medium through which to begin "dismantling processes of reification" (Debord qtd. in Levin 330). As such, cinema is not to be simply collapsed into the spectacle as an "inherently mendacious" technology ("Cinema and Revolution" 220). Rather, as Levin continues, what is contested by the SI is not cinema as such but a certain set of cinematic practices, which, in turn, "leaves open the possibility of an alternative sort of cinematic activity incompatible with the economy of spectacle" (328). Hence, in the announcement of the filmic version of *The Society of the Spectacle*, the SI argue that, "The cinema is itself an integral part of this world, serving as one of the instruments of the separate *representation* that opposes and dominates the actual proletarianized society. A revolutionary critique engages in battle on the very terrain of the cinematic spectacle, it must thus *turn the language of that medium against itself* and give itself a form that is itself revolutionary" ("On *The Society*" 221). It remains possible, therefore, that cinema, rather than reinforcing the logic of the spectacle, can be a revolutionary means towards its very undoing. While critics like Levin, Sadie Plant, and Jonathan Crary have examined the relationship between Debord's analysis of the spectacle and his use of cinema as a means of radical political expression, it remains to examine the nature of revolution that underscores this operation. Through a close reading of two of Debord's films, his third, *Critique de la séparation* (*Critique of Separation,* 1961) and his last *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni* (1978), it becomes apparent that repetition is the figure through which Debord articulates a new

understanding of revolutionary process grounded in circularity, incompleteability, and non-calculability.[5]

To unpack the significance of repetition in Debord it is necessary to begin with Henri Lefebvre, Debord's close friend and teacher, whose critical analyses of contemporary society and the problem of everydayness similarly emphasize repetition. Indeed, it is both through and against this sense of everydayness that Debord's engagement with repetition and revolution develops. The SI's investment in everydayness derives from the group's reassessment of the problem of alienation as a condition that permeates all levels of experience; since alienation is no longer under the sole purview of the workplace, struggle similarly extends beyond these bounds to become situated in the behaviors and habits of everyday life, as evinced by the title of Raoul Vaneigem's Situationist manifesto, itself a reference to Lefebvre, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*. What exactly constitutes the everyday remains somewhat elusive, in part due to its commonsensical nature. The everyday simply *is*; it exists as the essential, unnoticed, and overlooked minutiae of habit, or as what Rita Felski calls the "taken-for-granted continuum of mundane activities that frames our forays into more esoteric or exotic worlds" (77). For Lefebvre, the everyday is that "enormous, shapeless, ill-defined mass" that remains once the abstract endeavors that seek a higher level of knowledge (philosophy, science, art) have been extracted from human experience. As such, it is the basic "human raw material" (*Critique I* 252). Significantly, the everyday cannot be defined through one set of practices. Rather, it is the site where natural and social worlds come into dialectical contact with each other; as Derek Schilling

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[5] All quotations from Debord's films are taken from Ken Knabb's translation of his collected film scripts and writings, titled *Guy Debord Complete Cinematic Works: Scripts, Stills, Documents.*

argues, "the everyday resides for Lefebvre in neither work, leisure, nor private life, but in the totality of social interactions" (32). As the coincidence of the natural and the social, everydayness is formulated by the largely unconscious actions and routines of day-to-day living, which have transformed and continue to change over time. Thus, for Lefebvre, while in premodern societies the actions of everydayness were more fully integrated into the totality of human practices, in modernity they have become increasingly fragmented, specialized, and regimented. Thus, as Michael Gardiner contends, while "productive labour was [once] organically connected to daily life, to the rhythms and cycles of the natural world," in modern society "people spend most of their lives constrained and defined by rigid, immobile social roles and occupational niches [… and] imaginative and creative human activity is transformed into routinized and commodified forms" (76).

For our purposes here it is important to note that for Lefebvre, everyday experience is characterized by repetition: "The everyday is situated at the intersection of two modes of repetition: the cyclical, which dominates in nature, and the linear, which dominates in processes known as 'rational.' The everyday implies on the one hand [natural] cycles […] and it implies on the other hand the repetitive gestures of work and consumption" ("The Everyday" 10). Repetition is, in fact, a constituent part of the everyday for most theorists: Felski similarly maintains that the temporality of the everyday is repetition ("everyday life is, above all, a temporal term. As such, it conveys the fact of repetition" (81)) while Andreas Antoniades categorizes the everyday as a form of social repetition (419). For Lefebvre, capitalism "masks" itself in these natural cycles so that these "repetitive gestures" that mark the monotony of the everyday under capitalism are naturalized (10). As such, the everyday becomes "the repetitive buried under its own repetition, at once unknown and too well known, hidden beneath the

surface of the wilted rhetoric of humdrum discourse" (*Critique III* 65). Repetition highlights the

essential homogeneity of experience for while the consumer economy, under the banner of the

new, of progress, and of innovation, dictates that "everything changes," this change is, in fact,

planned: "production anticipates reproduction; production produces change in such a way as to

superimpose the impression of speed onto that of monotony" ("The Everyday" 10). The idea of

the new thus becomes another mark of the repetitious nature of experience within consumer

culture, an experience which generates a sense of "generalized passivity" as we give ourselves

over to the rhythms of daily life as its natural course ("The Everyday" 10). For both the SI and

Lefebvre, breaking the bonds of alienation and bringing about participation, activity, and control

is the work of revolution: "The end, the aim, is to make thought – the power of man, the

participation in and the consciousness of that power – intervene in life in the humblest detail […]

the aim is to change life, lucidly to recreate everyday life" (*Critique I* 227).

Felski identifies in Lefebvre's writing and in a certain set of conceptions of everydayness

a tendency to "equate repetition with domination and innovation with agency and resistance"

(84). Felski disputes what she sees as a wholesale rejection of repetition, arguing instead that it is

a necessary means of making sense of our environment and of organizing the world. Thus,

"repetition is not simply a sign of human subordination to external forces but also one of the

ways individuals engage with and respond to their environment" (84). But if repetition is

typically presented as a negative category of existence, a condition that marks the oppressive

regimentation of life within consumer capitalism and therefore that which must be overcome, it

begs the question why Debord's cinema, a cinema conceived as a form of revolutionary protest,

is structured by it and is overwritten with references to and patterns of circularity.[6]

The basic content of *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni* is comprised of a series of

repetitious images that emphasize everydayness; the film continually returns to images of the

same kinds of people, places, and actions – workers, shoppers, offices, homes, watching

television, eating and drinking, playing games – either as direct repetitions of the same image or

as implied repetitions through each person or place's similarity to those that have come before.

Alongside this, the film's visual style similarly incorporates a sense of repetition through the use

of repeated shots and repeated sequences. Indeed, one could argue (as I will below) that the

practice of *détournement* itself, the principle aesthetic strategy of reusing previously filmed

images integral to all of Debord's films, is grounded in a sense of repetition.[7] As a result, the

basic content and structure of the film appear shot through with forms of repetition that evoke a

sense of everydayness.

This incorporation of repetitions that gesture towards everydayness works as part of

Debord's larger avant-garde aesthetic – what Thomas Levin refers to as a "mimesis of

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[6] It is arguable whether, in fact, this is the case in Lefebvre at all. Indeed, as we will discuss below, repetition is the means through which the new can be imagined. As such, Lefebvre is not opposed to repetition *per se*, but to its naturalization within consumer capitalism and its generation of a passive society lulled into complacency by its rhythms. As with Debord's relationship to cinema, it is a specific socio-historic formation of repetition that Lefebvre associates with oppression.

[7] This use of found footage is not, in itself, new. As Walter Benjamin famously examines, it is the central form of dada art conceived as the reignition of pieces of the everyday that are otherwise useless commodities as new revolutionary objects. Similarly, numerous filmmakers have engaged this aesthetic, including Adrian Brunel, Esfir Shub, Bruce Conner, and Arthur Lipsett. Indeed, it is also the basis of the Kuleshov effect. In this sense, Debord's political use of found footage is, itself, a found (repeated?) aesthetic.

incoherence" – and it is within this investment in incoherence that Debord's emphasis on repetition develops its revolutionary significance. For Levin, Debord's cinema is characterized by two leitmotifs: "the calculated violation of cinematographic convention as a means of exposing the syntax – and in turn the ideological stakes – of the spectacle; and the deliberate stating of confusion as both a refusal of a false and reductive pseudocoherence of (narrative) spectacle and as a reflection of the fundamental *incoherence* of the reality of late capitalism" (358). Levin emphasizes as part of Debord's revolutionary aesthetic his films' resolute rejection of narrative or stylistic continuity and their concomitant investment in a discontinuous and obscure collage technique. Thus while Debord's films have been frequently classified as hard to watch, obscure, and fundamentally unsatisfying, as Levin continues, they are so "because the world is unsatisfying and the incoherence of the film reflects that of the reality. The task of radical documentary is thus to refuse the false reduction of a pseudocoherence and to present as such an incoherence that, in its impenetrable density, holds out the possibility of an alternative, not yet accessible meaning" (360). If the task of cinema, then, is to refuse the fantasies proffered by the spectacle and instead reveal its logic, it follows that repetition, as the fundamental characteristic of the everyday within the spectacular economy, must be rendered as such; modern life is alienated and repetitive and cinema must reflect this. Moreover, if we accept Blanchot's argument that "the everyday escapes […and] is the unperceived" (240), which is to say that the condition of its very everydayness means that we do not perceive its operations, Debord's cinema, which Levin describes as "an unbroken mirror reflecting a fragmented reality," becomes all the more urgent as a means of demonstrating the stultifying capitalist logic that underpins the seemingly natural cycles of the everyday (369). The circularity of the palindromic title of *In girum* – we turn in the night, consumed by fire – thus references the oppressive conditions of

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contemporary everyday life as a never-ending monotony. As Debord's voiceover describes it, "nothing translates the dead end and the restlessness of the present time better than the old phrase that circles back around itself completely, given its construction letter by letter as a labyrinth from which one cannot exit, and thereby conveying perfectly the form and content of perdition."

If the repetitions that make up *In girum* reflect the banality of everyday life, they also then function as a technique of incoherence by disrupting the familiar narrative of classical cinema and the pseudocoherence that it imposes upon experience. Indeed, the repetitions in the film do not operate as part of a larger classical narrative structure: the group of drinkers that we see early on in the film, for example, don't reappear later at dawn to convey any narrative drive – what they've been doing, what has happened elsewhere during these intervening hours, or even the simple passage of time. Rather, the film's fundamental refusal to narrate a story means that coherent connections between images, voice-over commentary, and subtitle are hard to formulate. As such, *In girum* separates classical narrative from meaning and without the structure of the former, the recurrence of the same faces across the film can only appear as repetition: we recognize these similarities and repetitions *as such* since we are unable to order them inside a linear narrative structure. Rather than telling a story, these repetitions lay bare the monotonous nature of everyday life while at the same time resisting a cinematic form that typically works to conceal the monotony of the everyday by replacing it with unified narratives of excitement and intrigue. In repetition, then, Debord finds a cinematic form that "turns the language of the medium against itself" to undermine the operations of the spectacle. Indeed, the tedium of these banal actions divorced as they are from any larger narrative structure that bestows upon them significance, what Blanchot terms the "nothing happens" of the everyday (243), is precisely what mainstream cinema attempts to conceal and distract us from. The

unconscious repetitions of the everyday are typically that which escapes representation since they do so little to entertain; here, this banality is given cinematic form to produce a film that reflects, in alienating detail, the repetitive and meaningless actions of everydayness.

In a certain sense, therefore, Debord's emphasis on repetition recalls Kracauer's theory of the mass ornament. While the two theorists remain opposed in some significant ways – for Debord, mainstream cinema can only every represent the false unity of the spectacle whereas for Kracauer such films actually reflect back the alienation of modern life – they remain linked in as much as cinema has the power to reveal the forms of alienation typically hidden from view. As Kracauer argues, "were this reality to remain hidden from the viewers, they could neither attack nor change it; its disclosure in distraction is therefore of moral significance" (326). Debord aims to develop a kind of cinema that, in Kracauer's language, "exposes disintegration instead of masking it" (328). Following this logic, the revelation of the condition of everydayness as empty, passive, and alienated produces a tension between what we imagine our lives to be and what they actually are, which, in turn, provokes the desire for radical social transformation. But we need to be careful here, for there is a way by which this notion of revelation can be taken as testament to the truth of material conditions in some positivist fashion. This idea that there is a truth to reality, a truth that Marxism, as a weapon against false consciousness has discovered, forms the backbone of orthodox structural Marxism. Yet the authoritarianism of such orthodox thinking runs counter to Situationism's fundamental libratory principles. As such, repetition must signal more than simply a revelation concerning the monotonous conditions of late capitalism; alongside this, it implies an alternate conception of revolution where, contrary to the linear determinism of orthodox Marxism, struggle is conceived as a perpetual process of self-determined possibility.

The sense of repetition that characterizes Debord's cinema operates as the aesthetic

formulation of a politics of anti-power, which functions as a response to the oppressive dogma of

teleological political ideology. While the problem of teleological determinism has formed the

backbone of numerous critiques of Marxism *tout court*, most of which find their roots in the

French poststructuralist philosophy of the period at hand, Debord, a committed Marxist,

positions teleology within the discourse of orthodox Marxism[8] and demonstrates an attempt to

think a new Marxist politics against the oppressive limits of such structural, scientific thinking.

The problem of teleology arises in the scientific strain of orthodox Marxism where the

contradictory nature of capitalism is seen as absolute in its determinism. Following this logic,

revolution is pre-determined as the dialectical laws of capitalism render Communism an

historical inevitability. Scientific Marxism is generally considered to have taken root with the

publication of Engels' famous pamphlet, *Socialism: Utopian or Scientific* (1880) in which

Engels argues for the objective nature of dialectical thought: "An exact representation of the

universe, of its evolution, of the development of mankind, and of the reflection of this evolution

in the minds of men, can therefore only be obtained by the methods of dialectics with its constant

regard to the innumerable actions and reactions of life and death, of progressive and

retrogressive changes" (697) .[9] For Engels, dialectics and the forces of contradiction are natural

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[8] I'm using the term orthodox Marxism with reference to Marcuse's critique of what he
alternately calls bureaucratic, Soviet, traditional, and orthodox Marxism. Indeed, Debord's
revolutionary theory has much in common with Marcuse, especially his emphases on the
significance of utopian thought (*An Essay on Liberation*) and the importance of an avant-garde
intelligentsia in any revolutionary movement (*Reexamination of the Concept of Revolution*).
[9] John Holloway, however, argues that the concept of scientific Marxism is present in Marx's
own writing, most prominently the 1859 Preface to *Contribution to the Critique of Political*

laws that Marxism had discovered; as such, it is a science capable of determining both the truth

of current material conditions and the shape of mankind's future.

Traces of scientific Marxist thought can be found in numerous Marxist theorists, but it

isn't until the publication of Louis Althusser's *For Marx* in the early 1960s that scientific

Marxism becomes retrospectively established.[10] By articulating the epistemological break

between a humanist Marx and a scientific Marx, Althusser argues for a scientific Marxism that,

as Mark Poster demonstrates, renders moot the notion of revolutionary struggle against the forces

of history: "Althusser's dangerous conclusion was that human interests and scientific interests

were completely separate and perhaps opposed. Logically, his revised philosophy of Marxism

had to be totally divorced from any leaning toward socialism itself. Science could have nothing

to do with revolutionary action" (395).[11] The scientific tradition which began with Engels slowly

solidified into Communist orthodoxy through Lenin and Stalin until it came to define the popular

face of all Marxist revolutionary thought. As John Holloway points out in his critique of

scientific Marxism, while there are relatively few defenders of Engels' work today, the scientism

of his thinking has come to define the legacy of Marxism so that "the tradition which Engels

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Economy and has been developed in the classical Marxist writings of Kautsky, Lenin, Luxemburg, and Pannekoek (119).

[10] As Althusser mentions in the preface to the English edition, only the introduction of *For Marx* dates from its publication as a book in 1965. The chapters collected in that publication were previously published in French Communist Party journals between 1960 and 1964 (9).

[11] Richard Gunn's "Against Historical Materialism: Marxism and First-Order Discourse" makes a similar critique of scientific Marxism to Poster. However, while Gunn's essay argues against the concept of historical materialism itself as that which is "unmarxist" (1), his alternate theorization of Marxist theory maintains the rejection of humanism that grounds Althusserian sociology.

represents continues to provide the unspoken and unquestioned assumptions upon which a great deal of Marxist discussion is based" (119).

Scientific Marxism's ideas of determinism and historical necessity render revolution teleological and closed. Grounded in an eschatological sense of progress and attainment, revolution becomes fixed – Utopia is ultimately waiting to exist on the other side of capitalism, the means of realizing this condition are laid out for us as a fixed path through history, and its fulfillment marks the end of struggle. In such a light, it is easy to see how the notion of contradiction as absolutely deterministic, despite its evocation of hope for the oppressed classes, can become oppressive; the capacity to articulate an end to struggle means that the process of revolution becomes programmatic so that any action not in direct service of this agenda is invalidated or suppressed. Moreover, the attainment of this objective ultimately marks the end of resistance and of politics with an impossible sense of finitude, calling into being the Communist version of Francis Fukuyama's end of history. As William C. Dowling points out in his discussion of the tension between Marxism as political philosophy and as cultural critique, this sense of teleological determinism is "what gives substance to the claim of the *nouveaux philosophes* that totalitarian oppression was written right into the heart of the Marxist program from the outset" (50). Dowling continues:

> The direct line that according to the *nouveaux philosophes* leads from Hegel to the Gulag does so, that is, as follows: (1) Hegel invents the notion of Absolute Spirit, and with it a teleology of history that is so far harmless as being confined within an idealistic system; (2) Marx then relocates this teleology within History conceived in materialist terms, which so to speak give it flesh-and-blood force; and (3) the annulment of contradiction at the end of the teleological process

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becomes, with Stalin or any dictator coming to power as a Communist, an

abolition of differences through sheer force. Thus Absolute Spirit becomes the

knock at the door, in the name of History, of the secret police. (50)[12]

We can thus infer from the turn away from linear narrative and towards circularity and repetition

in Debord's films a refusal of this teleological structure and a rejection of its doctrinaire sense of

revolution as a prescribed historical process.

This instantiation of repetition as an alternate model for revolutionary process means that

while on one hand it reflects the stagnant nature of everydayness, on the other repetition must

imply the possibility of difference. As Lefebvre himself points out in *Rhythmanalysis,* "absolute

repetition is only a fiction of logical and mathematical thought […] not only does repetition not

exclude differences, it also gives birth to them, it produces them" (7). As such, the repetitions

that multiply throughout *In girum* carry with them the possibility of difference; repetition is

potentially transformative. Indeed, the repeated shots and images across the film imply

difference by virtue of the fact that they come second, or third, or fourth; something has changed

between each iteration so that purely mimetic repetition becomes impossible and in every

moment of repetition there remains the possibility of difference. Indeed, *détournement* is

characterized by the twin processes of repetition and difference as it returns to existent footage in

order to see again and see differently, operating as what Patrick Greaney terms "a form of critical

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[12] To be clear, Dowling, through his engagement with Jameson, makes this argument as a
critique of the narrow-minded version of Marxism that was erected by the *nouveaux philosophes*
as a straw man for Marxism *tout court.* My aim in using this quote is to demonstrate what has
become a common critique of Marxist revolutionary thought and one that second-wave
revolutionary thinkers were sensitive to given the dominance of Stalinism within both the
structures of institutionalized Marxism and the popular political imagination. It is not my
intention, as should be clear from the theoretical investments of this project, to perpetuate the
claim that this version of Marxism is, or ever has been, its only formulation.

repetition" (81). Since, as Debord makes clear, *détourned* images retain a memory of their origin so that their "old and new senses" coexist, the practice operates according to a logic of repetition (the prior context and meaning of the image) with a difference (the new meanings that arise within the parameters of the new context) ("Détournement" 67). Thus, the images of Zorro and Robin Hood – two legendary rebels fighting for the poor – appear in *In girum* accompanied by Debord's voiceover comment that, "we can hardly expect revolutionary innovations from those whose profession is to monopolize the stage under the present social conditions." These *détourned* images, in their new context, can now operate as part of a critique of the system that produced them, in this instance arguing against the possibility of radical political forces from within the establishment and suggesting that mainstream cinema, as an arm of that establishment, sublates revolutionary forces so that they become a distraction rather than a call to arms. Indeed, given the reactionary nature of existing artforms, for Debord it is only through "extremist innovation" in the form of the *détourned* image that an artwork may overcome its dependency on the ideological formations of existing society and "go beyond them" ("A Users Guide" 207, 208). However, this movement "beyond" the ideological limits of artistic production is conceived through a return to and restatement of images firmly entrenched in it so that the possibility of revolutionary transformation is traced through the movement of repetition.

In a similar fashion, the inherent circuitousness of the palindrome that serves as the title of the film implies both repetition and difference: palindromes produce a repetitious cycle of ending where one began while at the same time the meaning of the sentence itself transcends the tightly wound circuit of its syntactical structure. Moreover, the translation of this particular palindrome inserts a sense of change into its circularity, "we turn in the night" implying both a

repetitive spinning motion and a transformation.[13] As the film progresses, the fire of the title becomes associated with the metaphoric fires of revolutionary change. Indeed, the palindrome of the title is also known as the "Devil's Verse" so when the voiceover describes the SI's allegiance with "the Devil's Party – the 'historical evil' that leads existing conditions to their destruction, the 'bad side' that makes history by undermining all established satisfaction" and the image track shows a scene from Marcel Carné's *Les Visiteurs du Soir* where the Devil enters the main hall of the castle and states, "Oh, what a splendid fire! I dearly love fire! And it loves me. Look, see how affectionate its flames are, licking my fingers like a puppy would! It's so delectable!," the fire of the Devil's Verse is linked with the fire of Carné's Devil, which, in turn, becomes linked with the revolutionary Devil's Party of Debord's voiceover. As a result, the title binds the fire of revolutionary struggle to the circuitous and transformative image of turning in the night so that repetition comes to stand for a new idea of revolutionary change.[14]

Debord's own evocation of the film's title is followed by a long quotation from Ecclesiastes 1.4 that similarly references repetitious movements that imply a kind of cyclicality and thus carry with them a sense of perpetuity: "one generation passeth away, and another generation cometh, but the earth abideth forever. The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down,

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[13] Some translations more clearly imply this sense of circularity by translating *girum* as "circle" so that the phrase translates as "we enter the circle by night and are consumed by fire"

[14] A later scene from the same Carné film performs a similar function by linking night with the Devil also. Imprisoned, Gilles sings, "Sad lost children, we wander in the night. Where are the flowers of day, the pleasures of love, the lights of life? Sad lost children, we wander in the night. The devil cunningly carries us away, far from our beloved ones." A manuscript fragment on the Themes of *In girum* similarly draws this connection between fire, night, the Devil, and revolution: "there is the theme of *fire*; of *momentary brilliance* – revolution, Saint-Germain-des-Prés, youth, love, *negation in the night*, the Devil, battles and 'unfulfilled missions' where spellbound 'passing travelers' meet their doom" (223).

and hasteth to his place where he arose … All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full;

unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again." This motif of repetition

stands against the idea of "total revolution" – a "permanent paradise […] a happy, eternally

present unity" which *In girum* associates with the logic of the spectacle; accompanying this

voiceover is a text frame uttering the phrase "coming soon to this theater." For Debord, then, the

idea of a post-revolutionary paradise as a fully realizable and attainable state is part of the same

oppressive ideology that characterizes the spectacle. More importantly, the text frame links these

two movements through reference to the technology of cinema so that *In girum* critiques not only

the logic of orthodox revolution but its cinematic counterparts that reinforce this ideology.

The revolutionary significance of these repetitious elements comes together in the film's

conclusion where a subtitle announces, "to be gone through again from the beginning." In this

moment, the very nature of a conclusion is undermined as the film replaces a sense of finitude

with a sense of circularity. Indeed, while the last moments of the film do mark its end they

similarly imply a new beginning, thus bringing them into circular continuity. Moreover, this is

not a moment of mimetic repetition but rather repetition with a difference since the film has

already been watched once and thus implies something new to be seen in the repetition. These

concluding comments render explicit the significance of repetition for the politics and processes

of *In girum*. Similarly, *Critique de la séparation* concludes with the claim that "this is a film that

interrupts itself and does not come to an end. All conclusions remain to be drawn; everything has

to be recalculated. The problem continues to be posed in continually more complicated terms."

Accompanying this narration is a still of a woman standing with her mouth open and a subtitle

that reads "I didn't understand all of it." In these closing moments, both films denounce the very

possibility of conclusion, instead announcing the need to return to the beginning, to "recalculate"

and continually engage with the problems of revolutionary struggle. The still of the woman in *Critique* provides a moment of identification for the audience; given the abstract nature of the film, any attempt to fully comprehend the film and reconcile its disparate elements into a coherent and unified interpretation leads to frustration. However, as this ending implies, totalizing the film in this way is not the aim. Indeed, since "all conclusions remain to be drawn," the call here is not to re-watch the film in order to master it. Rather, this return implies the continual need to re-watch and re-think so that the desire for revolutionary change that drives the film is never-ending and revolutionary struggle becomes a perpetual process. The very last moments of *Critique* join with the sense of repetition implied by the call to recalculate to emphasize the sense of perpetuity implied in repetition; the voiceover comments, "Just as there was no profound reason to begin this formless message, so there is none for concluding it" while the concluding subtitle states, "to be continued." At the ends of these films, then, repetition is foregrounded to mark the significance of perpetuity over a sense of completeability that restructures revolution as a necessarily unfinishable process. In this way, the path of revolutionary change becomes a continual process of struggle and any sense of linear progression is displaced by this circuitous image of return.

If repetition, then, is the mark of struggle as well as the expression of the alienations of capitalism as they traverse the everyday, it follows that this focus on repetition also undermines orthodox class-based revolutionary politics and the position of the party as the locus of struggle. Alongside this sense of incompleteability, repetition also signals a concomitant shift in the formulation of revolutionary process away from the structured hierarchy of party politics towards a radical sense of self-determination. In the preface to *History of the Russian Revolution* Trotsky famously comments that "without a guiding organization, the energy of the masses would

dissipate like steam not enclosed in a piston box" (xvi). For Trotsky, and for most classical

Marxists, it is the party that invariably steps in to give this sense of structure to revolutionary

energy. Indeed, if, as John Holloway argues, the "Reform or Revolution" debates between

Eduard Bernstein and Rosa Luxemburg over a century ago have, in essence, set the parameters

for our understanding of the process of transformation (11), then the party is repeatedly

privileged as the primary agent of social change – for Luxemburg, change is the result of the

rapid seizure of state power and its radical transformation by new party leaders, while for

Bernstein, change is introduced slowly through parliamentary process. Through either course of

action, however, the party stands as the *modus operandi* of social transformation and the

structure around which revolutionary energy coheres and gains momentum. Yet in becoming this

center, party leaders turn into the mouthpieces of the struggle and set its course, while the

veracity of such an agenda is supported by scientific Marxism's claim to objective knowledge.

Indeed, the notion of a teleological revolution is founded on the claim that Marxism's method for

understanding social development is exacting and objective and can thus reveal the truth of

historical process. However, if Marxism is understood scientifically as the bearer of the correct

knowledge of history, a distinction immediately arises between those who do and those who do

not know, between those with true and those with false consciousness. As Holloway maintains,

such a distinction,

> immediately poses both epistemological and organizational problems. Political
>
> debate becomes focused on the question of 'correctness' and the 'correct line'
>
> […and] if a distinction is to be made between those who know and those who do
>
> not, and if understanding or knowledge is seen as important in guiding the

political struggle, then what is to be the organizational relation between the

knowers and the others (the masses)? (122)

The consequence of this logic is to force radical politics to choose between two organizational

structures: either those who know educate the masses and lead the revolution (a vanguard party)

or revolution becomes the purview of a specific class (the masses or the workers) whose position

within capitalism necessarily affords them insight into the objective state of things, which in turn

produces a revolutionary disposition. In both cases, a specific political consciousness is imposed,

either by the party or the class structure.

The idea of a vanguard party is most commonly associated with Lenin. In *What is to be

Done?* Lenin argues:

> We said that *there could not yet* be Social-Democratic consciousness among the
>
> workers. This consciousness could only be brought to them from without. This
>
> history of countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is
>
> able to develop only trade union consciousness […]. The theory of socialism,
>
> however, grew more out of the philosophic, historical and economic theories that
>
> were elaborated by the educated representatives of the propertied class, the
>
> intellectuals. (74)[15]

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[15] Despite their later ideological differences (Kautsky, while remaining committed to socialism, became a renowned antibolshevik), Lenin approvingly quotes Kautsky in the same pamphlet for proffering a similar message: "The vehicles of science are not the proletariat, but the bourgeois intelligentsia: it was in the minds of some members of this stratum that modern socialism originated, and it was they who communicated it to the more intellectually developed proletarians, who, in their turn, introduced it into the proletarian class struggle where conditions allow that to be done. Thus socialist consciousness is something introduced into the proletarian class struggle from without and not something that arose within it spontaneously" (81).

Thus the liberation of the majority is deferred to a vanguard; revolution is the emancipation of the masses, but not their self-emancipation. Significantly, then, the alienation which struggle attempts to negate remains in place as politics retains its mediated structure and the question of revolution shifts from "how do we negate alienation?" to "how can the masses acquire class consciousness?" (Holloway 131). The authoritarian currents are readily apparent in such thinking – there is a hierarchy between those who know and those who do not, as well as a separation between the masses and the forces of revolutionary struggle. Revolutionaries under such a system become ambassadors for a party that speaks for the masses, performing a gesture that both reinforces a hierarchical power structure and a sense of passivity among the masses that no longer bear the responsibility for political change.

For Situationists like Raoul Vaneigem, the idea of allegiance to a political party has become synonymous with hierarchical power structures hidden under the guise of free choice:

> In this fractured world, whose common denominator throughout history has been hierarchical social power, only one freedom has ever been tolerated: the freedom to change the numerator, the freedom to prefer one master to another. Freedom of choice so understood has increasingly lost its attraction – especially since it became the official doctrine of the worst totalitarianisms of the modern world. (19)

Choice thus operates as an illusion of freedom that covers over its operation within a larger system of social control that perpetuates the alienated nature of social relations within consumer society. As Herbert Marcuse deftly argues in *One Dimensional Man,* individuals are only free to select from a predetermined range of options that function to reinforce the political and social

apparatus as one of repression.[16] This emphasis on the primacy of self-determination drives the

critique of institutionalized and formally constituted systems of political resistance since such

structures, defined as they are by their programs of action, present a block to self-determination

as individuals must conform to their standards in order to be part of the movement.

Against these mediated, top-down political structures, Debord's focus on the everyday

reasserts the realm of individual lived experience as the site of struggle. First and foremost, this

focus undermines the idea that there is a class proper to revolution. The everyday is a feature of

all experience, regardless of class. This is not to say that it traverses every life in an identical

fashion – this is certainly not the case. As Schilling points out, "It remains the case that some

groups experience the constraints of everydayness at higher cost than do others: alienation is

greater for women and for the working class than for the bourgeois male, who is able to make

room for self-cultivation and to escape from routine productive activity" (32). However, it

remains that the capitalist systems that shape everydayness structure it for *everyone* so that its

alienating effects are experienced, on some level, by all. On this ideological terrain, the working

class no longer remains as the sole victim of capitalism (as they arguably did under the sway of

its industrial iteration). Traditional class politics is no longer capable of accounting for the ways

in which reification, through the omnipresence of the spectacular economy, shapes the contours

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[16] "Under the rule of a repressive whole, liberty can be made into a powerful instrument of domination. The range of choice open to the individual is not the decisive factor in determining the degree of human freedom, but *what* can be chosen and what is chosen by the individual. The criterion for free choice can never be an absolute one, but neither is it entirely relative. Free election of masters does not abolish the masters or the slaves. Free choice among a wide variety of goods and services does not signify freedom if these goods and services sustain social controls of a life of toil and fear – that is, if they sustain alienation. And the spontaneous reproduction of superimposed needs by the individual does not establish autonomy; it only testifies to the efficacy of the controls" (9-10).

of everyday life.[17] As a response, the revolutionary class expands to encompass, as Sadie Plant

maintains, all "those who have no control over their lives" (15). The SI thus offers a new vision

of Marxist revolution where the proletarian class has morphed in line with the broadening grip of

capitalist forces.[18]

Debord's emphasis on the possibility housed within the repetitions of the everyday

renders the everyday potentially active and transformative and thus positions lived experience as

the arena of struggle where each individual has the power to resist immediately,

idiosyncratically, and fundamentally. Indeed, if we do as Deleuze asks and pay attention not only

to that which repeats but to that which does the repeating, we are confronted with ourselves as

social actors so that the repetitions of the everyday present, as Antoniades argues, "in the most

fundamental and radical sense a manifestation of social agency" (420). In this way, individual

acts of resistance, of attempts to render daily life personally meaningful, form one of the three

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[17] In a more pessimistic fashion, Lefebvre, in the second volume of *The Critique of Everyday Life,* argues that the proletarian can no longer be considered the revolutionary class given their increasing investment in mimicking the middle class. Schilling makes this point in his brief history of postwar theories of the everyday: "Only a naïve populist, admits Lefebvre, could any longer expect the study of working-class milieus to withhold some hidden truth of everyday life. As the world continues its ineluctable march toward the perfection of the system, even revolutionary praxis comes to resemble 'programming' put together by some punctilious bureaucrat" (33).

[18] The idea that revolution cannot be limited to the working class alone has much in common with the group of open Marxists who argue that the categories of capitalism are fluid and open; to presume that there is one class that experiences the oppressions of capitalism is to limit the forms and expressions of anti-capitalist struggle and to assume that the categories of capitalism are fixed and closed. As John Holloway argues: "The relation between capital and labour (or between capitalist and working class) is taken to be one of subordination. On this basis, understanding class struggle involves, first, defining the working class and, second, studying whether and how they struggle. In this approach, the working class, however defined, is defined on the basis of its subordination to capital […]. Indeed, it is only because the working class is assumed to be pre-subordinated that the question of definition can even be posed. Definition merely adds the locks to a world that is assumed to be closed" (140-41).

arms of revolutionary struggle (alongside the economic and political). Following this logic, it becomes apparent that change externally imposed (by military coup or violent regime change) is insufficient since the everyday must be radically altered as well and the agency of this transformation is located in individuals who formulate their own modes of resistance. As such, the everyday houses the potential for precisely the kinds of revolutionary action that the SI calls for – a politics of individual agency outside the oppressive limits of ideological dogma or party orthodoxy. The everyday, therefore, offers the possibility of direct action against the mediated modes of existence perpetuated by both capitalism and bureaucratic orthodox Marxism.

These non-hierarchical and resolutely non-institutionalized, unorganized political processes engendered by the everyday place significant emphasis on self-determination as its constituent features become autonomous, self-determined, and direct political thought and action. It is possible, therefore, to link the use of repetition as the motif of this alternate process in *In girum* and *Critique de la séparation* with a refusal to impress upon the audience a predetermined political position. In this vein, *Critique* opens by announcing the significance of repetition as a means of undermining the articulation of a clear political message: "We don't know what to say. Sequences of words are repeated; gestures are recognized." Rather than begin with a clear thesis, a position to be communicated and understood by the viewer, the film instead begins with uncertainty, which is then linked to repetition ("we don't know what to say. Sequences of words are repeated"). Moreover, this opening speech goes on to highlight the failures of the Situationist movement to emphasize incompleteness and the noncalculability of the future: "so many things we wanted have not been attained, or only partially and not like we imagined." Significantly, the image track in this moment shifts from a linear tracking shot of a group of people on a café terrace and a zoom in on Debord talking with a young woman to a 360

degree pan around the Plateau Saint-Meri. As the voiceover sets up the idea of an unfinished

movement whose message is unclear, the camera reinforces a sense of circuitousness through

this circular shot that displaces the linearity of the tracking shot that precedes it. Moreover,

accompanying this 360 degree pan is the subtitle, "Midway on the journey of our life … I found

myself in a dark forest … where the right way was lost." The circularity of the pan, then, is

presented alongside the loss of a correct path (the "right way") and a clear forward movement

(the tracking shot). This sense of linear progression and a clear message, implied by the opening

tracking shot and Debord talking, gives way to circularity and a form that purposely obscures its

content since we cannot hear what the Debord on the image track is saying as his conversation

with the young woman is displaced by his voiceover that privileges repetition over the clear

communication of revolutionary content.

Later in the film the voice over comments, "it must be admitted that none of this is very

clear. It is a completely typical drunken monologue, with its incomprehensible allusions and

tiresome delivery. With its vain phrases that do not await response." *Critique* thus undermines

the notion of content and communication as suggestive of a programmatic revolutionary

movement. Rather, the film is an incoherent ("drunken") and self-directed ("vain") monologue

that does not await response and is not interested in making sure that the audience understands.

In this sense, the film announces its politics of self-determination since its message remains

purposefully ambiguous and unclear. The refusal to articulate a clear political message is, for

Debord, indicative of his refusal to occupy a leadership position and thus reinforce the very

hierarchical systems that the SI aimed to demolish. Thus *In girum* criticizes the representatives

of such systems, attacking "flourishing political and labor-union functionaries" who undermine

the possibility of social transformation in order to preserve their privileged position within the

system, and the problem of "ingrained routines" that lead revolutionaries to "see no contradiction in following the course of studies accessible to them and then taking up one or another paid position at their level of competence." Refusing to operate as part of some "fantasized orthodoxy," Debord rejects such positions of power: "I would find it repugnant to become an authority within the opposition to this society […and have] refused to take the lead of all sorts of subversive ventures." By disavowing such positions, Debord articulates his adherence to a radical politics of self-emancipation that undermines such hierarchical structures. Thus, the circularity implied in these films and their attendant refusal to articulate a clear revolutionary message operates as a metaphor for this rejection, replacing it instead with an ambiguous image of continual struggle that undermines such institutionalized authority.

Repetition thus becomes a multivalent motif that implies at once the reified experiences of everydayness within consumer capitalism and the possibility of a transformative revolutionary politics. As Kaplan and Ross put it,

> even at its most degraded, the everyday harbors the possibility of its own transformation; it gives rise, in other words, to desires which cannot be satisfied within the weekly cycle of production/consumption. The Political, like the purloined letter, is hidden in the everyday, exactly where it is most obvious: in the contradictions of lived experience, in the most banal and repetitive gestures of everyday life […]. It is in the midst of the utterly ordinary, in the space where the dominant relations of production are tirelessly and relentlessly produced, that we must look for utopian and political aspirations to crystallize. (3)

The use of repetition as an aesthetic strategy exposes the structures of alienation that condition everyday experience and thus provoke a desire for something more. By shifting the locus of

alienation to the everyday, the revolutionary battleground becomes everyday experience. As such, individuals are reinserted as agents of transformation over and against political parties, epochal events, or the forces of history, and resistance becomes heterodox, personal, and direct. However, the processes of repetition mean that this exposure is not in service of some final, attainable victory. Rather, repetition promotes a sense of perpetual revolution where the question of liberation must be continually rethought and reengaged. Moreover, the terms of struggle remain ambiguous as Debord declines to clearly articulate a proactive revolutionary agenda.

Just as the perpetuity implied in repetition undermines claims to a final Communist victory, Debord's films refuse to articulate the content of their utopian desires. In his tracking of the more radical philosophical engagements with everydayness (Dada, Bakhtin, Lefebvre, Situationism, Heller etc.), Gardiner claims that this undefined sense of utopia is, in fact, constituent of this kind of thinking:

> [the utopianism of the everyday] is not what is generally identified with utopianism – that is, an abstract model of social perfection articulated by intellectual and social elites, projected into an unknowable future, and imposed on a recalcitrant reality […] rather, the utopian moment is emblematic of a longing for a different, and better way of living, a reconciliation of thought and life, desire and the real, in a manner that critiques the status quo without projecting a full-blown image of what a future society should look like. In this sense, utopianism is a sensibility that is oriented towards futurity and cognizant of the possibilities of social change as these are inscribed within the fabric of everyday life. (17-18)

Utopia thus remains as a sensibility oriented towards the possibilities of the new that are inscribed in everydayness. By replacing linear narrative progression with repetition, Debord's

films undermine our sense of expectation which, as Barthes famously asserts, relates to the truth claims of narrative where truth "is what is *at the end* of expectation" (76); if narrative closure marks the end of expectation and the arrival of truth, repetition perpetuates expectation and refuses to confirm a "true" sense of revolutionary process.

The rejection of orthodoxy and planned rebellion in favor of a politics of radical self-emancipation leads into an increasing investment in spontaneity as the foundation for action. Indeed, the SI's rejection of all forms of authoritarianism carries with it the rejection of a calculated revolutionary program and thus, to a certain extent, the notion of planned action. Therefore, as *Critique de la séparation* makes clear, revolutionary struggle is not to be "adapt[ed]" into "another neatly ordered spectacle that would play the game of neatly ordered comprehension and participation" since organized action nullifies revolutionary potential by rendering it part of the system of domination. Rather, as *In girum* argues, "It is an illusion to wait for a time when one will be completely aware of everything […] in reality you have to attack with what is at hand, launching a *sudden attack* on one or another realistically attackable position *the moment you see a favorable opportunity*" (my emphasis). As such, these films favor what Holloway terms "an anti-politics of events rather than a politics of organization" (214) or what Vaneigem describes as a "third force" – a "*spontaneous* feature of every struggle [that] radicalizes insurrections, denounces false problems, threatens Power in its very structures" (62, my emphasis). And this logic is further borne out in Debord's films where planned action, tied as it is to official structures, gives way to spontaneity and uncertainty: "despite the fantasies of the spectators of history who try to set up shop as strategists and who see everything from the vantage point of Sirius, the most sublime theory can never guarantee an event […] risks must be taken and you have to pay up front to see what comes next" (*In girum*); revolutionary politics

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must abandon any sense of finitude, direction, or calculability if it is to truly combat the forces of alienation and incite direct action.

Repetition thus signals not the structured outcome of the known but the production of the possibility of the future as difference that cannot be calculated or predicted. This incalculability links back into Debord's negative cinematic practice. As Levin points out, Debord "sketches the contours of an alternative only negatively, by means of [his] relentless violation, refusal, and critique of the contemporary politics of representation […] mak[ing] no positive claims for any sort of non-spectacular, alternative mode as such" (70). In this way, repetition is used to structure a negative revolutionary ideology that articulates not what should be, only what should not. This recognition of the content of revolution avoids the dogmatisms of a planned Utopia and, at the same time, marks a genuine openness to difference – that which cannot be known or imagined prior. In this sense, Debord restores to Marxism Marx's fundamental claim about the unknowability of Communism. If we return to an earlier quote from Levin, we can see how the unknowability of difference produced through repetition structures Debord's films: "they hold out the possibility of an alternate, *not yet accessible,* meaning" (my emphasis).

If we accept that the future is not calculable and that Situationism works against the instantiation of a planned Utopia, we must also concede that Debord's own utopian desires remain unknowable. A number of readings of the SI's critique of alienation assume that its remedy must be a Romantic fantasy of pure authenticity and non-separation, a Utopia free from all forms of mediation where our lives are directly present to ourselves and fully under our conscious control at all times. Exemplary of this kind of response is Jacques Rancière's claim that for Debord, the consumption of any and all images is fundamentally tied to passivity and therefore to systems of alienation, and that the only response is to forego any such representative

systems in favor of action: "Action is presented as the only answer to the evil of the image and the guilt of the spectator" (*Emancipated* 87). Debord's use of cinema to communicate the necessity of action is thus, in Rancière's eyes, paradoxical and contradictory. Against this impossible fantasy of non-separation, Rancière maintains that "The point is not to counter-pose reality to its appearances. It is to construct different realities, different forms of common sense – that is to say, different spatiotemporal systems, different communities of words and things, forms and meanings" (102). What Rancière fails to perceive, however, is that it is precisely the construction of alternate realities that Debord's cinema advocates.

The emphasis of these films on self-direction, their lack of guidance in terms of understanding, interpreting, or acting, and their call to continually return, reimagine, and remake meaning suggests that the goal is not to present some objective revolutionary truth since to do so would be to impose upon others a determining understanding of reality and its Utopian future. Rather, the desire is for each of us to realize our ability to make our own meanings and recreate the world according to our individual desires. As Andy Merrifield has recently argued, Debord's

> invocation of action isn't predicated on overcoming separation, or on some simple
> romantic humanism of yesteryear; it's more because Debord knows, as we now
> know, that there's really no separation anymore, that image and "real" reality are
> essentially one and the same thing. […A]ction and active practice aren't just
> invoked to overcome contemplation, to help us feel alive; they're mobilized as
> creative ways to invent new truths about the world […]. This is quite the reverse
> of repairing duality; it's again to create a separation, a separation between form
> and content, between surface image and real underlying texture. It's a call to bring
> new content to life, to introduce deep texturing into something that's been

flattened. It is to dream of and struggle for a third, fourth and perhaps even fifth

dimension to reality. (39, 38)

The revolutionary call of Debord's films, then, is to break through the imposed and naturalized

cycles of behavior generated by everydayness and instead act in ways motivated by our own

particular desires. This process is, of course, incompleteable and the outcomes of these actions,

whatever they may be, cannot be calculated in advance. But, the call to begin trying remains

urgent.

What both *Critique de la séparation* and *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni*

demonstrate, then, is Debord's articulation of a new sense of revolution – what *Critique* refers to

as a "poor rebellion" – firmly entrenched in a radical politics of anti-power where the circuitous

motion of repetition implies the continual repetition of struggle as a site of infinite productivity

and possibility. This sense of a revolution "to-come" puts us in the realm of messianism without

messianicity, a version of Derrida's "democracy to-come" laid out most clearly in *Specters of*

Marx, a book that Derrida describes because of its messianic politics, and in terms that Debord

would certainly approve of, as a "non-manifesto" ("Marx and Sons" 218).[19] Messianism without

messianicity is a revolutionary politics – "the messianic is revolutionary, it always has to be"

(*Specters* 211) – that attempts to think through the same problems of teleology, authoritarianism,

and calculability as Debord. Engaging in this problematic legacy of Marxism leads Derrida to

theorize a kind of revolutionary form without content, an urgent messianic hope for and belief in

the possibility of difference that exists as waiting without expectation, that is, with the

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[19] "Marx and Sons," Derrida's contribution to *Ghostly Demarcations* (a collection of essays that respond to *Specters of Marx),* and *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason* also deal with the concepts of messianism without messianicity and a democracy to-come.

expectancy of expectation but without calculation. As such, the "without" of messianism without messianicity marks an absence of certainty and the essential unknowability of the future, which undermines the teleological imperative of orthodox Marxist thought where revolutionary process is both calculable and its attainment immanent. As *In girum* makes clear, "even the most sublime theory can never guarantee an event" and the decision to act can never be based on the presumption of knowledge of the future if it is to escape the teleology of political *doxa*: "if one could count on what is coming, hope would be but the calculation of a program" (*Specters* 212). Rather, the messianic or revolutionary spirit is "an experience open to the absolute future of what is coming, that is to say, a necessarily indeterminate, abstract, desert-like experience" (*Specters* 112).

We see the same operative logic in *Critique de la séparation* which describes the movements in France as "a poor rebellion, without language but not without cause." What is poor here, in the sense of lacking, is a political program either in the form of a clear representation of action or an articulation of a revolutionary goal. As the film goes on to state, "It's less a matter of forms than of traces of forms, impressions, memories." As this subtitle appears, the screen goes blank, the blackness marking the film's refusal to articulate a revolutionary program. Indeed, as Debord's voiceover states, *In girum* is a film that communicates through its silences, that is to say, without the articulation of a revolutionary program. Moreover, the use of *détournement*, which Debord describes as "the flexible language of anti-ideology" in the film version of *The Society of the Spectacle,* reinforces this sense of refusal since "it appears in communication that knows it cannot claim to embody any definitive certainty." The ambiguity that *détournement* embodies thus operates as a principal means by

which Debord's cinema refuses to announce a coherent ideological position or stable revolutionary politics.

What both Derrida and Debord emphasize, then, is the impossibility of closure, of knowing or calculating the future and thus rendering revolution fully realizable. This is not to undermine the sense of urgency that permeates both figures, as the incompleteability of revolution does not diminish the exigency of action:

> Although there is a waiting here, an apparently passive limit to anticipation (I cannot calculate everything, predict and program all that is coming, the future in general, etc., and this limit to calculability or knowledge is also, for a finite being, the condition of praxis, decision, action and responsibility), this exposure to the event, which can either come to pass or not (condition of absolute otherness), is inseparable from a promise and an injunction that *call for commitment without delay*, and, in truth, rule out abstention. Even if messianicity as I describe it here can seem abstract (precisely because we have to do here with a universal structure of relation to the event, to the concrete otherness of him who/that is coming, a way of thinking the event 'before' or independently of all ontology), *we have to do here with the most concrete urgency and the most revolutionary as well*.
>
> ("Marx and Sons" 248-49, my emphases)

The same urgency permeates the work of the SI, producing what Greil Marcus describes as the "urgent, daring tone of even the lengthiest, most solemn essays in the *Internationale situationiste* – the sense of minds engaged, quickened beyond rhetoric, by emerging social contradictions" (12).

In *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason,* Derrida brings this idea of messianism without messianicity, or a "poor rebellion" to use Debord's term, back into the logic of repetition: "it seems difficult to think the desire for or the naming of any democratic space without what is called in Latin a *rota*, that is, without rotation or rolling, without the roundness or rotating rondure of something round that turns round in circles" (10). With this gesture, repetition is (re)located at the heart of our understanding of revolution. No longer bound to the linear logic of teleology and the authoritarian hierarchies of knowledge that structure it, revolution becomes non-programmatic, indistinct, and incomplete but still urgent, necessary, and to come.

Sembène's Everyday Revolution

Although, arguably, everydayness emerges as a particularly French politico-philosophical concern, its significance for second wave revolutionary cinema finds expression beyond France. Indeed, Ousmane Sembène's first film *Borom Sarret* (1963), made shortly after Debord's *Critique de la séparation,* examines the relationship between everydayness and revolutionary transformation in the context of Senegal's recently established post-independence state. In the film, repetition is similarly used to articulate the oppressive system of exploitation that has taken root in Dakar, while also subtlety demonstrating the necessary perpetuity of revolutionary struggle. As does Debord, Sembène identifies possibilities for social transformation within the structures of everydayness while presenting the autonomous political action that everydayness implies as a means for Africans to take control of their futures outside the influence of Western neoimperial control.

Borom Sarret carries the auspicious appellation of being "The First African Film," which is to say, it is the first film made in Africa by a black African filmmaker. Although the 1957 film

Afrique sur Seine was made by two black African filmmakers, Mamadou Sarr and Paulin Soumanou Vieyra, the film was shot in Paris since the pair could not secure permission to shoot anywhere in French-controlled Africa and as such, it is considered what Ken Harrow refers to as the "preamble" to *Borom Sarret* ("Introduction" 1).[20] Given Sembène's own investments in African freedom and self-respect (his films are described by David Murphy as "a rallying cry to all Africans, returning their personal history to them and restoring the dignity that European arrogance and indifference would deny them" (50)), one would perhaps expect *Borom Sarret,* made just three years after Senegal's official declaration of independence, to be a testament to the nobility of African history and an optimistic representation of the continent's future freed from colonial control. However, while the film is certainly embedded in African cultural traditions, especially that of the *griot*, *Borom Sarret* is a far cry from the celebration of African heritage and culture that independence was believed to reinstantiate. Rather than wholeheartedly celebrating this victory as the return of exalted cultural values and ways of life dismissed by colonial conceit, the film instead offers a scathing critique of the economic and social conditions of post-independence Senegal.

The film recounts a day in the life of an unnamed *homme de charrette* (an independent operator of a horse-driven cart) as he transports passengers around the native quarter of Dakar. Throughout the course of the film, the wagoner collects a series of regular fares who are as destitute as himself and who are therefore unable to pay for his services. After spending the

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[20] Martha Nochimson points out that the first African to make a film was, in fact, the Tunisian Albert Samama Chekli who began his career as a documentarian in 1914 and made his first short feature film, *Zohra,* in 1922. However, as Nochimson goes on to argue, Samama Chekli produced films in North Africa and is thus placed under the rubric of Arab cinema, which has been traditionally distinguished from sub-Saharan (Francophone) film (360).

morning worrying about what his family will eat if he fails to make any money, the wagoner finally receives a paying job transporting bricks only to give all the money he earns to a *griot* for singing songs of his ancestral glory. Now desperate to earn this money back, the wagoner agrees to take a wealthy young man to "The Heights," the old French quarter of the city where horse-drawn carts are not allowed. Given away by the squeaky wheel on his cart, the wagoner is caught and ticketed by the police while his passenger leaves without paying his fare. Forced to give his cart to the policeman as payment for the fine, the wagoner returns home not only penniless, but also lacking the means to make any more money. Upon hearing this news, his wife leaves their newborn baby with the wagoner and the film ends with her heading out into the city to get food. Across the brief nineteen minutes of the film, Sembène constructs a bleak portrayal of economic and social oppression, abject poverty, and class divisions that have reformed despite the expulsion of colonial forces.

The critiques of post-independence Senegalese society that the film offers have been well documented in film criticism and tend to emphasize three interrelated modes of oppression: religion, modernization, and tradition. *Borom Sarret* begins by emphasizing the significance of religion in the lives of the Senegalese. Through the imposing structure of the mosque to the muezzin's call to prayer that repeats loudly across the opening shots of the film, religion is presented as a pervasive organizing force in daily life. This is reinforced by the next cut to the wagoner as he says his morning prayers and invokes God's protection: "May God protect me from the laws and the infidels." Significantly, in his prayer, the wagoner collapses social contracts (laws) and religious doctrine (the threat of non-believers) to brings both under God's control, thus evacuating any sense of his own control over the relationships and structures that organize his life. Rather, the wagoner accepts his situation as being in God's hands so that the

injustices he experiences remain a question of divine providence. What becomes apparent in the

wagoner's interaction with the police officer, however, is that while it is very much the unjust

laws of economic segregation that the wagoner needs protection from, neither his faith in God

nor the numerous amulets with which he adorns himself are enough to secure this protection.

Indeed, the idea of protection from a law seems somewhat strange – if a law necessitates

protection it is unjust and must be changed. But the wagoner's faith in the divine blinds him to

this possibility so that the system of oppression remains intact. Indeed, as Amadou Fofana points

out, there is a clear incongruity between the two religious rituals in which the wagoner

participates (his faith in both Islam and marabouts). His need to cling to both the "abstract and

verbal" prayers of Islam and the "material and palpable" amulets of the marabouts (263), despite

their religious irreconcilability, thus serves to demonstrate the complete blindness of his faith.

Alongside this critique of religion as an exploitative system that promotes an

overwhelming passivity in its adherents, *Borom Sarret* positions the desire for a modern Africa,

constructed along the lines established by the colonial presence, as another means of

perpetuating the exploitation of the impoverished classes. The first two passengers that the

wagoner collects – Fatou and Mamadou – are, as Fofana describes them, "victims of modern

life" (262). Fatou's success is bound to the whims of the market where she buys and sells goods.

As such, her life is dictated by forces over which she has no control and the poverty of the

inhabitants of the native quarter ensures that she too remains destitute and unable to pay her fare.

Mamadou, although educated, has been incapable despite his persistent efforts of finding a job

and is similarly unable to pay his way. The wagoner can similarly be added to this list of

"victims" since his life too is bound up with the quest for money and is tied to the particular

economic system in which his customers operate. Since there is no possibility of breaking out of

this relation (he is prohibited from serving the rich residents of The Heights and therefore making more money) he too is victimized by the cruel class divides of this economic structure. As Fofana continues, "Cash economy and joblessness, two offshoots of modernity and independence, turn the three characters into downtrodden citizens" (262).

The problems of Dakar's post-independence economic structure are linked to the Western ideas of modernization and progress through the Heights, which is the gated and protected residence of the city's elite and, as it was during the colonial era, a site of class (as well as political and cultural) dominance. The inheritors of this colonial logic of progress, the African bourgeoisie, now populate the modernized and formerly French-occupied quarter, reproducing all of its old racial segregations and oppressions in class and cultural terms, as seen in the tension between the "primitive" wagoner and the modern bourgeois passenger, the repetitively similar stalls in the native market places and the repetitively similar apartment complexes of The Heights, and the powerlessness of the wagoner and the authority of the police officer, all of which echo the power structures of the colonial era. This emergent native bourgeoisie has thus become the new face of the old guard so that while the racial prejudice of colonial modernization has purportedly dissipated with independence, in reality its concomitant class and cultural logic remains firmly intact just as the systems of state control (the police) remain firmly committed to the side of the elite, reinforcing and protecting their wealth, which is positioned quite literally above the native quarter. The spatial representation of this class hierarchy, what Rachael Langford terms the film's "verticality" (97) is reproduced in the mise-en-scene of The Heights which is composed of a domineering high-rise hospital and towering residences which loom over the wagoner, and in the use of high and low angle shots (between the beggar and the wagoner and between the wagoner and the police officer) where the more affluent class similarly appears

to dominate their subordinate.[21] This class exploitation is reinforced by the behavior of the

bourgeoisie customer who, unlike the wagoner's other passengers, can afford to pay but simply

avoids doing so. In this moment, it becomes clear that his wealth is perpetuated at the cost of the

wagoner to the extent to which the latter's very livelihood is jeopardized by the behavior of the

former.

Sembène also demonstrates how the logic of modern capitalism has invaded African

traditions, altering them to accord with the profit motive, as evidenced by the *griot's*

transformation into what Fofana describes as a "profiteering" businessman who "ruthlessly

exploit[s] others" (257). The differences in appearance between the *griot* and wagoner are

prominent; against the wagoner's tattered clothes, malnourished frame, and missing teeth, the

griot appears well dressed, well fed and is even sporting a gold tooth. These differences in

appearance establish the *griot* as significantly wealthier than the wagoner and his ability to flatter

the wagoner out of his money marks him as another social element that conspires to exploit and

thus oppress the disenfranchised classes. Fofana sees this presentation of the *griot* as a critique of

the new class that arose in Senegal as a result of the colonial consolidation of capitalism in

Africa. Traditionally, Fofana points out, *griots* inherited their profession, the primary goal of

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[21] While her tracking of the presentation of verticality across the film is quite astute, Langford
counterpoises it to what she sees as the more democratic horizontality of the native quarter. For
Langford, "while verticality is negatively marked, horizontality has a more positive value in the
film. For example, the carter's journey around the city brings him into contact with those who
are in a worse situation even than he and his family are, such as the cripples, and the couple who
lose their child. With these people, he expresses solidarity by his acts, thoughts and words" (98).
It is unclear, however, where she sees this solidarity expressed, especially since in the examples
she gives the wagoner is particularly dismissive (he unfeelingly turns the beggar away and
abandons the father at the cemetery with his dead baby). Rather, it seems that the tension
between verticality and horizontality expresses two inter-related modes of oppression: one
marking the legacy of colonialism and the other the adoption of these inequalities into the fabric
of post-independence Senegalese society.

which was "not to make money, but to fulfill a culturally assigned duty and service to society" (256). This kind of *griot* is to be distinguished from "contemporary *griots* who trade their talents for monetary benefits," this shift in motivation the result of "the upheavals due to the conquest" (257).

The *griot* thus brings the modernizing drive of the capitalist economy into conflict with African tradition. However, this scene marks more than a critique of capitalist modernity; it is not simply the case that the legacy of colonialism continues to corrupt what would otherwise be a noble African tradition. Part of the problem in the exchange is the way that the *griot's* stories of ancestral grandeur operate as a form of escapism. While there is certainly a hint of pathos in this moment (who can blame the wagoner for desiring this momentary relief?), the pride that he expresses in his African heritage – "even if this new life enslaves me, I'm still noble like my ancestors" – seems more a declaration of willful ignorance than dignified self-respect. As Fofana asks, "What good does it do him if Borom Sarret's ancestors were kings and queens? How relevant is it for him to be reminded of that past when he can barely hang on to life?" (258). In this way, the film critiques one of the fundamental ideological maxims of the independence movement: the promotion of African history as a means of instilling national and racial pride. What was a necessary element of the anti-colonial struggle is presented here as regression into a glorious past as a means of intentionally ignoring the deplorable conditions of the present. Significantly, then, and as we shall return to later on, *Borom Sarret* recasts the idea of Africa's past glory as another means of manipulation and control and of perpetuating exploitation. As Sada Niang maintains, the film "delicately undermines all the social underpinnings of nationalist social agency in newly independent Senegal if not modern Africa" (217). As a result of this transformation of tradition into a means of exploitation, the driving ideology of the liberation

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movement appears as no longer an effective means of combating the inequalities of the present moment. It becomes clear, then, that "a return to tradition, to authenticity, does not always bring about solutions to the problems of Africans" (Diawara 10) and that the inequalities of the present moment require a different kind of action.

Given the overtly class-based nature of the exploitations detailed in the film, the kind of action that *Borom Sarret* calls for arises as some form of Marxist revolution. However, despite the careful reading of its critiques by critics like Diawara, Niang, and Fofana, the film is not really considered a revolutionary narrative. Thus, Robert Mortimer argues that while "Sembène is able to convey the heavy weight of poverty, the growing demoralization of an unproductive day, the frustration of the struggle to survive" in a city "marked by the gap between the rich who make the law and the poor who suffer its inequities," he maintains that "the mood of the film is one of pathos, not of revolution" (64-65). Similarly, Nigel Andrews sees the film as subtlety critical rather than explicitly revolutionary: *Borom Sarret* "scores its most effective points through understatement and suggestion rather than overtly political technique" (40). However, despite (and perhaps even because of) its failure to articulate an unequivocal revolutionary call, I would argue that *Borom Sarret* is very much grounded in the politics of second wave revolutionary cinema.

Even though *Borom Sarret* is not discussed in revolutionary terms, Sembène's biography positions him within the political discourse of Marxist revolution while his larger *oeuvre* is generally read as invested in a politics of radical social transformation. While I do not want to suggest biographical determinism, it remains significant that discussions of Sembène's career emphasize his investment in Marxist and Communist theory, his work with trade unions and other forms of socialist organizing, and the persistence of Marxist themes in both his literary and

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cinematic work. This personal history, what Samba Gadjigo refers to as Sembène's

"revolutionary culture" (xxii) is certainly not a key to unlocking the meaning of *Borom Sarret*;

however, it does lend some credence to a reading of the film as, at the very least, sympathetic to

a Marxist revolutionary politics.[22] More importantly, however, is the context within which his

films are typically understood that across the broad scope of African film criticism tends to

position his work as the expression of a political radicalism derived from a Marxist perspective.

In this vein, Harrow, in his review of Gadjigo's biography, emphasizes the Marxist concepts that

underpin his films:

> He made the notion of struggle central in all of his work, including especially that
>
> of the poor, the underclass, represented at times by the lumpenproletariat, or more
>
> accurately street people—beggars, handicapped, the impoverished, victims of
>
> capitalist exploitation and theft. He gave us the vocabulary for discussing the left
>
> agenda in an African setting […]. He embodied the political resistance of the left
>
> for an African community whose dominant literary trends had focused more on
>
> racial pride and responding to colonial discourses—that is, on Négritude, an
>
> ideology he never found to be meaningful for the people whom he sought to
>
> represent— than on class solidarity. (*Ousmane Sembène* 215)

Similarly, the title of Sheila Petty's edited collection on Sembène presents his filmography in

decidedly revolutionary terms as "A Call to Action." Nwachukwu Frank Ukadike echoes this

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[22] Gadjigo's preface briefly summarizes the development of Sembène's Marxist political consciousness during his life in Marseille. As such, the book clearly establishes Sembène as an artist whose work is invested in a certain kind of revolutionary politics. Indeed, the subtitle to the book, "The Making of a Militant Artist" reinforces this presentation of Sembène as a political radical, as does Gadjigo's outline of the biography for California Newsreel, entitled "Ousmane Sembène: The Life of a Revolutionary Artist."

sentiment by using the same phrase to argue that Sembène's films are "revolutionary in content and treatment" (102) and Frederick Case argues that Sembène's "commitment to change and his consistent ideological discourse are the textual literary evidence of a determined revolutionary purpose" (12).

This repeated categorization of Sembène's *oeuvre* situates *Borom Sarret* within a larger body of work marked by revolutionary concerns. By turning to Sembène's description of his own work, the nature of this revolutionary commitment becomes clear and a distinctly second wave perspective emerges. In discussions of his films, Sembène articulates a tension between what he terms a revolutionary cinema (which he rejects) and a political realist cinema of social engagement (which he embraces): "I am a realist in so far as I stick to reality. In my work I could portray revolutionaries holding all the power and reorganizing society the way I wish it to be. I could show ordinary people being content on a full stomach… but I don't want to make this kind of cinema, it would be the opposite of reality, so it would be false. You see, I don't invent anything. Go down the streets of Dakar and you will find there the people portrayed in my works" (Diallo 53). Here, Sembène marks his difference from Debord; while the latter, following the political modernist critiques of realism laid out in the pages of *Cahiers du Cinéma* (and discussed in more detail in the next chapter), understands realism to simply reproduce the false coherence of capitalist society and therefore perpetuate its ideologies, Sembène defends realism as the best aesthetic for communicating with his intended audience as they are able to recognize their lives on screen. However, the aims of both filmmakers are similar in as much as they work to reveal the oppressive structures that dominate everyday life; both *In girum* and *Borom Sarret* center on a critique of everyday life so that, in effect, the elective affinity in their political stakes outweighs their formal difference.

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In addition to this emphasis on critique, neither film articulates an explicit revolutionary program or defends a given political party; it is with reference to this refusal that Oliver Barlet describes Sembène's films (and African third cinema more generally) as "militant but not banner-waving" (93). Indeed, Sembène's rejection of a revolutionary cinema that portrays a program of revolutionary struggle and success and that maps out the ideal reorganization of society is precisely the kind of political cinema that Debord similarly rejects. It is possible, therefore, despite his own terminology, to read Sembène's investment in what he terms an "engaged political cinema" as an alternate articulation of a revolutionary cinema driven by some of the same ideals that underscore Debord's films (qtd. in Hennebelle 12). As Sembène himself puts it:

> What is interesting for me is exposing the problems my people have to face. […] I regard the cinema primarily as a political instrument of action. I stand, as I've always said for Marxism-Leninism. I am for scientific socialism. However, as I always continue to specify, I am not for "socialist realism," nor for a "cinema of signs" with slogans and demonstrations. For me revolutionary cinema is something else. (Hennebelle 12)

Clearly, then, Sembène's cinema is not revolutionary in the orthodox sense of the word but its Marxist-inspired critique of the exploitations of Senegalese society, coupled with its refusal to offer solutions or map out revolutionary programs, brings its "something else" intriguingly in line with the revolutionary principles of second wave revolutionary filmmaking.

Indeed, it is possible to argue that *Borom Sarret* is, at its core, a call for revolution (and for a version of a Marxist revolution at that) since it appears to be all that is left as nationalist revolution, staged as an appropriation of the state machinery, has clearly failed to bring about

meaningful change in everyday social relations. The optimistic dream of postcolonial Senegal as a modern democratic nation of possibility is recast as a neoimperial dystopian reality of joblessness, poverty, and destitution at the hands of a native comprador bourgeoisie. Similarly, the idea of returning to a glorious and noble past is repositioned as a means of exploiting the masses and fleecing them of their money. Whatever promise was held in independence is lost to the harsh realities of everyday life. Yet even the option to maintain the status quo is gone as the wagoner has lost his means of earning a living. Thus if his family is not to starve, something has to change; the exploited need to act if these inequalities are to be redressed but the revolutionary axioms of the independence movement are no longer sufficient. And it is with precisely this sense of possibility that the film concludes as the wagoner's wife leaves him at the end of the film to ensure that her family eats. I'll return to this point in more detail below suffice to say here that her action at the end of the film implies some form of change. What this action looks like and what it will result in remains unarticulated. But this does not mean that the film is non-revolutionary. Rather, this unstated sense of possibility is a fundamental principle of the film's revolutionary articulation.

If we accept that *Borom Sarret* is, in this light, a revolutionary film, it becomes apparent that, much like Debord's films, it imagines the process of revolution as perpetual struggle. This rejection of the notion of a final revolutionary victory is reinforced by the very nature of the film as a critique of post-independence society. Liberation from the French, far from marking the end of oppression, is shown to be entrenched in systems of exploitation that make a further revolution urgent and necessary. Moreover, this sense of the continuation of oppression is presented as repetition. This sense of repetition becomes all the more clear in the exchange between the wagoner and the police officer as the altercation between the two is presented as the

reenactment of an infraction that reproduces a familiar segregation; although carts are technically banned from the Heights on the grounds that it is the central business district and thus reserved for cars, the effect of this traffic rule during the colonial period was to reinforce the separation between the European-inhabited plateau and the native-inhabited Medina. In *Borom Sarret,* the rule enacts an economic segregation since only those who can afford cars are able to enter the district. The wagoner thus finds himself subjugated by the new face of the old guard which reperpetuates the same oppressions through its institutionalized authority. Indeed, as the wagoner drops his medal (for his service to France during the Second World War) it is stepped on and then confiscated by the police officer. In these two gestures, then, the police officer at once marks his distance from and similarity to the colonial elite; his stamping on the medal metaphorically implies his crushing of this symbol of the old order, while his confiscation of it aligns him with it (he becomes the recipient of this honor). That the officer demonstrates his power over the wagoner surrounded by the trappings of colonialism and through a series of low angle shots that have also been used to show the buildings' dominance over the wagoner, further reinforces the police officer's connection to this previous oppressive system of governance. Post-independence Senegal is thus restructured by old and, through their reappropriation by an emergent African bourgeoisie, new forms of oppression. Senegal has, at the same time, progressed beyond *and* restored the repressions of the colonial era. In this light, the bleak tone of the film becomes less an expression of pessimism (there is no hope for Africa) than a recognition that struggle must continue (injustice persists).

It is important to note this repetition is repetition with a difference as the classes of exploiter and exploited have shifted. As such and as we have already noted, the modes of resistance proffered by the nationalist ideologies of the liberation movement are no longer

adequate to address this new iteration of exploitation. Rather than restate the need to develop an authentic African society freed from the nefarious influence of Western culture, Sembène presents the everyday as the new arena of struggle. Ukadike, in discussing the alternative conception of revolutionary cinema laid out by Sembène as one that refuses to offer solutions, turns to Teshome Gabriel to conclude that Sembène's investment in a politics of denunciation means that "a film can be revolutionary without creating an actual revolution" (100). This seemingly contradictory statement makes sense if we understand "actual revolution" to be the kind of mass rebellion traditionally conceived as revolutionary (armed struggle, the overthrow of governments etc.). Conversely, then, if Sembène's films retain a revolutionary potential through their denunciation of systems of oppression and their concomitant desire to push the audience to rethink their lives, the idea that "a film can be revolutionary" becomes a mark of its investment in everydayness; Sembène's films, like Debord's, confront their audiences with critical representations of everyday life that, in prompting the spectator to reconsider their daily actions, hold out the possibility that social transformation can be enacted on this personal level.

In her analysis of Sembène's last two films, Karen Lindo argues that across his career, Sembène has gradually moved away from the "master narratives of Africa's historical past militant anticolonial and neocolonial denunciations" toward an increasing focus on what she calls "everyday heroism," a concept of resistance which "brings together the familiar, regular and even the banal" (110). While it is perhaps the case that Sembène's feature-length films tend to emphasize the crisis over the everyday (*Emitai*, *Ceddo*, *Camp de Thiaroye*), what Lindo defines as emergent in *Faat Kiné* and *Moolaadé*, I would argue is present in Sembène's first film where its critique of nationalist social agency situates struggle within the repetitions of everydayness.

Borom Sarret is structured around the familiar narrative trope of "a day in the life" as the story follows the wagoner through his morning prayers and his work day to his return home in the evening. As such, the bulk of the film is given over to the repetitive acts of labor as the wagoner collects and drops off his various passengers, but even his limited leisure time (his prayers, the familiar lunch of Kola nuts) is structured by repetition. As detailed above, what becomes apparent over the course of the film is how these repetitive everyday actions reproduce the wagoner's oppression. Similarly, the lives of Mamadou and Fatou are also structured by repetitive actions (heading to the market, searching for work) so that the lives of all the residents of the native quarter are marked by the reproduction of oppression through these repetitive actions. For the wagoner, these cycles have been naturalized as the familiar routines of everyday life; as he comments several times during the film, it is the same every day. This experience is generalized through the wagoner who remains unnamed in the film so that his day becomes a generalized portrayal of everyday life. Moreover, the film begins *in medias res* as the wagoner finishes his morning prayers, offering no introduction to its protagonist or set up of its themes. That this information is not necessary underscores the familiarity of this everyday experience – the wagoner's life is highly recognizable to the audience.

The film's representation of a familiar everyday experience as one marked by exploitation serves to put pressure on individual routines and attitudes that otherwise pass by unnoticed as the unconscious habits of daily life. In a fashion similar to Debord, then, Sembène's film reproduces the experiences of his viewers' daily lives to enable them to "see themselves from a spectator's point of view, to analyze and critique themselves, but most important of all, to

amend their ways and take action where needed" (Fofana 261).[23] Consequently, *Borom Sarret*

demonstrates the wagoner's complicity with and willing participation in the systems that ensure

his oppression; despite many moments in the film where the wagoner could act or act differently,

he remains a decidedly passive individual whose only actions serve to perpetuate his

exploitation. Indeed, while the wagoner has a lot to say about his passengers and the state of

Dakar, all this information is delivered as part of an internal monologue. As such, the wagoner is

silent for most of the film; he refuses to speak up or out about the things that bother him. Rather,

he relies on divine intervention to remake the world for him and, as he does on his walk back

from The Heights, blames everyone else for his misfortunes except himself. This sense of

passivity is masterfully captured in the exchange with the police officer. After the wagoner's

medal is stepped on by the police officer the camera lingers on a close up of the officer's

jackboot and the wagoner's clenched fist. The boot and fist resonate as iconographic symbols of

oppression and resistance but in this shot the wagoner's fist is inverted. In striking antithesis to

the familiar raised fist of action, then, the anger that caused the wagoner to clench his fist goes

nowhere. Moreover, since the take is noticeably longer that the other shots in the sequence, the

static nature of its composition is emphasized; the fist resolutely does nothing as the wagoner

fails to act. Moreover, when the wagoner does act, his actions perpetuate both his own

subjugation and that of others (his unfeeling dismissal of the beggar, for example).

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[23] For Fofana, this goal is related to Sembène's understanding of himself as a *griot*: "Unlike his filmic griot who distracts from the present by reviving irrelevant memories from the past, Sembène emphatically dips viewers into the present and forces them to examine its harsh realities, distinguishing and distancing himself from the praise-singing and cash-driven griots and radically countering their practice" (261).

Such an emphasis on the wagoner's passivity and our frustration with his behavior demonstrates how, while the repetitious actions of everydayness reproduce oppression, these moments are similarly impregnated with the possibility of resistance and of acting otherwise. That the cart driver participates in and reproduces these systems expresses at once how these things are human constructions (and therefore within our power to resist and transform) and how everydayness carries with it the possibility of enacting transformation; that the wagoner fails to act simultaneously illustrates that he *could*. Indeed, it is his wife at the end of the film who does act and, as such, breaks the cycle of repetition that propels this narrative. The wagoner's surprise at his wife's behavior reveals that this is not a typical occurrence and as such, she becomes the figure that mobilizes the possibility of difference that is housed within the everyday.

The fact that it is the wagoner's wife who marshals this sense of possibility marks another way by which *Borom Sarret* demonstrates both the failures of the independence movement and the need for a different form of resistance to contemporary subjugations. As Karen Lindo demonstrates in her analysis of gender in Sembène's films, the director is often understood as the "veritable torchbearer for African feminism" (110) since his narratives frequently depict what Aaron Mshengyezi describes as "strong, revolutionary 'masculine' women" (47) and Murphy terms "an array of radical young women" (136). For Murphy, this construction of women as strong-willed and politically active is, to a certain extent, an expression of Sembène's frustrations with the inadequacies of the independence movement and its predominately masculine discourse: "[Sembène's] conception of women's roles in society does rest in part in his disappointments with the men of his generation" (150). Schilling's comment, discussed above, that women experience the alienations of everydayness more forcefully than men since they are less able to "make room for self-cultivation" thus takes on a

particularly postcolonial inflection in *Borom Sarret* as this inability is a product of the normative

female position of domesticity coupled with the fact that women were generally excluded from

the independence movement; women were conceived as the bearers of home and tradition and

thus symbols of the backward-looking ideology of historical restoration that drove anti-colonial

revolution. As a result, they were not the ones to go out and remake the world anew.[24]

Positioning the wagoner's wife as the agent of social transformation in the film further

critiques the ideological limits of the independence movement while at the same time marks the

need for new, more inclusive means of struggle. "The failure," as Fredric Jameson puts it in his

reading of *Xala* and which we can extend to *Borom Sarret* as well, "of the African independence

movement to develop into a general social revolution" ("Third World Literature" 81) points to

the need for a new form of revolutionary opposition in the post independence period. This is not

to reinscribe an inverted gendered binary on forms of social transformation, which, as Lindo

points out, has frequently structured readings of gender and agency in Sembène's films (111).

Rather, it is to highlight the failures of this older form of revolutionary process which the

wagoner represents – the restoration of authentic African history – and the need to act in new

ways, and specifically in those that do not reperpetuate the oppression of women by marking

them as the mere inert repository of this tradition. Repositioning the everyday as the site of

struggle enables women, then, to become actors too as this next revolution transforms African

social *and* economic relations; it does not foreclose the possibility of men to act as much as it

demonstrates that the previous ideologies that have guided resistance to colonial domination are

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[24] Anne McClintock's *Imperial Leather,* in particular the chapter "No Longer in a Future
Heaven," discusses in detail the association of women with tradition and their exclusion from
radical political communities (352-89).

no longer adequate. Ultimately, this shift toward the everyday marks a concomitant shift away from the idea of the Grand African Hero of the fight for independence toward the everyday African hero that struggles through their everyday choices to transform the fabric of Senegalese society. As such, the paradigm shift that Lindo notes in *Faat Kiné* – that Jean and Djib "do not charge onto a battlefield to pursue *the* enemy (following the previous African versus Europe paradigm) but in rather subtle ways carve out individual choices within the context of the familiar" (116) is not solely a property of Sembène's later cinema. It is a constitute feature of *Borom Sarret,* a film which similarly anchors resistance to the material experiences of the everyday.

Despite the general agreement among critics of the opening-up of spaces for women's agency in Sembène's film, for a number of critics, given the time of day, her limited skills, and the economic environment in which she lives, it is clear to them that the wagoner's wife leaves her husband and baby to prostitute herself. For these critics, her actions at the end of the film are further evidence of her economic *and* gender oppression. However, it is important to recognize that this reading of her actions is purely conjectural and, in a film that does not shy away from presenting the harsh realities of life for the impoverished citizens of the native quarter, it is surprising that Sembène would choose to leave this detail up to the viewer's imagination. One could perhaps argue that doing so makes it much worse than anything that Sembène could show. However, such a claim runs counter to the director's investment in a realist aesthetic that confronts the spectator with the harsh realities that they do not otherwise perceive. Consequently, I argue, the ambiguity of the film's ending is related instead to its revolutionary aims. By not showing what the wagoner's wife does, her action remains a site of possibility, one that may or may not succeed in changing her family's material conditions. Her action represents the

possibility that things could be otherwise without giving shape to the form of her resistance or implying, through narrative cause and effect, any guarantee that it will, in fact, be transformative. In this way, the fact that we don't know what she does or the consequences of her action is what renders the film revolutionary in that it presents an urgent need for action without asserting the form that this action should take or assuming that its results can be calculated in advance. As with Debord, then, revolution is similarly cast as the possibility of difference rather than as a calculable program of action in service of predetermined Utopian ends.

Reflecting on the politics of his films in one of his last interviews, Sembène asserted that cinema is what "allows me to show my people their predicament so that they can take responsibility. They hold their destiny in their hands" (qtd. in Lindo 123). Given the history of imperial conquests, such a statement can be understood as a call for Africans to recognize their own individual agency and thus push back against the ideology that they need the west to fix things for them. As Niang claims, Sembène's "quintessential concern rests with human agency. His films seek to debunk the notions that Africans are lacking in essence because of their color, that they inhabit spaces rich in potential but doomed to oblivion unless Europe and its values intervene" (217). *Borom Sarret* thus argues for the need for each African to assert his or her autonomy, to take responsibility for their daily life, and to seize the opportunity to recreate their lives and, therefore their nation and continent, not as the French wanted them, nor as the privileged and powerful want them, nor even as Sembène wants them, but as they want them to be. To preserve this sense of autonomy while at the same time calling for its realization, *Borom Sarret* cannot present any clearly defined program or formula for revolution. Determining this content, as Sembène himself maintains, "escapes the artist" (qtd. in Ukadike 100) and instead becomes the work of the spectator.

Focusing on the everyday does not imply that we are all fully in control of every element of our lives and that we can improve our lot simply by applying ourselves. Structures of oppression are systemic and far-reaching and thus not easily overcome (hence Lefebvre's emphasis on the three arms of revolutionary action – political, economic, *and* social). But Sembène's focus on everydayness serves as a reminder that resistance and transformation are possible and that we must try every day. In this way, Sembène's presentation of the possibilities of revolutionary transformation in *Borom Sarret* echoes his attitude towards the possibilities of his kind of revolutionary cinema. As such, he states: "I am not naïve to the point that I believe that I could change Senegalese reality with only one film. On the other hand, if we managed to set up a group of cineastes who all make a cinema directed in the same direction, I believe that then we could influence a little bit of the destinies of our country" (Hennebelle 12). Similarly, one woman's decision to act differently will not change the larger reality. But it marks the possibility that things could be otherwise and demonstrates that we have the power to realize this difference.

Conclusion

In both Debord and Sembène, the focus on repetition and everydayness produces a new sense of revolutionary process marked by incalculability, incompleteness, autonomy, and openness. As such, it embodies one of the fundamental elements of second wave revolutionary thought – spontaneous and immediate direct action. While positioning the everyday as the site of revolutionary struggle is primarily a means of tackling the social arm of oppression (arguably, accomplishing very little in terms of political or economic transformation), it is of vital importance for two reasons. First, it stresses how capitalism has invaded every aspect of life and

that struggle is no longer bound to conditions of labor or to the working class. Second, it embodies a sense of possibility that impregnates every moment. Revolution is no longer deferred until the "correct" historical conditions reveal themselves, nor is it about conforming to the guidance of the party. Everydayness moves away from the sterility of endless ideological debate that the Italian Marxist Lucio Magri claimed characterized the radical movement in Europe prior to these upheavals (Bates 27) and replaces it with action. In Africa, everydayness works as a call to reclaim the revolutionary energy that led up to independence, to transpose it into the lives of every person and bring the power and responsibility of building the new postcolonial Senegalese nation into the hands of all of its citizens. In line with Samir Amin, it critiques postcolonial governments for their willingness to settle with the control of state power and the concomitant failure to meaningfully transform social relations. So, while it is certainly true that seizing the possibilities housed in the everyday will not by itself result in sweeping transformation, in this historical moment it produces a significant and timely call for a desperately needed and previously overlooked form of revolutionary action.

In girum, Critique de la séparation, and Borom Sarret thus all present an urgent call for direct participation in the reconstruction of reality according to our own needs and desires; the possibility for revolutionary transformation lies in the hands of each individual, not in the workings of the party, neoimperial forces, the dynamics of deterministic history, or the divine. As such, the form that such resistance takes as well as its visions of utopia must remain unarticulated in cinema since this content must be individually determined. Indeed, the emergence of this alternate revolutionary ideology demands a new conception of revolutionary cinema, one that is no longer invested in convincing the audience of the veracity of a particular political party or inspiring a specific form of action. Rather, revolutionary cinema, in its simplest

terms, is about encouraging spectators to take responsibility for themselves and to take steps to recreate their lives according to their own desires. In Sembène and Debord the aesthetic strategies for accomplishing this are distinct – one favors realism as a direct means of communication, the other a non-linear, non-narrative collage technique as a kind of inverted realism that reflects back the fragmented nature of experience. Indeed, the ideas of openness, autonomy, and incalculability that define this kind of revolutionary thinking pose a series of challenges for the formulation of a revolutionary cinematic aesthetic and it is to this set of questions that we shall now turn in the ensuing chapters.

CHAPTER TWO

Revolutionary Aesthetics: Inference and Absence

With all such ambiguous tactics, one can never be sure that the battle has been won
- Mira Morgenstern (233)

Introduction

The sense of repetition and everydayness that underscores Debord's *Critique de la*

séparation and *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni* and Sembène's *Borom Sarret* articulates

a new concept of revolutionary process that attempts to sidestep the problems of teleology,

vanguardism, and calculability that plague orthodox Marxist thought. These films thus mark a

reconceptualization of revolution within a poststructuralist Marxist framework where struggle

itself becomes a repetitious process in as much as it can never be completed. Freed from the

calculability of a teleologically determined future, this sense of revolution remains grounded in

an antiauthoritarian politics by emphasizing the centrality of self-emancipation to any

revolutionary "movement." Significantly, the refusal to occupy a position of authority, which is

the cornerstone of an anti-power politics, has radical implications for the role that cinema can

play in revolutionary struggle; no longer able to articulate a clear revolutionary program, cinema

must find a means of engaging the spectator without telling them what to think. That is to say,

cinema must somehow articulate a revolutionary politics without representing its content in a

deterministic fashion.

For Debord, repetition is more than a metaphoric expression of the perpetual nature of

revolution in second wave revolutionary theory. Significantly, repetition also operates as an

aesthetic strategy that attempts to represent revolution in a wholly non-deterministic fashion. As

part of his "mimesis of incoherence," repetition demonstrates the characteristics of this alternate

understanding of revolution in an aesthetic form that is similarly non-linear, non-dogmatic, without clear conclusion, and self-directed. Sembène, in a radically different fashion, attempts to do the same thing: although his narrative is realist and as such, much more conventional, it still engages these same revolutionary qualities through its subjecting of the well-worn narrative of "a day in the life" to the structures of repetition that it necessarily implies and through its open-ended conclusion, which suggests a non-dogmatic, self-directed, and thus incomplete process of transformation, thereby uncovering from this seemingly stultifying repetition the grounds for further possibilities.

To further unpack the impact of this new revolutionary thought on its cinematic counterpart, this chapter reads Godard's *Tout va Bien* (1972) and Glauber Rocha's *Terra em Transe* (1967) as examples from two significant yet distinct aesthetic trends – political modernism and the Latin American neobaroque – that attempt to think through the problem of revolutionary representation. While Godard's film is part of the European film culture that developed around the 1968 protests, Rocha's responds to the rise of right-wing authoritarianism in Latin America and draws its inspiration notably from the anti-colonial politics of Brazilian Cinema Nõvo. Despite their differences, however, both films are invested in a similar formation of revolutionary politics as an open-ended and self-directed process and therefore provide the opportunity to theorize aesthetic strategies that, in taking up these ideals, attempt to reference revolution without fully representing it.

The Problem of Representation

Godard's cinema is famous for its engagement with political modernism, an aesthetic that D.N. Rodowick defines as "the expression of a desire to combine semiotic and ideological

analysis with the developments of an avant-garde aesthetic practice dedicated to the production

of radical social effects" (1-2). In her comprehensive analysis of the influence of the politics of

the 1968 protests on French filmmaking, Sylvia Harvey catalogues the development of several

revolutionary film groups that were variously invested in "mount[ing] an attack, from outside, on

the existing structures of the film industry" (28). The result, Harvey continues, was that

"radically committed film-makers were searching for a new political content, a new audience,

and a new relationship between the two" (28). This shared commitment to developing films that

could be placed in service of the revolution expressed itself in different ways, these differing

tendencies coalescing around two signal impulses: the need to effectively communicate with a

mass audience and the need for new formal structures.

Groups like *Dynadia* and *Cinéastes Révolutionnaires Prolétariens* (Revolutionary

Proletarian Filmmakers) were concerned with the development of a militant cinema that would

communicate directly with the working class. As such, they were primarily invested in content;

they filmed strikes, protests, and confrontations and judged their films to be revolutionary based

on their militant and propagandistic qualities. For both groups, film was instrumentalized as a

means of disseminating specific political ideas; consequently, questions concerning the means of

representation and the ideological implications of specific forms of mediation were not of

concern. Relatedly, *SLON* (*Société pour le Lancement des Oeuvres Nouvelles* – Society for the

Promotion of New Works), which later became *Groupe Medvedkine*, produced similarly-styled

newsreels and cinetracts, and although the group questioned the relationship between aesthetic

form and political content, it likewise remained wary of radical aesthetic experimentation. Thus

while SLON "criticized the smooth, technical perfection of mainstream cinema, and opposed this

technical perfection in their practice," the group primarily addressed the problem of

revolutionary cinema at the level of production (Harvey 31). Thus, SLON operated as a co-operative film practice between workers and filmmakers and attempted to make revolutionary films both with and for workers, effectively surrendering the filmmaker's authoritative position as much as was possible. The other main group, Godard's *Groupe Dziga Vertov*, was the only major film collective to prioritize the relationship of cinematic style to politics and was thus the first to significantly and openly engage with the question of representation. Indeed, the very name "Godard" has become synonymous with the kind of political modernism that results in this critical investigation of aesthetic form. Moreover, the Dziga Vertov Group's contribution to second wave revolutionary cinema matured during the age of apparatus theory wherein the relationship between form and ideology came to define the critical climate of film culture, at least in Europe, with the politics of representation being similarly debated in the pages of *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Cinéthique* in France and *Screen* in the UK. As both journals make clear, the style of representation plays a fundamental role in determining the political possibilities of cinema, and the development of a radical political cinema requires a new aesthetic form that does not embody the ideologies of the bourgeois status quo.

As a theorization of this standpoint, *Cahiers du Cinéma* published the first part of "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism" in 1969, which Harvey describes as the journal's "most explicit statement of its post-'68 position" (34). The article proposes a politicized series of categories that differentiate films according to their relationship to dominant ideological forces.[25] For Comolli

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[25] These seven categories break down as follows: (1) films that fully embody the dominant ideology in an "unadulterated form"; (2) films that attack the dominant ideology through political subject matter and stylistic experimentation; (3) films that do not have explicitly political content but end up politicizing it through experimental form; (4) films that have explicitly political content but do not effectively criticize the dominant ideology due to their

and Narboni, the representational nature of cinema, its ability to generate impressions of reality,

is its primary ideological function. Thus, its status as a technology of representation means that,

to quote the SI quoting Godard, cinema is always at risk of becoming "the art of lying" ("Cinema

and Revolution" 219). Such a claim is predicated on the idea that certain formal mechanisms

enable a critique of dominant ideology while others reinforce it. For Comolli and Narboni,

realism falls firmly within the latter category since it "reproduc[es] things not as they really are

but as they appear when refracted through the dominant ideology" (61). Thus, realism does not

capture any "true" reality but registers "the vague, unformulated, untheorized, unthought-out

world of the dominant ideology" (60). If realism, then, is an illusory aesthetic that fools the

spectator into seeing its ideologically distorted representation as reality, "the only possible

'escape', as it were, from the realms of ideology is via the production of a 'materialist' cinema

which 'does not give illusory reflections of reality', and which is able to produce knowledge

about the world only on condition that it first produces knowledge about the cinema, thus

breaking the cinema's illusion-generating mechanisms" (Harvey 38).[26] Hence materialist film, in

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reliance on traditional forms; (5) films that appear to reinforce the dominant ideology at first
glance but upon closer inspection offer an "internal criticism" that means they are not fully
integrated into the dominant ideological system; (6) *cinéma direct* films that are based on actual
political events but "do not challenge cinema's traditional, ideologically-conditioned method of
'depiction,'" and (7) *cinéma direct* films that are based on actual political events but through
their form, question the conventions of documentary film (61-64).

[26] *Cinéthique* similarly denounced mainstream cinema as "a luxury and consumer product or as
a cultural gimmick for the enslavement of a public" and advocated what it perceived as the
progressive politics of aesthetic modernism (qtd. in Harvey 37).

calling attention to the fact of representation by revealing the operations of cinema, breaks the

illusion of the realist aesthetic so that its representation can never be mistaken for reality.[27]

The desire to develop a cinema that critiques the processes of cinematic illusionism

developed into two primary camps. In *The Crisis of Political Modernism*, D.N. Rodowick argues

that this split occurred around 1976 with the publication of Peter Wollen's "'Ontology' and

'Materialism' in Film" and Stephen Heath's "Narrative Space" in *Screen*. On one side, these

articles prompted filmmakers to argue that since narrative and representation were fundamentally

ideologically corrupted, cinema needed to emphasize "strategies of semiotic reduction that

systematically eliminate any elements of signification that do not belong to specifically

cinematic materials of expression" (xvii). As such, this camp favored a cinema where the image

was turned back on its own materiality so that it referred only to itself. In her discussion of

political modernism, Harvey argues that this mode of filmmaking was characterized by a desire

"not so much to go *beyond* illusionism in order to engage in an analysis and social

transformation of the real, as to engage in a constant critique of illusionism, to remain caught up

in a permanent meditation upon the nature of illusions, which is much the same thing as a

permanent meditation on the nature of art" (71). Dana Polan makes a similar claim in his essay

"Brecht and Self-Reflexive Cinema" where he argues that Noël Burch's dialectic undermines the

political by turning films in on themselves so that "fiction leads to and springs from fiction, [and]

the text becomes a loop which effaces social analysis." While this "art-centered model" as

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[27] Despite Debord's most profound dislike of Godard, the two filmmakers find agreement with
this idea as Debord's voiceover comment in *Critique de la Séparation* certainly echoes this
theory: '[this film] refuses to play the game of neatly ordered comprehension and participation
[…where] a coherent artistic expression expresses nothing but the coherence of the past, nothing
but passivity."

Harvey phrases it, characterizes the first group of filmmakers, the second remained invested in a movement beyond illusion; that is to say, they rejected a hermetically sealed sense of self-referentiality and remained committed to a critique of illusionism that referred to something outside of itself to perform a politically transformative function. For Rodowick, Wollen and Heath are exemplary of this politically invested mode of cinematic practice, while for Harvey, Godard stands out as the primary filmmaker committed to a modernist cinema of social transformation. Tellingly, in criticizing the "art-centered model" for its apolitical nature, both Polan and Harvey invoke Brecht as the appropriate corrective, arguing that a film that turns back on itself in a perpetual investigation of illusionism "fails to lead its audience 'through' this first consideration and towards a second, namely, a consideration of the action represented. It is this second area of consideration which opens up the possibility of introduction to knowledge of the social world and its processes, what Brecht would have called 'instruction'" (Harvey 82).

This turn towards Brecht re-injects a sense of political commitment to materialist cinema through the notion of active spectatorship. Confronted with a strange and confusing spectacle instead of a familiar realist image, the spectator will be compelled to investigate its mystery and thus be transformed from passive object to active subject as they begin to search for meaning, cause, and effect. This politics of distanced investigation thereby becomes revolutionary as it pushes the audience to recognize and consider the ideological forces at work in society and in the process of representation itself. No longer passively accepting images as reality, the spectator will actively work to interpret these images, all the while reminded of their nature as such, and thus come to understand, through their own cognitive labor, the truth behind the curtain that is the reality of material social conditions. Thus, if an art-centered cinema makes apparent the illusionism of cinema but refers to nothing beyond itself, a politicized version pushes the

spectator towards social critique with the argument that the illusionism of cinema, a reflection of dominant (bourgeois) ideology, obscures the true nature of material conditions. As Wollen maintains, the intent of Brechtian aesthetics is "not simply to break the spectator's involvement and empathy in order to draw attention to the artifice of art, i.e., an art-centered model, but in order to demonstrate the workings of society, a reality obscured by habitual norms of perception, by habitual modes of identification with 'human problems'" (17-18). Thus political modernism is an aesthetic capable of gesturing toward the reality that lies beyond representation. This is accomplished by restoring to the spectator a sense of conscious activity that breaks through the illusions of cinema and that, in turn, leads to an awareness of the reality of underlying social situations. The techniques of political modernism, then, need to be decoded for the spectator to perform an analogous decoding of dominant ideology to find the truth that lies beneath.

However, when put towards revolutionary ends, this move to overcome the problems of ideological suturing with active spectatorship in actuality reproduces the same logic that it purports to undermine in two ways: its desire to guarantee specific ends and its related construction of the filmmaker as "master," to use a term from Rancière. First, the idea that political modernism "demonstrate[s] the workings of society," as Wollen claims it does, echoes the scientism of orthodox revolution since it maintains a conception of cinema as a tool for producing a particular consciousness – it is the role of film to reveal the truth of material conditions, thus inculcating the spectator with the correct consciousness as the prompt for a specific action. As Rodowick describes it, "The aim throughout the 1970s was to produce a set of concepts that defined the relation between film form and ideology, and in reversing or negating that form, to produce a materialism and *nonideologial countercinema.* […] many writers argued that countercinema could produce *a position of genuine knowledge* in opposition to the

illusionism of commercial films" (xiv, my emphasis). Political modernism thus posits a truth to

material conditions that lies beyond the reach of realist representation, but can be got at through

a more active and critical engagement with film form. The result, if the spectator is willing to

work, is knowledge of this truth, and the film acts as an indirect path to its access. As a

revolutionary aesthetic, then, political modernism remains an alternative, but still instrumental

means to a specific and pre-determined ends since its techniques operate as the means through

which this reality is accessed. The political efficacy of the aesthetic remains based, therefore, on

the assumption of the non-ambiguity of signs – although there is added labor on the part of the

spectator, the goal is for the audience to read and interpret the message correctly. In this way,

political modernism becomes the flipside of the realism that it sets out against; both assume the

transparency of the image by assuming the outcome of interpretation in advance.[28] Rodowick

demonstrates this problematic inversion by highlighting the emphasis on negation as the primary

gesture that underscores the self-reflexivity of political modernism:

> To the extent that the negative and critical function of countercinema bases itself
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> on the necessity of reflexivity and the formal autonomy of the text, it must face an
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> irresolvable contradiction in its theorization of the spectator. As Rodolphe Gasché

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[28] Indeed, even for critics like Kristen Thompson who point out that this aesthetic mode is not a guarantee of any specific spectatorial experience, the lack of this guarantee derives simply from the spectator's unfamiliarity with avant-garde cinema: "The most a filmmaker can do is to create a set of cues for perception. But the spectator may be incapable of taking up those cues, for the ideology of viewing lies to a large extent in learned skills for understanding art works. The vast majority of film-goers have learned no way of viewing other than that needed to approach the classical narrative film" (128). What becomes clear in this line of thinking, then, is that the lack of success of such films (their inability to transform the thinking of their audience into a radical political consciousness) is the result of a lack of exposure – with more contact, the spectator will learn the appropriate way to interpret these cues and thus ultimately decode the correct message and develop the desired consciousness.

has pointed out in another context, the association of reflexivity with a

deconstructive criticism always relies on a version of its own negativity which, by

inscribing within the text the process of its own construction, will render "visible"

to the reader the suppressed elements of the textual work. But is it not precisely

the measure of a self-evidential representation that the discourse of political

modernism sets out to criticize in illusionist cinema? Rather than a difficulty in

reading, which is supposed to encourage a productive and active semiosis in the

spectator, is it not the case that what is asserted in place of a mimetic theory of

representation is in fact a "negative" identity theory where contradictions

produced "semiotically" within the modernist text are said to be reproduced as

'gaps and fissures' in the spectator's consciousness? (60)

Political modernism thus relies on the "science of social reality," as Rancière puts it, in order to

enable the spectator to become aware of the truth of material conditions otherwise hidden from

them by a mendacious realism (*Emancipated* 47). The self-reflexivity of political modernism is

thus rendered an indirect means of communicating a "nonideological truth." Such an aesthetic

may be confusing, even alienating for the audience, but, it remains that this aesthetic embodies a

pathway that leads to the revelation of this truth.

In his critique of active spectatorship, Rancière argues that artworks typically formulate a

political identity around a supposed transparency of their political message. However, this

assumption that the artwork's politics will be clearly understood presumes an ideal spectator who

will not only perform the interpretative labor that the artwork requires, but who will also do so

specifically in the fashion intended and thus experience its desired effect. In actuality, as

Rancière points out, to guarantee such an outcome the spectator must already agree with the

premises of the artwork that attempts to convince them. In his discussion of a collage that juxtaposes images of a luxurious modern American apartment with a photograph of a Vietnamese man holding a dead child, Rancière argues:

> For the image to produce its political effect, the spectator must already be convinced that what it shows is American imperialism, not the madness of human beings in general. She must also be convinced that she herself is guilty of sharing in the prosperity rooted in imperialist exploitation of the world. And she must further feel guilt about being there and doing nothing; about viewing these images of pain and death, rather than struggling against the power responsible for it. In short, she must already feel guilty about viewing the image that is to create the feeling of guilt. (*Emancipated* 85)

Following this logic, to define revolutionary cinema according to its political effect renders it paradoxically unnecessary since to ensure these ends it must address a spectator who already shares the precise point of view and emotional disposition that the film is intended to inspire. Thus, the revolutionary theory of political modernism as a means of indirectly demonstrating the truth of reality entails a belief in the transparency of its images, which runs counter to the aesthetic's expressed claims about the ideology of images, or an acceptance of the fact that this truth can only be guaranteed to reveal itself to those spectators who are already convinced of it.

In addition to these problems of guaranteed interpretative results, the idea that political modernism is a means of leading the spectator from ignorance to knowledge presumes a filmmaker that has himself determined the truth of reality, the consciousness necessary to engage in struggle, and the correct form of resistance. In Rancière's terms, the filmmaker becomes the master whose job it is to teach the ignorant the real state of things. However, such a relationship

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between the filmmaker and the spectator is predicated on a fundamental relation of inequality that is continuously reinstated:

> The master alone knows the right way, time and place for that "equal" transmission, because he knows something that the ignorant will never know, short of becoming a master himself, something which is more important than the knowledge conveyed. He knows the exact distance between ignorance and knowledge. That pedagogical distance between a determined ignorance and a determined knowledge is in fact a metaphor. It is the metaphor of a radical break between the way of the ignorant and the way of the master, the metaphor of a radical break between two intelligences. ("Emancipated")

This "break between two intelligences" signals the perpetual undermining of the emancipation that revolutionary cinema is supposed to enact since it maintains a hierarchy of knowledge. In this way, this model of spectatorship brings back to mind the problems of a party-led revolution; the idea that revolutionary cinema consists of moving the spectator from a position of ignorance to one of knowledge suggests that there is a correct knowledge and a correct path towards this knowledge, both of which the filmmaker is privy to, and that the desired goal is the development of a homogenous audience that will all come to the same political point of view. The audience is thus treated as an aggregate as the film becomes the means through which a specific consciousness is disseminated amongst all its members. Furthermore, the idea that there is a communicable truth to reality suggests that reality is already constituted and fixed, that it exists in a predetermined fashion that can be uncovered and conveyed. We thus find ourselves back in the realm of scientific Marxism where capitalism and its categories are reified and history and struggle are fixed in terms of the past and the future.

The idea that political modernism functions as the antidote to the illusionism of realism and is thus a representational aesthetic capable of expressing the radical politics that underscore second wave revolutionary thought comes unstuck since its attempts to move beyond the perpetual investigation of illusionism that characterizes the art-centered aesthetic model inevitably lead back into the realms of scientific Marxism, political vanguardism, and didactic filmmaking. Indeed, for Deleuze and other ontological film theorists, the very possibility of revolutionary representation is impossible since representation is always bound up with such structures of power and dominance.[29] Thus in "One Less Manifesto," Deleuze argues for an understanding of revolutionary theater as a non-representational theater since power is inseparable from the project of representation:

> When one speaks of a popular theater, one always privileges a certain
> *representation of conflicts*, conflicts of the individual and society, of life and
> history, contradictions and oppositions of all kinds that cut across a society as
> well as its individuals. But, whether naturalist or hyperrealist, etc., this
> representation of conflicts is truly narcissistic and everyone's affair. There is a
> popular theater analogous to the narcissism of the worker. Without a doubt, there
> is Brecht's attempt to make contradictions and oppositions something other than
> represented; but Brecht himself only wants them to be "understood" and for the
> spectator to have the elements of possible "solution." This is not to leave the

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[29] Stephen Shaviro, in his theorization of an ontological cinema in *The Cinematic Body*, argues that the question of representation must be abandoned if cinema theory is to adequately examine the power relations operative in cinema: "we need to abandon the notions of representation, identification, lack, and so on, if we are to be able to map out the political lines of force, the plays of power and resistance, that inhabit and animate the cinematic image" (64.5).

domain of presentation but only to pass from one dramatic pole of bourgeois

representation to an epic pole of popular representation. […] [C]onflicts are

already normalized, codified, and institutionalized. They are "products." (252)

For Deleuze, representation always functions from an ideological standpoint and embodies an

institutionalized point of view that operates as a narcissistic authority. As such, representation,

by its very nature, "presupposes a state of power or domination and not the opposite" (253). Part

of the problem for Deleuze is that representation is always concerned with fixity – it determines

a state of affairs according to an ideological position and defends this position with the voice of

authority, much as Rancière describes it. Deleuze thus extends the critique of realism that

characterizes apparatus theory to encompass the very process of representation itself. Thus, the

political commitment that underscores political modernism is called into question as the

authority embodied in representation makes its very nature inseparable from the problematic

power dynamics of an authoritarian dogma.

In addition to the problematic power dynamics inherent in representational systems, the

quest to find an aesthetic form capable of expressing revolution comes unstuck for Deleuze in

the deterministic nature of representation, which counters its investments in perpetuity and

unfinishability. For Deleuze, representation operates at the level of the "is"; that is to say, it is

concerned with establishing the identity of things based on an unequivocal relationship between

signifier and signified. As such, representation is fundamentally deterministic and static, which

runs contrary to a politics grounded in the replacement of "is" with a perpetual sense of

becoming. Indeed, for Deleuze, "of interest is the middle (*le milieu*), what is happening in the

middle. […T]he past and even the future are *history*. What counts, on the other hand, is the

becoming: becoming-revolutionary, and not the future or the past of the revolution" (242). Thus,

if revolution is a becoming, a perpetual process of struggle that is forever incomplete rather than a goal to be accomplished at a future date, revolutionary cinema cannot be a representational cinema since to be so is to undermine this sense of becoming by restoring the "is." Rather, a revolutionary theater (and a revolutionary cinema) is one that "will surge forward as *something representing nothing*" (256 my emphasis). Deleuze's program, then, as Laura Cull puts it, is to "construct a theatre that escapes representation and creates the conditions for presence as the encounter with what Deleuze calls 'continuous variation'" (5).

The ontological turn, although growing out of the same critiques of representation and the ideological machinations of cinema that engendered political modernism, goes further to abandon the representational problematic altogether. However, critics of this ontological approach argue that such a nonrepresentational cinema is impossible for there is no outside to representation nor can there ever be. Thus, any attempt to imagine a cinema outside of the processes of representation, as a non-medium or technology that does not mediate, is always already bound up in the process of representation. As Stephen Ross makes clear in his investigation of the philosophy of representation, "the critique and excesses of representation ring in representation. Within the critique of representation there sounds a countermovement that surpasses the limits of presentation and its critique, still within representation" (5). Similarly, in examining the politics of Artaud's theater, Derrida makes the similar claim that "Presence, in order to be presence and self-presence, has always already begun to represent itself, has always already been presented" ("Theater" 16). In more specifically cinematic terms, Rancière's *Film Fables* demonstrates from its opening chapter on Jean Epstein and through its discussions of Godard and Deleuze that any vision of cinema as non-representational inevitably falls back on elements of representation. Such theories, Rancière maintains, "extract, after the fact, the original

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essence of the cinematographic art from the plots the art of cinema shares with the old art of telling stories" (6). As such, and as Oliver Davis claims, cinema is "constantly feeding off and falling back into the representational" (141).

If we accept that cinema is about the ideological construction of images, at some level it remains bound to the question of representation. Indeed, it is hard to imagine a revolutionary politics that is not in some way fundamentally engaged in a process of communication with the audience. The challenge, then, is for revolutionary film to find a means of expression that communicates and represents its revolutionary ideology without reifying it into a singular and fixed object. On one level, this becomes a fairly automatic process since representation is far from a closed system – it always exceeds intention. There is no precise one-to-one correspondence between signifier and signified; representation requires interpretation and can thus always mean differently and heterogeneously so that it is never complete. Or, as Vološinov puts it, all signs are ideological and thus meaning is always constantly under negotiation and contestation (10).[30] In this way, the second wave revolutionary aesthetic becomes a process of exploiting the inherent instability of representation so that it remains, as T.J. Clark defines it,

> plural rather than singular and centralized: representation as so many fields or
>
> terrains of activity, subject to leakage and interference between modes and
>
> technologies, and constantly crossed and dispersed by other kinds of activity

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[30] Vološinov maintains, "Class does not coincide with the sign community, i.e. with the totality of users of the same set of signs of ideological communication. The various different classes will use one and the same language. As a result, differently oriented accents intersect in every ideological sign. […] This social *multiaccentuality* of the ideological sign is a very crucial aspect. By and large, it is thanks to this intersecting of accents that a sign maintains its vitality and dynamism and the capacity for further development" (23).

altogether: subject, as a result, to retrieval and cancellation – to continual

reversals of direction between object and image, and image and receiver. (ix)

Given the self-determined and noncalculable nature of second wave revolution, one way

of thinking its aesthetic form is to say that second wave revolutionary cinema does not presume

its categories in advance – there is no singular class of people to be addressed, no predetermined

consciousness to acquire, no final Utopia to be realized.[31] As a result, it foregoes categorical

truth claims and direct, unequivocal communication with the audience in favor of an open-ended

engagement with the nature of struggle. As such, second wave cinema develops as a kind of

meta-aesthetic as it attempts to formulate a representational strategy that engages the very nature

of revolution itself as a heterogeneous and perpetual process. As we shall see in the discussion of

Tout va Bien that follows, this produces a continued meditation on the problem of representation

that attempts to reengage revolution in Marx's terms "as a process of *continual engagement* with

the flows and constraints of the capitalist socius towards its overcoming" (Thorburn 3, my

emphasis).

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[31] In this respect, second wave revolutionary cinema finds some common ground with Deleuze's theory of modern political cinema. In *Cinema 2,* Deleuze argues that "In classical cinema the people are there, even though they are oppressed, tricked, subject, even though blind or unconscious. […] the people are already there, real before being actual, ideal without being abstract" (208). In opposition to this classical mode of political filmmaking, "if there were a modern political cinema, it would be on this basis: the people no longer exist, or not yet…*the people are missing"* (208). For Deleuze, the task of modern political cinema, therefore, is "not that of addressing a people, which is presupposed already there, but of contributing to the invention of a people" (209).

<u>A Presentation of Representation:</u> *Tout va Bien*

Godard's *Tout va Bien,* the last film made by the Dziga Vertov Group, is constructed as a meditation on the problems that representation poses for both revolutionary organizing and cinematic expression. Financed by Paramount with a budget of 230 million francs and starring the internationally renowned actors Yves Montand and Jane Fonda, *Tout va Bien* is understood as the Dziga Vertov Group's most commercial venture and their attempt to make a radical political film within the commercial film industry; Yosefa Loshitzky describes the film as "made with American money in an attempt to break the conventional commercial circuit and bring the revolutionary message to a larger audience" (32). This return to mainstream cinema is alternately framed as the desire to reach a broader audience and the need to make money in light of the failure of the group's previous project *Jusqu'à la victoire* (discussed in more detail in chapter four)*.* Regardless of whether this return is seen as economically or politically motivated, however, most treatments of the film recognize it as a continued exploration of the group's revolutionary investments.

Reponses to *Tout va Bien* upon its release can be schematized according to two broad perspectives, one critical, one laudatory. Critics compared it to Martin Karmitz's *Coup pour Coup* (*Blow for Blow* 1972), another French film released at almost exactly the same time that similarly deals with a wildcat strike, this time in a garment factory, in response to harsh working conditions and dismissive union representatives. As Pierre Baudry points out, *Tout va Bien* often fared badly in these comparisons; while *Coup pour Coup* was praised for its use of actual factory workers and its realistic treatment of the subject, *Tout va Bien* was criticized for its abstract modernist aesthetic (qtd. in Morrey 99). If the aim of the film was to politicize its audience and raise revolutionary consciousness, they argued, *Tout va Bien* failed resolutely in that its avant-

garde style was too esoteric to foster such an understanding. Yet defenders of the film countered that it was precisely *Tout va Bien's* avant-gardism that was essential to its politics. Champions of political modernism, they followed the logic of the *Cahiers* critics to claim that Karmitz had succumbed to the error of "taking up without criticism bourgeois filmic practice" so that *Coup pour Coup* reproduced "the ideology of the lived, of the 'well expressed', of the authenticated, exact detail: the ideology of the mirror" (Leblanc qtd. in Harvey 68).

The opposition that structures the comparisons between *Tout va Bien* and *Coup pour Coup* echoes what András Kovács terms the "paradox of political modernism" (371). For Kovács, "the auteurial discourses remain within the self-reflexive, abstract, and subjective modernist paradigm, but then the message remains either ambiguous (Godard) or overgeneralized (Straub and Huillet), or the message is unequivocal, but then loses its convincing potential as an auteurial discourse and becomes a good action movie, melodrama, or bad propaganda film" (371). The choice, it seems, is between an experimental aesthetic that alienates the audience and a realist aesthetic that reproduces the logic of the status quo. However, Kovács's paradox only holds if we accept its premise that *unequivocal* communication with the audience is the goal of revolutionary cinema. Rather, *Tout va Bien*'s complex, confusing, and at times contradictory representation of revolution, which Kovács identifies as its weakness, is actually fundamental to its larger engagement with the revolutionary potential of cinema.

Filmed in the self-reflexive style that by 1972 had become Godard's directorial signature, *Tout va Bien* focuses on the relationship between Susan, an American journalist living in Paris, and Jacques, a new-wave filmmaker who now directs television commercials, as they are trapped in the Salumi meat factory during a wildcat strike. As the strike progresses, Jacques and Susan come to critically reflect upon their careers as well as their relationship, this development

signaled at the end of the film by the narrator's comment that they had "learned to live historically." Although the film is structured around this general plotline, its narrative is far from linear. Rather, the events are presented as a series of confrontations – between the workers and the bosses as well as the workers and the CGT, between protestors and the police, and between Jacques and Susan. The majority of this action is filmed with a stationary camera where the actors deliver their arguments as talking heads. This relatively static cinematography is punctuated by a series of lateral tracking shots where the camera travels first left, then right along the length of the set. The film's self-conscious exploitation of the star system, its critical voiceover commentary analyzing the conditions of the film's construction, the politicized love story, the incorporation of narrative interruption and sound/image conflicts, as well as its non-linear structure and rejection of straightforward cause and effect, are all ways by which *Tout va Bien* articulates it social and political commitments against those of mainstream film while at the same time highlighting its own status as a construction.[32]

The film's critique of representation, however, goes much further than simply highlighting the conditions of its own construction to avoid charges of authenticity. Rather, *Tout va Bien* engages the problematic of representation at both the political and aesthetic levels in order to simultaneously articulate the inescapability of the problem as well as the persistent need to represent others for both cinematic and revolutionary ends. Thus, during the opening sequence of the film, which openly debates the very construction of the narrative, the voiceover details the classes of people that will be represented in the film alongside "him and her": farmers, workers,

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[32] Arguments detailing how the film's self-reflexivity and aesthetic experiment undermine Hollywood convention and illusionism have been well documented; Loshitzky's treatment of the film's self-reflexive and anti-Hollywood aesthetic strategies is particularly detailed (32-48).

the bourgeoisie. Each of these groups, including even Jacques and Susan, is extrapolated out into their representative gender and class forms – they are "hims" and "hers," workers and members of the middle class, rather than discrete individuals. However, the film maintains that these representations are tied to material social conditions; they are not completely abstract entities. As Morrey puts it, these characters "should not belong to some vague fictional world, but should be concretely situated with respect to the system of capitalist production in which the film itself is made" (99). In establishing this link between its images and the material conditions of France during this time, the film declares its status as a representational form while at the same time preserving its relationship to that beyond the realms of the diegesis (thus countering any attempt to interpret it as an art-centered film). As such, these characters are not real (they are individual representations of the classes listed at the start of the film which are, themselves, representations of the class dynamics of French society), but neither are they completely false (they are intended as expressions of material social conditions).

This opening seems strange, however, when considered alongside the fact that the main emphasis of the film's plot – the wildcat strike – is an action motivated by the very problem of representation itself; the workers, dissatisfied with their political representatives (the CGT), have taken action into their own hands in an attempt to bypass these systems of political representation and directly take control of their working conditions. Indeed, the film's sympathetic portrayal of the workers echoes the critique of systems of political representation – the party, unions – familiar to the '68 movements. Moreover, the narrative of *Tout va Bien* itself circulates around the question of political and aesthetic representation. As Loshitzky describes it, "The film depicts and analyzes the reactions of some fictional representatives of the CGT […] and two media people […] to the revolutionary acts of the workers" (33). As such, the film is

fundamentally about how the workers represent themselves and how two different

representational institutions, the political CGT and the aesthetic media (a filmmaker and radio

journalist, representatives of image and sound respectively) respond to and represent the wildcat

strike. A tension builds, therefore, between systems of political and aesthetic representation and a

question necessarily arises: Why is a critique of the alienating structure of representative politics

expressed through a representative medium that similarly looks to speak for a people?

The film's description of itself, presented through the "cryptically punning intertitle" that

James MacBean translates as both "a story for those who shouldn't still need one" and "an

account for those who take no account," sheds some light on this conundrum (*Film and

Revolution* 168). These "twin meanings" articulate the two somewhat conflicting aims of the

film: its desire to represent those who have been marginalized (its status as "story" for those who

don't have one) and its attempt to critique the processes of representation (its status as an

"account" of those who have failed to critique themselves). Thus, while the need to represent

remains paramount – those without a voice must be given one, be it politically or aesthetically –

this process is not without problem. *Tout va Bien*, then, builds a critique of the problem of

representation while at the same time attempting to find a way of expressing this critique that

does not reproduce on the aesthetic level the very problems of representation that it is

articulating at the political level.

The alienating tendencies bound up in systems of representation are highlighted in the

three speeches that the director, the shop steward, and the worker (Georgette) offer to explain

their feelings about the strike. The speeches of the director and the shop steward are similarly

framed medium shots, although the backdrop for each differs: the director sits at his desk with

the flashing neon sign of the factory behind him, while behind the steward is a photograph of the

meat products produced by the Salumi factory, which is in turn flanked by two unmistakably thuggish representatives from the CGT. Despite these different settings, each one denoting the different labors of the two men, the parallel framings mark the similarities between them – they both condemn the strike and focus instead on the importance of productivity. While these two speeches may appear to be the articulation of these individuals' point of view, they are actually quotations: the manager's direct address to the camera as he describes the historical changes since Marx and Engels is taken from Jean Saint-Geours's *Long Live Consumer Society*, and the steward reproduces his comments from the union newsletter, *La Vie Ouvrière.* The backdrops behind the characters thus render the two men avatars of their class who parrot the ideas of those in power (a government minister and a union under the sway of the PCF). While these speeches seem to present the image of one man speaking his mind, they actually reveal the ways by which an individual is lost within the representative structures of party politics. As one of the strikers later comments, "The union thinks for us workers. In the outside world as a citizen, the party thinks for you and you follow. All you can do is light a candle for the left."

If these two speeches show how party politics homogenizes individual opinion so that one can no longer speak for oneself, the third speech seemingly made by Georgette, itself a quote from the Maoist publication *La Cause du Peuple,* further reinforces this tension between party rhetoric and the people it represents. While the framing for this scene is different from the previous two speeches (here a close-up of Georgette's face), thus denoting the shift in rhetoric from anti- to pro-strike, the fact that it is similarly a quotation positions it back within the problematic system of representation that marked the first two. Moreover, this third speech is delivered via voice-over commentary, which forces a gap between the worker pictured and the ideas being articulated so that ultimately it is unclear whether it is actually Georgette that is

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articulating these words. Thus, a double separation emerges between the person on the image track and the words being uttered so that this twice-removed representation of her experience seems to have literally silenced and overwritten her. During the voice-over another worker interrupts to comment, "I got irritated listening to her. It was all true, but the way she told it was wrong. The poverty that expensively dressed reporter was scribbling about wasn't Georgette's." This moment brings together the critique of both political and aesthetic systems of representation. At the political level, the interruption articulates the same critique implied in the other speeches – the fact that Georgette is quoting from *La Cause* implies that the poverty she is relating is not, in fact, her own. Rather, it is someone else's poverty or the abstract image of poverty created by the publication's Maoist editors. In this sense, the moment reinforces the idea that there is a disjunct between political rhetoric and individual experience; the latter is not adequately represented by the former. However, there is also the added problem at the aesthetic level of Susan's transcription of Georgette's speech. On this level, the poverty that Susan is writing about isn't Georgette's because of her translation of Georgette's words into her own for the written article; her "scribbling" isn't fully representing what she is being told.

As the film progresses, it becomes clear that this idea of not being able to fully encapsulate the referent in representation is the fundamental root of this problem. After the strike is over, Susan talks with the workers at the factory about the story that she will write. A debate ensues among them as to the correct means of representation – what Susan should and shouldn't include, how she should frame her article, what details she should emphasize. Importantly, the issue is not resolved; rather, the workers repeatedly disagree and the scene ends with the expression, "It's complicated. I can't explain." The problem here does not seem to be one of speaking for another – the workers appear quite happy to let Susan write the story and they are

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able to offer their input, which she listens to attentively. So while for Thomas Kavanagh the scene demonstrates that "what the strike means can never be expressed in the language of the bourgeoisie" (45), I would argue that more pressing issue is that what the strike means can never be fully and definitively captured in a single representation. What is at stake, therefore, is not that because it is Susan representing the workers she will misrepresent them since she is not one of them, but that the process of representation itself is fundamentally incapable of fully representing the strike. Any attempt to reduce the event into a single fully determinative representation is bound to fail. Indeed, later in the film Susan is dismayed with her efforts; we never hear the report she has written and she herself dismisses it, unable to read such "crap." In this way, *Tout va Bien* undermines the notion that there is a unified one-to-one correspondence between signifier and signified, instead seeing representation as an always inadequate expression of its referent.

However, that it is inadequate to fully encapsulate its referent does not mean that representation is therefore simply erroneous. To return to Georgette's speech, as the voiceover to it states, "it was *all* true." What we get, then, is a truth in representation *despite* its inadequacies and the inherent falsity of representation as representation (rather than the actual thing being represented). This idea that representation is both right yet inadequate occurs again in the film when the strikers are trying to plan a course of action. As one striker tries to explain the situation, another responds, "That's not the right way to explain things." When asked, "What's wrong with it?" he replies "Nothing. It's just not right." What we see in these moments is the possibility of meaning despite contradiction and falsehood: the representation is true but at the same time incorrect. Georgette, Susan, and the party are thus both right and not right, each presenting only

one possible mode of representation that cannot be reified into the definitive expression of class conflict.

The idea of multiple, competing, co-present representations is articulated in one of our first encounters with Susan, which introduces her to us as a news reporter reading a story for the American Broadcasting System. During her reading of this first broadcast, she begins a voice-over that translates the story into French that plays over the English version that she is reading. This engagement with the process of translation is significant since the very act of translation itself necessarily carries with it a change in meaning. Indeed, even though it is Susan reading the story in both instances, it is impossible for the two renditions to correspond perfectly, a fact that is exacerbated by their asynchronicity, and we are left with two separate articulations of the same event. Both are "true" but non-identical. In this moment *Tout va Bien* pluralizes representation for the spectator so that the meaning of the event being reported cannot be tied to one determined representation; there are, quite literally, different ways of saying things that are not identical, and therefore potentially contradictory, but still "correct."

The two different aesthetic presentations of the factory in *Tout va Bien* highlight this possibility of multiple simultaneous representations. The exterior of the factory is presented in a realist fashion through establishing shots and the photograph on the wall of the offices, both of which show an actually existing factory. The interior, however, is clearly artificial, its bold color scheme and cross-sectional layout creating what Robin Bates refers to as the "set's unreality, its pointedly schematized format" (29). However, it is not the case that one or the other style of representation (realist or purposefully artificial) is more accurate than the other. Rather, the film offers two distinct representations of the factory that do not correspond but still both succeed in representing the factory's exterior and interior. That they do not add up to a unified signifier for

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the factory does not matter; they exist as two different ways of representing the same thing. What these representations of the factory reveal, then, is *Tout va Bien'*s challenge to the reification of representation into a one-for-one relationship between signifier and signified. Rather, the film insists on the possibility of multiple representations, all of which are simultaneously both true and false, which can coexist despite contraction. This is significant for it demonstrates that *Tout va Bien* is not attempting to undermine the processes of representation *in totum*. Rather, it attempts to destabilize the relationship between image and referent so as to avoid the reification of meaning that occurs when the image is seen to correspond precisely to a sole historical or material referent. Here, there is more than one way of seeing the factory and of understanding what is happening inside. Indeed, the cross-sectional presentation of the factory means that we are able to see events as they unfold from multiple perspectives simultaneously.

Tout va Bien thus defends the project of representation but only on the grounds that its meaning can never be fully or singularly determined. Representation, much like second wave revolution itself, is a fundamentally open and incomplete process. Indeed, the film's argument about the nature of representation means that its representation of revolution will be similarly multiple and incomplete. As such, the film offers up other possible forms of revolutionary action alongside the strike, most clearly the occupation of the supermarket. Significantly, this action is presented using the same back-and-forth tracking shot that was first used in the factory. As such, the film offers two parallel modes of action: one directed at labor, the other at consumption. In this vein, Morrey argues that "the incessant rattle of the cash registers and the periodic interruption of the PA system create a cacophony comparable to that of the factory, while the gestures of the cashiers ringing up the merchandise, *but also those of the shoppers* lifting their goods from the trolly to the conveyor belt have the same mechanised, repetitive quality of

factory labour" (104). Thus, as Susan points out, "outside the factory, it is still the factory."

Through this shared cinematographic presentation, the film expands the notion of revolutionary

action beyond the confines of the factory to show how capitalism regulates all aspects of daily

life. As such, it pluralizes the notion of struggle by offering two different yet equally "true"

representations of revolutionary action.

But then the film also closes with this kind of lateral tracking shot across an empty

wasteland while various lines from earlier in the film are repeated on the soundtrack.[33] While the

tracking shot has been tied to revolutionary action through its two previous uses in the factory

and the supermarket, the nature of revolutionary action implied by the use of the shot here is left

open – the image is of an empty landscape. Moreover, this track does not complete the reverse

motion that we've come to expect from its earlier use. The track thus carries with it the

possibility of something new – a new direction or movement beyond the forms of revolutionary

action that we've already seen – but what this content is remains open. In this way, *Tout va Bien*

represents revolution with the familiar sense of incompleteness and uncertainty that characterizes

second wave revolutionary thought. Here, revolution is a form without a predetermined, stable,

and therefore certainly not guaranteed, significance. Similarly, after having shown the

incongruity between the two representations of the factory, the striker paints over the photograph

on the wall so that it becomes blank; its indexicality – its privileged relationship to an objective

and singular version of reality – is overwritten. This is not to deny the possibility of

representation but to liberate it from reified meanings, such that the factory and revolution are

portrayed through simultaneous, contradictory, incongruent representations; they are both of

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[33] A similar shot closes *In girum*; the film finishes on a tracking shot over an empty body of
water that is accompanied by the subtitle, "to be gone through again from the beginning."

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these things and more, this infinite potentiality re-signified to the audience by the blank canvas and the barren wasteland.

Tout va Bien thus articulates its revolutionary aesthetic as representation without expectation. It isn't about confirming particular, singular actions as exhaustively or exclusively true – this is impossible. Representation *means*, but not in a definitive or predetermined fashion. As Morrey describes the film, "instead of providing a single 'correct' interpretation of the events on display, then, *Tout va Bien* offers the terms for a debate which it invites the spectator to carry on beyond the confines of the film narrative" (100). As such, revolutionary representation is thus somewhat akin to *Tout va Bien's* wildcat strike – a politics of spontaneity that insists upon its urgency without any predetermined sense of its own ends. Indeed, the strike is unplanned and the workers themselves seem unsure what their goal is – as one comments, "all we've done since yesterday is wait outside this door. What's the point?" – and the strike itself seems to conclude suddenly without any clear consequences (there is no settling of grievances, overthrowing of the CGT, firing of the boss, or even the development of a growing radical movement). But the urgency and importance of the action are not diminished for this lack. As another striker argues, "Our anger was justified […] We were right not to chicken out." If we return from here to the beginning of *Tout va Bien* we can see that both the beginning and the end of the film embody this notion of representation without expectation. The series of takes that opens the film – "*Tout va Bien* scene 1 take 1; *Tout va Bien* scene 18 take 3" – is more than a self-reflexive gesture aimed at reminding the audience that they're watching a constructed representation. Rather, they immediately indicate a series of representations whose meaning has yet to be determined, accompanied as they are by the black screen of the opening credit sequence. Moreover, the takes also demonstrate the multiplicity of ways of understanding the film, for there is a sense in which

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this is *Tout va Bien*; the film is the labor of its cast and crew listed in this moment, the timing of

the clapper board with each new list of workers reinforcing the idea that each scene is the labor

of a specific group of people. The film is thus simultaneously this sum of its labor, the content of

the scenes referenced and whatever these scenes come to mean, the openness of this possibility

implied by the empty black screen.

Tout va Bien is thus anything but the totalitarian work of ideological domination that

Wheeler Dixon describes (124). Rather, the film demonstrates how there is no simple one-for-

one relationship between signifier and signified. As a result, the reifying ontology of the "is" that

Deleuze reads into representation is replaced by a sense of multiplicity and incompleteness. The

film opens up a different way of understanding the political modernist aesthetic beyond the

negative ontology that Rodowick describes. The aims of revolutionary cinema as it has been

traditionally conceived (that it must communicate a political truth to the audience so as to

inculcate a determined revolutionary consciousness) perhaps lead to this critique. However,

rethinking revolution as an incomplete and open-ended process that cannot calculate its ends in

advance enables a concomitant rethinking of the political modernist aesthetic as one that is less

interested in indirectly articulating the truth of material conditions than it is in revealing the

problems and desires of a revolutionary politics. Indeed, as Jameson has argued in his work on

the modernist aesthetic, while the content of an artwork articulates a more straightforward

denotative representation, form is more complex, indirect, and ambiguous. As such, the need to

work *through* form that this kind of aesthetic experimentation carries with it illustrates that

representational signs are fundamentally ambiguous and that their meanings can be neither

straightforwardly nor categorically determined; that the film operates through obfuscation and

indirectness reveals the impossibility of articulating any kind of simple truth. At best, what is revealed here is the truth of a revolutionary problematic.

While *Tout va Bien* complicates and problematizes the process of representation to undermine the idea of a direct correspondence between a representational signifier and an ontological signified, Glauber Rocha's *Terra em Transe* extends this critique by arguing that there is no ontologically determined signified for representation to even attempt to correspond to since reality, as a constructed experience, does not house the preexisting categories of revolutionary struggle. As such, and as Rocha suggests, the work of revolutionary film is to liberate the imagination in a way that will break this rational bond and imagine the categories of struggle anew.

New Latin American Cinema and the Problem of Militant Documentary

Glauber Rocha's *Terra em Transe* (1967)[34] is often compared to Godard's political cinema for its analogous investment in film as a political weapon and its preoccupation with the aesthetics of revolution, as well as its incorporation of violations of continuity principles and various other political modernist techniques.[35] Despite these similarities, however, *Terra em Transe* responds specifically to the political problems circulating in Brazilian culture during the late 1960s. As such, the film's position within the larger international second wave of

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[34] The film's title is variously translated as *Land/Earth in Anguish, Anguished Land/Earth, Entranced Land/Earth, Distressed Earth/Land,* or *Land/Earth in Trance*.

[35] Gabe Klinger argues that Rocha's films "resemble the didacticism of Godard's Dziga-Vertov period" while Robert Stam highlights the violations of continuity and screen space in *Terra em Transe* that mark its relationship to the political modernist aesthetics of Godard's films (*Land in Anguish*).

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revolutionary filmmaking and its attempts to open up the cinematic engagement with revolution beyond the teleological narratives of earlier cinematic representations differ from Godard's. This difference is marked by the incorporation of certain political modernist techniques as part of a larger neobaroque aesthetic that undermines the epistemological empiricism of militant neorealist-inspired films and their concomitant evocation of a revolutionary teleology while at the same time pluralizing our experience of reality and revolution by rendering their representation conjectural. This neobaroque aesthetic produces a version of revolutionary filmmaking that is infinitely more complex, multivalent, precarious, and personal than the pedagogical proletarian didacticism of earlier Latin American revolutionary films.

Terra em Transe figures as an example of New Latin American Cinema (NLAC), a term used to denote a long period in Latin American film history, from the anti-studio neorealist turn of the mid 1950s to the early 1980s when major economic contraction caused a sharp drop in film production across the continent.[36] While NLAC is loosely bound by what Paul Rodríguez identifies as "a shared Marxism and a marked preference for experimental modes of representation" (88), the term is often used as shorthand for the militant nationalist populist cinema of the 1960s, which has come to dominate understandings of post-war Latin American cinema. In her history of NLAC, Ana López points out that this use of the term has become institutionalized to the point that it has retroactively overwritten the national distinctions between

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[36] Paul Rodríguez points out that there is still a tendency to refer to more contemporary films as "New Brazilian," "New Mexican," or "New Argentine" film, despite fundamental changes in film production over the past twenty years: "the use of the adjective 'new' to describe the cinema of the past two decades is problematic because it suggests a continuity that does not stand up to scrutiny, and because it perpetuates a kind of historical amnesia. In suggesting this continuity, the idea of 'newness' perpetuates a kind of historical amnesia that may advance the marketing of contemporary films, but stifles our understanding of the complex history that led to their specific modes of production and representation" (89-90).

various cinematic articulations: "Fifteen years ago we could speak of a 'Third Cinema.' And 'Imperfect Cinema' or a 'Cinema of Hunger,' but today these terms have becomes practically obsolete and are subsumed under the far more powerful and empowering 'New Latin American Cinema'" (138). However, while López draws attention to this homogenizing tendency, at the same time she reproduces it, allowing the militant cinema that her examples denote to dominate the history of NLAC. This gesture is generally reinforced across Latin American film history through the canonization of a specific set of films and frequently anthologized essays and manifestoes by the same directors, all of which emphasize the thought of this particular period. While the militant phase of NLAC is certainly fundamentally important to film history, this tendency to reduce all Latin American films from a period spanning twenty-plus years to this one classification fails to address the series of significant ideological and aesthetic transformations that NLAC embodies. Indeed, the supremacy of Glauber Rocha's "Aesthetics of Hunger" (1965) or Fernando Bírri's "For a National, Realist and Popular Cinema" as examples of NLAC manifestoes overshadows the drastic transformation of their thought in the later years of the movement, as expressed in the radically different "Aesthetics of Dream" discussed below (Rocha 1971) or "For a Cosmic, Delirious and Lumpen Cinema (Manifesto for Cosmunism, or Cosmic Communism)" (Bírri 1978).

The militant phase of NLAC is only one part of a much longer and more complex history of Latin American cinema. In his nuanced history of Latin American filmmaking, Rodríguez argues that NLAC evolved from earlier neorealist investments into two "succeeding, but not mutually exclusive" periods: the militant phase in the early 1960s and the neobaroque phase that develops in the late 1960s, through the 1970s and early 1980s (90). While the militant phase was characterized by filmmakers who saw their cinema as a form of populist nationalist expression

invested in social and political liberation, the later neobaroque phase saw the same filmmakers

transform this political commitment in order to address the changes in the political landscape that

the various military coups and authoritarian governments ushered in.[37]

The neorealist period of Latin American cinema, what in Brazil became the first wave of

Cinema Nõvo, emerged in the late 1950s as the result of a series of debates about the possibility

of developing a national cinema more attentive to the issues facing the Brazilian people.

Somewhat ironically, the development of this national cinema was predicated on the import and

adoption of Italian neorealism. This European aesthetic was popular for several reasons. Its

reliance on on-location shooting and non-actors meant that it was relatively affordable while at

the same time it offered a counter to the studio system (embodied most famously in Brazil by the

Vera Cruz studio), which was seen as fundamentally compromised by its Hollywood

associations. Moreover, neorealism seemed capable of cutting through the artifice of classical

cinema and presenting a more ethically responsible view of the experiences of Brazilian poverty.

As economic and political conditions deteriorated, filmmakers became increasingly

dedicated to the development of a revolutionary cinema that denounced neoimperialism, which

was understood as the fundamental root of economic and cultural oppression. Inspired by the

anti-colonial movements in Africa and the success of the Cuban revolution, filmmakers began

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[37] The three phases that Rodríguez lays out (Neorealism, Militant NLAC, Neobaroque NLAC) correspond roughly to the three phases of Brazilian Cinema Nõvo: the early phase prior to the 1964 coup, the period between the coup and the 1968 coup-within-a-coup, and the years following 1968. Parsing the different names for these periods can become difficult, however, as on one hand, certain blanket terms have come to overwrite these differences (NLAC, Third Cinema) while on the other, alternative terms have proliferated (Marginal Cinema, *udigrudi* Film, *tropicalismo*). Rodríguez's terminology is compelling both for is clarity and for its evocation of the neobaroque aesthetic, which is central to the development of the revolutionary aesthetic that I discuss here. For these reasons, I have used his terminology despite the existence of other possible and, in some cases, more nationally specific terms.

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asserting the cultural, political, and economic autonomy of Latin America. As such, the nascent

nationalism of the neorealist phase hardened into the revolutionary politics of the militant phase

as filmmakers began to develop a cinema that promoted a sense of anti-imperial national unity.

As López argues, "In the face of what has always been perceived as the dominating and stifling

presence of other cultures and ideologies, the cinema was identified early on as a crucial site for

the utopian assertion of a collective unity identified as the nation" (Lopez 141). Emblematic of

this militant phase are some of the most well-known NLAC films: *Black God White Devil*

(Rocha, Brazil, 1963); *The Hour of the Furnaces* (Solanas and Getino, Argentina, 1968); *The

Battle of Chile* (Guzmán, Chile, 1969-75); *The Jackal of Nahueltoro* (Littín, Chile, 1969), and

Blood of the Condor (Sanjínes, Bolivia, 1969).

This nationalism was driven by a militant call for the total separation from foreign

capital. Leftist radicals demanded an end to the systems of international aid and investment that

funded developmentalist projects which, they argued, perpetuated a paralyzing dependency on

foreign capital and ensured the economic oppression of the working and peasant classes. This

separation entailed a corresponding decolonization of Brazilian culture, which evolved into the

call for a unified populist nationalism predicated on the restoration of authentic autochthonous

tradition. Areas of the country that had not yet been brought into the programs of modernization

and development were seen as pockets of authentic Brazilian life that could operates as the

wellspring of a revolutionary nationalist and populist politics.

In cinema, the dominance of Hollywood films in the domestic Brazilian market became a

mark of a corresponding cultural colonialism. In an interview with *Cineaste* entitled "Cinema

Novo vs. Cultural Colonialism," Rocha makes this point clear, arguing that, "the public in Latin

America is very colonized by Hollywood. The penetration of Hollywood in Latin America is not

only an *aesthetic* education but also, since it is psychological conditioning, a *colonial* education"

(Crowdus 4). The response to this, Rocha continues, is the development of a nationalist system

that opposed this studio aesthetic: "I think that in Latin America one should create a cinema

completely in opposition to Hollywood cinema […]. *Against,* because Hollywood produces a

colonizing cinema and we need a cinema against colonization" (qtd. in Crowdus 4). This anti-

imperial cinema typically took the form of militant documentary – a blend of neorealist

aesthetics and documentary practices that became, as Mariano Mestman claims, "Latin American

cinema's own genre and greenhouse" (167). The militant period of NLAC was thus dominated

by a persistent realist aesthetic perpetuated by the emphasis on documentary and the "testimonial

dimension" of fictional cinema (Mestman 168). Zuzana Pick argues that "this endorsement of

cinematic realism was the result of the experiences that filmmakers themselves made as they

came into contact with the reality of their respective counties" (42). Realism and the militant

documentary form (most famously developed in Solanas and Getino's open, essay-style

documentary *Hour of the Furnaces*) provided an aesthetic that not only countered the dominant

Hollywood style (thus lending itself to the constitution of a nationalist aesthetic in opposition to

colonial modes of expression) but also recreated cinema as a means of social action: "cinematic

realism was suited to challenge consensus and closure, and transform the cinema into an

empowering instance of social action through oppositional strategies capable of integrating

creativity into the struggle against underdevelopment" (Pick 42).[38]

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[38] The politics of realism in this period of Latin American filmmaking are complex, bound as
they are to questions of authorial intervention and social action. As such, realism is not seen as a
naïve assertion of the direct representation of the truth of reality directly communicated to the
viewer. Since the focus in this reading is the baroque period rather than the militant phase, the
theoretical nuances of this aesthetic are not central to this argument. For more on the relationship

What is most significant in this militant phase for our purposes here is the general tendency to represent revolution as teleologically imminent. Ismail Xavier sees this sense of revolutionary certainty as one of the fundamental characteristics of this period of political filmmaking, which the subsequent phase would come to critique (5). Similarly, The Latin American Subaltern Studies Group maintain that, "The new prestige that the [Cuban] revolution gave to Marxism among Latin American intellectuals and cultural workers provided an optimism and epistemological certainty regarding the nature of historical agency," a logic which was evinced in "the documentary film school of Santa Fe created in Argentina by Fernando Bírri, the films of the Brazilian Cinema Nouvo and Cuba's ICAIC, [and] the Bolivian concept of 'film with-the-people' – developed by Jorge Sanjinés and Grupo Ukamu" (138-39).

Given the emphasis in this chapter on Brazil, Rocha's *Black God White Devil* operates as a significant expression of this kind of teleological revolutionary thought. The film tells the story of Manuel, a worker on the *sertão*[39] who, eventually overwhelmed by the poverty and exploitation of his situation, kills his boss after he tries to cheat Manuel out of his wages. Manuel flees with his wife Rosa to follow Sebastião, a fanatical preacher. After Rosa kills Sebastião, the couple then joins with Corisco, the last of the *cangacerios* – the peasant bandits that roamed the *sertão* after having fled the oppressions of the landowners. At the end of the film, Antônio das Mortes, killer of *cangaceiros,* has found the group and kills Corisco. The action of this scene is dictated by the verbal cues of the narrator's voiceover, who sings a song that tells the story of

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between realism and Latin American politics, see Pick or Julianne Burton's edited collection, *The Social Documentary in Latin America* that takes up Latin American documentary filmmaking as "an instrument of cultural exploration, national definition, epistemological inquiry, and social and political transformation" (6).

[39] The *sertão* is an arid region in Brazil, typically associated with an exploited peasantry who labor in oppressive working conditions.

this duel. As Corisco dies, his body outstretched in the form of a cross, he becomes a martyr for

the peasant cause, a sentiment echoed in his final cry, "stronger are the powers of the people!"

After his death the refrain, "the *sertão* will become the sea and the sea the *sertão*" is repeated on

the sound track, as Manuel and Rosa, whose lives Antônio has spared, run in a straight line

across the *sertão*. This "*corrida*," which Xavier describes as "the first straight-line vector within

a trajectory marked by constant circling of glances, movements, and even thought" (32),

reinforces a sense of straightforward movement toward the future of revolutionary

transformation suggested by the repeated refrain. The same refrain is heard several times

throughout the film as various characters discuss their dreams of a happy life so that the

transformation of the *sertão* into the sea becomes a metaphor for revolutionary transformation.

Indeed, the closing shots of the film show the *sertão* being flooded and transformed into the sea

so that this revolution is metaphorically realized. Thus while, as Xavier points out, "Manuel's

corrida does not imply any 'model for action' typical of political films with pedagogical

concerns" (33), it does reproduce a teleological sense of revolution. This prophetic conclusion,

for critics like Xavier and Lúcia Nagib, "renders actual the telos that guides the main characters

through the film" and is "the projection toward the glimpsed future and the certainty of radical

transformation" (Xavier 33, 32).

However, as the 1960s progressed and Latin American governments became increasingly

authoritarian, both the realist aesthetic and this imminent sense of revolution that underscored the

militant phase of NLAC gave way to new aesthetics and revolutionary ideologies. Both

Rodríguez and B. Ruby Rich argue that the aesthetic shift was predicated on a new need to

demonstrate marketability and a desire to avoid censorship: "Cinema was "stunted by the

military coup that overthrew João Goulart in 1964. Then the coup-within-the-coup of 1968

generally eroded the cultural zones of tolerance, and led to the emphasis in Brazilian cinema in this period upon metaphor and symbolic allusion" (276).[40] Cinema Nõvo's transition from a politically invested neorealism into a militant realist/documentary genre took place in the early 1960s. In 1964, the military coup interrupted the teleology that underscored this phase and simultaneously placed both new demands and restraints on cinematic production. Although the relationship between the new government and the national film industry remained fairly amicable, at least during the early years of the new regime, increasing censorship and political repression severely undermined any belief in imminent revolutionary transformation. By 1968 the coup-within-the-coup that transformed Brazil into an authoritarian police state forced several filmmakers associated with this militant leftism to flee the country (Rocha included) and the movement began to decline. As Rui Guerra puts it:

> Cinema Novo had very little time to develop. We began making our first films in 1962, and in 1964 there was the *coup d'état.* So we had only two years. From 1964 to 1968 there was a limited political and economic space for a certain kind of production, but it became increasingly difficult to make films. In truth, the birth, apogee, and decline of Cinema Novo came in a very short period of time. (Johnson and Stam 103)

Terra em Transe was released in 1967 and, along with Aléa's *Memories of Underdevelopment,* (Cuba, 1968), comprises what Rodríguez sees as the transitional period

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[40] Rodríguez similarly argues that, "as Latin American governments turned authoritarian in the late 1960s and early 1970s, many filmmakers shifted gears to reach art-house audiences, steer clear of censorship, and still maintain a strong commitment to film as a transformative art" (91).

between NLAC's militant and neobaroque periods.[41] Given that the film was borne of a moment when the optimistic confidence of revolutionary transformation was washed away by the rising tide of right-wing authoritarianism, some critics see *Terra em Transe* as a dystopian film that critiques Rocha's earlier Utopian vision in *Black God White Devil*. Consequently, the two films, made on either side of the coup, are seen as expressions of a prior Utopian faith in imminent revolution and the later "post-utopian […] demise of the revolutionary project" in the face of right-wing victory (Nagib 13). Similarly, Xavier argues that *Terra em Transe* is "a dramatic representation of the crisis of the teleology assumed by *Black God White Devil*; the allegory now forcefully reworks the figures of disenchantment typical of the baroque drama depicted by Walter Benjamin" (18). However, while the film is certainly critical of the ideologies of populist nationalism, it is not a wholesale abandonment of the revolutionary investments of the militant period. Although for Xavier *Terra em Transe*'s baroque styling is tied to its disillusionment with revolutionary politics, following Rodríguez's classification of NLAC neobaroque, this aesthetic actually becomes the means through which the film develops a new revolutionary orientation.

Terra em Transe and the Spectacle of Populism

     Terra em Transe takes place in the fictional country of El Dorado where Paolo Martins, a poet and political activist attempts to convince Felipe Vieira, Governor of the province of Alecrim, to resist the impending right-wing coup led by the neoimperialist Porfirio Diaz. When Vieira refuses, Paolo angrily leaves his mansion and, in an act of romantic defiance, drives

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[41] Films that fully constitute the neobaroque phase include: *How Tasty was my Little Frenchman* (Santos, Brazil, 1971); *The Last Supper* (Alea, Cuba, 1976); *Org* (Bírri, Italy, 1978); *Maluala* (Giral, Cuba, 1979), and *The Age of the Earth* (Rocha, Brazil, 1980).

through a police blockade and is subsequently shot by Diaz's forces. Slowly dying, Paolo recalls

the events that led to his demise. Four years ago, Paolo left Diaz's employ to work for Vieira's

gubernatorial campaign. But when Vieira betrays the people and turns the police on the

protestors, Paolo quits and joins in the hedonistic pursuits of the press magnate Fernandez

Fuentes. Vieira's aide and Paolo's ex-girlfriend, Sara, succeeds in bringing Paolo back to work

on Vieira's presidential campaign by asking him to make a film revealing Diaz's political

treachery and his allegiance to the formless neoimperial conglomerate, EXPLINT. Diaz,

threatened by Vieira's popularity with the masses and concerned that it will cost him the

presidential election, foments a *coup d'état* with the help of Fuentes, who was originally

supporting Vieira. From here, the film returns to its opening scene, crosscutting images of Paolo

dying on a deserted highway with images of Diaz's elaborate coronation as President. The film is

baroque and impressionistic, its operatic tone, stylized acting, dramatic poetic dialogue, and

discontinuous editing combining to produce a complex and disunified narrative that examines the

failures of Brazilian populism.

Since the film focuses on a political coup and the collapse of populist government, it is

generally considered to be a loosely allegorical narrative about the history of Getulism in Brazil.

During his presidency (effectively 1930 to 1954[42]) Gétulio Vargas and, to a large extent his

successors Juscelino Kubitschek and João Goulart, perpetuated a populist politics known as

Getulism. Nicknamed "Father of the Poor," Vargas espoused an ostensibly nationalist populist

rhetoric that favored workers rights and social welfare, and he made numerous concessions to the

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[42] Vargas was installed in office by military power and outside political influence during the 1930 revolution. In 1937 he instituted an authoritarian corporatist regime known as *Estado Novo*. Vargas ceded power during free elections in 1945 but was reelected to office in 1951 and remained President until his suicide in 1954.

working classes, including the formation of state-organized trade unions. However, Vargas remained a staunch anti-Communist and maintained significant ties to the landowning class and to foreign capital. Indeed, Getulism was constituted by the balancing of this profound contradiction where the President's nationalist, populist rhetoric was undercut by a deeper commitment to the prevailing twin logics of developmentalism and industrialization. The landowners, to whom Getulism demonstrated the strongest loyalty, tolerated the President's populism as long as the economic status quo was maintained. In fact, his populist policies went a long way towards precluding the fermenting of Marxist insurrection as the unions were under the sway of the government and the workers were granted just enough concessions to stave off this kind of revolutionary organizing. However, as the industrial economic boom ended, the balance between nationalist populism and transnational capitalism imploded and Goulart, labeled a socialist threat by the military and right-wing sectors, was ousted through *coup d'état* at the end of March, 1964. The similarities between this history and the narrative of *Terra em Transe* are clearly apparent, so much so that Xavier sees the film as an allegorical engagement with the failures of Brazilian populism and the reasons for the conservative ascendency.[43]

Terra em Transe, the second film in Rocha's Land Trilogy, opens with a long tracking shot across the ocean that takes up the closing images of *Black God White Devil.*[44] As a kind of

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[43] While Vieira resembles Vargas and his successors through his contradictory populism, his conservative opponent, Porfirio Díaz, is named after the Mexican dictator from the end of the nineteenth century whose politics of modernization and political repression echo loudly those of Diaz in the film and of Brazil's post-*coup* President, Castello Branco. In this sense, while the film is invested in the particularities of Brazil's political situation, it does gesture towards the generalization of these issues across the continent.

[44] The Portuguese title of *Black God White Devil,* the first film in the trilogy, is *Deus e o Diablo no Terra del Sol,* which literally translates as "God and the Devil in the Land of the Sun." The

continuation of this first film, the sea that opens *Terra em Transe* is the transformed *sertão* of

Black God White Devil, which is to say, it is the post-revolutionary paradise that the latter film

evoked with its conclusion. To begin with, *Terra em Transe* seems to be the realization of the

national populist millennial vision of the earlier film; while the *candomblé* music on the

soundtrack evokes the native Afro-Indian Brazilian population, the sea gives way to a lush and

verdant land that a title imposed over the image tells us is El Dorado – the promised land of

plenty. However, as the camera cuts to Governor Felipe Vieira as he decides to concede to an

impending *coup d'état,* it quickly becomes apparent that El Dorado is far from this populist

paradise. The teleological certainty of victory implied at the end of *Black God White Devil* is

thus undone in the opening scenes of *Terra em Transe* where the optimism of imminent

revolutionary triumph gives way to disenchantment in the face of a rising authoritarian regime.

This undoing of teleological revolutionary certainty is reinforced in the first scene of

Paolo's flashback where Diaz, dressed in a modern suit, is shown landing on the beach

accompanied by a priest in a catholic habit, a sixteenth century Spanish conquistador, and a

native Indian. Diaz then initiates a ritual that echoes the first mass performed by early colonists

to celebrate the discovery of the New World. Thus, the sea, rather than being the source of an

autochthonous nationalist revolutionary paradise, is shown to be "the origin of the continent's

anti-popular authoritarianism and class struggle" (Nagib 18). A two-fold link, then, is established

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third film, *A Idade da Terra* (*The Age of the Earth*) was made in 1980 when Rocha returned to
Brazil from exile. As the last film that Rocha made, it is seen as a culmination of the ideas
expressed in his earlier films and "a condensed panorama of all [his] characters" (Klinger). *A
Idade da Terra* is typically read as an example of the aesthetics of garbage as it was, in part, an
homage to the *Boca do Lixo* (Mouth of Garbage) film movement that was contemporary with the
neobaroque phase of NLAC. For more on the relationship between Rocha's aesthetics of hunger
and garbage, see Robert Stam's "Hybridity and the Aesthetics of Garbage: The Case of Brazilian
Cinema."

between the revolutionary promise of *Black God White Devil* and authoritarianism. On one level, that the sea gives birth to Diaz signals how the 1964 coup undermined any confidence in an imminent populist revolutionary victory; leftist rebellion gave way to a right-wing dictatorship, not a Communist paradise. On another level, however, and one borne out across the film, the scene positions the nationalist populism of *Black God White Devil's* revolution as fundamentally similar to the authoritarianism of Diaz's dictatorship: both are ideologies that control rather than liberate.

Terra em Transe formulates its critique of populism through its presentation of Vieira. That the Governor is not committed to the people he purports to represent is made most clear in his refusal to arrest the Colonel who murders a peasant (we are told it is not the first time) in order to protect his campaign contributors and in his subsequent decision to use the police to silence the protest. This critique is deepened during Vieira's political rallies where his populism is presented as a performance that demonstrates little genuine interest in the needs of the people. During these rallies, Vieira repeatedly fails to listen to his would-be constituents. Performing for the cameras (he is followed everywhere by a reporter), Vieira asks an old peasant woman to speak about the issues that concern her but the sounds of the rally drown out what she says. Vieira continues unphased, however, telling his aides to "write it all down" even though they have no idea what she said. Another peasant, upon seeing this mute exchange, similarly tries to speak. But his speech is slow and as he stumbles through his sentences, Vieira dismisses him with the assurance that he will "solve these problems" before the peasant is able to articulate the issue. He again tries to speak and Vieira gestures to the on-looking crowd as he affirms to them that the people should be able to speak, but as he turns back to the peasant the band plays over whatever the peasant is saying and the camera cuts away before he can make his point known.

These exchanges construct Vieira's populism as a performance for the crowd; he says the right things (that the people should be heard, that he will address their issues), but his behavior betrays his disinterest in actually helping the people at all. This sense of performance is reinforced later in the rally when Vieira gives his speech. In this moment the sound is nonsynchronous with the image so that the content of Vieira's speech appears to have been overdubbed at a later date. His actions in front of the crowd, therefore, are simply a performance engineered to read as gestures of sincere political commitment. The idea that these rallies are empty spectacles, performances of populism that lack any underlying political commitment, is brought home by the fact that the signs the crowd carries are blank – there is, quite literally, no political content.

As well as demonstrating Vieira's politics as an empty performance of populism, these rallies also render apparent the false sense of national unity upon which such populist politics is founded. The crowds are comprised of a range of disparate and contradictory figures: politicians, government representatives, priests, students, native Indians, journalists, peasants, union leaders, children, samba troupes, and old women. However, these divisions lose their immediacy as the crowd begins to dance the samba and the rally transforms into a carnival where everyone starts moving together. In this way, the disparate groups that comprise the audience of the rally come together in unison, their coordinated actions making the crowd cohere into one unified whole: the people. Yet it quickly becomes apparent that this sense of unity is (much like carnival itself) a performance of political equality. Sara, concerned that the crowd is getting out of hand, invites the union head, Jeronimo, to speak. As a representative of "the people" chosen by Vieira, Jeronimo is part of the official left and can thus only toe the party line: "Everything is wrong. I really don't know what to do. The best thing to do is to await the president's command." He is immediately called out by a peasant who pushes his way through the crowd to speak: "Jeronimo

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does the people's politics but he's not the people. I am. I have seven children and nowhere to live." But the peasant, who finally articulates the problems that "the people" are facing is expressly denounced as an "extremist" and killed by the crowd. As such, the rally enacts "an allegorical representation of Brazilian populism as carnival, as a grotesque juxtaposition of incongruous figures, as a display of dancing masks miming the unity of forces that are in fact incompatible" (Xavier 75). The execution of the peasant, silencing his voice and expelling him from the crowd, ultimately reveals that "the people" is not only a constructed class, but even more perniciously a fictive unity used to shore up political power at the expense of populist or subaltern dissent. The sense of solidarity that the rally espouses is simply another performance, one that papers over fundamental divides by excluding things it cannot control and denouncing what it refuses to deal with; as one of the politicians at the rally cries, "hunger and illiteracy are extremist propaganda." As such, this constructed idea of the people is more than just false; it is *violently and horrifically* false, maintaining a sense of bourgeois unity through the spectacular sacrifice of the peasantry. Indeed, in a scene highly reminiscent of the ship doctor's inspection of the rotting meat in *Battleship Potemkin,* the man who decries extremist propaganda examines the body of the dead peasant with his pince-nez only to declare that everything is "perfectly healthy." Through this allusion, *Terra em Transe* aligns the populist government with the oppressive upper class as part of the same system that seeks to control and oppress.

The similarities between populism and conservatism are further developed through the film's use of doubling; characters may appear distinct but they all echo each other in profound ways. Perhaps the most prominent example of this is Paolo and Diaz who, according to Xavier, are "two faces of the same authoritarian principle" (90). Aside from both beginning their political careers on the left and being lifelong friends, Paolo and Diaz are linked through their

shared dislike of the masses. Indeed, Paolo may profess a populist rhetoric but he brutally attacks

several peasants, calling them "weak," "cowardly," and "servile," and he imagines himself

suppressing the masses on Vieira's orders. In other moments Paolo's voice is imposed over

Diaz's mouth so that it appears as if Paolo is speaking through Diaz. Thus, despite the former's

remonstrations that "he is not in my blood!" Paolo himself comments that Diaz is "dying like

me" and Alvaro refers to Paolo as "a dirty copy of Diaz."

In his reading of the film, Robert Stam argues that *Terra em Transe* circulates around the

theme of "apparent difference" where a skein of supposedly opposed characters all share similar

traits and "subterranean affinities" (*Land in Anguish*). Indeed, other characters from supposedly

antithetical political positions similarly echo each other. The parallel montage of the two

presidential campaigns highlights certain superficial differences in rhetoric between Vieira and

Diaz while at the same time marking a series of similarities between the two: both are theatrical

performances that position the candidates above the people (Diaz climbs a mountain while Vieira

waves from his balcony), both speeches favor highly poetic calls for national unity, and, at times,

the crowd around Vieira sounds as if it is chanting "Diaz." Similarly, Paolo, Vieira, and Diaz are

all referred to as "adventurers" at some point in the narrative and their homes all share similar

architectural details (three archways divided by columns), thus reinforcing a sense of connection

between all three. Indeed, this architectural detail can be read metaphorically as a representation

of these three characters; Paolo, Vieira, and Diaz are thus imbedded in the film's iconography as

similar foundational elements of the same oppressive structure. Even the more minor characters

appear as echoes of these three: Alvero is similar to Paolo (they both worked for Diaz, were both

Silvia's lovers, and now both support Vieira), and Sara, who in some ways appears as the most

rational and committed leftist, only ever acts according to Vieira's direction and never strays

from his ideas. Similarly, Fuentes moves from Vieira's camp to Diaz's while Alvaro moves the other way, emphasizing the interchangeability of these positions. Even Paolo's most rebellious gesture – his raising of the machine gun over his head – is echoed by both Diaz and Alvaro.

What becomes apparent in this systemic doubling of characters is that there is no real difference between these political positions; all are bound to a similar rhetoric of mythical national unification which, rather that stabilizing the country and elevating its poor, actually serves to shore up political power and further oppress the masses. The similarities between these positions lead Xavier to claim that *Terra em Transe* is singularly critical of the revolutionary project: "the fight for power is reduced to a game of individual passions and endless treachery," a "courtly affair" divorced from the needs of the masses (90). This profound disenchantment with revolutionary possibility extends to revolutionary art so that Xavier reads the film as marking both the utter failure of the pre-*coup* left and the revolutionary endeavors of Cinema Nõvo: "In this tradition, the role of the scholar is to aspire to become the prince's counselor, to accept the rules of the game […]. The poet, once defeated, enacts the agony of his illusory status, maintaining at the same time an obstinate narcissism in a discourse that is obsessive and self-indulgent in its pomp and ceremony" (90). However, while *Terra em Transe'*s critique of populist revolutionary ideology is certainly pervasive, the film's baroque aesthetic does more than imply the "courtly" nature of politics and the divide between politics and the people. Alongside this critique, *Terra em Transe* also engages with alternate understandings of revolutionary process engendered by the failures of populism and the subsequent *coup* as well as the concomitant transformation of revolutionary artistic expression that this shift entails. The film thus performs a kind of Benjaminian *Umkehr,* that is, "a movement that *changes* direction without simply negating its previous direction or returning [to] its point of departure" (Weber

15). While the film turns it back on the teleological notion of revolution and its concomitant oppressive ideologies, it brings this same revolutionary commitment to bear on its turn towards new formulations of political thought and expression.

A Baroque Revolution

Although Rocha's films have always been some of the most experimental and esoteric examples of NLAC, the overtly baroque tone of *Terra em Transe* marks a decisive shift away from the neorealist aesthetic that typically characterized its militant phase. This aesthetic shift is bound up with a rejection of the didacticism of this earlier period that was tied to its epistemological empiricism; what Bírri established as the need for national cinemas to document their reality translated in revolutionary terms as the need to clearly communicate the "truth" of material conditions to the audience and raise social and political consciousness. As discussed earlier and as Stam argues in relation to NLAC, this theory of political cinematic representation, grounded as it is in the idea of filmmaker as arbiter of knowledge, becomes inherently paternalistic: "It claims that art should speak to the people in simple and transparent language, at the risk of not 'communicating'" (*Land in Anguish*). Consequently, the baroque turn is not about the restoration of a conservative aesthetic but about finding new ways to critique social relations without positing a bankrupt form of authenticity as the counterpoint. As Rodríguez argues, "By drawing on practices that the militant NLAC had shunned because it considered them to be intrinsically conservative, the neobaroque NLAC effectively expands the militant NLAC's narrow political/aesthetic modernism, so that even when traditional formulas are brought into play, they are used to denounce the artifice of unequal social relations, rather than being reinforced as natural or desirable (105).

The power of this critique centers on the baroque's emphasis on artificiality. Angela Ndalianis describes the baroque aesthetic – expressed through techniques such as intertextuality, semantic play, parody, theatricality, hyperbole, and oneirism – as extravagant, ornate, complex, impulsive, chaotic, and fundamentally lacking the reason and discipline of the Enlightenment. As such, it represents the "decline of the classical and harmonious ideal" (7). In Latin American art, Ndalianis argues that this compulsive engagement with fragmentation and illusionism marks "a formal strategy that could be used to contest the 'truth' of dominant ideologies" (12). Rodríguez echoes this thinking by distinguishing the functions of the baroque and neobaroque in "the global economic metropolis" from its functions in the periphery: "Generally speaking, baroque and neobaroque works in the global economic metropolis tend to situate those in power at the center of clearly demarcated social hierarchies, whereas baroque and neobaroque works in the global economic periphery tend to situate marginalized subjects at the heart of narrative and visual compositions in such a way that existing social and cultural distinctions, rather than being clearly demarcated, are inverted or else altogether lost in an excess of signifiers" (95). This means that "baroque and neobaroque works in the metropolis tend to position viewers so that we identify with existing structures of power and social relations, whereas baroque and neobaroque works in the periphery tend to position us to identify with those whom society marginalizes" (96). Thus in the metropolis, the baroque signifies counter-reformation, while the neobaroque imparts imperialism; conversely, in the periphery, the former expresses counter-conquest and the latter anti-imperialism (97). In *Terra em Transe,* this critique of dominant ideology functions in two ways: through the deconstruction of a sense of unification and its replacement with a multivalent point of view.

In relation to the revolutionary investments of the film, this deconstruction translates into the loss of a clearly unified political position or process. Vieira preserves this ideological position, evoking the fantasy of "the people" as a unified force through his rallies and his claims that "only one force can change history and nobody will stop it." Upon uttering this statement, however, the film cuts to Vieira's mansion as Paolo tells him of the *coup*. This transition radically undercuts Vieira's confidence in a uni-linear teleological revolution; "the people" is not a unified group that will unwaveringly progress towards victory, it is a fictional construct whose ability to enact revolutionary transformation has been fundamentally stymied, if not entirely corrupted.

Terra em Transe further undermines this sense of a unified political position by refusing to establish a clear point of identification for the audience via a character who embodies the revolutionary attitude that should be adopted. As we've already seen, the characters are all too similar for any one to stand out as a representative of a "correct" politics. Rather, they all (with the possible exception of Diaz who remains a more unequivocally negative symbol) embody traits that appear admirable in certain contexts and problematic in others (Sara's commitment to a populist politics, for example, or Paolo's staunch advocacy of armed resistance). The monological ideology of populist nationalism, grounded in the restoration of an authentic and traditional way of life beyond the influence of neoimperial intervention and assured through the teleological drive of history, is undone by the interruptive force of the *coup* and the conflicted politics of the characters.

The film also undermines this sense of ideological unity through its neobaroque aesthetic. The structure of *Terra em Transe* is elliptical, poetic, oneiric, and overly dramatic. Central to the production of this stylized operatic tone is the rejection of the principles of continuity editing. In

place of a unified and coherent linear narrative, the film employs jumps cuts, overlapping and elliptical editing techniques and violations of the axis of action, as well as nonsynchronous, nonsimultaneous, and dissonant sound. Indeed, even though at its core the film relates a basically straightforward story, the flashback structure disrupts this linearity; as Xavier makes clear, *Terra em Transe* is "hardly organized along a conventional pattern of conscious reminiscing" (64) as Paolo's poetic sensibility produces a fairly incoherent set of recollections. As a result, the film appears highly fragmented and disordered. Thus, the disjuncture and incoherence that characterizes its political expression is echoed in the formal structure of the film where reality is presented as a disunified dramatic performance. Against the idea of a true and authentic reality to be uncovered, *Terra em Transe* emphasizes the constructed nature of reality, its performative, operatic, and stylized aesthetic underscoring this rejection of the objective state of things.

This turn to the baroque and its emphasis on artifice does not signal the abandonment of the revolutionary aims of the militant period but their reworking. As Ndalianis points out,

> whereas the Latin American baroque (of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) was simply a colonial extension of the European (and, in particular, the Spanish) baroque, the neobaroque embraces a more critical stance by returning to the European (as opposed to colonial) origins […]. The aim was to reclaim history by appropriating a period often considered to be the "original" baroque thereby rewriting the codes and "truths" imposed on Latin America by its colonizers. By reclaiming the past through the baroque form, these contemporary Latin American writers could also reclaim their history. The new version of history that resulted from this reclamation spoke of the elusive nature of truth, of historical "fact," of "reality." (14)

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The baroque aesthetic thus maintains the militant period's revolutionary aim of reclaiming history. However, this gesture is reenacted not as the reclamation of an authentic national populist identity but instead as the deconstruction of the very grounds of this retrogressive notion. In this way, the idea of an authentic and unified Brazilian identity is undone at the same time that the ideologies imposed by colonialism are undone. History is reclaimed not as a return to authenticity but as the freedom to create reality outside of these imposed limits. The baroque's emphasis on artifice and the bankruptcy of truth claims undoes the orthodox narrative of revolution with the argument that all of its precepts are constructions: there is no fundamental truth to history and therefore no class proper to revolution, no correct revolutionary process, and no predetermined path towards it realization. Revolution, rather than attempting to recover an autochthonous and singular way of life, becomes about the power to freely construct and create reality.

As a result of this new understanding of revolution, *Terra em Transe* looks to replace the singular vision of populist revolution with a polyvalent and unstable understanding of reality and, thus, of social and political transformation. As Rodríguez argues, "the neobaroque NLAC rejected univocal narratives and realist mise-en scène, as these would reproduce the one-dimensional perspectives associated with the liberal revolutionary populisms that it sought to demystify" (102). This is primarily achieved through the interconnection of reality and fantasy. In the closing scenes of the film, Paolo's death is cross cut with Diaz's coronation. While the overall effect of the scene is highly oneiric and abstract, we can discern, as Xavier so carefully details, two different presentations of the coronation itself. The first appears to be Paolo's imagination – he is present at the coronation and crawls up the stairs holding a gun in preparation to shoot Diaz. The dreamlike quality of this version of the coronation is reinforced by the fact

that the actual execution is carried out by the peasant worker that died earlier in the film and by the rapid editing and cacophonous soundtrack that accompanies the sequence. However, after Diaz is executed the sequence begins again and a second presentation of the coronation is crosscut with Paolo's death throes on the highway. This second version of events seems to take place outside of Paolo's imagination as an actual objective event. In this sequence the dissonant sound and short takes of the first are replaced with silence and long takes. Thus, while the effect of the first sequence is of an imagined event seen through Paolo's fevered mind, the second appears to adopt an external point of view. This tension between an internal imagined event and an external objective event is echoed in the two different presentations of the run-up to Paolo's shooting; at the beginning of the film, the event appears as an objective sequence signaled through long takes, while at the end it appears as a fragmented and chaotic subjective experience. In fact, Paolo's poetic sensibility infects the narration of the entire film, which at times appears straightforward and objective and at other times firmly lodged in his imagination so that for most of the film the ontological status of events is hard to determine. However, these two different presentations, despite differences in editing and sound, remain remarkably similar and the film refuses to draw a sharp distinction between reality and fantasy. Rather, Paolo's point of view and the externalized third person perspective are presented as "mediations sharing the same attitude" (Xavier 67). As a result, they become interrelated but not unified.

This interconnected sense of objective and subjective perspective is echoed in the movement of the camera. In the opening scene on Vieira's terrace, for example, the camera moves in a circular motion around the characters as they debate their options. When Paolo arrives to convince Vieira to resist the coup, the camera becomes static and Paolo takes up its movement as he starts walking in a circle around the people, critically commenting on their

conversation. By doubling the movement of the camera with Paolo's physical movement, his subjective engagement with the conversation becomes inflected in the objective movement of the camera and vice versa. As such, the idea of a coherent reality is undermined by its presentation as a state fundamentally bound to the subjective; what is left is the realization that objective reality and subjective experience are not mutually exclusive, but neither can they be simply collapsed into each other or dialectically resolved into a unified third term encompassing the totality of both views by resolving their contradictions and particularities. *Terra em Transe*'s polyvalent narrative perspective instead implies the malleability of objective reality as a set of experiences conditioned by subjective desires and vice versa, the two being mutually constitutive of each other. Paolo's recollection of events is thus not false (a subjective distortion of objective reality) but neither is it singularly true. Rather, it constitutes *a* truth, and we can imagine an infinite series of recollections that would differently treat this series of events, each of them equally true and real.

Following this logic, the film refuses to limit itself to a univocal revolutionary position. As a result, political attitudes and actions towards which we may be theoretically sympathetic are spread across a range of different characters and undercut by that person's other attitudes and actions. Indeed, on one level, the film is structured around the question of what constitutes the right political action as Paolo's political trajectory – from his entry into Vieira's employ to his death – is motivated by his desire to bring about revolutionary transformation. As such, most of the film is taken up with discussions between Paolo and various other characters about what should and should not be done, and whether what was done was the right thing. Consistent throughout these debates it the film's continual refusal to make it clear what the answer should be: is Vieira's desire to protect the people and avoid bloodshed right ("the blood of the people is

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sacred"), or is Paolo's call to arms the right action ("Blood isn't important […]. History isn't changed by tears")? Thus, Xavier is right to argue that the film represents "the hour of the decision," but the decisions made in the film simply prompt further questions as their consequences seem fundamentally unsatisfactory and the alternatives they present patently refuse to clarify the better option. In this way, the film repudiates any clear articulation of a correct revolutionary politics, and while there are inflections and references that evoke the question of revolution, they persist in an incoherent and contradictory fashion.

The neobaroque aesthetic thus highlights the constructed nature not only of cinema (against the epistemological realism of militant NLAC), but also of reality as well (against the idea of revolution as the recovery of an authentic national populist identity whose realization is teleologically assured). As such, it subverts both the universalized political truth claims of both the authoritarian regimes that took hold of Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s, and of the populist revolutionary movements that attempted to counter them. The neobaroque thus becomes a means of articulating a new pluralized, at times intentionally contradictory, non-unified and non-linear understanding of revolutionary transformation. Significantly, as in *Tout va Bien,* the preservation of this heterogeneous sense of revolution and the refusal of political didacticism means that the film conveys revolution without representing it as such.

The Absent Signified

This alternate aesthetic of a kind of indirect representation of revolution in *Terra em Transe* is bought into focus through its difference from the film-within-the-film – "Biography of an Adventurer" – that Paolo makes in order to defame Diaz. This brief political tract, comprising "documentary" footage of Diaz in the grounds of his mansion, is made according to the logic of

the militant period; while it is somewhat experimental in its form, it relies on documentary footage and employs a highly didactic voiceover to make its political points clear. Consequently, this film-within-a-film serves as a critique of the militant documentary genre. As Stam describes it, "The 'Biography' is a piece of militant journalism sponsored by one political force in order to destroy another political force. It is the kind of film that politically committed filmmakers often make or are encouraged to make—clear, factual, militant, and immediately 'useful'" (*Land in Anguish*). In *Terra em Transe*, however, this genre is demystified and shown to be constructed, politically manipulative, and ultimately inefficacious.

While the baroque aesthetic of the larger film highlights artifice, "Biography" does so in a different way. Stam continues:

> As an off screen voice delineates his perfidies, Diaz laughs as if he were conscious of the soundtrack but unmoved. The footage has obviously been manipulated, for we see Diaz perform in a film whose political ends he would never have approved. The technique reminds us that all films are fabrications; it illustrates Godard's notion that the distinction between documentary and fiction film is an arbitrary one.

Against its empirical appearance, the realism of the militant phase of NLAC is here shown to be equally artificial and constructed and its truth a product of cinematic manipulation. More than highlighting the artifice of militant documentary, "Biography" also suggests the failure of the genre; neither early Cinema Nõvo nor Paolo's film (an homage to that genre), is capable of inciting revolution or preventing the military *coup*. Indeed, the manipulation of the footage that Stam points to where Diaz appears to be laughing at Paolo's defamatory voiceover highlights the film's inefficacy; Diaz, unphased by their cinematic revelation, simply laughs off these

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accusations. Despite its clear political message and didactic tone, the film-within-the-film has no effect on the political situation and dissolves into the larger filmic text without event as the "Biography" just seems to stop and *Terra em Transe* resume so that Paolo's film simply passes by without comment.

Unlike "Biography of an Adventurer," which hides it artifice under the guise of revealing the truth of Diaz's political dirty-dealings, *Terra em Transe,* as a neobaroque film, immediately announces its own artifice through its overblown theatrics, melodramatic action, and operatic tone. In his famous theorization of the Latin American neobaroque, Sevaro Sarduy defines it as "the apotheosis of artifice, the irony and mocking of nature, the finest expression of that process" (272). Sarduy's definition of the neobaroque runs contrary to other Latin American authors, specifically d'Ors and Carpentier, who see the baroque as an expression of natural reality. For Sarduy, conversely, the neobaroque is the very antithesis of the natural; it is a fundamental process of "*artificialization*" (272). This process operates according to three mechanisms, the substitution, the proliferation, and the condensation of signifiers, whose collective function is to undermine any supposed natural relationship between signifier and signified.

Terra em Transe makes particular use of the mechanism of proliferation, politicizing its effects so that it becomes a means of implying revolution without articulating it. Sarduy defines proliferation as the process of "obliterating the signifier of a given signified without replacing it with another, however distant the latter might be from the former, but rather by a chain of signifiers that progresses metonymically and that ends by circumscribing the absent signifier, tracing an orbit around it, an orbit whose reading – which we could call a radial reading – enables us to infer it" (Sarduy 273). As noted above, *Terra em Transe* is a film that circulates around the attempt to determine the correct action to incite "Revolution" (the signified) but the

film continually refuses to clearly answer this question. Rather, it presents a proliferation of signifiers that imply "revolution" – armed struggle, personal protest, self-sacrifice, compromise, love, the voice of the people, hedonism, political assassination, absolute commitment, populist leadership – without clearly articulating which is correct. This purported failure to coalesce into a clear and stable meaning is, in actuality, fundamental to the baroque aesthetic: "th[is] heterogeneous grouping of 'emptied' objects does not lead us, even in a subtly allegorical way, to any precise signified; the radial reading is *deceptive* in the Barthesian sense of the word: enumeration is presented as an *open* chain" (Sarduy 275-76). The baroque aesthetic thus enables Rocha to infer revolution without fully representing it and thus reifying it into a specific set of ideals and actions or historical laws and orthodox axioms.

The construction of the process of signification as an "open chain," a system of "uncontainable metonymization," (271) means that idea of revolution implied in *Terra em Transe* is more than simply that which is not directly represented. Indeed, were we to consider proliferation as a closed allegorical mechanism, the film would simply reify what revolution is by carving out its shape as a fully determined absence. Rather, since the baroque process of artificialization represents an "always inconclusive, unrealizable projection of signification" (276), this potentially limitless proliferation of signifiers means that the signified can never be resolved: revolution remains in a perpetual state of ongoing re-determination.

An example of the mechanism of proliferation occurs at the end of the film when Paolo, in his last dying moments, lays out his revolutionary critique of Brazilian political society:

> No more decorations, this joyous pomp of glories, the golden hope on the plateau.
> No more this regal parade with war and Christ marching side by side. No more
> the impotence of faith, the naivety of faith. It is no longer possible. We are eternal

sons of darkness, of inquisition and conversion, and we are forever sons of fear of

our brother's blood. And we don't accept our violence. We don't accept our ideas,

and neither our barbarian hate. We don't assume our stupid and feeble past, plenty

of prayers and laziness. A landscape abounds over indolent souls. These indolent

races, servile to God and the lords. A typical passive indolence of indolent people.

Ah, I can't believe it is all true! How long can we stand it? How long beyond faith

and hope can we stand it? Until when, beyond patience and love, can we stand it?

Until when, oblivious to fear, beyond childhood and adolescence, can we stand it?

In this speech, Paolo denounces political performance, artificial populism, and faith in historical

determinism. He denounces the hypocrisy of a revolution that walks arm in arm with

neoimperialism, chauvinistic religiosity, and the fantasy of restoring some authentic, traditional,

ur-Brazilian identity. Paolo calls out those that shrink from fighting back against the dominations

perpetuated by religious and class ideology, criticizing them for failing to recognize their own

fears and motivations. While the speech clearly adopts a revolutionary tone, one reinforced by

the fact that these are Paolo's dying words, uttered as he raises a machine gun above his head,

what we can deduce from this list does not result in a clear picture of revolution. While the

speech denotes certain fundamental characteristics of what revolution is *not* while at the same

time marking its necessity ("how long can we stand [last without] it?"), the precise nature of

revolutionary action remains beyond the contours of the delineable.

Implying the concept of revolution through the proliferation of signifiers across the film

allows for competition, contradiction, and negation in its representation. As a result, revolution is

not a monolithic thing but a multivalent and changeable concept. That the baroque is a

"mechanism of periphrasis, of digression and detour, of duplication and even tautology" (Sarduy

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281) means that *Terra em Transe* "crowns and dethrones, displays, deforms, duplicates, inverts, strips, [and] overloads" (282) the viewer with various ideas of what revolution could or even should be. The presentation of the signified in this complex and multiple fashion "enriches our perception" of it while at the same time it refuses the didactic position that presumes a singular truth to reality. As Sarduy maintains, proliferation "make[s] conjectural that which it obliterates" (277) so that the idea of revolution remains complex, multiple, changeable, and subjective.

This sense of subjectivity brings the process of interpretation to the forefront. For Rodríguez, "What one sees in the neobaroque NLAC is the elaboration not of the militant NLAC's epistemology, but of a decentered, *systemic* counter-epistemology that undermines hegemonic hierarchies of power and social organization by highlighting the fact that knowledge is produced through the interpretation of *systems* of signifiers" (100). Revolutionary knowledge is thus not a matter of didactic sermonizing, of communicating truth to an audience, but of fostering interpretation and the kind of expanded perception that the baroque proffers. As such, the project of revolutionary cinema is to cultivate an awareness of the constructed nature of reality and imply the possibility and necessity of revolution while prompting the spectator to extrapolate from his or her own experiences what form this action may take. To return to Sarduy, "No image can exhaust this infinitude [of interpretation], but a structure [film] may potentially contain it, *indicate* it as a power" (289).

Oneiric Revolution

The emphasis on interpretation, multiplicity, and subjectivity means that revolution is free to become something more cosmic and unrestrained than the monolithic process of orthodox Marxism. In his later manifesto, "Aesthetics of Dream," Rocha defines revolution in these terms

as the reclamation of the possibility of the unwritten: "A revolutionary work of art should not only act in an immediately political fashion, but also encourage philosophical speculation; it should create an aesthetic of eternal human movement towards cosmic integration. The spotty existence of this revolutionary art in the Third World is due, fundamentally, to rationalism's repression." For Rocha, earlier revolutionary movements have been too rational in their theorization of process and action, which becomes its own form of oppression by limiting how revolution can be conceived and what properly constitutes its realization. By defining revolution in such limited orthodox terms it becomes a means of controlling behavior and paralyzing meaningful change:

> Revolution, as the possession of the man who throws his life towards an idea, is the highest spirit of mysticism. Revolutions fail when this possession is not whole, when the rebellious man is not completely freed from oppressive reason, when the signs of the struggle are not produced on the level of rousing and revelatory emotion, when – still activated by bourgeois reason – method and ideology are confused to such a degree that the struggle's transactions are paralyzed. To the extent that non-reason formulates revolutions, reason schemes repression.

Revolution must thus embrace the irrational and become "the unforeseeable within dominating reason." As the unforeseeable, or the incalculable to return to Derrida's language, revolution must remain unrepresentable but not unrepresented, as the conundrum may have it, so as to avoid binding and constraining it to reified representational strategies. The baroque aesthetic is thus fundamental to any cinema invested in revolution since it embodies this irrationality through its oneiric qualities. Neobaroque cinema fosters the kind of imaginative dreaming that pushes

beyond the bounds of reason by denying empirical rationalism and opening up the possibility to think and dream outside of these limits. If "liberating irrationalism is the revolutionary's strongest weapon," films like *Terra em Transe* maintain the revolutionary investments of earlier Cinema Nõvo but in a radically different fashion. Rather than promoting a specific understanding of reality that leads to a predetermined course of action and projected resolution, they engage the question of revolution as a contradictory, irrational and incomplete question, one that fundamentally refuses a fully determined sense of purpose or rational calculability.

Xavier argues that "the pedagogical impulse" of *Terra em Transe* is "contaminated by passion and hysteria" (77) and that, as such, the film marks the dissolution of Cinema Nõvo's revolutionary aspirations. This kind of irrationality and incoherence certainly marks a rejection of orthodox rational revolution, but this is not at the expense of revolutionary commitment *tout court*. Rather, it marks a new formulation for revolutionary cinema that embraces the poetic, emotional, and irrational in order to liberate the spectator's revolutionary imagination. This isn't to suggest that revolution can now become anything. What constitutes revolution still has parameters; however, these are now much broader and, significantly, open to debate. Moreover, the results of any action remain incalculable. What is struggled against is clear but the shape of opposition and its outcomes are to be constantly determined, and this is the work of revolutionary film. As Rocha puts it,

> Every film of the Cinema Novo begins at zero, like Lumiere. When filmmakers
> decide to begin at zero, to create a cinema with new kinds of plot, interpretation,
> rhythm, and poetry, they begin the dangerous and revolutionary adventure of
> learning at work, of uniting the parallel activities of theory and practice, of
> reformulating theory at the outset of each practical move, of behaving according

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to Nelson Pereira dos Santos' appropriate phrase, when he quotes a Portuguese

poet: "I don't know where I am going; but I know where I am not going."

("Beginning at Zero" 146)

Conclusion: Interpreting Revolution

For both Godard and Rocha, revolutionary forms of representation necessitate complex

negotiations of meaning that remain fundamentally incomplete and unfinishable. In a certain

sense, then, both filmmakers engage in a paradoxical aesthetic practice since for their films to

remain revolutionary in terms of second wave ideology, it appears that revolution cannot be

represented as such. Rather, it must always be inferred or hinted at in ways that maintain the

possibility of multiplicity and contradiction. Moreover, it must be done so without expectation.

Revolutionary's cinema's familiar desire to inspire social change thus remains intact, but the

nature of this change cannot be preached and its outcomes cannot be determined in advance.

Consequently, what becomes central to the function of a second wave revolutionary

cinematic aesthetic is the role of interpretation. For such films the aim is not to affirm a pre-

existing set of categories of class struggle – "the people," "revolutionary action," and "Utopia"

do not exist in any predetermined ontological state. Such thinking is a product of a scientific

Marxism that sees the terms of history and struggle as both singular and objective. Rather, these

categories, however they are to be defined, need to be brought into being. Moreover, this is a

perpetual act, a constant negotiation where the terms and forms of revolution remain continually

up for grabs. What constitutes revolution is thus a perpetual matter of interpretation, discussion,

and debate and it is as part of this process that revolutionary cinema finds traction. Both *Tout va

Bien* and *Terra em Transe,* as meta-explorations of the larger question of the forms of

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revolutionary cinema, demonstrate this process by highlighting an aesthetic strategy that refuses full articulation and instead prompts interpretation. Significantly, then, this form of revolutionary cinema cannot be assured of its value as a revolutionary tool since the outcome of interpretation cannot be calculated in advance. The pedagogical impulse typically associated with revolutionary cinema is thus foregone in favor of a complex and open-ended engagement with revolution that repeatedly works to bring new, non-determined categories of struggle into being. And if revolutionary cinema is about interpretation, as Susan says in *Tout va Bien,* "everything is a matter of style."

CHAPTER THREE

Revolutionary Feelings: Desire and Disgust

> It is worth noting that *revolt* and *revolting* had acquired, from mC18, an application to feeling as well as to action: a feeling of disgust, of turning away, of *revulsion* […]. It is curious that *revulsion* is etymologically associated with *revel,* which itself goes back to *rebellare,* L – to rebel
>
> - Raymond Williams (*Keywords* 272-73)

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I argued that the tracking shot that closes Godard's *Tout va Bien* is emblematic of the anti-programmatic revolution articulated by second wave revolutionary cinema, a concept that can be understood in relation to Derrida's theorization of messianism without messianicity as a revolutionary politics that remains both urgent and uncertain. But there is something else present in this image which is similarly implied in Derrida's description of messianism without messianicity as a "desert-like" experience (*Specters* 112). Indeed, the image in question is of an urban wasteland, a large, vacant expanse that is "desert-like" in its emptiness. The barren nature of this space and of Derrida's phrase evokes the contentless nature of a revolutionary politics that acts without a defined political program. Yet this emptiness, while on one hand implying the freedom from teleological dogma that constitutes such "poor rebellion," to return to Debord's terminology, also carries with it a profound negativity of feeling; this closing image is flat and desolate so that any sense of hopefulness implied by the tracking shot's revolutionary connotations is at the same time undercut by a sense of despair. Indeed, it appears that such negative feeling operates as a constitutive element of a politics that refuses to calculate the future. As Derrida describes it, such quasi-messianism is "unsure in its indigence […] anxious, fragile, and impoverished […] a 'despairing' messianism" (*Specters* 212). This sense of

despair is fundamental to a weak messianic revolutionary politics since it is that which preserves a version of hope outside of teleological determinism: "without this latter despair and if one could *count* on what is coming, hope would be but the calculation of a program" (*Specters* 212). Without a corresponding negativity, without this despair that is the product of uncertainty, revolution becomes, once again, fully affirmative through the surety of its outcomes. The uncertainty of messianism without messianicity thus undermines the confident optimism of a scientific Marxism that has absolute faith in the future. Denied such guarantees, revolution is no longer characterized by optimism or assurance of the future; rather, it is marked by hope *without* expectation, by desire without determinacy, by anxiety, insecurity, and anguish.

This conjoining of hope and despair is similarly echoed in the closing lines of *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni*. Quoting Marx's letter to Arnold Ruge where Marx himself links desperation to hope ("You can hardly claim that I think too highly of the present time. If I nevertheless do not despair of it, it is because its own desperate situation fills me with hope") the voice-over states, "Preparing an era for a voyage through the *cold* waters of history has in no way dampened these *passions* of which I have presented such *fine* and *sad* examples" (my emphasis). Here, Debord counterpoises the supposed strength of revolutionary passion with the cold and depressing waters of a history of oppression, qualifying such passions themselves as both fine and sad, as both enlivening and depressing. It appears, then, that such negative feelings form the fundamental affective register of an anti-programmatic revolutionary politics, their presence the necessary consequence of a politics of transformation that makes no claims for the future.

This notion that negative feelings are a constitutive element of revolutionary thought can help to explain the emotional register of second wave revolutionary cinema which stands in

contrast to the rousing sentiments and Grand Passions that characterize the first wave of revolutionary filmmaking – the righteous anger of Vakulinchuk in Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* or the proud determinism of the Mongolian in Pudovkin's *Storm Over Asia*, for example. Rather, second wave films are oddly pessimistic, drawing instead on feelings of boredom, disgust, paranoia, and melancholia. To this end, *Tout va Bien* directly discusses the problem of emotional appeal. When Georgette is giving her speech to the reporter about the problematic working conditions at the factory the voice-over comments, "If Georgette heard herself, she'd be disappointed. She'd be bored herself, and in her soft voice, she'd say, 'It sounds so lame. Doesn't make me want to fight.'" In this moment, the film acknowledges its own negative emotional framework; indeed, the tone of Georgette's speech is in keeping with the majority of the film which is similarly monotonous (even moments of action, such as the storming of the offices or the singing of protest songs are repetitive and presented in such a way as to highlight their awkwardness and ineffectuality). At the same time, *Tout va Bien* implies the need for emotional inspiration as a stimulus for struggle; without a passionate arousal, people will not be motivated to fight. However, the film does not therefore endorse the use of empathy or anger as a means of persuasion. When the strikers are discussing the best way to represent their cause to the media, one worker argues against the use of pathos by claiming it as a technique of the CGT who would be the ones to present the factory as a disgusting place in order to muster sympathy for the cause. Here, the evocation of sympathy becomes associated with party politics; it is a manipulative move that contradicts the autonomous aims driving the wildcat strike. The idea that emotional appeals equate to manipulation is examined in more detail below, suffice to say that *Tout va Bien* itself follows this line of argument by refusing to offer the

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spectator any such standard emotional positions, instead using this moment to provide a commentary on the problematic nature of such pathetic appeals.

This turn toward negative feeling thus forms a significant part of second wave revolutionary cinema's ideology, characteristic as it is of a quasi-messianic politics. But such negative feelings do more than simply evoke the sense of despair that is necessarily co-present in hope without expectation. Rather, they are part of such films' complex engagement with the problem of revolutionary cinema itself. Alongside their relationship to Derrida's revolutionary formulation, negative feelings operate in three significant ways: as a response to the idea, as mentioned above, that certain kinds of emotional appeals are antithetical to a radical political cinema; as a symptom of the problem of affirming what constitutes revolution, and as a function of what Sianne Ngai calls the "suspended agency" of art as it attempts to mediate between the aesthetic and the political. While I will demonstrate these ideas more fully through an analysis of Makavejev's films, to better ground this discussion, it is worth spending some time working through the history of these ideas.

Emotion and Political Cinema

As Carl Plantinga makes clear in the introduction to his recent book, *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience* (2009), the role of affect and emotion in cinema has received relatively little critical attention. The dominance of psychoanalysis as a critical paradigm in film studies, one that emphasizes drives and instincts over emotions, is one of the primary reasons why the study of emotions in cinema has been comparatively neglected. Perhaps more central than this, however, is the legacy of Enlightenment thought that posits emotion as antithetical to reason, the former thus operating as a source of distrustful and easily manipulated

experiences. We could add into this an implicit sexism that devalues emotions as feminine over and against a more meaningful masculine logic and a similarly feminized understanding of emotions as private and personal and thus insignificant to a scholarship invested in larger social and ideological questions. To focus on cinematic emotion, therefore, would *de facto* legitimate the study of such pernicious responses. Indeed, as Plantinga argues, "The neo-Brechtian screen theory that dominated film studies at the end of the twentieth century evinced an implicit disdain for the 'soft,' bourgeois – or at any rate, somewhat embarrassing – emotions of the audience" (*Moving* 4).

Recent work in cognitive psychology, however, has disputed such dualistic logic. Plantinga continues, "It is now commonly believed that emotions may be either rational or irrational, but that to consider emotion to be *prima facie* irrational is simply confused" (*Moving* 4). The fact that cognitive psychology is the discipline from which an interest in emotion has developed explains why a significant portion of the research into the relationship between cinema and emotion that has been undertaken recently falls into one of two categories: genre studies or cognitive film theory. Genre-based research examines the emotional register specific to a certain kind of film, most commonly horror, melodrama, or pornography. Thus, for example, Linda Williams' seminal essay, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, Excess" (1991), brings these three genres together to examine the pleasures operant in the physicalized emotive responses of fear (screaming), anguish (crying), and sexual excitement (climaxing). Alternatively, research that operates within the field of neuroscience and cognitive psychology concerns itself more with the ways by which filmic narrative produces emotion at the cognitive level rather than with the political implications of the emotions that a particular film generates. Such studies tend to focus on the relationship between emotion and narrative structure. Thus Ed Tan's book, *Emotion and*

the Structure of Narrative Film examines the nature of cinematic emotion in classical Hollywood narrative to understand whether or not the aesthetic emotions generated by a film are the same as the emotions experienced in everyday life. Similarly, Torben Grodal's *Moving Pictures: A New Theory of Film Genres, Feelings and Cognition* and Greg Smith's *Film Structure and the Emotion System* examine how narrative and style are designed to structure and cue specific emotional responses.

Although cognitive theories of emotions do recognize the socially constructed nature of emotions and the processes of judgment and evaluation that they encompass, generally speaking, cognitive theory tends to accept the emotional elements of a film as part of its generic disposition – *Halloween* is a horror film, therefore it is attempting to generate fear – and, as such, do not investigate the relationship between these emotional states and the larger ideological structures of the narrative. And it is precisely this question of the politics of emotion, of their ideological function, in which this chapter is invested. Rather than investigating the nature of cinematic emotions, their relationship to bodily sensation or cognition, or their condition as rational or irrational states, this chapter examines the uses of emotions, specifically negative feelings, in revolutionary cinema, and in the films of Dušan Makavejev in particular, as part of a political aesthetic. As such, it examines how negative emotional registers operate as part of the ideological function of Makavejev's films, specifically *Sweet Movie.* In doing so, it follows and builds Plantinga's work on cognitive theory, classical Hollywood narrative, and the ideology of cinematic emotion.

As far back as Aristotle, emotions have been understood as a form of persuasion and Plantinga's book makes a similar claim, arguing that emotions are one way that films rhetorically position their audience. Plantinga's work explores the rhetorical use of emotions in cinema and

their function within ideological criticism. However, while he is sensitive to arguments concerning the manipulative potential of emotional appeals, he maintains that this does not necessitate the dismissal of cinematic emotions *tout court*. Plantinga argues against the neo-Brechtian claim that the experience of emotion in mainstream cinema is "inherently mystifying and politically regressive, because emotion clouds a certain kind of critical judgment" ("Notes" 372). Rather, Plantinga maintains that "the *kind* of emotional experience a film offers, and not emotion *per se,* is a proper target of ideological investigation" ("Notes" 372).

As Plantinga points out, there is a tendency in certain schools of film criticism to "resume a duality between an emotional response deemed naïve, self-indulgent, or even perverse, and an intellectual, vigilant, cognitive response based on reason and critical judgment" ("Notes" 373). Such thinking, prevalent in discussions of the political possibilities of cinema, argues that emotion engenders a passive audience – in appealing to emotions, the spectator is easily manipulated into accepting the ideological premises of the film in question and is inhibited from critically examining the foundations of its premises. An intellectual cinema, on the other hand, one that distances the spectator from events, allows for a critical engagement with politics where the spectator actively works through a film in order to rationally and consciously understand its premises. As Plantinga puts it, "An emotional or pleasurable experience is often thought to be harmful or naïve of itself, while an alienated, distanced response becomes the mark of a knowing spectator" ("Notes" 373).

Sara Ahmed echoes this sentiment in her work on the cultural politics of emotion when she argues that emotion is dismissed as weakness that inhibits the higher functions of cognition and critical thinking:

It is significant that the word for "passion" and the word for "passive" share the same root in the Latin word for "suffering" (*passio*). To be passive is to be enacted upon, as a negation that is already felt as suffering. The fear of passivity is tied to the fear of emotionality, in which weakness is defined in terms of a tendency to be shaped by others. […]The association between passion and passivity is instructive. It works as a reminder of how "emotion" has been viewed as "beneath" the faculties of thought and reason. To be emotional is to have one's judgment affected: it is to be reactive rather than active, dependent rather than autonomous. (2-3)

Ahmed's formulation is significant for it highlights the way that emotional states are typically understood as passive conditions, which brings us back to the active/passive binary as the typical model for thinking the condition of politically engaged spectatorship. The classic theorist of the problem of emotion in political art (both theater and cinema) is Brecht, a figure whose theory of Epic Theater and the alienation effect is often invoked in discussions of second wave revolutionary filmmakers (particularly Godard and Rocha).[45] Indeed, for Brecht, passive spectatorship – a mode of engagement grounded in distraction and thus profoundly non-critical and anti-revolutionary – is a product of both the realist aesthetic and the empathetic appeal of traditional narrative form. As Murray Smith puts it in his discussion of characters and emotion in popular cinema,

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[45] Plantinga maintains that neo-Freudian film theory and its emphasis on the problem of pleasure marks another school of film criticism that, similar to Brechtian thought, is distrustful of the pleasurable affective experience that cinema elicits ("Notes" 375-76). Given my focus on the history of revolutionary filmmaking, however, and the legacy of a Marxist inflected film theory, this line of argument is of less significance that that concerning Brecht.

Bertolt Brecht argues that the way in which we respond emotionally to characters

in fictions lies at the heart of the tendentious and ideological effects they may

have. […] For Brecht, traditional (or what he referred to as "Aristotelian" or

simply "dramatic") theatrical form and realist staging techniques effect an

"illusion of reality" in which spectators experience the fictional world as real,

through a powerful empathy with the protagonist. The emotional potency of such

empathy prevents critical reasoning, that is, the possibility of seeing undesirable

outcomes as contingent and socially determined, not inescapable, natural

necessities. (3)

For Brecht, then, films that rely on emotion obscure the historical nature of social relations,

instead naturalizing them and thus engendering a mystified view of the world. Since, as

Plantinga puts it, "Brecht's ideological criticism has become a model for critical theory"

("Notes" 373) and since it is one of the primary sources of the politically invested film theory

that underscores many of the films that this dissertation deals with, it is worth spending some

time unpacking the relationship between emotion, reason, and the politically engaged spectator

that lies at the heart of Brechtian thought.

The primary focus of Brecht's critique of emotions in theater is empathy, which he

defines as the process by which the audience is led to identify with a character and share their

emotions. In his essay on the use of the alienation effect in Chinese acting, Brecht makes clear

that this process of identification is the means by which a spectator is led to unquestioningly

accept the ideological premises of the narrative. When the alienation effect is employed,

however, such a subconscious endorsement of ideology is prevented: "The efforts in question

were directed to playing in such a way that the audience was hindered from simply identifying

itself with the characters in the play. Acceptance or rejection of their actions and utterances was meant to take place on a conscious plane, instead of, as hitherto, in the audience's subconscious" (91). Again, this idea of empathy as a means of subconscious persuasion is reminiscent of the problem of passive spectatorship as the language of identification recalls the problem of suturing that structures the illusionary cinema that the *Cahiers* critics argued against. Indeed, for Brecht, empathy is about "exploiting his [the spectator's] most easily-accessible emotions" (100). As such, it becomes another means by which the audience is mystified and distracted. An emotional cinema, therefore, "plunge[s the audience in]to self-identification with the protagonist's feelings" so that they cannot "take part in the moral decisions of which the plot is made up" (280); it aims to pacify its audience rather than encourage critical thought or social consciousness.

The "extremely classical, cold, highly intellectual style" that Brecht aims for, his Epic Theater, is thus defined through a series of oppositions to dramatic theater that center on the shift away from emotion and experience to reason and judgment (14); where Dramatic Theater provides the spectator with sensations, preserves instinctive feelings, puts the spectator "in the thick of it" to share the experience and is characterized by feeling, Epic Theater, conversely, forces the spectator to make decisions, brings instinctive feelings to the point of recognition, positions the spectator outside the action where he can study it, and is characterized by reason (37). Thus, Epic theater, in setting its [the audience's] reason to work," (14) makes it possible for the audience to learn the truth of material conditions and become agents of social transformation: "Once the spectator, instead of being enabled to have an experience, is forced as it were to cast his vote; then a change has been launched which goes far beyond formal matters and begins for the first time to affect the theatre's social function" (39).

While Brecht is, at times, scathingly critical of "the scum who want to have the cockles of their hearts warmed" (14), it is important to note that it is the legacy of Brecht's thought that has polarized the opposition between emotion and reason and determined the former to be politically bankrupt. Brecht, although distrustful of pathos-driven art and of the use of empathy in particular, did not dismiss the role of emotion in a politically engaged theater altogether. In fact, emotion remains a central component of Epic Theater, although it is now tempered by an investment in reason: "The essential point of the epic theatre is perhaps that it appeals less to the feelings than to the spectator's reason. Instead of sharing an experience the spectator must come to grips with things. At the same time it would be quite wrong to try and deny emotion to this kind of theatre. It would be much the same thing as trying to deny emotion to modern science" (23). Indeed for Brecht, classical theater is the one guilty of defending such a facile binary between emotion and reason: "It is the orthodox theatre which sins by dividing reason and emotion, in that it virtually rules out the former" (162). Thus while empathy remains a problematic emotion, this does not mean that all emotions can and should be eradicated from a politically invested cinematic experience.

This distinction between a theater that generates empathy as a means of manipulating its audience and a theater that uses emotions as part of a larger critical project is significant for it demonstrates that not only is there a way by which emotion may operate as part of a politically motivated cinema but that such political intentions are, in fact, implicated in the emotional tone of such a film. Brecht's logic then, far from advocating the abandonment of emotion in revolutionary cinema, can help us understand the turn to negative feelings that second wave films embody as an attempt to mobilize emotions in a critical and politically progressive fashion.

The nature of this kind of appropriate emotion is hinted at in Brecht's own expression when describing Epic Theater. The alienated style that Brecht advocates as a tonic to the passivity of traditional narrative is marked by a feeling of dispassionate indifference; Brecht describes the educational elements of *The Threepenny Opera* as a "cold douche for those whose sympathies were becoming involved" (132), while Epic Theater is described as "an extremely classical, cold, highly intellectual style of performance" (14) and the Chinese actor's performance, which Brecht praises as a version of the alienation effect, similarly appears "cold" to a Western audience (93). One on hand, the use of the word "cold" simply implies that lack of sentiment that Brechtian theater is thought to represent. However, it also marks the tone of such a theater in what are typically see as negative terms. A cold theater is a harsh, unfeeling, callous theater. Confronted with such a theater, an audience may experience a similar range of negative emotions – boredom, apathy, frustration, confusion – that are thus bound to the nature of an alienated production. There is a sense, then, in which Brecht's adjective of choice suggests that Epic Theater is characterized by a negative emotional register.

We can expand this logic of negativity if we think about the opposition that Brecht's thought sets up between a traditional, Hollywood cinema and an avant-garde, political cinema. Plantinga, in explaining his interest in cinematic emotions, states that:

> In all of the academic talk about film interpretations, meanings, negotiated readings, comprehensions, and so on, what is often forgotten is that for the vast majority of film spectators, movie viewing is first and foremost a pleasurable experience, suffused with affect. Audiences are willing to pay for this experience with money, time, and effort, and in exchange they expect to be fascinated, shocked, titillated, made suspenseful and curious, invited to laugh and cry, and in

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the end, given pleasure. On this foundation of pleasurable affect rest the

multibillion-dollar international media industries. (*Moving* 2)

Plantinga's statement that "pleasurable experience" motivates the majority of spectators and thus

(although causality could flow the other way) the industry itself makes clear the foundational

relationship between pleasurable affect and film as a commodity. This is the basic argument that

Richard Dyer lays out in "Entertainment and Utopia." According to Dyer, entertainment, as it is

culturally and historically determined by the conditions of capitalism, is a utopian product that

operates as a form of "escape" or "wish-fulfillment" (373). Significantly, Dyer conceptualizes

entertainment in affective terms, arguing that entertainment is not invested in presenting a model

of a utopian world but in expressing what it would *feel* like. Thus entertainment works at the

level of sensibility; it is a series of representational and nonrepresentational signs that produce a

positive, utopian "affective code" (373), which supports capitalist ideology: "the categories of

the sensibility point to gaps or inadequacies in capitalism, but only to those gaps or inadequacies

that capitalism proposes itself to deal with. At our worst sense of it, entertainment provides

alternatives *to* capitalism which will be provided *by* capitalism" (377). Plantinga similarly argues

that Hollywood narrative fiction films are, by and large, characterized by positive emotions and

that even in instances where they seem to elicit negative feelings (melodrama, for example), such

films replace this negativity with positive emotions through a transformative process of "working

through" (*Moving* 169-97). Thus, to put Dyer's point in Plantinga's terminology, the stylistic

codes and propositional content of entertainment cinema operate at the level of positive affect to affirm capitalist ideology.[46]

A simple answer, then, to the question of why revolutionary films turn to such "ugly feelings" (to borrow a phrase from Sianne Ngai) is that they function as a denunciation of the emotional tone of commercial cinema as entertainment. In the turn to negative feelings, revolutionary cinema positions itself as the antithesis of entertainment, rejecting it as a "by and large conservative" industry (Dyer 372). If positive emotions reinforce capitalist ideology, within the logic of that system, negative feelings thus challenge it through the process of negation. As part of this process of negation, negative feelings work to bring the positive emotions of mainstream cinema into critical focus, prompting the spectator, in Brecht's words, to "adopt a critical approach to his emotions, just as [he] does to his ideas" (101). In a general sense, negative feelings in revolutionary cinema encourage self-examination and critical judgment since they foreground our expectations as spectators and highlight the typical emotional cues of more mainstream narrative films. In *Sweet Movie,* for example, and as discussed in more detail below, disgust works to highlights the problematic use of desire in both mainstream Western and Soviet cinema.

However, as *Sweet Movie* also demonstrates, positive emotions are not solely under the purview of the entertainment industry – one need only think of the propagandistic use of emotion in Nazi cinema, or the appeals to heroism, patriotism, and class and party allegiance in early

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[46] While Plantinga's main claim is that emotional appeals in mainstream cinema are not always "ideologically pernicious or cognitively unhealthy" (195), he does recognize the frequently problematic ideological ends to which Hollywood emotions operate. Thus while Plantinga would perhaps not endorse the claim that the positive emotions of mainstream entertainment are wholeheartedly dishonest and ideologically conservative, his work certainly recognizes the prevalence of this logic.

Soviet films and those of the Social Realist period in particular (including the Yugoslav period of nationalist realism). In the context posed by this chapter, it would perhaps be better to think of the appeal to negative feelings in eastern European cinema as a response to the enforced optimism of socialist cinema used as a means of promoting Communist ideology (as discussed below, in the case of Yugoslav film, this optimism is directed towards the period of socialist reconstruction following the Second World War). Indeed, as Herbert Eagle makes clear, the confines of social realist aesthetic ideology meant that films were bound to serve "the explicit, immediate needs of socialist construction by fostering appropriate attitudes" through the depiction of society "not *as such* but in terms of its 'revolutionary development' – that is, that contemporary social reality is presented not *as it is,* but with a substantial (though inaccurate) admixture of *what is supposed to be* according to ideological positions" (qtd. in Goulding 7). The consequence of this adherence to an ideological vision of society meant that films be "didactic and clear-cut" and, in terms of their emotional register, "ultimately optimistic" (7). Following this logic, then, negative feelings push back against such regulated optimism by highlighting the gap between what is and "what is supposed to be."

The relationship between capitalist and Communist aesthetics is discussed in more detail in relation to *Sweet* Movie, suffice to say that given these similarities, negative feelings must respond to more than simply the commercial appeals of mainstream cinema or the state-sponsored optimism of Communist film by highlighting audience expectations or revealing the disjunction between reality and utopia. Indeed, such claims could be made about any number of films that don't strictly adhere to the standardized models of the Hollywood blockbuster or the partisan war epic. What is specific to negative feelings in relation to revolutionary cinema, then, is their function as part of the second wave's problematic relation to representation in as much as

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negative feelings, by destabilizing processes of identification, trouble any straightforward

acceptance of the revolutionary premises of the film.

Emotion, Affirmation, and Agency

As argued in the second chapter, one of the central problems facing second wave

revolutionary cinema is the challenge of developing a political film that does not fully articulate

a clear revolutionary program since to do so would be to reify the form of revolution (which

stands in opposition to the sense of self-determination that grounds the radical politics of the

period) and to produce a didactic cinema that reaffirms the filmmaker as the master who imparts

his knowledge of "true" material conditions and "correct" revolutionary practice to an

unknowing audience. In a revolutionary context, then, positive emotions are problematic for the

way in which they affirm a set of ideas or behaviors – what constitutes correct revolutionary

consciousness, attitude, action, and allegiance. This process of affirmation is a result of the

relationship that emotions share with specific objects. If we think about emotions in cognitivist

terms, it becomes apparent that emotions take an object – they attach themselves to something

and endow it with meaning and value. Cognitive theories of emotion, therefore, presume that

emotions are about more than just bodily reflexes but involve socially and historically

constructed modes of feeling as well as processes of evaluation. Emotions thus entail an

appraisal and judgment of something; as Sartre famously asserts, "Emotion is a specific manner

of apprehending the world" that through its cognitive function, becomes a mode through which

we present the world to ourselves and determine what has value (35). Thus, for example, anger

typically implies the judgment that something is bad (although, of course, these judgments do not

entail any objective "truth"). The fact that emotions take objects leads to the general idea that

emotions are *resident* in objects, that objects are the cause of particular emotions. While this notion is what Elizabeth Spelman calls the "Dumb View" of emotions that overwrites the cultural history of emotion and our socialized orientations towards things,[47] it explains our general experience of emotions in relation to things and thus provides a way of describing the outcome of certain emotional attachments: an emotion "sticks" to the thing that appears to generate it, to use Ahmed's term, so that the object in question is subject to a value judgment based on our emotional response.

Plantinga makes a similar argument with regards to spectatorial emotions, arguing that while "for the cognitivist, emotions have reasons, or objects. […] *Spectator* emotions also have objects or reasons" ("Notes" 374). Developing the point that entertainment is characterized by positive emotions generated by a film's propositional content, it follows that this content is then affirmed through these positive emotional responses through the evaluative process that emotional states entail – something is good because it makes us feel good. Emotional responses to the content of a film, therefore, become ways by which the audience is encouraged to judge, value, and ultimately desire the nature of that content. In this way, emotions can be used as modes of ideological validation and critique.

In terms of revolutionary cinema, the use of positive emotions thus becomes problematic if the film in question is unwilling to represent revolution since positive emotions would tend to affirm the content presented as properly revolutionary or the desirable form of action. Thus negative feelings work to trouble any straightforward acceptance of a film's revolutionary

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[47] As Ahmed points out, "the object of feeling both shapes and is shaped by emotions […] How the object impresses (upon) us may depend on histories that remain alive insofar as they have already left their impressions" (8).

content by binding it to something unpleasant that would typically involve a negative evaluative judgment. As Heather Love puts it, such negative feelings "resist the kind of idealist affirmation" that is so attractive to political movements (27). Thus, in revolutionary cinema and as Brecht argues in relation to Epic Theater, emotional effects are not done without; rather, they are "clarified in it, steering clear of subconscious origins and carrying nobody away" (Brecht 88). Such negative feelings preclude us from getting "carried away," that is, from simply endorsing the premises of a film because of its emotional register. Informed by what René Spitz terms the global affect of "against," Ngai points out that such feelings are "organized by trajectories of repulsion rather than attraction" (11), which, I would argue, challenge processes of ideological acceptance. By interrupting the processes of identification that underscore the empathetic sentiment that Brecht found so troubling, negative feelings forge a gap between content and emotion so that the former cannot easily be accepted as good, right, or proper. In this way, negative feelings reinforce the process of representation without expectation by undermining the status of any revolutionary content.

This refusal to fully articulate or endorse a revolutionary politics leads us to the last function of negative feelings as an index of the limited nature of cinema's power as a tool of social transformation. If revolutionary cinema remains committed to an aesthetic that refuses to fully articulate and thus reify the processes of revolutionary action, it must, at the same time, accept the limits that this places on its ability to enact social transformation. For without this clear articulation, revolutionary cinema always carries with it the possibility of failure, its negativity marking what Sianne Ngai refers to as the "suspended agency" of art as it mediates between the aesthetic and the political (1). Ngai describes art as "a relatively autonomous, more or less cordoned-off domain in an increasingly specialized and differentiated society" (2).

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Working through Adorno's historicization of this aesthetic autonomy, Ngai argues that "the separateness from 'empirical society' which art gains as a consequence of the bourgeois revolution ironically coincides with its growing awareness of its inability to significantly change that society" (2). Negative feelings thus ensue from this sense of "restricted agency" and stand as the affective expression of art's awareness of its own "powerlessness" as a form of political action (2). For Ngai, then, "ugly feelings" are a symptom of the "suspended agency" of art as an agent of significant social change.

Heather Love, in her exploration of negative feeling in relation to queer history, shares with Ngai a suspicion regarding the political potential of negative feelings. For Love, it is "hard to see how feelings like bitterness or self-hatred might contribute to any recognizable political praxis" (4). Love turns to Lauren Berlant's work on the differences between feeling and politics, between the psychic and the social, to remind her reader of the problems of using affect as a basis for social action. Thus, although the relationship between affect and collective action forms a significant part of the politics of feeling, for Love, the disjunction between affect and the social means that we need to question the extent to which the negative feelings that accompany the actual experience of marginality are capable of responding to injustice in a politically meaningful way. What negative feelings offer, then, is their ability to diagnose a social and historical moment "not yet fully articulated in institutions as the dominant mode of existence" (12). For Love, "it seems useful to consider a range of negative affects as indexes of social trauma" and thus as a means of thinking about the "importance of damage in the history of queer representation" (12, 14) while for Ngai, negative emotions are "diagnostic rather than strategic" (22), and the "unsuitability of these weakly intentional feelings for forceful or unambiguous action is precisely what amplifies their power to diagnose situations" (27). Thus negative

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feelings are significant for the ways in which they help to clarify lived experience, be it of queerness or frustrated political action.

Significantly, Love argues that in highlighting the importance of negativity as a category of queer experience in both the past and the present, negative feelings disrupt a queer literary genealogy in that they undermine the sense of progress that drives the queer movement. For Love, the difficulty of integrating such feelings into an active political movement generates a kind of "backwardness" that disrupts the progress narrative of queer history, which drives the utopian desires of the contemporary movement to imagine a better world for queer subjects. We can usefully apply such logic to the narrative of political progress that similarly underscores orthodox revolutionary thought; historical conditions are bringing us ever closer to the inevitable moment of revolutionary transformation – a better world exists on the horizon and we are slowly moving towards it. As diagnostics of a social climate, then, negative feelings index the gap between such aspirations and actual experience, thus charting the defeats and frustrations that comprise the reality of a movement. In this way, negative feelings undermine the sense of teleology that drives orthodox revolutionary thought, instead bringing to light the failures and aporias of a movement that refuses to guarantee its success. Thus we find ourselves back in the realms of Derrida's despair where negative feelings diagnose the experience of second wave revolutionary thought and the uncertainty that it necessarily contains. In this sense, negative feelings mark the site where revolutionary cinema confronts the limits of its own thought.

However, while negative feelings certainly do appear to index the experiential climate of this kind of political thinking, there is a way by which such feelings can be put to political use. Thus, negative feelings in revolutionary cinema function as *both* a diagnostic of the frustrations of revolutionary movements (those produced through Derrida's messianism without messianicity

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and through the separation of art from the social that Ngai – via Adorno – lays out) *and* as a potential tool of revolutionary transformation. What this means, then, is that negative feelings are a vexed concept that expresses at once the limits and the possibilities of revolutionary cinema; while they index the frustrations that the realities of such a cinematic praxis elicit, at the same time, they remain a site of its possibility.

Yugoslav Cinema, *Praxis,* and the Soviet Problem

To further explore this relationship between negative feeling and political possibility we can turn to the films of Dušan Makavejev, a Yugoslavian anti-Stalinist Marxist whom David Paul has described as "the most radical filmmaker to have emerged in Eastern Europe" (10). Makavejev began his career within the Yugoslavian film industry, which, as was the case for most countries of actually-existing socialism, was nationalized after the Second World War, its infrastructure developed during what Daniel Goulding refers to as the "administrative period" of the late 1940s (xi).[48] Yugoslavia's first feature film, Vjekoslav Afrić's *Slavica* (1947), was a partisan war film that set the industry tone for years to follow. Indeed, the war genre, realized as either the struggle against fascism or for the Communist Revolution, dominated Yugoslav cinema in its first decade of nationalist production (12 of the 13 films produced in Yugoslavia by 1950 dealt with either the National War of Liberation or the socialist reconstruction effort that followed). The doctrine of Socialist Realism was being dismissed in Yugoslavia at the same time that its cinema was being nationalized. Thus in 1948, in defiance of Stalin, Tito proclaimed that

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[48] The following history of post-war Yugoslav film is taken primarily from the first chapter of Pavle Levi's *Disintegration in Frames* and thus follows closely the narrative that he lays out. For more detailed histories of the Yugoslav film industry see also Daniel Goulding's *Liberated Cinema* or Mira and Antonín Liehm's *The Most Important Art*.

Yugoslavia would no longer operate according to the mandates of Soviet policy, but would instead pursue its own "autonomous path toward socialism" (qtd. in Levi 14). As Levi describes it, "After 1950, this autonomy developed under the sign of the project of 'socialist self-management,' conceived as enabling the working class to directly participate in socio-economic decision-making and presented as a progressive alternative to the Stalinist deformations of the true Marxist-Leninist objective. (In practice, Tito, the state, and the Communist Party leadership still acted as final political arbiters, but they exercised power in a more relaxed fashion)" (14-15). Thus, while the traditionalism of national realism persisted beyond Yugoslavia's 1948 break with Russia, over the next ten years, the controls over the industry relaxed so that by the 1960s, a period often referred to as the "Golden Age" of Yugoslav cinema, it was dominated by a generation of young and talented filmmakers who took full advantage of the opportunity for individualized expression and formal experimentation and pushed against the limits of the ideological framework prescribed by the state that had been left largely unchallenged in the war films of the previous decade.[49] This period, influenced by Italian Neorealism and the French and Czech new waves, became known as New Yugoslav Film (Novi Jogoslovenski Film) and later,

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[49] Mira and Antonín Liehm maintain that, in fact, in the first few years following Yugoslavia's expulsion from the Cominform such "official supervision of culture increased, voices that seemed excessively critical were suppressed, and a number of writers fell silent" (128). It wasn't until the early 1950s after the reforms of self-management began to take shape that resistance to national realism developed as a force. Thus by the end of 1954, despite an attempt by the Central Committee of the Communist Party to condemn the radical activities of the prominent party ideologist Milovan Djilas and to once again develop guidelines for the production of cultural artifacts, "Party Presidium member Edvard Kardelj made a declaration about the freedom to create that was to remain influential, to a greater or lesser degree, for several years" (128).

as a result of the ideological campaigns of the Yugoslav censors who banned the works of

several Novi filmmakers, the "Black Wave."[50]

Inspired by the progressive movements sweeping across the Eastern Bloc in the years

following Stalin's death, as well as by the loosening of state control and the increasing

democratization of social life afforded by the project of self-management and the struggles of the

Second Yugoslav Revolution, the Black Wave established itself as the critical voice of

Marxism.[51] Thus, as Levi maintains,

> although often strongly critical of the concrete social, political and cultural
>
> manifestations of Yugoslav socialism, the views of these filmmakers were, for the
>
> most part, not opposed to socialist ideas as such. They were, however, opposed to
>
> ideological dogmatism and reification and were committed to a critique of the

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[50] The term derives from an article published in *Borba*, the official daily newspaper of the Yugoslav Communist Party, entitled "The Black Wave in Our Film" which targeted Želimir Žilnik's *Early Works* (1969) as politically radical and ideologically dangerous (Liehm and Liehm 425). Goulding points out that the term specifically refers to what he classifies as the third phase of Novi film from the late 1960s to the early 1970s, when "the counteroffensive against *new film* tendencies was renewed and intensified under the banner of *black film*" (78).

[51] David Paul argues that a sense of political commitment and social responsibility is part of the fabric of Eastern European art, having "woven [itself] permanently into the complex mosaic of art, literature, drama and film in Eastern Europe" (7). For Paul, the close link between art and politics is bound to the history of Eastern Europe and the legacy of Communism: "Long before the invention of the motion picture, art and literature played a political role in the region, as writers, poets and even musicians considered themselves called to articulate the destiny of the nation. Latter-day filmmakers, then, are part of a long tradition that defines the role of the cultural intellectual, in part, as a spokesman for a societal cause. Communist doctrine has made his role explicit and sought to specify the nature of the artist's social responsibility in definite terms. In response, the contemporary artist has answered the challenge, just as his ancestors did, and fashioned for himself a creative role coloured by a deep social commitment" (7). For Paul, this means that the artist functions as either a "defender of official values or as one who challenges them, as a force working to mobilize the masses for a historic purpose or as a critic who alerts the public to serious weaknesses in the social fabric" (7).

"unquestionable" collective national mythology promoted by the Yugoslav state

and pertaining to the national War of Liberation (1941-45), the revolutionary

struggle of the Yugoslav peoples, and the nature and functioning of a Yugoslav

socialist model. (16)

Cinema was seen to be central to this mode of critique, given the political function of Nationalist

Realism (the Yugoslav equivalent of Zhdanovism) and the development of partisan war films as

modes of institutional ideological propaganda. As Živojin Pavlović, one off the leading figures

of the Black Wave argues:

Those who here spoke about the war by way of the celluloid . . . did not scold

history, they beautified it, but in a most disgusting way. . . . In Yugoslav cinema,

various forms of un-truth permanently replace each other. . . . Quasi-poetics

replaces quasi-epics, quasi-drama replaces quasi-psychology, and quasi-

mythologization of history replaces quasi-documentation. Instead of art about the

revolution, we have revolutionary kitsch. (qtd. in Levi 16)

The task of the Black Wave, then, was to develop a critique of the current social system. As

such, the political commitments of the Black Wave echo the ideas of the influential Marxist

humanist journal *Praxis*, which was similarly devoted to the critique of all forms of social and

political domination and the project of Communism as it had developed in Eastern Europe.[52]

Much like the Situationists, *Praxis* argued that Marxism's ultimate goal was free creative activity

and saw institutional Communism and Soviet dogma as profoundly antithetical to the realization

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[52] Most all academics writing on Makavejev make this link between *Praxis* and the Black Wave, including Pavle Levi, Herbert Eagle, Daniel Goulding, Mira and Antonín Liehm, and Lorraine Mortimer.

of this aim. *Praxis* developed its ideas from Marx's early humanist writings, following what Althusser would term the Marx of the Early Works (as opposed to the scientific Marx of the Mature Works).[53] Writing on Marx in the late 1960s, Gajo Patrović, the journal's longest serving editor, argued that alienation is a social as well as economic problem. If it is to be truly emancipatory, then, a revolutionary program must therefore account for both forms of repression since "only that self-determined activity is free in which a man is not slave of this or that special thought, emotion or tendency" (qtd. in Eagle 133). Part of the problem with Soviet Communism, then, much like Sembène's critique of the post-independence Senegalese government, was its failure to address the social forms of alienation and revolutionize the everyday.

For *Praxis* thinkers revolution is thus a twin-process of social and individual transformation whereby individual freedom is the necessary precondition of collective freedom; as Mihailo Marković puts it, Communism is "a society in which the freedom of each individual will be the condition of the freedom of all'" (xii). The definition of such individual freedom is tied to the idea of a non-alienated existence where man is fully in control of his life: "freedom is possible only when man is truly the subject, the *creator,* of his own fate, and not a mere *object* over which power is exercised" (Tadić qtd. in Levi 30). The cinematic parallel to this position found its expression in the Black Wave's investment in free individual expression. As such, the movement's investment in the problem of social alienation meant that its critique of the current social system was entwined with an investment legitimizing the truth of subjective experience. Replacing what film theorist Dušan Stojanović understands as the "collective mythology" of

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[53] Drawing this distinction between the different "Marxes" highlights the journal's break with the idea of scientific or structural marxism that Althusser is thought to have engendered and thus aligns it more fully with the humanist-driven politics outlined in chapter one.

nationalist realism with "endless individual mythologies" (qtd. in Levi 17), the Black Wave lacked any coherent agenda or established aesthetic. Rather, its films are characterized by a desire for free expression and experimentation beyond the confines of Soviet ideological and bureaucratic dogmatism as well as a preoccupation with the failures of revolutionary optimism and the harsh realities of communist experience.[54] Given its critical impetus and the fact that the movement's name was inspired by institutional suspicion of its motives, the term "black wave" quickly became shorthand for precisely this kind of nonconformist cinema.

For Levi, the Black Wave's investment in a politics of liberated individual expression carries serious implications for the way that revolutionary transformation is understood, calling into question the ability to think Marxist revolutionary ideals "in static terms, as a set of concrete, predetermined properties" (30). Quoting Petrović, Levi argues that the struggle for a completely non-alienated and thus fully liberated individual/society means that revolution must be thought (as previously discussed) as a perpetual process:

> When, if at all, should creativity of a socialist revolution stop? … Obviously, when every self-alienation is abolished, when man becomes fully man, and society completely human. However, when should such a moment actually arise? Hopefully never. . . . If man is to be, developing to the full extent his potentialities, then the social revolution is thinkable only as a never-ending process. Only in living as a revolutionary can man fulfill his essence. (Petrović qtd. in Levi 30)

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[54] See, for example, Makavejev's *Man is Not a Bird* (1965), Fadil Hadžić's *Protest* (1967), Želimir Žilnik's *Early Works* (1969), Živojin Pavlović's *The Ambush* (1969), Bata Čengić's *The Role of My Family in the World Revolution* (1971) and *The Life of a Shock Worker* (1972), and Petrović's *The Master and the Margarita* (1972).

For the *Praxis* thinkers, this idea of "living as a revolutionary" as part of a never-ending process of personal and collective liberation means that revolutionary art is an "essentially anarchistic event" (Pavlović qtd. in Levi 30) where the artist uses his creativity as a revolutionary praxis that pushes against the ideological limits placed on his way of thinking and being. The evocation of a spirit of anarchism is important here for it marks the necessary absence of an organizational structure. Danko Grlić makes a similar argument in *Praxis* in 1965:

> If a plan, an organization, or an institution always represses human freedom in some way, then must nevertheless the struggle against such institutions, and against such a plan, itself be planned and institutionalized? Must the struggle against bureaucratism itself necessarily become bureaucratized? If "Praxis is opposed to everything established, dogmatic, rigid, static, and once-and-for-all determined, fixed, and standard", will not any organization work against the aim of complete individual freedom and creativity? (qtd. in Eagle 137)

Both *Praxis* and the Black Wave thus advocate for the non-instrumentalized nature of revolutionary art; against the dogmatic tendencies of institutionalized thinking, revolutionary art must operate without an organizational principle or an investment in a set of predetermined ends. Much like messianism without messianicity, then, the revolutionary thought of the Black Wave emphasizes the perpetuity of revolution and a resolutely non-teleological sense of social transformation.

Desiring Revolution

For the filmmakers of the Black Wave, and for Makavejev in particular, cinema is a revolutionary weapon since it is a means through which the repressive limits of ideological

dogma, themselves perpetuated through other kinds of film, can be broken down. One of the central themes in Makavejev's cinema is a like-minded exploration of the tension between individual liberation, collective living, and the alienation engendered by social and political institutions. As James MacBean puts it, Makavejev's cinema is "a plea for the individual, but for the individual who himself subscribes to the communist commitment to create a society which provides to each according to his need" ("Sex" 13). In an interview with *Sight and Sound* in the early 1970s, Makavejev describes cinema in such revolutionary terms as a "guerrilla operation" against "everything that is fixed, defined, established, dogmatic, eternal" (qtd. in Robinson 177). Like Godard, who Makavejev said has placed himself at the service of the revolution, Makavejev understood his cinema as part of a larger revolutionary struggle:

> In fighting in the cinema, through our movies, for a freer, more authentic expression, with weapons that can include *joie de vivre* and comedy, we are waging the same war as those who fight on the barricades. It's always the same job of freeing yourself from authority, of breaking down rigid structures, of opening up doors, opening up paths; in short, to create a free, open world where every individual can be himself. (qtd. in Robinson 177)

Rather than reaffirm collective ideals, then, Makavejev is invested in the liberation of individual consciousness from all forms of authoritarian control.

For most critics of Makavejev, montage is the primary aesthetic means through which this liberation is achieved since Makavejev's montage works to open up different possibilities for meaning according to the spectator's own investments, passions, and perceptions. Thus Levi argues that, unlike Eisenstein, who employed montage to generate "precise concepts and ideas" in the spectator, and contra Bazin, who saw montage as a technique that "by its very nature rules

out ambiguity of expression," Makavejev's cinema demonstrates a montage that is "dialectical first and foremost insofar as it destabilizes the singularity and certainty of textual meaning and invites a number of possible responses from the viewer" (33). Arthur similarly compares Eisenstein and Makavejev, arguing that unlike the former, who developed montage as a means of dialectical argument, the latter employs montage to "foster contradiction for its own sake, withholding the clarifying endpoint of synthesis or resolution" (12).[55] Makavejev's collage technique thus operates as a revision of soviet montage that attempts to combine its avant-garde aesthetic with the undirected spectator of Italian neorealism. As such, it marks one level on which Makavejev engages the history of revolutionary filmmaking in order to conceive of a politically motivated yet liberated spectator. However, while this collage technique is certainly significant, it cannot be separated from the emotional register of the films it structures. As Arthur maintains, Makavejev's oeuvre is characterized by an emphasis on affect that interrupts our ability to rationalize and fully reconcile what we see: "It is not that Makavejev always privileges affect over intellectualism but he makes it impossible to leave our primal reactions out of the equation" (12). As explained below, Makavejev's critique of desire and his concomitant elicitation of disgust are central to his revolutionary politics of personal and social liberation.

In his early films, this investment is most clearly focused in a commitment to sexual liberation and the erotics of revolutionary transformation. In these films, Makavejev pre-empts the battle cries of Daniel Cohen-Bendit and the ideologues of May '68 who argued that Stalinist bureaucrats "reduce the evils of capitalism to economic injustice […so that] when they extend

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[55] See also Raymond Durgnat's *WR: Mysteries of the Organism* and MacBean's "Sex and Politics: Wilhelm Reich, World Revolution and Makavejev's *WR*," as well as Nevenka Stankovic's discussion of Makavejev's "patchwork" system in "The Cities of Play and Disclosure: *WR: Mysteries of the Organism.*"

their criticism of capitalism to other fields, they still imply that everything would be solved by a fairer distribution of wealth. The sexual problems of youth and the difficulties of family life are ignored. […] If a social organization is repressive it will be so on the sexual and cultural no less that the economic planes" (96). For Makavejev, this idea was present in the Soviet revolution's failure to address the repressive sexual mores of Eastern Orthodoxy or Catholicism. As Beverle Houston and Marsha Kinder write, Makavejev's films are "an explicit attack on the failure of the revolution that it never created the slightest deviation from the Russians' puritanical, Tsarist orthodoxy" (558). In response to the sexually repressive nature of Yugoslav society and Soviet Communism, Makavejev's early films present the liberation of the self through the removal of sexual taboo where to give into one's own desires is to relinquish the control that received social and moral restraints place upon human freedom.

Unsurprisingly, the use of sexually liberated characters to critique the failures of the Communist Revolution was unpopular with the Yugoslav authorities and Makavejev's last amateur film, *Don't Believe in Monuments* from 1958, which is about a young girl's attempts to have sex with a nude statue, was considered too erotic and was banned for five years, as was his first play, *New Man at the Flower Market,* in 1962. Similarly, his first two feature-length productions focus on the playfulness and libratory power of unchecked sexual desire: In *Man is Not a Bird*, Jan Rudnicki, a serious and hard-working engineer, dedicated to the Soviet state and unwilling to recognize his girlfriend's sexuality, is awarded a medal for his ability to increase productivity at a copper mine but during the lavish ceremony where his allegiance to the Party and to the ideology of productivity is rewarded, his girlfriend leaves him to make passionate and fun-filled love with another man. In the same film Barbulović, the epitome of the classic Soviet laborer who is rapidly becoming an anachronism, abuses his wife who eventually leaves him for

another man at a carnival. Similarly, in *Love Affair, Or The Case of the Missing Switchboard Operator*, Isabella, a sensual and almost anarchic free spirit, seduces Ahmed, a repressed state exterminator overly invested in a sense of order, while *WR: Mysteries of the Organism* draws on the sexual alienation theories of Wilhelm Reich to tell the story of Milena, a revolutionary committed to the principles of free love as a means of combating the socially repressive forces of Leninist-Stalinist dogma. In each of these films, sexual desire is placed in opposition to Communist orthodoxy, acting as the liberating foil to the repressive nature of the ideology of work and production.[56]

While this trajectory through Makavejev's films traces his investment in the affirmative power of sexual liberation, we can also perceive here a concomitant exploration of the violence that such sexual freedom potentially carries with it. Indeed, in both *Love Affair* and *WR* the sexually promiscuous female leads are both killed by the repressed men they seduce. Similarly, as Herbert Eagle argues, the Reichian therapy sessions in *WR* carry charismatic and chauvinistic overtones in the way that Lowen and Ollendorf treat their female patients while the cross-cutting between the electroshock patient and the people moaning and writhing during one of Dr. Lowen's group therapy sessions implies an underlying authoritarianism. Likewise, the actions of the American counter-cultural movements that supposedly advocate the revolutionary exercise of

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[56] Alongside MacBean's "Sex and Politics" and Houston and Kinder's "*Sweet Movie,*" several recent articles interrogate the relationship between sexual freedom and revolutionary liberation in Makavejev's films. Constantin Parvulescu's "Betrayed Promises: Politics and Sexual Revolution in the films of Márta Mészáros, Miloš Forman and Dušan Makavejev" examines the sexual politics of "real-existing socialism" to reveal how film challenges the inscription of power in the enduring conservative institutions of marriage and family. Similarly, Nina Power traces Makavejev's investment in sexual liberation and its implications for feminism across his first five feature films, while Paul Arthur links Makavejev's belief in the libratory potential of sexuality to his use of montage, describing the latter as a "trope for promiscuous coupling" (12).

sexual freedom "often degenerat[e] into forms of egotism, sexual chauvinism, narcissism, fetishism and dogmatism" (143). Again in *Love Affair* this tension between desire and violence is present through the film's constant paralleling of life and death, sex and murder: nudity is associated with desire through the scenes when Isabella makes love to Ahmed and with violence in the scene where she is laid out on the coroner's table ready to be autopsied. Also, as Eagle notes, the plumber sets up pipes like female genitals and then "lovingly plasters these into the wall, reinforcing the same life-death opposition" (136). There is another side to desire, then, something destructive that is more fully articulated in Makavejev's next film, *Sweet Movie,* where desire is reconfigured as yet another means through which capitalism exercises its authoritarian power. As *Sweet Movie* shows, a spoonful of sugar really does help the ideological medicine go down.

Lorraine Mortimer opens her discussion of *Sweet Movie* with a brief history of the relationship between sugar and power. Drawing on the work of the anthropologist Stanley Mintz, Mortimer notes that the Indo-European word *swād* is actually the root of both the words "sweet" and "persuade." Mintz's analysis of sugar examines its transformation in the seventeenth century from a luxury good to a necessary item. Sugar, as one of the first commodities to make this transformation, becomes exemplary of a fundamental shift in our understanding of the nature of commodities in emergent capitalism and their relationship to us. Sugar, the "favored child of capitalism," thus embodies both the "promise and the fulfillment" of this economic system, marking the materialization of capitalist ideology, its dissemination, and its consumption (L. Mortimer 191, 192). Metaphorically speaking, then, sugar is the commodity through which the ideology of consumer culture was first "sweetened" for consumption.

Sweet Movie can be understood as a critique of this very process: the means by which ideology is "sweetened" for consumption, how an audience can be convinced of the pleasures of an ideology to overlook its oppressive foundations. The film tells the story of two women, Miss World, a Canadian beauty queen, and Anna Planeta, a "prostitute of the revolution" and Captain of the revolutionary ship *Survival* (a large boat filled with candy with the head of Karl Marx at its helm) who are representative of Americanization and Stalinization, respectively, although, as Stanley Cavell notes, their names imply that they are global phenomena (313). Their intertwined stories of desire, sweetness, and death reveal Makavejev's critique of the use of desire as a means of persuasion. The film thus exposes the ways by which both consumer culture and its revolutionary critique ultimately employ the same methods of erotic seduction to promote adherence to their cause. In *Sweet Movie*, the freedoms that both ideologies expound are revealed as illusions, the individual instead reduced to commodity status, either as an erotic commodity within consumer culture or as an expendable object seduced by the revolutionary promises of an authoritarian community. This critique marks the film's larger engagement with the possibilities of a revolutionary cinema and the problematic use of film as an ideological weapon used to render a given ideology more attractive. This larger engagement with the history of revolutionary cinema articulates the film's critique of desire as a means of persuasion while also helping us to understand its more controversial and disgusting elements.

The turn to disgust in *Sweet Movie* marks Makavejev's own interpretation of the use of negative feelings in Black Wave cinema. Indeed, "Black Film," as a term, critically references the negative emotional register of the third phase of Novi film. Vladimir Jovičić's eight-page supplement to *Borba*, the official party newspaper of the Yugoslav Communist Party from which the term is taken ("The Black Wave in our Film"), critiques contemporary Novi film for its

pessimism and overtly nihilistic tone. As Goulding explains, the term had origins in the black

pessimism films of France from the 1930s (in particular those of Marcel Carné), the Polish Black

Series of documentaries from the 1950s and the Czech dark wave films of the 1960s, all of which

presented highly negative, pessimistic, and bleak portraits of social reality. Such

"monochromatic tendencies," as Jovičić put it, reflected nothing more than a "reverse

Zhdanovism played in black rather than white" and led to an "invalid cinema of pessimism and

defeatism, and an attempt to reject all that is positive" (qtd. in Goulding 80, 81). Jovičić's

indictment of such negativity demonstrates how the Black Wave understood negative feelings as

a key element of their criticism of contemporary Communist society and the state-sponsored

optimism of national realism; negative feelings, therefore, as reverse Zhdanovism or not, remain

central to the political project of Black Wave cinema.

Makavejev's films, however, don't quite fit into this pessimistic framework and are often

times fairly light-hearted and comedic in tone; as Paul Arthur describes them, Makavejev's films

are "Marxian dialectics as interpreted by the Marx brothers" (11). Makavejev is different in this

respect to other Black Wave filmmakers in his advocacy of a light and humorous approach to

filmmaking: in his own words Makavejev argues that "humor is a mechanism of counter-

repression, truth is a weapon of counter-repression, joy, all kinds of happiness and of creation are

anti-repressive actions" (qtd. in Sitton 3). But *Sweet Movie* is a strange case that, while not

adopting the melancholic tone of other black films, does draw on negative feeling through its

evocation of disgust. As such, the film is interesting for it marks a use of negative feelings

beyond the negation of the enforced positivism of national realism. Since the film demonstrates

how the revolutionary potential of desire has been exhausted, it turns instead to disgust as an

affective register that embodies a new radical potential. However, in turning to such an

ambivalent "ugly feeling," *Sweet Movie* simultaneously marks its desire for a new mode of revolutionary cinema and the limits that such a model entails. Thus while the film refuses desire as an affect that manipulates the audience through a pleasure in looking, the turn to disgust means that the film cannot be put to work in the same way. Without this affirmative rhetorical gesture *Sweet Movie* emancipates the spectator as Rancière would put it, but at the cost of articulating a coherent political message. Disgust, therefore, is a means by which Makavejev attempts to articulate his interpretation of the anarchist spirit of the *Praxis* intellectuals.

Although the film ultimately operates according to a logic of disgust, the notion of a revolutionary sexual politics that runs through Makavejev's earlier films is still present in *Sweet Movie* and is most apparent in Miss World's storyline. Set in 1984, a year forcefully associated with totalitarianism through Orwell's classic novel, *Sweet Movie* begins with the Crazy Daisy Show where Martha Aplanalp, the head of the Chastity Belt Foundation, is searching for the virgin with the most beautiful hymen, whose prize will be marriage to her billionaire son. This opening sequence immediately indicates the relationship between abstinence and fascism. As Martha comments, the chastity belt requires "no metals, no elastic supports, no tranquilizers. Through the guidance of our sensational method, your own body kills the animal. We advocate simple triumph of the will." The reference here to Leni Riefenstahl's notorious Nazi propaganda film marks the first link between repressed sexual desire, bodily control, and fascism, a chain of associations that the film will build on in the Milky Way Commune sequence and the footage of Nazi gymnastics for babies, both of which I'll come back to shortly. Given the terror that Miss World experiences at the hands of Mr. Dollars' sterile sexuality (that is, his compulsive need to disinfect himself and his bride) and her status as a commodity within the relationship (she is the virgin bride bought "brand new") it would be simple to read this sequence as another critique of

conservative attitudes towards sexuality and thus the Therapy Commune as a utopian carnival of bodily freedom.

But *Sweet Movie* is a lot more complicated. While the Crazy Daisy Show certainly pokes fun at puritanical sexual mores, one cannot overlook the ironically hyper-sexualized presentation of this virgin competition. Each of the contestants is dressed provocatively and their interactions with Dr. Mittelfinger are certainly flirtatious. More significantly, when Miss World is asked to remove her underwear, rather than look at the doctor, she turns and looks seductively into the camera before replying, "I'm not wearing any." This moment of direct address plays on the audience's desires in a familiar way, the glance at the camera making it appear as if we're sharing in some sexual secret as Miss World flirts with us. But Miss World is a commodity, and her sexualized behavior is designed to make this commodity seem more desirable. We see this again when she is trapped in Jeremiah Muscle's milk-bottle home, where she surrenders herself to him after hearing his personal advertising slogan, "try me, I'm delicious." After licking his face to taste his "chocolate complexion," Miss World again turns to the camera and says "sweet," while Jeremiah turns and says "finger-lickin' good." Jeremiah's self-advertising is the means through which he seduces Miss World into staying with him. Indeed, despite being kidnapped and stuffed into a suitcase, she seems pleasantly surprised by his "taste" and smiles at the camera. The effect, then, is for her to forget the abuse she's endured. Sex is thus shown to be the means by which an ideology (here consumer capitalism) is consumed and the erotic nature of these two encounters designed to sweeten it for the audience. Through the direct address to the camera the audience is bought into the system of erotic exchange and the abuses that Miss World experiences are transformed into something pleasurable.

These scenes with Miss World, then, critique the use of sex within the visual media of consumer culture. For while the spectator is addressed in an erotic way and may perhaps enjoy these moments, this pleasure is countered by the extreme abuses that she endures. And, while she may submit to them willingly, the audience is privy to the degradation Miss World experiences as a commodity. Sex may be used to sell us the ideology of consumption, but, as the film reveals, oppression and debasement lie at the heart of commodity culture. Thus in her closing scenes, Miss World is masturbating in a vat of chocolate for a commercial shoot – her body literally transformed into the commodity she is selling – as the cameraman comments with saliva on his lips, "I want them to feel as if they're eating you." The scene brings her earlier abuses full circle as the statue of the black man designed to turn her on brings to mind Jeremiah Muscle and her drowning recalls the similar scene with Mr. Dollars' mother who tries to drown Miss World in a pool. Thus while the eroticism of the scene is intended to be its selling point, and while Miss World certainly seems to be enjoying herself, what is revealed to the audience is the dehumanizing and self-destructive nature of consumer culture brought sharply home to us as Miss World slowly dies, choking on melted chocolate, swallowing capitalist ideology to the point of drowning in it, the last shot of her mimicking Marion Crane's dead body in *Psycho* in reference to the violence that underscores cinematic scopophilia.

Sweet Movie uses this analysis of Western film and advertising to illustrate how its revolutionary critique – Communist cinema – similarly employs desire as a means of sweetening its ideology, and thus how capitalism, soviet-style Communism and fascism bleed into one another. The previous allusion to *Triumph of the Will* references one of the most famous deployments of cinema as an ideological weapon. Significantly though, this reference, linked as it is to the chastity belt, suggests more than simply a Reichian theory that ties repressed sexuality

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to fascism – it also indicates a relationship between political cinema and fascism, for according to the logic of *Sweet Movie*, it is through desire that cinema constructs a position for its spectator, a position that they consent to uncritically, prompted into acceptance by the pleasure it offers. In this way, political cinema uses desire to bolster the myths of revolutionary struggle.

This preoccupation with the use of desire as a means of ideological persuasion is present in much of Makavejev's work and his earlier films are similarly shot through with this investigation of the role of cinema in the processes of revolution and Communist mythmaking and their fascist undercurrents. To this end, all of Makavejev's films engage with the history of revolutionary filmmaking in the Soviet Bloc. Indeed, only a handful of discussions highlight Makavejev's emphasis on film history, most mentioning his various cinematic allusions only as points of trivia.[57] These referential moments are, however, significant elements in Makavejev's larger engagement with the power of cinema as an ideological weapon; that is, how it has been employed to render a given ideology even more attractive, or, as András Kovács describes it, how film "eroticizes and sweetens its subject matter even more, no matter which side it is on" (380). Makavejev's first film, *Man is Not a Bird,* draws on the familiar typage of nationalist realism to critique the myth of the hardworking Communist hero perpetuated by cinema: Jan

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[57]Lorraine Mortimer notes only some of the allusions in her excellent book-length study of Makavejev. Conversely, while Eagle fairly exhaustively catalogues Makavejev's references, he makes little commentary on their significance. Similarly, Houston and Kinder unpack the references to Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* in *Sweet Movie,* while also noting other Hollywood and art house references in the Miss World storyline: the use of the rose as an allusion to "rosebud" in *Citizen Kane*, Jeremiah Muscle's *King Kong*-style kidnapping of Miss World as he carries her to the top of his tower, the verbal evocation of Buñuel's *Milky Way* with Makavejev's renaming of the commune, and his extension of the scene from Antonioni's *Blow Up* where the photographer straddles Varushka and is actively excited by the death that might occur in front of his camera, much as the commercial director is with Miss World. However, while Houston and Kinder list these references, they don't really unpack their implications.

Rudnicki is "the very model of a socialist-realist positive hero – serious, dedicated to his task,

working long hours to accomplish the goal" while Barbulović is "a hulking, muscle-bound giant,

the very physical type who could serve as the perfect model for a worker in socialist-realist

sculpture" (Eagle 133). In a more direct allusion, Barbulović's wife, during one of the early

scenes in the film, is made up to resemble the mother of Pudovkin's famous Soviet film. Here

though, her downtrodden nature is caused by the abuses she experiences at the hands of her

Communist "hero" husband, not the Tsarist elite. Similarly, *WR* uses footage from the

Chiaureli's epic ode to Stalin, *The Vow* (1946), to explore how cinema is used to deify

Communist leaders. In the same film, Milena is represented through visual allusions to earlier

Soviet films, her passionate speech to the tenement building recalling the mise-en-scène and

cinematography of Eisenstein's *Strike.*[58]

    While *Man is Not a Bird* undermines the heroic typage of Soviet cinema, *Love Affair*

employs newsreel footage from Esfir Shub's 1927 Soviet documentary *The Fall of the Romanov*

Dynasty, which commemorated the tenth anniversary of the Russian Revolution, to reveal the

(sexual) repression that underscores everyday Communist life and the use of cinema as a

technology of seduction – the film is the means by which Isabella seduces Ahmed, watching it

with him in her room where it is "more intimate."[59] As Power comments, "We have a fictional

couple watching a documentary within a documentary as a form of seduction: the cinematically

informed viewer is thus seduced three times over" (45).

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[58] MacBean argues that the courtyard in *WR* is also reminiscent of that in Renoir's 1936 film, *Le*
Crime de Monsieur Lange ("Sex" 9).
[59] Both Nina Power (45) and Paul Arthur (12) argue that this footage is actually taken from
Eisenstein's *Enthusiasm,* which incorporated footage from Shub's documentary.

Following this critical engagement with the history of Soviet cinema, Makavejev's

Innocence Unprotected is a documentary about the making of the first Serbian "talkie," which is

also called *Innocence Unprotected*. The original film was produced in Nazi-occupied Yugoslavia

in 1942 by Dragoljub Aleksić, a famous acrobat. Makavejev's film brings to light Aleksić's

alleged collaboration with the Nazis in order to get the film stock necessary to make the film and

highlights his Naziesque obsession with physical form and strength and its cinematic

representation. Makavejev also alludes to other problematic elements of the film's history,

including Aleksić's possible responsibility for the death of his female assistant during a

cannonball stunt and for the death of his co-star in the original *Innocence* who may have died as

a result of a beating Aleksić dispensed in the original film (Eagle 139). We thus see the tenuous

links between Serbian nationalism and fascism which is furthered by Makavejev's incorporation

of clips from Serbian collaborationist newsreels and Nazi propaganda films from WWII, the use

of documentary footage of the violent destruction of Yugoslavia by the Germans, and the use of

Alexandrov's mid-1930s Soviet musical *Circus* which also includes a cannonball stunt and

which uncritically promotes the desirability of Soviet living. As such, the film highlights the use

of cinema as a tool for promoting nationalist ideology while at the same time critiquing the latter

as a pseudo-fascist enterprise. For Herbert Eagle,

> The hymns to the "superman" Aleksić, both in the original film and in the
>
> segments of Makavejev's own creation, begin to parody the deification of heroic
>
> Communist leaders like Stalin and Tito. This reference becomes clear when the
>
> hymns are surprisingly alternated with the "Internationale" (added in one of
>
> Aleksić's stunt sequences) and a Soviet national hymn ("Wide is my Native
>
> Land") taken from the socialist-realist musical *Circus*. Ultimately, Makavejev's

film emerges as a satiric condemnation of national and socialist "mythmaking",

worship of leaders and chauvinistic pride. (140)

What Eagle leaves out is that the focus of this critique is directed towards cinema itself and as such, *Innocence Unprotected,* and Makavejev's oeuvre more generally, presents an indictment of the role of film in this process of Communist/Soviet mythmaking. What runs common to all these cinematic references, and is revealed in *Sweet Movie,* is the use of desire in cinema as a means of perpetuating the myths of revolutionary struggle. These references thus call into questions the myths built up through Soviet film history and argue instead for the repressive and authoritarian foundations of the Communist organization of everyday life.

A similar preoccupation is to be found in *Sweet Movie,* whose male leads are Luv Bakunin, a sailor from Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* and El Macho, a stereotype drawn from numerous Pancho Villa movies. The scene with El Macho is particularly illustrative of this critique of revolutionary cinema, taking place during an on-location shoot for a film about the Mexican revolution. Immediately we are struck by the falsity of the tale being told – there are multiple anachronisms in the shots and it is hard to imagine why a Mexican revolutionary would be half-way up the Eiffel Tower. If this weren't enough, the repeated shots of the cameras, El Macho's bad lip-synching, and the director's comment that he needs to "look straight into the camera and look terribly Mexican because I didn't fly all the way over here to have you look like a French extra" hammer home the profoundly constructed nature of this mythic revolutionary image. When El Macho takes to the stage he sings of his willingness to die for the cause and the nobility of such a death while the women in front of him scream as if he is a rock star. Again, it is through sex that this message of martyrdom is sweetened for the public – while singing of his stallion nature and his wild mane, El Macho gyrates his hips and a low angle shot emphasizes the

bulging outline of his penis. Miss World falls for El Macho, bad Spanish accent and all, and they have sex, only to become locked together, the sexual act, supposedly pleasurable, ultimately reduced to an involuntary, spasmodic muscle contraction that leads to humiliation. Indeed, the two are finally forcefully separated in front of a large crowd in the kitchens of a busy restaurant and while El Macho leaves, singing his revolutionary song to the cheering kitchen hands, Miss World is wheeled out with the trash. She is once again used up and discarded, this time at the hands of the revolutionaries. In this way, Miss World passes from the objectifying hands of the capitalists to the revolutionaries and is equally abused by both to highlight the oppressive uses of sex and seduction that characterize both of these supposed oppositions.

While El Macho reveals the constructed nature of revolutionary myths in cinema, the character Luv Bakunin stands in as the embodiment of the desires they are employed to produce. Luv introduces himself to Anna as her new lover, his desire to get on the boat being immediately tied to sex. Anna's reciprocation of these feelings, her own desire for "an authentic sexual proletarian" is, like Miss World at the Crazy Daisy show, delivered in direct address. This time though, we share a point-of-view shot with Luv as he mounts the stairs to join with Anna. The spectator, then, is put in Luv's position – Anna's sexual advances are toward us, and Luv's desires are ours. As the shots of the cheering men and women by the side of the river suggest, there is pleasure in looking, and the pleasure of this eroticism makes the boat a desirable place. But as Anna herself points out, the boat goes "all the way to the bottom." Yet despite her warnings that everyone who loved her has died and that the boat is full of corpses – it walls are covered with images of fallen Soviet heroes and Hollywood stars – Luv chooses to stay. Inevitably then, after making love to Anna on a bed of sugar, she stabs him. Luv however, enjoys this moment since, as he comments, he need no longer be jealous that it was Vakulinchuk aboard

the Potemkin who died. Luv becomes, like Vakulinchuk in Eisenstein's film, yet another

supposedly inspirational martyr, sacrificed for the cause. As does Miss World, Luv dies

surrounded by sugar and in a post-coital moment. Thus sugar, desire, and death come together,

the ideology of their politics appearing so sweet that they are desired, even to the ultimate

destruction of those concerned.[60]

The violence underscoring these moments is bought home in Luv's body position after he

dies, his mouth wide open in a close up that mirrors the shots of the massacred bodies in the

Katyn forest. This documentary footage of Nazis uncovering the mass grave of thousands of

Polish POWs, intellectuals, policemen, priests, and officials executed by the NKVD,

demonstrates the links between Nazism and Stalinism. While the corpses are exhumed, the

audience is confronted with the violent oppression that is Soviet Communism while the clinical

disinterest with which the Nazi soldiers treat the bodies reveals a similar lack of respect for

human life.[61] Moreover, the intertitle that appears over a red sugar substance that resembles both

candy and blood reveals an Allied indifference to the massacre that suggests another level of

culpability in the West. Significantly, the red sugar background becomes the material from

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[60] According to Winfried Menninghaus, the rotting corpse is "not only one among many other foul smelling and disfigured objects of disgust. Rather, it is *the* emblem of the menace" (1). The corpses that litter *Sweet Movie* – Luv's body, the corpses of the seduced children on the riverbank, Miss World, and the mass of bodies exhumed in the Katyn Forest – can thus be understood as another level on which the film engages the politics of disgust. Indeed, Lorenzo Codelli maintains that "the corpse as protagonist" is an "idée fixe of Makavejev" (qtd. in L. Mortimer 199) so that it is possible to read a version of disgust permeating all of Makavejev's films.

[61] One could also understand this moment as a reference to the Stalinist purges that executed any voices of dissent. Here, Luv's murder marks the silencing of the anarchist alternative that Bakunin's thought represented and the consolidation of Communist authority. This idea is reinforced through the similarities between Luv and the exhumed corpses in the Katyn forest, this visual echo metaphorically placing Luv among those executed by the NKVD.

which a red rose is fashioned – the same one that we see on the back of Dr. Mittelfinger's chair and on the cameras at the Crazy Daisy Show, on Mr. Dollars' helicopter and the gate to his home, and on Anna's boat where it appears the sugar rose is created. This horrific act of violence, then, is directly linked back into sugar and desire, into capitalism, Communism, and fascism.

So, while the liberation of our desires is a fundamental element of revolutionary struggle, *Sweet Movie's* critique reveals how revolutionary cinema has enslaved this desire to ideological ends. Thus revolutionary cinema cannot be differentiated from mainstream Hollywood or the visual media of consumer capitalism in as much as both use desire as a means of manipulating the spectator. Through its manipulation of this positive emotional register, cinema becomes a means of manufacturing a sense of "mystical unity" that for Vaneigem boils down to "that drunken Saturday-night feeling that we are 'all brothers'" which "reeks of the incense of religious mystification" (49). If the radical potential of desire, then, has been reduced to a kind of fascist management of spectatorial subjectivity, we can begin to understand why *Sweet Movie* is ultimately so disgusting.

From Desire to Disgust

There are two scenes in *Sweet Movie* that are typically described as disgusting: Anna Planeta's seduction of four young boys and the Vienna Therapy Commune's treatment sessions. These two moments, however, employ disgust quite differently, the first relying on a sense of moral revulsion. The disgust of this scene operates as a kind of shock used to highlight the "perverted" nature of Anna's kind of seduction that stands as an allegory for the similarly perverted seduction of the masses by Soviet ideology, the Russian Orthodox Mass on the

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soundtrack suggesting a manipulation of faith where revolutionary mythicism has become the new opiate of the people. Or, given Makavejev's investment in sexual liberation and as Houston and Kinder argue, this seduction scene, the "peak of 'outrage,' in the counterculture plot," needs to be considered in the context of Reich, who advocated "liberation from patriarchal dominance for children as a well as for women" (557). The use of moral disgust in this scene is part of the film's surrealist aesthetic, an association strengthened by the casting of Pierre Clementi as Luv (Clementi starred in two of Bunuel's later films, *Belle de Jour* and *Milky Way*, the latter title being picked up by *Sweet Movie* as the name Makavejev gives to Otto Műehl's real life Vienna Therapy Commune – the Actions Analytical Organization – in the film). Anna Planeta's pedophilia, be it a metaphor for mass ideological seduction or a critique of bourgeois sexual morals (or both), is a kind of surrealist attempt to undermine the status quo. But the antics that take place in the Commune are arguably the most challenging part of the film – Paul Arthur describes them as "emotionally harrowing" (11) – and incite a sense of moral revulsion only as a secondary response, their primary effect being physical.[62]

The commune scene begins with a group dinner that quickly disintegrates into a food fight. The members of the commune spit food at each other and gargle their drinks before making themselves sick and regurgitating their food back up on the table. While one man urinates on his companions, who take turns drinking urine directly from his penis, another pulls a large ox tongue from his trousers as if it were his penis and begins to slice it up and throw the

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[62] This is not to undermine the significance of the seduction scene aboard the *Survival.* As Nina Power points out, this scene also played a significant role in Makavejev's fall from favor in the eyes of film critics, with the British Board of Film Censors denying the film a UK cinema certificate in 1975 and the Polish government exiling Anna Prucnal for seven years from her home country based on her role as the revolutionary seductress/murderer (44).

pieces to his friends. As they start chewing on the raw meat, he severs an artery in the tongue and blood spurts across the table. The tongue is then discarded, only to be fought over by two people like dogs fighting over a bone. From here, the camera cuts to a series of shots of three commune members squatting over plates and defecating in front of the group, after which they raise their plates in pride before tossing their feces at each other. While their speech has regressed into grunts and yelps, one man lays on his back as several people wipe the excrement from him. As they pamper and clean him like a baby, he urinates freely before suckling at a woman's breast. The scene is cross cut with footage from another documentary, this time of Nazi doctors helping babies perform gymnastic moves in a series of images that project hygiene, Aryan strength, and total bodily control.

The commune scene seems to be one of regression, where the members purposefully try to expel everything from their bodies and to undo the control that they experienced as children, a control associated with fascism through the infant gymnastics.[63] The relationship between repression, bodily control and fascism thus finds it counter in the desublimated actions of the commune members. As Houston and Kinder write, "We learn discipline one muscle at a time, starting in infancy with toilet training but then moving on to calisthenics or the goose step. […] Hence the regression to infancy can be an act of political liberation whereby one discards all cultural imprinting and once again becomes a chaotic natural being with unlimited potential" (552-53). Similarly, Lorraine Mortimer describes the scene as "Nazi babies now grown up, who are trying to unmake their fascist-inherited bodies, purging themselves by their gorging,

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[63] The idea that the behavior of the commune members is linked to a desire to undo the legacy of fascism is reinforced by Műehl's own political and artistic history as an Austrian national who was drafted by Hitler's army to fight in the Ardenne's Offensive and who later embraced a radical utopian politics of free expression.

vomiting, urinating, and defecating" (194). The commune thus represents the tonic to fascism, pushing back against the control over the body and desire, both literally and metaphorically, that underscores such authoritarian structures while at the same time challenging the boundaries of taste at the aesthetic level. The commune members are thus the "beastly animals, [the] chaotic, natural beings" that Martha Aplanalp so fearfully warns of during the Crazy Daisy Show, here recast as anarchists liberated from the bonds of physical, moral, social, and aesthetic control. Indeed, the total freedom of the scene can be understood as a rebuke of Lenin's own repudiation of anarchism in his book, *Left Communism: An Infantile Disorder,* where Lenin's censure of anarchists as purile and immature is recast positively as a mark of genuine freedom outside the oppressive confines of Communist bureaucracy. This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that the film was released in Italy under the title, developed by Pasolini, *Infantile Malady of Left Communism.*[64] As the complete refusal of social decorum, aesthetic taste, and bodily restraint, the Milky Way Commune represents the most anarchistic freedom imaginable, an embracing of this "infantile malady" as the site of liberation from fascist control where the participants literally refuse to swallow what they are being fed.[65]

However, the affective register of these two scenes is interesting. As Lorraine Mortimer points out, we see "cute little beings with personalities, full of life. But we must go back to less

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[64] This title was one of five titles for the Italian release of *Sweet Movie* that were developed because of concerns over the film's controversial content and the criticism it had engendered in other countries. Indeed, in several countries, the film was screened with the seduction scene and/or the scene in the commune edited out (Houston and Kinder 564).

[65] In commenting on the politics of this scene, Makavejev states, "You are not supposed to throw up. Whatever you eat, you have to digest. So even if you get the most poisonous ingredients – food, ideology, anything that is against what your being represents – you are not supposed to throw up. […] You are supposed to digest, even at the expense of some part of yourself" (qtd. in Mortimer 216).

pleasant sights at the commune" (194). Or, as Marsha Kinder puts it, "on the gut level, we are still revolted by the shit and turned on by the sugar" (4). Yet surely the sights of the Nazis should be the "less pleasant" ones, not those in the commune. But the visceral revulsion that the commune projects renders the Nazi documentary footage appealing, a kind of ordered respite from such debauchery. This scene, then, cannot be read simply as a Rabelaisian transgression where the abject takes on political power by virtue of its negation of bourgeois norms (which is as far as Mortimer and Kinder go; while they point out this irony, they don't probe its significance). Rather, the scene is difficult and disgusting and the alternative that it presents to fascist control, not enormously appealing. Indeed, the film maintains a critical stance towards the radical libratory politics of the commune – Miss World is at the commune and she's once again abused as her participation in the commune's actions doesn't seem fully consensual.[66] Anna Planeta is also there with a new look, her presence implying the new face of what is, perhaps, another dogmatic regime. Moreover, the liberation of the commune remains linked to fascism through the musical score, Ode to Joy. While Schiller's original poem was heralded as a revolutionary tract adored by Bakunin (the historical one) and played as part of the May Day celebrations, Beethoven's symphony carries fascist connotations, having been adopted by Japanese kamikaze pilots in WWII, by the 1936 Berlin Olympics and the celebrations for Hitler's birthday, as well as being the song played on German radio stations upon the

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[66] Our sense of discomfort with Miss World is added to by the fact that, as Power points out, "it's not clear that [Carole] Laure is acting her disturbance in these scenes" (51). Houston and Kinder similarly point out that Laure was originally intended to achieve a revolutionary transformation in the commune but she was "too frightened by the 'crazies' and thus chose to remain the masochistic victim to the end" (553). Indeed, Laure later sued Makavejev and *Sweet Movie*'s producers for personal damages inflicted during filming (562).

announcement of his death. What we get in this scene, then, is a further co-mingling of libratory and fascist ideologies.

So it appears that there is a fine line between love and shit, between desire and disgust, between oppression and liberation. As William Miller argues in *The Anatomy of Disgust,* disgust is, on a certain level, conjoined with desire so that "we might not want to oppose so-called unconscious desire […] to disgust at all, but see them as necessary to each other, as part of a complex syndrome" (113).[67] The connection between desire and disgust, which runs through the work of Freud, Kristeva, and Bataille to name but a few, is echoed in the opening scene of *Sweet Movie*, which is also repeated on the soundtrack during the defecation contest in the commune. In these moments, Anna Planeta sings of something black on the mountaintop that could be either "cow shit" or "my beloved." Indeed, in her closing moments, Miss World plays with chocolate in a manner reminiscent of the food games in the commune and her body is covered in brown chocolate just as the man-child in the commune is covered in brown feces. Like the commune members, Miss World lets out a series of guttural grunts to further link the two scenes, while the cut to Luv looking in the windows of the *Survival*, edited to appear is if he is looking at Miss World covered in chocolate, brings the three worlds together; capitalism, soviet-style Communism and (anti)fascism all bleed into one another.

For some critics, Makavejev's turn to disgust is part of the film's larger political aims. For Stanley Cavell, the scenes of disgust in *Sweet Movie* provide "the chance for a cleansing revulsion" by forcing us to question what we find disgusting and how this reflects our complicity

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[67] William Miller (following Kolnai, albeit unknowingly) identifies two kinds of disgust, that of surfeit and that of reaction formation, both of which imply, in different ways, that "fair is foul and foul is fair" (113).

with systems of oppression (319). For Cavell, the seduction scene and the scene at the commune, structured in general adjacency with the sequence of the Katyn massacre, which is also revolting, prompt us to ask ourselves what we are revolted by: "If rotting corpses make us want to vomit, why at the same time do live bodies insisting on their vitality?" (316). Faced with this tension between disgust at an act of "unredeemable" violence and revulsion at the attempts of the commune members to "vomit up the snakes and swords and fire the world forces down our throats," he concludes that the latter sequence is, in fact, one of innocence (316). For Cavell, then, *Sweet Movie* brings into relief a genuine disgust, disgust directed towards tyranny rather than the image of vital bodies, which could become the basis of a politics since it helps us "learn to tolerate our disgust more easily than we learn to tolerate what disgusts" (328).[68] While Cavell maintains that the fact that the Katyn massacre may appear less disgusting highlights for us the extent to which we have become complicitous with the logic of tyranny, his move to read the scene at the commune as an expression of innocence, which thus undercuts its hideousness, doesn't reflect the visceral and physical response that the scene engenders. Indeed, Cavell seems to want to undo our disgust at the commune by transforming the scene; revulsion, although our first response, is actually invalidated by the truly disgusting horror of the Katyn massacre. We shouldn't, Cavell argues, find the commune disgusting once we've thought about it. Other critics, recognizing the powerful revulsion that the scene elicits and refusing to transform it into something else, understand the disgust of *Sweet Movie* as Makavejev's descent into pessimism. In this vein, Nina Power argues that it is "relatively easy to see the film as a pessimistic response

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[68] Cavell's logic here seems to draw on Makavejev's comment to Robert Benayoun and Michel Ciment that it is "impossible to invent more terrifying sequences than those contained in certain documentaries" (L. Mortimer 198).

to the assimilation of the very things, freedom and sexuality, that Makavejev sought to explore so boldly" so that it becomes "difficult to isolate a notion of hope amid all the various minor and world-historical horror that Makavejev parades before us" (51).

However, while disgust certainly does make the film harder to watch and obscures its politics, the powerful physical response that it elicits does not erase the film's revolutionary potential. Neither do we have to attempt to rewrite it as something other than disgust in order to see how. In fact, it is with this emotional experience, challenging though it is, that the possibilities of a revolutionary cinema remain. As Ngai points out, our response to disgusting stimuli blocks the processes of sympathetic identification since disgust is "constituted by the vehement rejection or *exclusion* of its object" (340, 22).[69] Organized by a "trajector[y] of repulsion rather than attraction," by a "phobic striving 'away from' rather than a philic strivin[g] 'toward'" (Ngai 11), disgust repulses the spectator and pushes them away. In this respect, it is the opposite of desire, refusing the spectatorial pleasure that the film is at pains to critique and thus the seduction that *Sweet Movie* sees as the heart of fascist bodily control. As such, the presence of disgust here interrupts discourse and the process of communication by rendering the representation of supposed libratory politics so unpalatable. This disjunction between the affective experience and the political significance of the scene precludes the ideological seduction that will lure the audience into accepting the politics of the film. Thus if the spectator is to take on whatever politics are articulated in this moment of disgust, they must work through and against their affective response.

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[69] Susan Miller makes a similar claim in her book, *Disgust: The Gatekeeper Emotion* when she explains how disgust is often invoked to disrupt empathy (19).

Here, then, a possibility of revolutionary cinema remains since such negative feeling becomes a means of disrupting the clear communication of a revolutionary politics. But it may only remain as a possibility. For the gap also creates ambivalence – the spectator may indeed refuse the disgusting and turn away with contempt. Such a response was, unsurprisingly, common: Kinder points out that at the screening of the film at Berkeley in 1974, some viewers "wanted to reject the film completely by vomiting in disgust or seeing it simply as a pile of shit" (5). Similarly, *Time* Magazine was morally outraged and declared *Sweet Movie* part of the "porno plague" invading America that included *Deep Throat* and *Behind the Green Door* (45), while Jay Cocks described the film as "full of unenlightened lunacy, […] a social disease" and Ian Christie saw its "anarchic provocation" as "a major betrayal of promise [that] has left Makavejev with a continuing credibility problem" (qtd. in L. Mortimer 311 n8). In fact, *Sweet Movie*, because of its revolting elements, effectively ruined Makavejev's career in exile, leading to his virtual expulsion from the art house film scene for what Lorraine Mortimer terms its "transgression of the decorum of the art film" (216). Alternately, the spectator may revel in the disgusting, taking pleasure in its spectacle for, as numerous theorists of the emotion have pointed out, there is a "paradoxical magnetism" about disgust; it often fascinates and attracts our attention as something that we cannot help but take interest in, despite our revulsion (Korsemeyer 3). Indeed, *Time*'s categorization of *Sweet Movie* as pornographic indicates that it contains the same titillating and enticing elements that such taboo genres exploit. But for the film to remain anti-fascist, that is, for it to refuse to lead the spectator, it must leave these options open.

However, the use of disgust here has to be more complicated if it is to formulate a revolutionary aesthetic. Indeed, if disgust functions as simply a different way of making the

spectator think, we are back within the problematic logic of spectatorship where the filmmaker maintains his authoritative pedagogical position – the director has not only determined the truth of revolutionary action (the commune) but also the best way to communicate that truth to the spectator (disgust). While disgust introduces the caveat that this education may not work, if we consider disgust as the simple inversion of desire – an alternate means of making the spectator understand – it's still bound to the same problematic logic of truth and calculability and the corresponding power differential between those who know and those who don't. Disgust is assimilated back into an affirmative system of representation that fixes revolution and attempts to communicate this truth to the ignorant viewer.

Alongside this rejection of sympathetic identification, then, disgust carries with it a further sense of ambiguity that is bound to its negativity. In his theorization of disgust Winfried Menninghaus argues that the repulsion that characterizes disgust renders it profoundly negative: unlike desire which "aims at the overcoming of distance" (1), "the defense mechanism of disgust consists in a spontaneous and especially energetic act of saying 'no.' Yet disgust implies not just an ability to say no, but even more a compulsion to say no, an inability *not* to say no" (2). Thus the elicitation of repulsion underscores a negation of the object of disgust: "while disgust is always disgust toward [… its] trajector[y is] directed toward the *negation* of [its] objects, either by denying them or by subjecting them to epistemological skepticism" (Ngai 22). Plantinga reads a moral judgment onto this negative trajectory, arguing that "physical disgust is used to create – whether explicitly or implicitly – moral and ideological antipathy toward certain characters and their actions and to promote their condemnation" (*Moving* 212). In the context of revolutionary cinema, therefore, such negation undermines that which is presented – in the case of *Sweet Movie,* the revolutionary, radically liberated, anti-fascist actions of the commune. The powerful

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negativity that disgust exhibits in rendering its object wholly and "compulsively" intolerable thus prohibits it from performing the same affirmative function as desire. To this extent, disgust can only show what is good by virtue of opposition to itself. But again, this simple inversion is troubled in *Sweet Movie* since this disgusting moment is, through its attempt to undo any and all traces of ideological bodily control through the act of regression and expulsion, the very absence of authoritarian control that second wave revolution calls for.

The negative affective register of the scene thus does more than simply negate the positivity and optimism of early Yugoslav cinema to inhibit the mythicization of revolutionary action. It's also more than a negation that shows what should be affirmed through inversion. Rather, the presence of disgust means that the film refuses to affirm revolutionary action; the anti-fascism that the commune represents becomes paradoxical since our revulsion renders this freedom unacceptable. We are left, then, with a critique of Soviet-style revolutionary politics and a sense of what revolution is not, but no sense of what it should be. In this way, the film engages the question of revolution but mobilizes paradox and ambiguity in order to avoid the problems of determinism, calculability, and authoritarianism that a clear political message entails. To this end, the film achieves its goal of personal liberation since the negotiation of this ambiguity becomes a profoundly subjective experience. Indeed, the lack of ideological coherence leads us back into the anti-Stalinist anarchism of the Black Wave. The use of disgust creates a cinema that pushes back against received ideas of acceptability, taste, and, morality, where the ideological constraints of what Dušan Stojanović calls "the bureaucratized mind" give way to a liberated body and mind, a "free, independent, personal, even anarchist spirit" (qtd. in Levi 17). At the same time, the representation of this revolutionary possibility cannot be easily reconciled as part of a political program or stand as an unproblematic example of what revolutionary action

should be. What we are left with instead is a profoundly paradoxical and ambiguous representation of revolution that accords with the "open metaphors" that Liehm and Liehm mark as the characteristic feature of the Black Wave (417) and what Paul Arthur, writing for *Cineaste*, describes as a political film practice that is "dynamic, unstable, pluralistic, erotic, intuitive, joyful [and] able to nurture and sustain paradox" (12).[70]

However, it is important to note that the "open structure" of *Sweet Movie* is not a simple endorsement of interpretative relativism. Makavejev explicitly counters such relativism, arguing that the anarchistic spirit evoked by the *Praxis* thinkers must be combined, somehow, with a sense of order and organization if it is to be effective as a means of social transformation:

> For it seems to me that the all-anarchism of, let's say, the New American Cinema or the anarchism of the New Left, this kind of totally unorganized way in which people are now reacting to power structures, is inefficient because it lacks organization, yet if it turns to organization it takes the same old forms, like the highly organized, militant, puritan, self-sacrificing groups, so this just perpetuates the old system of power and fighting power with power. (qtd. Sitton 8)

Here, Makavejev returns us to the problem of party politics elaborated in chapter one: without organization, rebellion becomes atomized and ineffective on a larger social scale, but as a structured practice it becomes dogmatic and alienating. Suspicious of both individualism and collectivism on a representative scale, Makavejev instead advocates a kind of organized spontaneity or "well organized anarchy" (qtd. in Sitton 9). In terms of cinematic structure, this

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[70] One could argue that this language of open metaphors is part of the history of Soviet Bloc filmmaking in terms of the effect of censorship on film style. The realities of political censorship meant that Yugoslav filmmakers became particularly adept at developing a politically charged metaphorical language that would evade the eyes of the censors.

paradoxical concept renders his films "liberating traps" – open structures that "forc[e] people to throw their own irrationalities into the film" (qtd. in Sitton 8). The emphasis thus remains on personal and subjective response but within a framework that conditions the contextual parameters of engagement: our personal response is to the problem of revolutionary cinema. Moreover, this investment in "irrationalities," in forcing the audience to "projec[t its] own wrong ideas, [its] own misinterpretations […] into the film" once again highlights the profoundly non-didactic nature of the film. Arthur argues that this tendency towards the irrational is bound to Makavejev's emphasis on affect in as much as "any effort on our part to rationally order or interpret this centrifugal overload of associations, in part as emotional defense against revulsion, is frustrated" (12). While I do not wish to reinforce the opposition between emotion and intellect that is perhaps implied by Arthur, his comment does highlight the way in which emotional response interrupts our ability to fully interpret the film.[71] Rather, the paradoxes of the "liberating trap" encourage confusion and puzzlement so that the process of interpretation remains "frustrated" and thus unfinished. As such, *Sweet Movie* remains resolutely negative and refuses to give way to a positive, affirmative, or complete representation of revolution.

Conclusion

It is through this sense of paradox and open-endedness that *Sweet Movie* articulates it revolutionary potential. However, in refusing to do so, the film necessitates a similar rethinking of the way that we understand revolutionary cinema as the aesthetics strategies of Godard and Rocha did in the previous chapter. Indeed, while the affective paradox of the film enables it to

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[71] Which would also, it seems, undermine Cavell's claim that once we've thought about it, the commune scene is really more about innocence than revulsion.

maintain a radical potential, on another level it means that the film undermines its own ability to engage in revolutionary struggle since it still precludes the coherence that political movements are typically founded on and that Makavejev himself sees as necessary to radical change. Thus Belgrade critics like Milutin Čolić and Milan Ranković, who were originally supporters of the Black Wave, came to question the negativity of the movement as a viable political form and to understand its abandonment of social engagement in favor of individual expression as a return to a bourgeois aesthetic (Goulding 82). The profoundly anti-programmatic nature of *Sweet Movie*, then, clarifies a paradox that lies at the heart of second wave revolutionary cinema.

For in both its aesthetic and affective forms, revolutionary cinema faces a similar conundrum: film can either represent a coherent politics with the aim of inspiring directed action but in doing so become implicated in the ends-oriented teleology of Marxist orthodoxy and the authoritarianism of the filmmaker as master, or it can exploit negativity, inference, and multiplicity to undermine any such authority but in doing so relinquish its ability to affect political change. The form and feeling of second wave revolutionary cinema thus prompts a redefinition of the genre. Much like revolution itself, second wave cinema cannot be defined according to its ends; any such preconceived notion of effect carries with it all the problems attendant to orthodox revolutionary thought that we have detailed thus far. Rather than thinking in terms of fully determined goals, then, revolutionary cinema becomes an imperative, a genre that maintains its call for radical social transformation but without expectation of result. While such films lay out critiques of capitalism, they do not endorse a people or an action as proper to social transformation. Rather, they foreground the importance of interpretation as a means of bringing these categories into being. The responsibility for this kind of definitional work remains with the spectator, each one deciding for themselves when and how to struggle, and in service of

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what ends. There is certainly a sense of "suspended agency" here as it is possible, indeed perhaps probable, that these films will not result in any concrete forms of action. But their investment in a fluid theoretical politics expands the categories of struggle and shapes, in a never-ending fashion, what the contours of revolution can be. Thus while cinema can't in the most literal sense fashion weapons for battle as Rancière makes clear (*Emancipated* 103), it can function as part of the imaginative process that defines how to struggle and why. However, this work of definition remains a continuous process as the conditions of revolution remain in a perpetual state of debate and contestation. As such, revolutionary cinema doesn't look to affirm a predetermined set of revolutionary categories but to continually inspire the forms of new ones. In this sense, second wave cinema works to reposition revolution in Marx's original terms, not as the realization of a timeless preexisting victory but as a continual, fluid engagement with the similarly fluid constraints of capitalist society. Films like *Sweet Movie* thus attempt to reengage this notion of perpetual and adaptable struggle in a form that does not undermine these theoretical investments.

One way to imagine this practice is, following Milovan Djilas, to think second wave revolutionary cinema as an "unperfect" genre. Djilas titled his radical political critique of Stalinist Communism *The Unperfect Society* since the more familiar adjective "imperfect" implied that society could, in fact, be perfected, given enough time. Rather, he wanted to convey the impossibility of realizing utopia, and chose the word "unperfect" to reflect his belief that people "must hold both ideas and ideals, but they should not regard these as being wholly realizable" (4). The paradox of *Sweet Movie* and of second wave cinema more generally – the fact that its revolutionary possibility is bound to its very failure to communicate a clear political program or inspire social action – similarly points to the *unperfectability* of revolutionary cinema. This is not to undermine the need to resist all forms of social and economic domination

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or the urgency of struggle but to recognize the fundamental incompleteness that accompanies such a politics. *Sweet Movie*'s challenges and aporias are the means by which it maintains its revolutionary possibility, but it is a possibility that can never be fully realized. And this, perhaps, is Makavejev's interpretation of Petrović's act of living as a revolutionary where we constantly strive for the satisfaction of a desire that disgust keeps perpetually out of reach.

CHAPTER FOUR

Revolutionary Remainders: Mourning and Melancholia

> I just want you to know that more than once I've seen hope – what they call bright
> new tomorrows – drive people I've valued as much as I value you to kill themselves
> -   Jacques Lacan (43)

Introduction

In 1976, Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville released *Ici et ailleurs* (*Here and Elsewhere*), a film that began life as the Dziga Vertov Group's never-completed Palestinian revolutionary film, *Jusqu'à la victoire* (*Until Victory*, a name taken from an al-Fatah slogan). The original intent was to compile the film, which was commissioned and financed by the Information Service Bureau of Fatah, from footage shot at refugee camps in Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria during the spring of 1970 where Palestinian revolutionaries prepared to regain the land that had been occupied by Israel during the 1967 war through armed resistance. The PLO was confident of its success and King Hussein's rule appeared to be on the brink of inevitable collapse. As such, and much like Luigi Perelli's *al-Fatah: Palestina* (1970), a documentary funded by the Italian Communist Party and the Films of Palestine group, *Jusqu'à la victoire* was originally intended as a prognostic document of the success of the Palestinian Revolution. As James MacBean puts it, the film was intended to be "a *défense et illustration* of how the Fatah Movement's thorough, patient, and systematic planning and organization made it a model of revolutionary preparedness" ("Godard" 31), an idea which the film's original subtitle, *Méthodes de pensée et de travail de la révolution Palestinienne* (*Thinking and Working Methods of the Palestinian Revolution*), plays out.

But the making of *Jusqu'à la victoire* was fraught with problems: the money from the Arab League soon ran out and Godard and Gorin were forced to take a commission from German

television to make a film about the trial of the Chicago Eight in order to continue funding the project (the Chicago film became *Vladimir et Rosa*). After their tour of the US, Godard and Gorin resumed their attempts to edit their Palestinian footage, although fears that they would become the target of Israeli assassins slowed the process and prompted Godard to ask Claude Nedjar, the editor for all the Dziga Vertov productions, to provide an armored door for their editing studio (MacCabe 231). Godard and Gorin continued to struggle for several years to edit the footage that they had collected into a coherent film; after their repeated failures, what Gorin refers to as "our impossibility to edit it," Gorin announced in 1974 the decision to make four or five films from the ten or so hours of footage that they had collected, which would reflect this "impossibility" (Thomsen). This revised and expanded project was not to be either; around this time Gorin moved to California, the Dziga Vertov Group dissolved, and *Jusqu'à la victoire* spent two more years in the editing room until its release in the radically different form of *Ici et ailleurs* .

More than Godard and Gorin's fears and frustrations, the major obstacle to the original film's completion was the PLO's failure to realize its revolutionary goal. In September 1970, Hussein launched a violent counter-offensive against the PLO, which resulted in the deaths of thousands of Palestinian activists and militants. The ensuing armed conflict, which continued until July of the following year, resulted not in the liberation of Palestinian territories but instead in the decimation of the PLO's leadership, their expulsion from Jordan and the reestablishment of Hussein's monarchical power, as well as the death of thousands of militants and the creation of over 50,000 Palestinian refugees. The brutal failure of Palestinian resistance and the fact that the majority of the revolutionaries that Godard and Gorin had originally filmed were now dead stood in paralyzing opposition to the Dziga Vertov Group's original intentions for the film.

Godard was unable to find a formal structure capable of adequately expressing this loss; as Colin

MacCabe notes in his biography of Godard, "When Chris Marker dropped into the Dziga Vertov

editing room in September 1970, Godard told him, 'This film is in pieces, just like Amman'"

(243). The militant documentary[72] that he and Gorin had originally planned seemed woefully

inadequate in the face of these deaths and its title a cruel reminder of the movement's misplaced

optimism. On top of this, the retreat of the French left during this period and the gradual

exhaustion of revolutionary energies across the globe had called into question the militant

documentary genre; as MacCabe puts it, by this point, "much of the initial enthusiasm of *Vent

d'est* had worn off" and the idea of making another Dziga Vertov film no longer seemed

appropriate (231). Thus, the film that was originally designed as a prophetic document of

revolutionary success, in the wake of revolutionary failure instead became a critical examination

of the very idea of revolutionary filmmaking and the political project of the Dziga Vertov Group

itself.

  Godard and Gorin's Maoism had always stressed the global nature of revolution and the

collapse of *Jusqu'à la victoire* signified not only the failures of the Palestinian struggle but also

the disintegration of revolutionary movements throughout the world. Indeed, by the mid-1970s,

the revolutionary fervor that had swept the globe during the previous decade had by and large

run its course. The once revolutionary momentum that grew from various international political

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[72] Richard Brody cites Armand Marco, the cameraman for *Jusqu'à la victoire,* as evidence of
this film's doctrinaire point of view: "theoretical discussions served a predetermined end. Before
travelling to the Middle East, Godard had put together an elaborate story board of the action to
be filmed. He and Gorin approached the project like advertising: they had a message that they
wanted to expound, and they decided in advance what they wanted to show in order to exemplify
it. 'There were drawings and shots already worked out,' Marco recalled. 'We went to verify that
structure'" (351).

movements – anticolonial struggles, student protests, national strikes, radical black

consciousness, opposition to the Viet Nam war, Latin American guerilla groups, Chinese

opposition to Soviet Communist hegemony – now dissipated as radical groups dissolved or were

broken up, key figures were arrested or died, and revolutionary agendas gave way to compromise

and reformism. Roy Armes, in his discussion of third world filmmaking, exhaustively catalogues

this decline:

> In North Africa, the FLN (National Liberation Front), as a guerilla force, had been
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> virtually annihilated by the French military by the time that Algerian
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> independence was finally achieved in 1962, and in Latin America, armed struggle
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> in the name of revolution proved more difficult than had been anticipated. The
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> Cuban and Vietnamese successes were not to be repeated; Che Guevara's failure
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> to spread revolution outside Cuba and his execution in the Bolivian mountains in
>
> 1967 certainly indicated that the spread of revolution cannot be achieved by
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> guerillas who overestimate their own strength and misjudge the situations they
>
> wish to transform. Indeed, the 1960s saw not socialist revolution in Latin
>
> America, but the succession of ever more brutal right-wing military coups in the
>
> 1970s, most of them with covert U.S. backing. The overthrow and death of the
>
> first democratically elected Marxist head of state, Salvador Allende, in Chile in
>
> 1973, marks at least the provisional end of an era of hope. (89)

In Europe, radical movements fared no better: Russia sent the tanks into Czechoslovakia to crush

the Prague Spring and German student protests failed to stop the Bundestag from passing the

German Emergency Acts into law. In France, despite his fears, de Gaulle's government achieved

a sweeping victory in the June 1968 elections, and shortly after assuming the presidency in 1969,

Georges Pompidou established the *anti-casseurs* law and disbanded the Gauche Prolétarienne.

As a result, what radical energy remained was channeled towards the development of militant

left-wing organizations which, in contrast to what came to be seen as the largely ineffectual

process of civil disobedience, attempted to bring about revolution through armed struggle.

Although some groups remained active for several decades (the second and third generations of

the Red Army Faction in Germany and the United Red Army in Japan, for example), again, swift

and strong government retaliation, combined with internal infighting and ideological

factionalism, ensured that their political impact was relatively inconsequential.[73] As Dorothea

Hauser argues, the rise of militant activism from the ashes of the declining protest movement

"was but the somewhat desperate endeavor of a very small number of militants anxious to

perpetuate the dwindling dynamics of '1968.' Because their activity met with little sympathy, let

alone support from former activists, their political impact was negligible" (269).

Thus, while the "myth of Tricontinental Revolution via the figures of Fanon, Che

Guevara, and Ho Chi Minh" (Chaliand 27) collapsed under the weight of reforms, coups, and the

reassertion of state authority and capitalist hegemony, correspondingly, the commitment to the

political function of cinema similarly dissipated. As governments in Eastern Europe, Latin

America, and Africa consolidated their power, the critical attitudes that developed around 1968

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[73] Despite their relative longevity, the history of the Red Army Faction and the United Red Army bear testament to this: the first generation of the RAF were arrested and, after several failed attempts to escape from prison, committed collective suicide, while the majority of URA militants were arrested in a police raid. The remaining members retreated to a training camp in the Japanese Alps where the leadership proceeded to execute a substantial number of activists, the affair ending with the infamous ten-day siege at the Asama Sanso Lodge and the arrest of the remaining militants, a number of whom then went on to commit suicide in prison.

were silenced as numerous filmmakers were subject to censorship, blacklisting, imprisonment, or exile.[74] In western Europe, political filmmakers distanced themselves from the revolutionary genre; the collapse of the Dziga Vertov group is understood by many to signal a shift in Godard's work away from militant political commitment[75] and Bertolucci's next project after *Partner* was the more conventional mainstream film *The Spider Stratagem* (1970). Similarly, political collectives and experiments in alternative film production dissolved:

> The collectivist production that grew out of 1968 in the shape of groups such as Dziga-Vertov, Medvedkine and Cinélutte came apart as the 1970s wore on and it became clear that the radical change that 1968 had seemed to announce was not a present possibility. Production returned to more conventional modes with film-makers again making films in their own name and not in that of a group. Those collectives that did survive mutated into small production companies run along more conventional lines. (O'Shaughnessy 14)

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[74] Armes offers a striking list of political filmmakers forced into exile as a wave of military coups swept across Latin America and Africa: Rocha and Guerra in Brazil in 1968, Sanjinés in Bolivia in 1971, Ruiz and Littín in Chile in 1973, and Solanas and Getino in Argentina in 1976. Armes also references Guney's repeated imprisonment in Turkey and his eventual death in exile, Med Hondo, who made all of his films in exile in Paris, and even Sembène who, "despite his reputation as black Africa's leading film maker, has had a continual battle with the censors in his native Senegal, where *Xala* was released only after eleven separate cuts and where *Ceddo* remained banned for eight years" (93). We could add to this list the dozens of Eastern European directors, screenwriters, and cinematographers who were forced to leave their countries as censors cracked down on the production of radical political cinema, banning hundreds of films and exiling those involved in their production.

[75] A number of critics, including Irmgard Emmelhainz, argue that *Ici et ailleurs* actually marks the start of this shift (651). However, while the film is certainly critical of the project of political filmmaking as practiced up to this point, as this chapter argues, it maintains a clear commitment to revolutionary politics.

As revolutionary movements faltered and failed, what Roy Armes calls the "consistent pattern of commitment" (96) that characterized cinematic production around 1968 also waned so that by the mid 1970s, revolutionary cinema's second wave had crested.

So what are we to make of films like *Ici et ailleurs*, films that maintain a residual revolutionary commitment amidst this climate of thwarted expectations and radical decline? What do films made in the post-revolutionary moment contribute to the history and theory of revolutionary cinema? In this closing chapter, I look at two films, *Ici et ailleurs* and John Abraham's *Amma Ariyan* (1986) to examine how films made in the wake of the second wave impact our understanding of the possibilities of a revolutionary cinematic genre. Significantly, both of these films circulate around the bodies of dead revolutionaries – the corpses of burned Palestinian radicals in Godard's film and the body of a dead Naxalite in Abraham's – which, both literally and metaphorically, cannot be buried. Working against the canonization of the dead revolutionary as martyr, a familiar move in revolutionary rhetoric and cinema which subsumes the dead into the larger historical trajectory of revolutionary teleology, the corpses in these films continually interrupt the narrative and disturb its teleological drive. As such, the bodies demand attention in a way that cannot easily be satisfied. These films, then, take stock of the human cost of revolution to examine our debt to its remainders, a debt which prompts an alternate sense of history that brings both the loss and the promise of the past into the present and the future. In a sense, we return to the idea of repetition that opened this project as history, refusing to be buried, continually haunts the present in order to open up new possibilities for the future.

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Part III of Eisenstein's revolutionary masterpiece, *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), is subtitled, "The Dead Man Calls Out." This man is Grigory Vakulinchuk, the first aboard the ship to "sound the cry of rebellion" and, as the intertitles inform us, "the first to fall at the executioner's hand." After his murder, Vakulinchuk's body is taken ashore and laid to rest in a tent on the Odessa pier with a burning candle clutched in his dead hands and a sign on his chest that reads, "for a spoonful of borscht." As the citizens of Odessa perform a mass pilgrimage to the pier to mourn the fallen sailor, their grief slowly transforms into anger; close-ups of peasants crying are cross-cut with close-ups of clenched and raised fists until mourning completely gives way to rebellion and the town rises as one to overthrow its oppressors and "take revenge on the blood-thirsty vampires!" Vakulinchuk's dead body "calls out" to the people, then, as a symbol of oppression, as what Karla Oeler refers to as "revolutionary cinema's most prominent Martyr" (11). Indeed, it is *only* in death that Vakulinchuk is able to realize his revolutionary significance so that in *Battleship Potemkin,* as in much Soviet revolutionary cinema, the value of life is fundamentally bound to the virtue of self-sacrifice for the collective cause. Thus, as Oeler maintains, in revolutionary cinema death is structured, "not as the brutal end of a life meaningful in itself, but as a life's crowning significance within a progressive historical trajectory" (11).

This instrumentalization of death and the conversion of loss into revolutionary energy are bound to a logic of history that exercises its faith in the realization of revolutionary triumph as a means of justifying past and present suffering. Indeed, as Oeler continues, "In the strictest extreme of class struggle, murder cannot take place because killing an oppressor is not murder, but rather the creation of a new social order, and killing the oppressed is always a matter of class violence in which the individual is irrelevant" (12). In this way, suffering and violence are recast

as the expression of dialectical historical forces and the memories of individual victims are traded for an abstract significance in the collective conscience. Violence thus becomes justifiable through the future anterior of revolutionary triumph, a faith in victory which Godard and Gorin tried, but ultimately were unable, to call on. As the signal expression of class struggle, violence is subsumed as part of the narrative of what will have been the inexorable march of the dialectic towards revolutionary liberation. Thus, the "Eternal memory to the fallen fighters!" that one man promises the people of Odessa is to be realized, not in present grief or mourning, but in the future that is the product of struggle and the revolutionary victory inaugurated by his death. Taking up the struggle in the place of those no longer able to fight operates as both a means of remembrance and of assuming the Utopian promise that will have justified their sacrifice. The memory of the dead, therefore, transforms into the promise of the future, or, as Ashis Nandy suggests, "the future becomes our tool to control others *now*" (2). In this way, the future is only ever the ideological consolation of and for the present and not revolutionary difference as such.

The origins of this kind of future-oriented historical thinking can be traced back to Marx, whose defense of violence as a structural component of revolutionary struggle became axiomatic to the majority of revolutionary thinking and thus the foundation for the narrative of sacrifice taken up by revolutionary cinema. Indeed, while Marx's own body of writing on revolution constitutes a profoundly complex and nuanced theorization of struggle, various interlocutors have established, through the canonization of particular texts and aphorisms like the famous assertion, "history is the judge, its executioner, the proletarian," a more universalist revolutionary

ideology that sees force as the primary characteristic of all revolutions.[76] Thus, what Matthias

Fritsch refers to as "a certain teleo-logic of history" has come to dominate much revolutionary

ideology (15). Following the logic of this particular narrative, since revolutionary triumph is a

teleological certainty, any violence in the present moment is *a priori* justified on the basis of its

position as the necessary prehistory to the advent of Communism proper. This thinking performs

what Fritsch terms a "Marxist sacralization of history by way of the theory of progress" where,

in the name of the instantiation and institutionalization of Marxism, any number of atrocities can

and have been justified (14).

Although this historical justification of violence is part of the interpretation of Marx that

leads more clearly to the orthodoxy of Lenin and Stalin and the institutionalization of

bureaucratic Communism, the necessity of violence to revolutionary struggle finds a similar

voice in the '68 turn towards Mao. Despite the positioning of Maoism as a viable Communist

alternative to Stalinism, the same narrative of violence as part of the general history of

revolution, as opposed to its localized historical position in Marx, arises in Maoist ideology and

is furthered by its international adoption. In "Problems of War and Strategy," Mao famously

asserts that "political power comes from the barrel of a gun" and that "the seizure of power by

armed force, the settlement of the issue by war, is the central task and the highest form of

revolution. This Marxist-Leninist principle of revolution holds good universally, for China and

for all other countries" (224, 219). Thus, we see in Maoism the generalization of armed struggle

as the universal means of revolutionary transformation and its instantiation as a fundamental

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[76] This quote comes from "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte" (578), which despite being, as Derrida deftly argues, an intricate, complex, and circular text, is often canonized as a statement of revolutionary orthodoxy.

mechanism in the revolutionary historical narrative. The second wave emphasis on Mao, as well as its embrace of other third world revolutionary thinkers (Guevara, Fanon) that condoned (albeit in radically different and complex ways) the use of violence in political struggle, established violence as the means of transformation in Europe. This turn toward Maoism was itself prompted by the historical development of Communism in Europe through a social democratic perspective, the result of which was a politics of parliamentarianism, reform, and compromise (it is this strain of Marxism as social democracy that Benjamin expressly attacks for its future-oriented ideology and its faith in history as progress in "On the Concept of History," which is discussed in more detail below). The failures of this approach to institute radical transformation and the critique of such institutionalized Marxism around which the politics of '68 circulated thus prompted the turn to the third world as the site of a Communist alternative and of a successful revolutionary strategy. Indeed, the rise of armed militant movements across the globe during this period not only demonstrates the belief in the necessity of force for the realization of revolutionary transformation, but also the desire for an alternative means of struggle that, given the successes of the wars of decolonization in Africa and guerilla warfare in certain parts of Latin America and Asia, carried with it the possibility of major social and political transformation. The universalist claims of Maoism legitimized the application of third world revolutionary strategy in the West, which in turn, furthered the idea that revolutionary process operated according to a universal mechanism of armed resistance. Groups and situations as diverse as the RAF in Germany, the URA in Japan, M19CO in America, GRAPO in Spain, and the Naxalites in India thus all proclaimed armed struggle as the means to victory. Hence Lucio Colletti's comment, "It is impossible to be a Communist if your aim is not the violent seizure of power" (219) or Charu

Mazumdar's proclamation, "he who has not dipped his hand in the blood of class enemies can hardly be called a Communist" (qtd. in Dash 22).

This universalization of violence, coupled with its legitimization via the teleological advent of victory produces a specific relationship to death and suffering. Like Vakulinchuk, the dead must be "ontologized," as Derrida puts it (*Specters* 9), and put to work in the name of the future lest the weight of their loss hang, as Marx fears, "like a nightmare on the brain of the living" (595). Thus against the backwardness of earlier revolutions that have been weighed down by history only to reproduce it as farce, current movements must look only towards the future. The dead, then, must be buried and mourning put to an end by writing suffering into the future as its necessary past. And it is towards this future, where past suffering will be redeemed, that we must orient ourselves.

Raymond Williams, in his theorization of revolution as tragedy, testifies to the dangers inherent in an historical orientation that attempts to instrumentalize loss in the name of the future. For Williams, revolution is a profoundly tragic experience that is fundamentally centered on suffering – both the suffering against which revolution struggles and the suffering that this struggle itself causes – but this experience of suffering is disavowed by an ideology that treats history as the precursor to revolutionary victory:

> A time of revolution is so evidently a time of violence, dislocation and extended
> suffering that it is natural to feel it as tragedy, in the everyday sense. Yet, as the
> event becomes history, it is often quite differently regarded. Very many nations
> look back to the revolutions of their own history as to the era of creation of the
> life which is now most precious. The successful revolution, we might say,
> becomes not tragedy but epic: it is the origin of a people, and of its valued way of

life. When the suffering is remembered, it is at once either honoured or justified.

That particular revolution, we say, was a necessary condition of life. (*Modern* 64) Suffering and loss *as such* thus become excluded from the history of revolution. Any recognition of tragedy is, from this futural point of view, recast as the inevitable cost of victory: "suffering is then at once non-human: is a class swept away by history, is an error in the working of the machine, or is the blood that is not and never can be rose water. The more general and abstract, the more truly mechanical, the process of human liberation is ordinarily conceived to be, the less any actual suffering really counts, until even death is a paper currency" (*Modern* 75).

Thus despite his own belief in the inevitable working through of dialectical history, Williams remains firm that thinking revolution in these terms produces an alienating ideology: "I do not rely on what is almost certain to happen: that this tragedy, in its turn, will become epic. However true this may be, it cannot closely move us; only heirs can inherit. Allegiance to even a probable law of history, which has not, however, in the particular case, been lived through, becomes quite quickly an alienation" (*Modern* 65). This sense of alienation arises in several ways; first, through the transformation of men into "the enemy," "the tyrant," or "the symbol of class oppression." This move turns subjects into objects and renders them symbols of an abstract relation, which is a denial of their humanity. Second, this abstract relation is seen as a function of historical process such that revolutionary purpose exists above and beyond individual men. The result, Williams argues, is "the conversion of actual misery and actual hope into merely tactical 'revolutionary situations'" where actual life is converted "into the ruthlessly moulded material of an idea" (*Modern* 82).

If revolution is to remain revolutionary, therefore, if it is not to harden into its own form of alienation, it must develop a new historical orientation that takes account of the tragedy of

revolution and the experiences of suffering and loss around which it inevitably circulates. Thus

for Williams, suffering and loss must be fundamentally reinserted into any attempt to think

revolution and kept there at its heart. It is in this vein that Benjamin's famous construction of the

angel of history pushes against the tyranny of teleology and attempts to bring a recognition of the

past as suffering, as "one single catastrophe," into the present:

> His eyes are wide, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how the angel
>
> of history must look. His face is turned toward the past. Where a chain of events
>
> appears before *us, he* sees one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage
>
> upon wreckage and hurls it at his feet. The angel would like to start, awaken the
>
> dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from
>
> Paradise and has got caught in his wings; it is so strong that the angel can no
>
> longer close them. This storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his
>
> back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows toward the sky. What we
>
> call progress is *this* storm. (392)

The angel suggests that while history as progress silences the dead and the horrors of the past in

the name of a brighter future, his backward look undermines this "storm" of progress by bringing

the detritus of past suffering into the future and refusing to transform this catastrophe into a

productive historical stage. As Heather Love claims, for Benjamin this insistence on seeing the

past for what it is, on "taking the past seriously[,] means being hurt by it. He [the angel] is

damaged both by the horrible spectacle of the past and by the outrage of leaving it behind" (148).

Suffering is reawakened in the gaze of the angel and brought into the present moment, reinstating

it over and against the Utopian belief in a better tomorrow, as the foundation for revolution. In

other words, the inheritance of the failed promises of the past, carried into the present by the

angel of history, form the basis for revolutionary transformation as a political imperative rather

than a goal. The past's claim on the present "cannot be settled cheaply" and the suffering of the

past cannot be easily redeemed (Benjamin 390). But our recognition of this claim is what frees

us from the teleological determinism of a future-oriented politics and what thus opens up new

possibilities for the future.

Benjamin's effort to "blast open the continuum of history" (396), to arrest the dialectic in

a monadic constellation through the recollection of the past in the present, undoes the sense of

history as progress and instead presents a disunified narrative of history as suffering. For

Derrida, the figure that encapsulates this sense of suffering and performs this blasting is what he

alternately calls the ghost, the revenant, or the specter. These ghosts are what remain when we no

longer attempt to write history in terms of laws, logic, or progress. As figures that reappear in

and thus disrupt the present, they mark the impossibility of controlling or mastering that present,

of constraining it to a linear teleological ideology, such as the one which cancels past suffering in

the name of an eschatological future. Rather, as Wendy Brown argues, ghosts "figure the

necessity of grasping certain implications of the past for the present only as traces or effects

(rather than as structures, axioms, laws, or lines of determination) and of grasping even these as

protean" (*Politics* 145-46). The idea of the ghost as a spirit that refuses to be laid to rest thus

carries with it an insistence on justice for its past. Such specters return, then, as reminders of the

catastrophes of history, their haunting forcing the present to take account of this loss.[77]

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[77] The critique of Stalinization and the institutionalization of Marxist thought that underscores a significant part of second wave revolutionary cinema makes clear the brutality that this instrumentalization of death can be used to justify. Thus, as discussed in the previous chapter, *Sweet Movie,* by mirroring the contortions of the exhumed corpses in the Katyn forest in Luv Bakunin's prostrate body, quite literally, unearths the genocide that can be defended through this

However, as Fritsch makes clear, justice can never be enacted since to do so is to silence the past: "In this constellation [of promise and memory], the promise must include a memory of loss and suffering, while such memory will be seen to be invested with a promise that renders it both interminable and allows it to further contribute to political changes in the present: *a memory of the promise as well as a promise of the memory*. The resulting reformulated promise thus cannot be seen to surpass or overcome its own troubled history, but needs to revise the temporality that merely opposes the future to the past, that plays off a utopia, or any future ideal, to the remembrance of the past" (4).

This spectral historical relation, in undoing the teleology of history conceived as progress at once opens up new possibilities for the future; that is to say, it reinstantiates futuricity, or the future as the possibility of difference. In her work on spectrality and queerness, Carla Freccero argues that spectrality "leads to a different place by treading the familiar, familial, forgotten,

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logic. Indeed, it is Luv's jealousy of Vakulinchuk's status as a martyr that causes him to allow himself to be murdered by Anna and become one more dead radical on a boat that is "full of corpses." Revolutionary ideology thus perpetuates a logic of violence and self-sacrifice that rationalizes even the most brutal and senseless bloodshed in the name of its revolution. Indeed, the purpose of Anna's boat seems to be to collect the corpses of people who die in the name of Communism – from the revolutionary soldier killed in a battle to overthrow his capitalist oppressors to the political prisoner executed as a subversive intellectual and thus a threat to the survival of Communism. But communism's survival, as the boat (*The Survival*) represents, has become simply a mass grave. In his discussion of *Sweet Movie,* Herbert Eagle asks*,* "Why is the urge toward martyrdom so strong in revolutionaries? Is their acceptance of their own destruction related to their willingness to destroy others?" (146). This scene answers in the affirmative: the sense of history that governs the valorization of martyrdom makes death at once desirable and justifiable for it holds out the future promise of remembrance and validates past and present suffering in the name of a brighter tomorrow. At the end of *Sweet Movie,* however, Luv's corpse, along with those of the four boys similarly murdered by Anna aboard the ship begin to stir. As they climb out of their body bags the same lyrical music that played over the documentary footage from the Katyn forest is once again heard on the soundtrack. As the ghosts of Anna's victims rise up, the soundtrack brings the dead of the Katyn forest into the present as well. In Makavejev's film, then, the dead refuse to remain as such, this reanimation signaling a ghostly return that disrupts this logic of sacrifice.

forsaken paths of the past. That place, arrived at through repetitions, will, it is hoped, open

something up to greater possibility" (69). Thus as the past rises up and repeats itself in the

present through a ghostly haunting, it restores past possibilities to the present, thus opening the

future to new imaginings. This understanding of history as a Derridean hauntology, as opposed

to what Freccero terms "a necrological" model that foregrounds the idea of burial (70), keeps

these possibilities open as the past continually returns in new and different ways.

The alternative historical orientation that I'm presenting through these readings of

Williams, Benjamin, and Derrida is one that tries to take account of the trauma and suffering of

the past, which, in turn, opens up new pasts and futures infused with affect. In this way, it brings

together the ideas of repetition and negative feelings that have circulated elsewhere in this

project by positioning a melancholic engagement with the past as potentially revolutionary. This

sense of melancholia is different to the left melancholia that Wendy Brown distills from

Benjamin's critique of the left and which she uses to characterize the condition of contemporary

Leftist politics as "caught in a structure of melancholic attachment to a certain strain of its own

dead past, whose spirit is ghostly, whose structure of desire is backward looking and punishing"

("Resisting" 26). Left melancholy, for Brown, describes the affective condition of a left so

beholden to long-held, now outdated ideas and ideologies that it has become narcissistically

invested in its own past identity over and above its investment in the present possibilities of

political transformation. While this sense of "left melancholia" is marked by a backwards-

looking temporality and a refusal to let go of and bury the past that echo the spectral relation to

history as suffering that I have laid out above, Brown's formulation marks a habit that needs to

be "thrown off," a ghost that must be banished in Derrida's formulation, so that the left can

overcome what she sees as its paralyzing tendencies (26). What transpires in *Ici et ailleurs* and

Amma Ariyan, however, is the exact opposite: this melancholic spirit becomes the foundation for thinking a new ethics of revolution and a new form of political action, one that actively maintains its melancholic relationship to history as suffering.

The Now and Then of the Here and Elsewhere

Before getting into an analysis of the film proper it is worth taking a moment to lay out some of the parameters of the Palestinian revolutionary movement that *Ici et ailleurs* references, especially in the first ten years of the PLO. Although now typically seen within the context of religious warfare as a regional conflict with the specific aim of restoring lost territory, during the second wave period it was, to a certain extent, invested in various Marxist ideals. The influence of Marxist ideology is primarily due to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the other major group alongside al-Fatah that comprises the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). The PFLP was the result of a merger between three groups: Youth for Revenge, the Palestinian Liberation Front and the Arab Nationalist Movement, this last a secular and socialist movement whose founder, George Habash, was profoundly influenced by Guevarism. Upon uniting after the Six Day War, the newly-formed PLFP declared itself a Marxist-Leninist organization.

In addition to the PLFP influence, even al-Fatah, the other major party within the PLO, although not expressly Marxist, was organized around a set of secular principles that defended the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people (a principle that resonated with the sentiments of '68) and the development of a progressive social democratic state. Moreover, the PLO remained generally faithful to the principles of Pan-Arabism, which entailed a staunch anti-imperialism and the adoption of a broad socialist agenda. Furthermore, the PLO maintained links

with other international Marxist organizations; for example, the Japanese arm of the United Red Army trained in Lebanon with the PLFP and carried out the Lod Airport Massacre in 1972. So, while the Palestinian struggle was not a Communist revolution in the strictest sense, its ideology at this time did reflect a broad Marxist investment.

However, it is possible to argue that the PLO paid lip-service to Communism as a means of gaining international support for their cause, especially given the Cold War opposition between the United States and the USSR. It is also certainly true that over the years the conflict has become more entrenched in religious and regional concerns and any commitment to Marxism has largely faded away (although one could argue that this is, itself, another example of the decline of Marxist revolutionary movements throughout the 1970s). Whatever its Marxist investments were, it still remains the case, however, that Godard and Gorin imposed their own revolutionary agenda on the Palestinian struggle during the filming of *Jusqu'à la victoire* and that arguably Godard does the same thing in *Ici et ailleurs*, subsuming it under the generic idea of "revolution" and thus enabling Godard to make a film that critiqued his own revolutionary investments and cinematic experiments. In this sense, the Palestinian struggle is used as a symbol of a general Leftist revolution so that *Ici et ailleurs* can engage the history of second wave revolution as a whole.

Ici et ailleurs has often been quickly passed over in academic treatments of Godard, perhaps because of its status as a transitional film in Godard's oeuvre, marking his shift from the Marxist films of the Dziga Vertov group to what Douglas Morrey describes as "the less idealistic politics of desire" (106). Analyses that do take up the film tend to use the title to focus their readings so that they examine how the film theorizes the relationship between a "here" and an "elsewhere," which translates as the relationship between France and the Middle East, between

the first and the third world, between the self and an other.[78] In this vein, *Ici et ailleurs* is

understood as a reassessment of representations of the other in western discourse in light of a

rapidly changing global consciousness informed by the legacies of colonialism, the Cold War

ideological division of the globe, and a belief in the revolutionary potential of the peasant and

subaltern classes of the third world. As Brody puts it, the film "establishes the notion of the

medium as mediating between two distant and remote realities" to interrogate the politics of

representing an other's revolution "elsewhere" (377). Thus, Brody continues, "Godard speaks at

length on the sound track to apologize for having shot the original footage in the Middle East

without regard to the reality of the participants and the audience and Miéville intervenes midway

through to debate with him both his earlier approach to the subject and his attempt to make good

on it now" (377).[79]

    Ici et ailleurs is, indeed, an exploration of the problems of representing an other in

relation to transnational systems of power, a problem rendered all the more acute given the

deaths of the film's participants who could no longer respond to the images constructed by an

outsider. However, the here and elsewhere of the film encompasses more than a geographical

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[78] Brody, Morrey, and Emmelhainz principally frame their discussions of the film according to its geographical concerns while Drabinski focuses on the relationship between space and time.

[79] Another common reading, developed by both Morrey and Emmelhainz, is the film's critique of mass media and the possibilities of alternative journalism: "Godard and Miéville's compass for action after 'things exploded' in the early 1970s was reshaped as 'audiovisual journalism'. Therewith they addressed the changing conditions in political engagement, challenging the mediatisation of mediation prompted by the Leftist utopian belief in the emancipatory potential of the media (influenced by Walter Benjamin, Bertolt Brecht and Hanz Magnus Enzensberger); what Jean Baudrillard called the 'expiration of speech'" (Emmelhainz 651). Similarly, Bérénice Reynaud sees the film as "an analysis not only of the way the images of their [the Palestinian radicals] dead bodies are 'consumed' by the news, but also of how we use the bodies of others – the unemployed in France, for example – to construct the signifying chains of our own discourses" (13).

and cultural separation; it also marks a temporal separation between the here and *now* of France in 1974 and the elsewhere and *then* of the Palestinians in 1970. In fact, during the opening moments of the film, the temporal separation is made more pronounced than the geographical one as on the soundtrack Miéville draws our attention to it with the repeated phrase, "In 1970 this film was called *Until Victory*. In 1974 it is called *Here and Elsewhere.*" Indeed, the deaths of the rebels that made apparent the ideological problems of the original film and prompted its reconstruction as *Ici et ailleurs* present more than a problem of spatial difference: since the revolutionary movement has since been annihilated and the rebels, as mute corpses, cannot respond to the film and its representation of them, *Ici et ailleurs* is not only a question of how the *here* represents the *there* but how the *now* represents the *then*. As we shall see, the geographical divide, which marks a shift from the universalist rhetoric of a globalized total Marxist victory (this film was called *Until Victory*) towards a localized and historicized sense of struggle (now it is called *Here and Elsewhere*) is, in fact, a product of the new temporal orientation that the divide between 1970 and 1974 compels.

More than prompting the question of how the now represents the then, however, these dead bodies, which appear continuously throughout the film both as corpses and as live bodies that have since been killed, make any definitive answer impossible. As their continual return implies, the film cannot find an adequate way of representing these deaths and thus cannot lay the bodies to rest. The dead disrupted Godard and Gorin's original intentions to make a revolutionary documentary that presaged Palestinian victory. Given the transnational perspective adopted by western radicals during the 1970s, the failure of the Palestinian revolution marks at the same time the failure of the larger project of international transformation of the second wave. As Irmgard Emmelhainz argues:

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> *Tiers-mondisme* as a movement, project or ideology became essential to the
> engaged intellectual's imaginary. Specifically, for the French Left, it became a
> way to catalyse the issues of slavery, colonialism, socialism and revolution. As a
> European movement, it acquired the role of a utopian 'outside' from which the
> new would emerge, resolving the contradictions of the imperialist West as new
> socialist nations. (649)

In this way, the failure of this "outside" to realize revolutionary victory was also a failure for the west; Godard and Gorin's intention to film the success of the Palestinian struggle was, from a western point of view, the filming of the emergence of a new socialist world system. Its failure, then, sounded the death knell of the western hope for a revolution from the outside and marked the end of Godard and Gorin's own revolutionary visions as much as it did the PLO's. The dead thus haunt the new film, inciting anxieties about revolutionary struggle and the cinema that tries to usher in such transformation. Indeed, the loss of certitude in revolutionary victory that these bodies provoke makes it impossible to reduce these deaths to a function of the dialectical mechanics of history. Rather, they prompt an attempt to work through the promise of Marxist liberation in a way that recognizes this violence and loss as such. In Gorin's own words, *Ici et ailleurs* is "haunted by this history" and brings the past into the present to undermine the temporal logic of Marxist teleology that would put these deaths to work in the name of revolutionary history. Rather, the past repeatedly returns and rises up to undo the very mechanics of teleology and to open up new relations to both the past and the possibilities of the future.[80]

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[80] This quote is taken from a *Jumpcut* interview with Gorin where he talks about the new relationship to history that *Ici et ailleurs* attempts to establish: "Take schizophrenic people: they are haunted by history, and so were Artaud and Bataille. They are driving back history on their

The opening segment of *Ici et ailleurs* is comprised mainly of the footage captured in Jordan that was to become *Jusqu'à la victoire* and, as such, it "gives us some sense of what the unfinished Dziga Vertov Group film might have looked like" (Morrey 106). Significantly, this opening sequence adopts the familiar logic of revolutionary temporality where, through the dialectics of history and the force of armed struggle, victory awaits as the inevitable result. As Godard comments on the soundtrack, victory was a foregone conclusion and its certainty drove the narrative of the original film: "we wanted to crow victory right away."

This first part of the film thus operates according to a five-part dialectic of revolutionary struggle: the will of the people; armed struggle; political work; the prolonged war; until victory. This historical narrative gains objective precision through its presentation in Godard's voice-over as a mathematical formula where the will of the people + armed struggle = the people's war + political work = the education of the people + the logic of the people = the prolonged war, which will then continue until victory arrives as the only possible resolution. This stagist narrative is repeatedly reinforced throughout the first part of the film through Godard's narration, which lays out the experience of capturing the footage in a similar order (first they filmed the people, then the people taking up arms, then political work etc.) and through the translations of the speeches given by the rebels that emphasize this inevitable resolution through various articulations of the formula, "By the people, for the people, revolution until victory." As Godard's voiceover continues, "All that we had [was] all organized like that […] all the sounds, all the images in that order." Our impression of the original film, therefore, is of a narrative structured according to the

own bodies. They are always in the process of tattooing history on their white skin, and when we make a film, the screen is only a white skin to tattoo. Schizophrenic people can travel through centuries, and what have we been doing in films like *Wind from the East* and *Struggles in Italy*?" (Thomsen). Here, Gorin welcomes a past that haunts the present and sees the film as an attempt to bring this history forward in a meaningful way.

logic of the teleological inevitability of victory and the idea that victory was already being filmed

because Godard and Gorin were filming all the steps that would necessarily lead up to it.

During this section, violence is presented as an inevitable element in this dialectical

process. Armed struggle, the third stage, is necessary to bring about the final victory; as a rebel

leader confirms in a speech to his troops, "we shall construct peace with the help of this gun."

Violence and death are thus to be expected as part of the process of revolutionary social

transformation and, as a fundamental component of this dialectical movement of history, as *a*

priori justified by the victory that hangs on the horizon. This relationship to death is reinforced

by the composite image of a rebel fighter over which the words are superimposed, "If I die, do

not be sad, pick up my gun." The phrase, reminiscent of Che Guevara's dying words,[81]

underscores the alienation of individuals within revolutionary struggle that Williams theorizes by

emphasizing the replaceability and interchangeability of fighters (the composite image of the

fighter also reinforces this idea).[82] Conceived within this logic, the struggle continues on without

thought of its human cost and irrespective of the individuals who sacrifice themselves for it since

these deaths will be atoned for through victory. And in one sense, this image reinforces this logic

since the words "pick up" (*ramasse)* and "gun" (*fusil*) are flashing to form an imperative

command for the audience. However, the text that expresses this sentiment is inverted, in pale

type, and superimposed over the face of the soldier, so that it is difficult to read. Moreover, the

text soon disappears, as does the composite face, so that the image that is left is of a painting of a

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[81] Guevara is purported to have uttered several things before he was shot, including "I don't care if I fall as long as someone else picks up my gun and keeps on shooting."
[82] Fidel Castro's comment in *Che: A Memoir* echoes this same sentiment: "Che considered himself a soldier of this revolution, with absolutely no concern about surviving it" (92).

Muslim fighter from around the 11th century, dressed in a white tunic with his face covered. The composite face that accompanies the logic of picking up a gun thus gives way to a faceless image; every face becomes no face at all as individuals reform as the abstract image of "rebel fighter." The image of the Muslim fighter thus at once reveals the abstraction of suffering at the heart of this teleological logic and the idea of revolution as a history of suffering. Indeed, his white robes are redolent of the *kaftan* that Muslims are wrapped in prior to burial so that the soldier represented in the drawing, who we know is now dead (as are the rebels in the film), becomes the still body of a shrouded dead soldier. Like the angel's gaze, this backward glance unites the Muslim fighter with the Palestinian rebels in a long and ceaseless history of suffering and loss. The narrative of progress and victory and its attendant alienation is thus interrupted by an historical image that refuses to stay buried.

Thus when the footage from Jordan used to illustrate the first four stages in the dialectical process transforms into the images of the grotesquely burned bodies of Black September, when "that [certain victory] became this [suffering and death]" as Godard puts it in his voice-over, it becomes painfully apparent that the revolutionary dialectic does not end with victory. Rather the "prolonged war," which Godard himself extends in his voiceover ("*la guerre prolooooonnnngée*"), is recast as the perpetual intensification of suffering, as the piling up of wreckage that Benjamin's angel mourns. Indeed, the corpses of dead rebels interrupt the teleological chain of the dialectic and highlight the very absence of its resolution. Moreover, since victory is the historical stage from which these deaths would become justified, the bodies not only highlight the failure of the revolution; they also insist, in the absence of victory, on some other form of recognition. In this way, the film explores the other option posed by the inverted quote and asks what would happen if we refused to pick up a gun but chose instead to

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acknowledge suffering; rather than exorcising it through the banishment of the corpse, what would happen if we were to remain "sad"? Or, as John Drabinski puts it, "What if the wound of diachrony remained just that – a wound estranged from even provisional healing treatments?" (150). Can we imagine a revolutionary politics from within this melancholia?

For Drabinski, it is the very presence of the corpse that produces this estranged wound since it is "a radical other, an alterity without alter ego" (155). As such, the corpse is a faceless mute that "refus[es] to perform" and thus remains as an insistent difference, an "enigmatic presence" that "commands image as time, without space, so that the abyssal separation of death registers its fissure" (155). The two dates at the beginning of the film, 1970 and 1974, are thus separated by this death, which rises up from the past to disturb sequential time and instead mark the chasm between these two moments where revolutionary promise and death can no longer be bridged by victory. In this way, the failure of the revolution is cast in temporal terms where the future, having failed to enact itself as victory, means that death remains an unabsolved loss. By refusing to present these dead within the narrative of martyrdom or victimhood, which would rewrite them within the sequential logic of dialectical revolutionary history, Godard leaves the dead as dead, as loss, and thus preserves this fractured temporality. As a result, the film is "haunted by, yet never responsive to, death" (151) since to respond to it would mean to attempt to reconcile the dead with history and thus forget them. Rather, the film enables the dead to persist as such, that is, as loss, so that this teleology is undone. Adopting the angel's gaze, *Ici et ailleurs* looks not forward towards a future of liberation but backwards over the past of revolutionary struggle that has piled up as a catastrophic history of suffering and death and uses this loss as the foundation for an alternative revolutionary politics and cinema.

To reveal the problematic instrumentalization of the dead encased in the first teleological historical dialectic, Godard presents another five-stage plan that is centered, not on revolution this time, but instead on the dead and the problem of representing them: "Almost all the actors are dead; the film filmed the actors in danger of death; death is represented in the film by a flow of images; a flow of images and sound that hide the silence; a silence that becomes deadly because it is prevented from coming out alive." As another five-stage process presented in a fashion similar to the original five stages of the Palestinian struggle, this second series exposes the problematic logic that drives the original dialectic sequence. Central to this critique, then, is the way in which revolutionary narratives position death within a teleological flow that hides the silence of the dead – hides their deadness – and instead reanimates them by making them speak as martyrs for the future, just as the dead Vakulinchuk speaks to the citizens of Odessa.

The realization of this problem thus prompts the image of a calculator that adds the dates of various revolutions and Godard's voice-over comment that, "We must have made a mistake in our calculations [...]. Through adding hope to a dream, figures have probably been mistaken." In this moment, we are reminded of Derrida's claim, discussed in chapter one, that "if one could *count* on what is coming, hope would be but the calculation of a program" (*Specters* 212). This idea of calculation, presented in the film through the simple mathematical formulation of the dialectic of struggle, is shown to be predicated on a false confidence in the outcome of struggle as victory and hence as a finishable project. That this process actually tallies the dead rather than leads to victory is reinforced by the sound of gunfire that accompanies each keystroke of the equation. This kind of teleological thinking, rather than adding struggle to struggle on the path towards the final victory, is, in fact, the piling up of death and suffering. Suffering is thus the

only inevitable outcome of armed struggle but it is denied as such under the force of revolutionary teleology.

In his discussion of this mathematical sequence, Morrey emphasizes the geographical relationship between the revolutions added together: "Godard implies that the filmmakers were mistaken in trying to understand and interpret the Palestinian revolution according to western models like the French Revolution (1789), the Russian Revolution (1917), the Popular Front (1936) or May '68" (108). But these dates represent more than the instantiation of the dynamics of western revolutionary history as a universal logic; they also expose the problematic understanding of history as the "prolonged war" of class struggle where what began with the French revolution will finally see its resolution in Palestine as the final stage of revolutionary transformation. This sequence thus provokes a confrontation with the cost of this logic; what we see in the addition of these dates is not the stages of the prolonged war that add up to the final victory, but the piling up of a series of barbarisms.

The Dead and the Digital

If this second dialectic metaphorically refers to the historical narrative that silences the dead, it also more literally refers to the flow of images that constitute a film's narrative, which Godard sees as complicit with the teleological view of history. As Drabinski points out, "*Ici et ailleurs* is as much about the act of filming – the fate of a certain kind of representation, under certain conditions, spatial and temporal – as it is about the political events documented" (152). Thus the second part of the film continues Godard's critique of narrative and his investment in an ever-evolving political modernist aesthetic to argue that classical cinematic form (characterized by linear narrative and continuity editing) naturalizes a sense of teleological cause and effect by

making what are in actual fact discrete and separate images appear continuous and thus causally linked. As such, there is a profound relationship between the construction of history and of film in teleological terms. At the start of this segment, the five stages of the original revolutionary dialectic are shown twice, first separately as each one is discretely held in front of the camera and then continually as they pass in front of the camera in a continuous line. In his early analysis of the film, Reynold Humphries points out that these two sequences represent the actual and perceived operations of cinema: "The first position is the real order of things: *discrete*, separate images which have to be ordered into a discourse […]. The second position is the Imaginary order: a homogeneous flow of images that pass themselves off as naturally linked and consecutive, thus masking the heterogeneity of space, cinematic codes and chemical intervention deployed to render them intelligible" (23). Film is constructed from a series of discrete images given order through the imposition of a narrative unity that presents these heterogeneous images as part of an unmediated chain of signification. This unity naturalizes the same sense of teleology that drives this problematic strain of revolutionary ideology.

It becomes the task of a new revolutionary cinema, one that works against this logic, to find new ways of relating images. Since film is, in fact, comprised of discrete units, its teleological impulse can be undone through new methods of montage. Godard comments, "Each time one image ceases to be replaced by another. Each time the image after expels the image before and takes its place, keeping of course, more or less the memory of it." The centrality of memory – a highly unreliable and changeable device – to the experience of cinema means that it is capable of producing more than a seemingly objective and natural chain of images with clear cause and effect. Indeed, mobilizing memory against the constraints of an ordered chain produces a sense of connection between images that is infinitely more contingent and changeable

and an experience of history that the film characterizes "not as a whole anymore but a sum of translations, a sum of feelings." Abandoning the forward-looking teleology of narrative unity in favor of the backward-looking, heterogeneous temporality structured by memory allows different and various historical relations and future possibilities to emerge. As Fritsch claims, "Insofar as memory is a kind of repetition, it is thereby exposed by the promise to an unforeseeable future, a future whose unpredictably changing context turns repetition into a productive 'iteration' of difference" (6). This evocation of memory in both the organization of history and cinema means that the past can repeat in the present of both (as the memory of previous sufferings or of previous images) in unpredictable ways that enable new and various future possibilities. Indeed, as Godard demonstrates with the pair of equations where, at one time, $1917 + 1936 = $ Hitler and at another $1917 + 1936 = $ May 1968, the past represents a history of both possibility *and* suffering and different engagements with history will produce different meanings in the present and different possibilities for the future. History is itself historical and the act of historical construction thus equally contingent.

Working through the complex temporal possibilities of the film in this way means that Yosefa Loshitzky's argument radically misunderstands the point of the film, as she avers that *Ici et ailleurs* makes simplistic and naïve connections between historical periods and figures as part of its borderline anti-Semitic, pro-PLO stance.[83] While the juxtaposition of images does, on one

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[83] Loshitzky argues that, "The naïve idealization of the PLO by Godard and Miéville is accompanied by an anti-Israeli position equating the Israeli retaliations against Jordan (and in particular the Karame operation) with Nazi atrocities. The climax of this anti-Israeli stance (which verges on anti-Semitism) is conveyed through the image of the wedding of Golda Meir, Israel's prime minister at the time, with the voice-over of a Nazi speech delivered by Adolf Hitler. The film, like many of Godard's other political movies, is extremely naïve and dogmatic, if not infantile it its approach towards the East/West conflict. This conflict is presented and

hand, show some of the alarming parallels between Nazi ideology and the Israeli rhetoric

concerning Palestine, on the other, as Morrey puts it, "by insisting upon the irreducible

difference between the two situations with jarring, often brutal, juxtapositions" Godard shows

"the absurdity of a culture in which images have been devalued to such an extent that

comparisons of this type are possible at all" (113). Against this reductive chain of associations,

Ici et ailleurs attempts to provoke infinitely more complex and changeable relationships between

images and, given the parallels that Godard draws between history and cinema, between times.

As a result, the film explores alternate methods of combining images. *Ici et ailleurs* makes

frequent use of overlapping images, where connections and differences are buried beneath the

layers of images and which variously come to light as different parts of the composite image fade

away or come to the forefront. This use of overlapping images is then compounded by the rapid-

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explained through a montage technique whereby images of advertising and consumption are associated with the West, while images of violence are linked with the East. This manipulation reaches its climax in the ideational audio-visual link Godard creates between the events of 1917, 1936 and 1968. Through this simplistic and horrifying equation Godard claims that the sum of 1917 and 1936 is 'Black September,' which occurred a few months after the shooting of *Jusqu'à la victoire*. This simplistic and monstrous equation is carried further in an association aligning the capitalist system (visualized by images of mass production lines) with images of the Nazis' mass murder of the Jews" (49-50). While Loshitzky's argument here does seem to overlook the ways in which the film works to complicate and pluralize the relationship between images, on another level it does point towards the possibility that the very openness of this kind of revolutionary representation leaves it susceptible to politically conservative interpretations and fascist appropriations. Indeed, Humphries makes a related claim in his discussion of the potentially reductive nature of these montage sequences: "The problem is that Godard may not be inviting spectators to equate Israel and Nazi Germany, but that he is wanting to draw our attention to the irony of Jews condoning genocide (compare Israel's intervention in the [sic] Lebanon) or to highlight similarities. What is wrong-headed is the inability to understand the polysemy of the image and how a spectator is likely to read the chain of signifiers" (23). For Humphries, then, the problem isn't Godard's intention but the likelihood that his audience won't be able to appreciate his nuance. On one hand, this is precisely Godard's point about the problematic circulation of simple images in mass media: that they do not foster careful or critical engagement and instead present a series of simple and reductive relationships. But on the other, his commitment to a non-dogmatic directorial position means that Godard must always risk the possibility of this kind of simplistic understanding, even as he tries to counter it.

fire editing between images so that they pass by too quickly to be taken in instantaneously by the viewer. Rather, the chains of images appear as jumbled blurs from which each spectator will draw a different and fleeting impression. In addition, the film makes use of the different montage possibilities made possible with digital technology. Foremost among these possibilities is the split-screen technique of showing multiple discrete images within the frame at the same time (sometimes up to twelve), each image changing rapidly within its own separate screen. As each image changes, new relationships and connections are produced that are contingent, multiple and although still somewhat ordered by the director, infinitely less so than in classical cinema. Indeed, the film positions the linear narrative of the filmstrip, implied by the chain of people that walk in front of a celluloid camera, in opposition to the more complex means of montage that digital technology makes possible. These various editing techniques attempt to articulate an aesthetic that marshals memory and the discreteness at the heart of cinema. As a result they articulate an alternative temporal orientation where past, present, and future are no longer teleologically organized and where the horrors of that past are no longer reduced to some stage in a dialectical transformation of history. Rather, as Godard states in the voiceover to this section, we need "to be employed by the other's time and employ it in return." This new temporality grounded in the interruption that the corpse provokes finds its aesthetic expression in these new montage techniques that attempt to bring different images and times together in the same frame.

This desire to disrupt linear temporality motivates the long lists of binaries that Godard's voiceover lays out, each one combined with the "and" emphasized. The "and" here thus signals the co-presence of these supposed antagonists. For Morrey, who draws on Deleuze, Godard's use of a conjunction rather than an opposition undermines the notion of a fixed and fully determined identity and replaces it with a permeable frontier between things that is continually and

repeatedly traversed in "the ongoing process of identification" (108). Indeed, Godard comments after another list of opposites that it is "too simple and too easy to divide the world in two." The "and," then, marks not the separation of past and present but their ability to continually occupy and shape each other. Revolutionary cinema, then, as we saw in chapter two, must break the hold of teleology in both form and content by finding new ways to combine images. However, now there is the added responsibility of bringing the images of revolution's traumatic history to the surface not to smooth them into a linear sequence, but to let the dead rise up and speak as such. Thus alongside attempts to combine images in ways that reflect this perpetual processes of interpretation and meaning, images need to be presented without the constraining narratives of ideology so that they can speak for themselves. However, this is not to say that images should, or even can, exist as pure immediacy, outside of ideology in some paradoxical idea of non-mediated representation.

   Ici et ailleurs formulates its idea of images speaking for themselves around the relationship between sound and image, where the dominance of sound, what MacCabe refers to as "the very foundation of Western politics" (244), has drowned out the image as such by putting it towards predetermined political ends. With reference to *Jusqu'à la victoire,* Godard remarks, "We did as several people [have done]. We took images and put the sound too loud." As he utters this remark a hand turns up the volume of a radio so that the revolutionary song, the *Internationale*, blares from the speakers. The song, the official anthem of the Second International and perhaps the most recognizable soundtrack to Marxist revolutionary politics, reinforces the same teleological logic of final struggle and victory that *Ici et ailleurs* so

thoroughly critiques.[84] The sound of revolutionary ideology, the film argues, has drowned out

these images by forcing them into a chain of associations that rendered past suffering and death

part of a teleological history. Godard goes on to explain how this same sound has overridden the

history of revolutionary struggle and dominated our understanding: "Viet Nam was always the

same sound, always too loud. Prague, May 68, France, Italy, the Chinese Cultural Revolution,

Strikes in Poland, torture in Spain, Ireland, Chile, Portugal, Palestine. The sound so loud that it

almost drowned the voice it wanted to draw out of the image." The violence and suffering that

the images of these radical movements capture have been silenced by the eschatology of

revolutionary ideology and the images themselves reduced to ideological visual aids. As

MacCabe puts it:

> The mistake of the earlier film [*Jusqu'à la Victoire*] was that the sound was too
>
> loud – every image was reduced to a set of political slogans. The filmmakers may
>
> have gone to the Middle East, but the soundtrack that they bought with them
>
> meant that they were unable to see their own images. The structure of the Dziga
>
> Vertov film with its Maoist emphasis on the people and the armed struggle had
>
> failed to engage the reality of what had been shot. Many of those they
>
> photographed would die in the bloody battles of Black September. This simple
>
> fact of death – a death now evident but rendered invisible by the original

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[84] The first stanza of the song and its repeated refrain clearly endorse an eschatological view of revolutionary struggle and the idea that future victory will wipe clean the violence and suffering of the past: "Stand up, damned of the Earth / Stand up, prisoners of starvation / Reason thunders in its volcano / This is the eruption of the end / Of the past let us make a clean slate / Enslaved masses, stand up, stand up / The world is about to change its foundation / We are nothing, let us be all / This is the final struggle / Let us group together, and tomorrow / The Internationale / Will be the human race."

soundtrack – is what redeems the images even as it renders the original film null

and void. (244)

This act of redemption means to let images speak for themselves, which, in *Ici et ailleurs* means to bring the violence and suffering of the past to the surface, enabling what has been silenced and *a priori* justified by teleological determinism to be seen. As such, restoring suffering from its disavowed position within the narrative of revolution to a place of representation is just that, another form of representation, not the revelation of a determinate "Truth" which has been obscured by the sounds of ideology. The move, then, is to compound the narrative of revolution rather than merely correct it by returning the "Truth" of the image as a competing determination that counters revolutionary determinism.

Moreover, since these images are to be connected with new methods of montage that attempt to complicate and destabilize this constraining narrative, the meaning and significance of these images remains outside of teleological ordering and thus contingent, which is to say that it is capable of returning in ever new and multiple ways. Rather than looking forwards to a future that tries to lay out the path of revolutionary transformation, then, Godard suggests that radical cinema needs to look backwards to the past of struggle in a noninstrumentalizing way and restore the suffering that has been displaced by the idea of progress to what becomes a more complex and heterogeneous idea of transformation. In *Ici et ailleurs,* it is the image of the corpse as the marker of revolutionary failure and history as suffering that is capable of disrupting this teleological drive. The dead haunt the present as a reminder of this failure, thus insisting upon a new temporal orientation that at once demands recognition for the suffering of the past as loss.

Engaging historiography as hauntology does more than present new modes of engaging the past in the present. At the same time, it also allows for new ways of thinking the past in relation to possibilities for the future. As Brown puts it:

> Interruption or "blasting open the continuum of history" becomes a kind of persistent revolutionary political orientation that breaks both with the notion of progress and with its cousin, uniquely "ripe" revolutionary conditions, even as it attends closely to historical configurations of opportunity and possibility. The "arrest" of history that revolution achieves not only sets history's sails in a new direction (as opposed to the progressivist view that revolution is a teleological conclusion of a historical process) but also indicts a fundamental premise of progress, namely that more just and felicitous times have steadily displaced more impoverished ones. For Benjamin, the past is not an inferior version of the present but an exploitable cache of both traumatic and utopian scenes. Thus the theological moment that Benjamin believes inheres in all revolutionary hopes pertains to traces of the good life left behind, preserved and cultivated as imagistic memories. These are the traces that would inspirit revolutionary action, and it is precisely the ideology of progress that eliminates them from view. (*Politics out of History* 157)

In Benjamin's historical formulation, history requires active construction that is at the same time political action since it opens up new possibilities for imagining the future, especially at times of crisis when old ideologies have crumbled. Significantly though, this idea of "interruption" foregrounds an ethical relationship to the past, one that asks us to look backwards at both the suffering *and* the possibilities that history contains and to carry both forward with us as we are

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blown into the future. Moreover, that these past possibilities are retained as "imagistic memories" brings us back to the work of cinema as a collection of images connected through memory. Images of the past preserve these desires so that when the past returns it brings with it the reanimation of these hopes. Cinema can take these images and bring them into the present and by employing memory to connect them, they can rise up outside of a teleologically determined order to present these old hopes as new and different possibilities for the future. So, in the case of *Ici et ailleurs,* the dead Palestinian rebels rise up to restore the sense of revolutionary possibility that they carried with them in the past, which was for Godard the possibility of a global transformation begun from "outside," (to return to Emmelhainz's language). Indeed, given the decline of the radical Left in the west and the concomitant feelings of frustration, disappointment, and paralysis that it engendered, the restoration of this lost revolutionary commitment is timely since it reasserts a sense of possibility in an otherwise despairing political moment. While this possibility is now colored by a responsibility to the dead who bring it forth so that any new revolutionary action must proceed with this suffering fully present, it means that the cycle of traumatic repetition is not completely suturing. History as suffering does not come back to inspire a perpetual wallowing in grief; rather, it returns to restore a sense of lost possibility that is, at the same time, an attempt to take account of this loss.

Thus at the end of *Ici et ailleurs,* the film returns to and repeats footage from its opening scenes by switching back and forth between Palestine and France, between 1970 and what has now become 1975. Significantly, the commentary that accompanies these images is all delivered in the present tense so that the images of the Palestinians are now reanimated to appear as if they are from 1975. Cinema always carries with it the potential power of resuscitation, of bringing the dead back to life on screen; in *Ici et ailleurs,* the dead rebels are seen as both at once –as the dead

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bodies of a brutal history and as the living fighters that carry a future possibility. At the end of

the film, then, the past enters the present to change how we understand it while the repeated

intertitle, "thinking through that again" (*en repensant cela*) reiterates the ability and the need to

continually rethink and reengage these different historical relations. In this way, interpretation is

foregrounded as a fundamentally activist endeavor since it is the continual contestation of its

meaning which prevents the past from being laid to rest and which therefore enables the future to

remain as the possibility of difference. At the end of the film (where we see this title twice in the

same minute of film) the relationship between these images of France and Palestine, between

here and elsewhere, between now and then, is rethought again and again, each time the present

conjuring the past anew. And while the film has moved forward in time, the past has not been

laid to rest as the ghosts of the dead rebels still traverse the gap between these times, but now

connoting possibility as well as suffering.[85]

    Ici et ailleurs, much like *Tout va Bien,* is another metacritical engagement with the form

of revolution and of revolutionary cinema. As such, it directs its analysis at the level of theory as

it tries to work through the anxieties of revolutionary failure and produce a cinema capable of

maintaining a sense of revolutionary commitment while at the same time doing justice to the

suffering of the past. I would like now to turn to another film made in the wake of revolutionary

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[85] Drabinski contends that "Godard's oblique, yet decisive engagement with time changes
everything about the *here and elsewhere* of the film, *in an act of de-location*. What remains is a
different kind of separation, separation without contact [present] or future, and thus a pure
memory of loss as loss. […] *Ici et ailleurs* becomes, at that moment, an anxious, melancholic
film without redemptive effect or affect" (151). While I agree that the work of mourning the
dead is not completable and redemption isn't attainable in the teleological sense, the film holds
out a possibility of it so that this melancholia becomes active and mixed with a certain promise
of the future, albeit one that remains outside of any sense of calculability or teleological
certitude.

failure, John Abraham's New Indian Cinema film *Amma Ariyan,* which, like *Ici et ailleurs,* maintains an ethical commitment to the violence of history and a non-teleological temporality. However, Abraham's film, although certainly invested in developing a theory of revolution and revolutionary representation, is also more clearly invested in how this new cinema can lead to collective organizing. If *Ici et ailleurs* works at the level of interpretation, prompting the spectator to reimagine the possibilities of struggle while at the same time thinking through the responsibility to the dead, *Amma Ariyan* uses suffering as the basis for a revolutionary collective.

Indian Radicals: New Malayalam Cinema

The New Indian Cinema movement emerged in the early 1970s as an extension of Indian art cinema that similarly eschewed the apolitical extravagance of mainstream film. Against a dominant commercial industry that emphasized romance and family relationships and the spectacle of lavish sets and costumes, elaborate song and dance numbers, and popular film stars, New Indian Cinema was instead marked by its engagement with Indian politics and social realities. Although the term "New Indian Cinema" is somewhat of a catch-all used to refer to a broad range of filmmakers that do not fit the mold of popular cinematic production, the movement does operate according to certain distinguishing characteristics, the foremost being a hostility towards the mainstream industry for its suppression of artistic experimentation and political inquiry and its corresponding adherence to the notion that commercial viability is the only measure of a film's success. As Yves Thorval describes it, the movement signaled the renewal of aesthetic experimentation and thematic exploration: "'New Cinema' has no real theory or manifesto – but is a reflection of various objectives. These include the desire to adopt a linear type narrative, and a perspective, which is largely humanist and realistic in its manner of

presentation. Other factors include a careful psychological portrayal of the characters, and basically an anti-establishment view of the social and political systems of society – a breakaway from the idealism of post-Independence India" (139-40).

After the States Reorganization Act in 1956, Tamil Nadu and Telugu became known as the southern centers of the commercial film industry. As such, Karnataka and Kerala emerged, with the help of government financing, at the forefront of the New Indian Cinema movement in the south. The influence of locale and culture on film production meant that in Kerala, New Indian Cinema, or what became known regionally as Malayalam Parallel Cinema, developed according to the culture of the state as a politically charged movement. This was partly due to the strong influence of the Communist Party; Kerala was the first state to democratically elect a Communist leadership (the CPI in 1957) and the party's cultural policies enabled Malayalam Parallel Cinema to flourish. Historically, Kerala has always been among the most progressive states in India; reform-minded maharajas and strong anti-feudal and pro-democratic movements during the colonial period produced a highly literate and politically-minded citizenry. This, coupled with the high ratio of film theaters to population, has led to a politically oriented regional cinema where the themes of modernization, social reform, and class struggle are prevalent (Bandhu 65). Indeed, Muraleedharan Tharayil argues that Kerala's political progressivism means that its art cinema can be differentiated from its counterparts in other states which tend to focus on rural and village life and the persistent problems of feudalism. The "relative absence of a sharply etched rural/urban divide in Kerala, facilitated mainly by the Left-initiated land reforms," meant that the "conventional feudal conflict" of Indian art cinema was

redundant in Malayalam film, which instead focused on the changing social order and the rise of an alienated class (194).[86]

Given the widespread circulation of Communist ideologies in the region – around 35% of the population are declared Marxists (Thorval 377) – and the history of Naxalite activity in the state, it is unsurprising that the political investments of Malayalam parallel cinema circulate around radical politics and the possibilities and failures of the Marxist promise. In his analysis of Adoor Gopalakrishnan's aesthetics within the Malayalam Parallel cinema movement, G.V. Nair describes Kerala as "a state where commitment is a pet theme in artistic circles of pronounced left leanings" (276), while Vasanthi Shankaranarayanam argues that the "intense political awareness that permeates the Kerala society" means that cinema has become a fundamental instrument of political expression and of fostering understanding: "Revolutionary movements, counter revolutionary activities, disillusionment with ideologies – have all found expression in cinema. Both sections, the revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries, have used cinema as a medium to develop this political awareness" (8).

By the mid 1970s, however, Kerala's "engaged cinema" had taken a darker turn. By this time the Naxalite movement, which had violently materialized in 1967 and spread, in the words of the Naxalite leader Charu Mazumdar, like a "prairie-fire" across India from its beginnings in the small village of Naxalbari in the northern part of the state of West Bengal, had been mostly

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[86] Yves Thorval similarly maintains that the transformation of Kerala from feudalism to Communism "by the ballot" meant that it "rapidly procur[ed] for the remotest villages a level of education – as well as radio, newspapers, etc. – unequalled by its neighbouring States in those days and even in the Indian Union. These factors have almost immediately steered Malayalam cinema to socio-political subjects (including, superficially, in commercial cinema) in which castes and religion played a secondary role" (410).

extinguished (Mazumdar 7).[87] The movement, infamously described in the *People's Daily* as "Spring Thunder over India" was incited by a dissatisfaction with the revisionism, class-collaboration, and parliamentarianism of the Indian Communist Party. As a result of what was seen as a betrayal of the ideals of Communism, the All India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (AICCCR) declared, in May 1968, the need for a People's Democratic Revolution (Singh 18). Kerala's first revolts, however, were a far cry from the "great storm of revolutionary struggle" heralded by the *People's Daily* ("Spring"); the movement began to decline in 1972 and by 1976 was all but dead in the region.[88]

Naxalism's swift decline in the face of its fatidical prophecies of immanent victory and its legacy of brutal violence meant that it came to be seen as the model of failed revolution in Kerala and the region's cinema took to exploring the evolution and decomposition of radical politics within the state and the possibilities for revolution in light of Naxalism's failures. Thus, in the year that Mazumdar heralded as being the year of Naxalite revolutionary victory,[89] P.A.

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[87] In Kerala, the first Naxalite uprisings occurred in Pulpally in the Wynad district and Thalssery in the Kanur district in November 1969. Such actions were encouraged and incited by the petite bourgeoisie, which was the same radical bourgeois element that took up arms against British colonial rule and which later turned to Communism.

[88] Thomas Nossiter maintains that the Naxalite rebellion failed to take root in Kerala because the class tensions in the region were not so pronounced as elsewhere in the country and a number of progressive leftist reforms had attempted to redress some of the inequalities that Mazumdar thought would drive armed struggle. Nossiter also points to wide-spread literacy and the violent government crack-down against the movement which led to the capture of almost all the Kerala leaders and the government adoption of policies aimed at appeasing the peasants and drawing them away from the Naxalites, specifically the Kerala Scheduled Tribes Act in 1975. Finally, Nossiter argues that the tension between the bourgeois intelligentsia that organized the Naxalite offensive and the peasant and *adivasi* base that they hoped to mobilize significantly weakened the movement (358-61).

[89] In a speech entitled "March Onward, Day of Victory is Near," which was later reprinted in *Liberation*, Mazumdar stated, "When I say 'Make the 70s the Decade of Liberation' I cannot

Backer released his first film, *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol* (*When the River Kabani Turned Red* 1975), a love story about a Naxalite revolutionary murdered by the police. Four years later he released *Sanghaganam* (*Chorus* 1979), a film about a young radical searching for a mythical political leader, Gautama (a reference to Siddhartha Gautama, the man who became the Supreme Buddha), only to realize, after witnessing the torture and murder of a trade union activist by the police, that he must take responsibility for his own political actions. In both of Backer's films, violence becomes a vicious and self-perpetuating cycle that can only be broken by moving outside the logic of party politics and a messianic faith in mystical leaders and revolutionary victory. However, the films' critiques of Naxalite ideology operate within a world where political and economic oppression persist and rebellion remains an urgent task. The films, then, maintain a revolutionary call but rather than engaging violence as a revolutionary method, witnessing or experiencing violence instead become the experience against which radical consciousness is solidified (hence the multiple valences of the title, *When the River Kabani Turned Red* – red with blood of the victims, red with the anger of the people, and red with rise of Communist rebellion).

In this same vein, Adoor Gopalakrishnan released *Mukhamukham* (*Face-to-Face* 1984), a film told in two parts – the period just before the CPI won the elections in Kerala in 1957 and a decade later when the CPI split in two – and which Ashish Rajadhyaksha and Paul Willemen describe as revealing the "unpalatable aspects of radical populism in Kerala" (432). As in Backer's films, *Face-to-Face* explores the cycle of revolutionary violence, retaliation, and

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think beyond 1975. […] I believe that it is by the end of 1975 that the 500 million Indian people will complete writing the great epic of their liberation" (4, 5). Inspired by the rapid spread of Naxalism across India in the late 1960s, Mazumdar was convinced that the movement would maintain its momentum and "mobilize the 500 million people of India in a surging people's war" that would emerge victorious by the middle of the decade (4).

revenge and the problematic deification of political leaders, while also critiquing the political melodrama genre (popular in Kerala) and the political ideologies generated by mass culture. What Backer and Gopalakrishnan's films reveal, then, is the alienating and pacifying nature of institutionalized politics and the corresponding need for a genuine peoples' movement that maintains an ethical relationship to the history of political violence that has scarred the Malayalam political landscape. This notion of a non-institutionalized ethico-political collectivity as the future of revolution is carried through the films of John Abraham, in particular *Amma Ariyan*, which is the focus of the remainder of this chapter.

Refusing to Bury the Dead

During his short life (he died at the age of 49), Abraham made only four feature films, each shot through with a critique of institutionalized politics and ideological dogmatism as well as an insistent petition for rebellion against oppressive forces. His first film, *Vidyarthikale Ithile Ithile* (*This Way, Students* 1972) critiques the futility of student strikes against more productive forms of collective action while his second film, *Agraharathile Kazuthai* (*A Donkey in a Brahmin Village* 1977) satirizes the rigidity of Indian social conventions, and the concomitant requirement of obedience, conformity, and reverence. Abraham's third film, *Cheriyachande Kroora Krithyangal* (*The Evil Deeds of Cheriyachan* 1979) depicts the continual fear and sense of helplessness perpetuated by the threat of class oppression and the guilt of class privilege.

Amma Ariyan (*Report to Mother* 1986) similarly takes up these earlier films' critique of the relationship between institutionalized politics and violence to explore alternative forms of political action. The film is structured as an open letter from a young student, Purushan, to his mother who on his return to university, encounters a dead body hanging from a tree. Thinking he

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knows who the suicide might be, Purushan becomes obsessed with the corpse and abandons his return to school to instead attempt to determine its identity. To do so, Purushan seeks out numerous friends and relatives who form a large group that collectively identifies the body as Hari, a former Naxalite, student, and musician. Through their contradictory and incomplete memories, which rise up and intertwine with the present-day narrative, the group attempts to piece together a sense of who Hari was as they travel south to find Hari's mother and tell her of her son's suicide. As they journey to Cochin, the film weaves together documentary footage and fiction to construct a history of radical politics in the region and a political revaluation of radicalism in Kerala in light of the failure of the Naxalbari revolution. As Thorval describes the film, "Reality, fantasies and attempts to throw light on a suicide serve as a pretext to a journey – real, from the north to the south of Kerala – in search of an identity and a political reevaluation across all the generations of the tumultuous Seventies in this State" (385).

That the film circulates around a suicide can be understood as a response to the political culture of violence and martyrdom that characterized the Keralan political landscape. According to K.G. Sankara Pillai, "The 70s had this trend of waiting for martyrs. Rumors flew about revolutionaries being killed in police custody" (*Yours Truly John*). This culture of violence, death, and sacrifice as part of revolutionary struggle was given cinematic expression in the immensely popular film *Mooladhanam* (1969), a socialist melodrama set during the Communist-led revolt against Diwan C. P. Ramaswami Iyer. The title of the film literally translates as "Capital." However, as Gayatri Devi claims in her argument about the laboring classes in Malayalam cinema, the main character Ravi performs a "catachrestic conflation" of sacrifice and capital by telling the laborers he organizes that the only "capital" they have in the fight against oppression is their willingness to sacrifice themselves for the cause (179). Devi continues,

Indeed the word "sacrifice," with its mystical and religious undertones, has become a star-studded vehicle for the representation of radical ideology in Malayalam cinema. The "sacrifice" story is essentially the story of an individual, not a collective. The revolutionary is acutely conscious of his awareness of his difference from society: he is an outsider, his devotion to his cause alienates him from the rest of the society. Fearless to the end, the radical revolutionary dies for the cause, a martyr. Or, conversely, the revolutionary recognizes the futility of his mission, yet he goes on, almost in the manner of the mythical Sisyphus pushing the stone endlessly up the hill, because it is in his nature. (179-80)

Devi reads this logic of martyrdom and sacrifice as forming the backbone of radical cinema in Kerala: "historically, the radical intellectual in Malayalam cinema remains the wanna-be martyr" (182). Malayalam political cinema, then, typically adopts the same logic of sacrifice and death that underscores orthodox revolutionary ideology.

As Devi herself points out, *Amma Ariyan* presents an exception to this rule. For Devi, this is due to the film's privileging of a collective and politically ambiguous identity over that of a lone and focused hero. Perhaps more disruptive, however, is the fact that Hari's death is a suicide. Although, as Lacan argues, suicide is "the only act that can succeed without misfiring" (43), suicide functions more ambiguously within the narrative of revolutionary sacrifice than other deaths (in battle or at the hands of oppressors, for example). Narratives of political suicide certainly do exist – suicide as the refusal to compromise, as the determination to die on one's own terms, as a demonstration of protest or anguish – but it is hard to reconcile such motivations with Hari's suicide since the film reveals so little about him or the circumstances surrounding his death (what we do find out is fragmentary and contradictory). Indeed, without this larger context,

it becomes impossible to construct his death as a symbolic act. Without this distinct symbolic aspect, Hari's death appears as a futile and self-destructive gesture that lacks any larger ethical or political dimension. For *Amma Ariyan*, however, this distinction is somewhat moot. Whether Hari kills himself as a grand political gesture, whether he is killed by the police, or whether he commits suicide out of frustration with the failures of the Left, the end result is still the same: a dead body. What the film attempts with this kind of death, then, is to reveal the utter futility of this sacrificial logic. By denying the viewers access to any details that may enable the rewriting of Hari's death into the narrative of martyrdom, *Amma Ariyan* instead forces them to confront death simply as loss.

Referencing the spectral narration of Cheriyachan's mother in *Cheriyachande Kroora Krithyangal*, the repeated opening and closing of the coffin in *Agraharathile Kazuthai* and the stillborn child in *Amma Ariyan*, Adoor Gopalakrishnan argues that in Abraham's films, the dead often return to haunt the present and disrupt the boundaries between life and death and between the past and the present: "Artists who cherished the dead and the living, the exciting and the lifeless with the same intensity of indulgence and affection are not to be found anywhere except John." Allowing the dead to return in this way undermines the traditional process of mourning whereby the dead are laid to rest and the process of mourning completed. As Derrida argues, mourning typically marks an attempt to "ontologize" the corpse, "to know *who* and *where,* to know whose body it really is and what place it occupies – for it must stay in its place […] Nothing could be worse, for the working of mourning, than confusion or doubt: one *has to know* who is buried where – and it is *necessary* (to know – to make certain) that, in what remains of him, *he remains there*" (*Specters* 9). In *Amma Ariyan* the questions that circulate about Hari – who he was and why/how he died – remain unanswered so that his ghost can never be

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ontologized and thus laid to rest. Rather, his ghost refuses to remain in place, and instead repeatedly returns and haunts the film in order to disrupt the self-assurance of the present.

The difficulty of the process of identification begins the moment that Purushan encounters the body. His first response to the police when questioned is that he doesn't recognize it, but he later admits that there is something familiar about it. Yet it becomes increasingly difficult to determine who the body is; Purushan turns to several friends to help identify it, but each, in turn, is unable and enlists the help of another. This process repeats several times in the same fashion: Purushan brings someone to the morgue, they pull the body out and study the face but cannot make a determined identification, the newcomer then suggests someone else who may be of help and he thereby joins the group by bringing this new person to the morgue. Even after the corpse is identified as Hari, the group continues this process and the next visitor to the morgue, rather than confirming this identity, says that the body belongs to someone entirely different. Significantly, then, although from around this point in the film the group starts behaving as if the body belongs to Hari, there always remains the question of whether or not this identification is, indeed, correct.

This indeterminacy over the corpse's identification is further perpetuated as the group travels to Cochin to tell Hari's mother the news about her son. During this journey, they continually ask each other questions about Hari, but the memories they share simply produce more questions as each member of the group recalls Hari differently, consequently producing a composite image of the man that is fragmented, contradictory, and profoundly incomplete: did he play the tabla or the mirdangam? Was he a fisherman? A political radical? A student? A drug addict? What were his aspirations and affiliations? How committed was he to Marxism? Was he even wanted in the Naxalite movement? Indeed, although Hari has pictures of Che and Marx on

his wall, reads aloud from Lavreksky's biography of Che, and is tortured by the police for his

Naxalite affiliations (although we can only assume this based on the fact that his torture occurs

alongside Narayanankutty's, who we know was tortured for these reasons), in other memories he

appears as an apolitical and disaffected college student more interested in drugs and music than

revolution. One man's description of Hari as "confused" and someone who "would never

commit himself" seems radically appropriate, then, since the portrait that the film paints of him

is also confused and similarly refuses to commit itself to a definitive statement about his

personality or motivations.

Mixed with the more declarative recollections about Hari's identity are flashbacks of

more random, imagistic memories, including an extreme long shot of Hari walking with

Purushan across an arid landscape, and point of view shots of Hari swimming with

Ramachandran. The variations in perspective in these recollections foreground the idea of

different points of view and the inability to collate these disparate memories into one coherent

vision. Neither are there clear divisions between these memories of Hari and the present-time

narrative. Rather, the flashbacks seamlessly bleed into the present so that it becomes hard to be

sure which narrative time the current images occupy. Moreover, as these past experiences fade

out of the present-time narrative, the sounds of the memories carry over from the past as the

image track returns to the present. These sound bridges mark the perpetuation of the past in the

present as the distinction between these two time periods becomes increasingly blurry and

intermediated. Indeed, as Purushan begins recounting the history of various rebellions in the

state, image flashbacks combine with present-time narration and sonic flashbacks combine with

present-time images so that the continuity between time and space is disjointed and the idea of a

strict temporal order is undermined.[90] In this way, Hari's ghost and the ghosts of other rebels

rise up to threaten the past/present divide. Memories of Hari destabilize this separation so that

the past becomes instead an active force in the present. As such, Hari's dead face periodically

appears, unmotivated, in the present-time narrative, while the position of his corpse in the

morgue is echoed in the body positions of various characters in the past (Hari lying down in jail)

and the present (Purushan lying in a bed of flowers, and the baby doll that hangs from the

rearview mirror in the van). Hari's corpse thus haunts all the temporal strains of the film, shaping

both the past and the present. Indeed, the film itself is structured around both temporal and

spatial travel as Purushan moves backwards and forwards in time (his engagement with Kerala's

radical history) and space (his journey first north then south).

But the destabilization of Hari's identity means that this movement through space and

time is without resolution since who Hari was and why/how he died cannot be determined. This

instability precludes the foreclosure of how his ghost returns. Indeed, such ambiguity is at the

heart of the intermediated temporality of both Benjamin and Derrida which itself destabilizes the

categorical distinction between memory and history. As Brown puts it, "to be haunted is at once

to experience the profundity or significance of something from the past and not to know what

that something was" (*Politics out of History* 152). Full knowledge of this something is to reduce

it to a given discourse and thus manipulate it. That Hari remains a contested symbol prevents his

ghost from being put to rest. Rather, his persistent presence in the present continually

undermines the drive of such logic: "The phenomenon remains alive, refusing to recede into the

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[90] In this way, *Amma Ariyan* marks its investment in more experimental aesthetic forms that the
more typically neorealist films of New Indian Cinema. Indeed, although certainly more realist
that *Ici et ailleurs, Amma Ariyan* contains elements of the surreal and oneiric, with Purushan's
poetic voiceover recalling Paolo's own operatic narration in *Terra em Transe.*

past, precisely to the extent that its meaning is open and ambiguous, to the extent that it remains interpreted and contested by the present, and to the extent that it disturbs settled meaning in the present" (*Politics out of History* 151). Thus at the end of the film, Hari's mother comments that his motivations were unknown, even to her: "His hopes, his intentions – I, his mother, couldn't understand them." Any last hope of understanding Hari is thus extinguished in these concluding moments that instead reaffirm his unknowability.

In his discussion of *Amma Ariyan* for the online Malayalam cinema database, Rajmohan Manuvilsan criticizes Purushan and his group for not questioning Hari's death: "The crowd that never bothered about this vital issue [how and why Hari died] is not a movement capable to act as the backbone of a system but just a crowd of apolitical individuals." Manuvilsan concludes that without this active inquiry, the group is thus actually just a "mob," the "apolitical intelligentsia" referred to in the quote from Otto Rene Castillo that one member of the group reads aloud during the film. Such a critique reads the film within the logic of revolutionary orthodox struggle. Indeed, Castillo's quote – "One day the apolitical intellectuals of my country will be interrogated by the simplest of our people" – operates according to the logic of an eschatological victory from which this judgment can be passed. What Manuvilsan misses, then, is that Purushan's refusal to understand why and how Hari died marks a fundamental rejection of this very logic. Such orthodox thought is critiqued in the film in the song that Ramachandran sings to Balettan as they drive south: "There was a man who died. He who bore the dead one on his back, he also died. The living forgot to count the numbers of the dead." The song makes clear that the use of the dead to perpetuate rebellion only leads to more dead. The living, therefore, rather than taking up the fight of the dead, need to "count" them, that is, they need to recognize and engage with their deaths as death. To this end, *Amma Ariyan* is not interested in establishing

the truth of Hari's death. Its emphasis on the ambiguity, contradictions, and incompleteness of memory means that, to return to Brown, "we inherit not 'what really happened' to the dead but what lives on from that happening, what is conjured from it, how past generations and events occupy the force fields of the present, how they claim us, and how they haunt, plague, and inspirit our imaginations and visions for the future" (*Politics out of History* 150).

In refusing to categorize Hari's death as sacrifice or Purushan's journey as a political awakening, *Amma Ariyan* rejects the logic of martyrdom that drives both the ideological construction of death in orthodox revolutionary thought and the history of its filmic representation in Malayalam cinema. In the closing lines of his letter to his mother, Purushan states, "I want to share the political ideals of these people. But I cannot do so. The memories of Hari's suicide prey continually upon me." The continual presence of Hari's ghost in the present is thus what prevents Purushan from retreating into the comfort of a political ideology that would exorcise the ghost. Purushan's willingness to be haunted, his refusal to let go of his grief by giving into an ideology that would write Hari's suicide as part of a revolutionary historical teleology and transform it into knowledge for productive organizing is what insists upon and preserves the film's relation to history as one of perpetual negotiation. The return of the dead in a way that will not allow them to be put to rest means that the film refuses to allow these ghosts to be silenced or the work of mourning to be completed. Indeed, the film is structured as a wake (at its core, *Amma Ariyan* is a gathering of friends and relatives who share stories about the deceased) and thus as part of the mourning process. That the film itself ends without conclusion – it simply ends, abruptly and suddenly, more as if the camera was accidentally shut off – reinforces the perpetual nature of this wake and its melancholic relationship to the past. Indeed, in this sense, the film is truly melancholic in as much as it articulates no desire to overcome the

object of mourning. Drawing on Freud, Wendy Brown defines melancholia as an "attachment to the object of one's sorrowful loss [that] supersedes any desire to recover from this loss, to live free of it in the present, to be unburdened by it. This is what renders melancholia a persistent condition, a state, indeed, a structure of desire, rather than a transient response to death or loss" ("Resisting" 20). This melancholic structure is precisely what maintains the intermediate temporality considered here since it ensures that the past cannot be laid to rest. Thus, while the film is structured as a wake, the work of mourning that it embarks on remains unfinished.

Amma Ariyan establishes its melancholic tone in the opening of Purushan's letter to his mother, which begins shortly after he leaves her house to return to Delhi: "Night creeps into my days. My spent dreams are scarred with silence. I throw them into nights of empty sleep. They fall into deserts of nightmares of misery." When Hari's body is discovered, the film becomes notably quiet. Gone are Hari's voiceover monologue, the ambient sounds of nature and transportation, and the non-diegetic musical soundtrack, while the police only speak in short, staccato statements with long periods of silence in between. The silence that has "scarred" Purushan's dreams, then, is the silence of the dead,[91] a loss which has transformed dreams into nightmares. Later in the film, these dreams are marked as revolutionary ones, and death is tied to the culture of violence and brutal retaliation sprung from the Naxalite movement. After the

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[91] As with *Ici et ailleurs*, this silence is the silence of the dead as dead, as loss. This is a silence that has the power to speak in the present but only as loss, that is, it must speak as silence, as absence, as loss, if death is to be recognized as such. It is perhaps best thought of in Pablo Neruda's terms as "the silent noise of death" so as not to be confused with the dead who speak in the present as the voice of revolutionary progress. This line is taken from Neruda's poem, "Death Alone," which Purushan recites after he encounters the body. The poem's melancholic description of death as silent, irredeemable loss echoes the sentiments of the film. That the poem describes the face and the gaze of death as green (Neruda's personal color of hope) implies that death also carries with it a sense of hope. However, as in *Amma Ariyan,* this is not a hope borne of the transformation of death into something else but of the recognition of death as loss.

identification of the body as Hari, Purushan's letter continues, "How many violent deaths? This is how dreams break. How many skulls split open? A lacerated heart. Fighters shattered by guns. Vultures that flap and screech over the gallows tree. What do we get in return? This endless chain of violent deaths can give us no hope. Children are more fearless and farsighted. A whole people can be betrayed by misery and suffering." This monologue contextualizes Hari's death within the political climate of Kerala and relates it to the violence of revolutionary struggle so that it becomes a betrayal of the revolution's ideals. Moreover, Hari's suffering, be it as a victim of murder or a suicide motivated by political failure, becomes the suffering of a "whole people." The sense of suffering and loss that his death represents thus encompasses everyone who has suffered through revolution, be it at the hands of the oppressors or the rebels themselves.

Significantly, then, the melancholia that Hari's death provokes becomes a collective state. As Purushan travels around the state, first attempting to identify the body, then gathering the group that will travel south and finally trying to find Hari's mother, the group of mourners grows. Its similarity to a wake (recast here as a perpetual one without end) at once marks the collective effect (and affect) of Hari's death. In addition, Purushan's report to his mother melds with a history of radicalism in Kerala as he reports to his mother not only Hari's death but the deaths of countless other rebels throughout the region. In this way, while Hari's singular death produces a collective response, Purushan's mother's melancholic response (her tears as she watches the film) is to a history of multiple deaths. Moreover, Hari's report to his mother is only one such report in the film. Each time a new man joins the group the same series of events transpires: the group goes to his house; meets his mother who then tells the group where her son is, they go and tell him of Hari's suicide and their plans to tell his mother. In each case, the son decides to go with them and tells his mother that he is leaving. His mother, in a close up that

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shows the grief and worry on her face, then makes some comment about the terrible nature of

suicide as she watches her son leave. Each mother is thus brought into the collective grief for

Hari, while Hari metaphorically expands to encompass these sons as each mother worries that

the same fate will befall her child in "these troubled times." The act of mourning thus expands to

include all mothers for their sons,[92] so that the boundaries between the individual and the

collective become blurred as the death of one in the present becomes the pretext for a collective

mourning of many from the past, present, and future.

Melancholic Political Collectivity

     Amma Ariyan's emphasis on collective mourning positions negative feeling as a

constitutive element of historiography as hauntology. As Carla Freccero argues, haunting is "the

way history registers affect" (78). This affective relation to history is also an ethical one; rather

than constructing loss as the engine of future victory (which is actually the continuation of

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[92] That Purushan means simply "man" in Malayalam perhaps further implies this collective identity: Purushan is "mankind" reporting to its "mother" a history of her loss. There are numerous references to Durga (the supreme mother-goddess) throughout the film that would perhaps support this allegorical reading of women. In this vein, Manuvilsan reads the mother figure as an analog for nation so that the film becomes a report to the nation about the loss of its sons. There is perhaps something here, although the problematic overtones of such a metaphor must be pointed out. Indeed, despite their displays of mourning, women occupy a conservative place in the film in general, excluded as they are from the travelling group. Women are instead associated with the home (the mothers remain inside their houses and watch their sons leave), religion and mysticism (Hari's mother is found at a Christian baptism; Paru is studying at an *ashram* and is writing her thesis on the mother-goddess concept; one mother has her palm read by another woman whose proclamations of private happiness and family success are contrasted with the violent political history that her son is reading), and insanity (Narayanankutty's sister goes mad after seeing her brother and Hari tortured by the police). As discussed in chapter one in relation to Sembène's critique of the independence movement, women, in many ways, are denied full participation in political life, including the alternative political collectivity posited by the film, although the inclusion of both Hari's and Purushan's mothers in the collectives at the end of the film perhaps goes some way towards recovering a sense of female inclusion.

violence and death), haunting insists that loss be allowed to exist as such, as an inheritance of the promises and failures of the past that cannot be redeemed. For some, this ethical turn marks a move away from the realm of political action (death as a motivator for the realization of victory) towards that of philosophical contemplation (death as the occasion for mourning and historical consideration). As Heather Love asks in her reading of Benjamin's angel of history, "What are we to do with this tattered, passive figure, so clearly unfit for the rigors of the protest march, not to mention the battlefield?" (148-49).

For Adorno and as is emphasized in *Ici et ailleurs*, the answer to this question comes from the work of interpretation that this kind of historical orientation prompts. As such, he posits Benjamin's melancholia as both active and critical: "as a form of melancholy which perceives transience in everything historical, this attitude is also *critical* […]. This is a melancholy that has become active, not a melancholy that makes do, that remains stuck fast in an unhappy consciousness, not at home with itself, but a consciousness that exteriorizes itself as a critique of existing phenomena. Such a melancholy is probably the pre-eminent critical, philosophical stance" (134). It is possible, therefore, for melancholia to embody an activist potential, but it exists in a form different from that produced by faith in a calculable and inevitable future.[93]

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[93] And, I would maintain, it exists as activism, as an injunction to act, not as the anti-materialist passivity that Freccero suggests. She states, "If this spectral approach to history and historiography is queer, it might also be objected that it counsels a kind of passivity, both in Bersani's sense of self-shattering and also potentially in the more mundane sense of the opposite of the political injunction to act. In this respect, it is also queer, as only a passive politics could be said to be. And yet, the passivity – which is also a form of patience and passion – is not quite the same thing as quietism. Rather, it is a suspension, a waiting, an attending to the world's arrivals (through, in part, its returns), not as guarantee or security for action in the present, but as the very force from the past that moves us into the future, like Benjamin's angel, blown backward by a storm (104). Freccero's emphasis on waiting, in fact, runs counter to the critique

Amma Ariyan uses this relationship between melancholia and interpretation as the basis for a new form of political collectivity.

As noted earlier, Raymond Williams posits the recognition of violence, suffering, and loss as the basis for revolution: "what we mean in suffering is again revolution, because we acknowledge others as men and any such acknowledgment is the beginning of struggle, as the continuing reality of our lives" (83-84). Paramount in this formulation are not the dialectical forces of history that will manufacture the revolutionary transformation of society but the acknowledgement of suffering as the foundation of perpetual struggle. Indeed for Williams, for revolution to remain revolutionary, it must begin with and maintain a recognition of the suffering that both caused it and that it itself causes:

> We have still to attend to the whole action, and to see actual liberation as part of the same process as the terror which appalls us. I do not mean that liberation cancels the terror; I mean only that they are connected, and that this connection is tragic. The final truth in the matter seems to be that revolution – the long revolution against human alienation – produces, in real historical circumstances, its own new kinds of alienation, which it must struggle to understand and which it must overcome, if it is to remain revolutionary. (82)

In *Amma Ariyan* this very recognition of loss, one that does not attempt to justify it or disavow it through appeals to a future victory, brings the group together, however accidentally or contingently, and thus forms the basis of this new collective. Similarly, at the end of the film, it is Hari's mother's tears that draw more people to the group so that by the end of the film its

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of classical dialectical materialist history and the sense of urgency that lie at the heart of Benjamin's revolutionary politics.

numbers have swelled to the hundreds. Moreover, this sense of loss is what prompts Purushan's journey south and thus his engagement with Kerala's radical history.

Each encounter on this journey leads Purushan to another instance of oppression and rebellion, from the student protests against the corporatization of the medical profession and the toyi-toyi[94] for Nelson Mandela on campus, which Purushan sees as he tries to identify the body, to the striking quarry workers, the fishermen protesting mechanized trawling, the clashes with black marketers in Kottappuram, and the Vypeen Island liquor tragedy,[95] which the group learn about as they head south. The sense of suffering and loss that prompts Purushan's engagement with history at the same time conditions it so that the history of radicalism that he compiles continually emphasizes suffering and death. As Purushan writes to his mother, "my tragic journey through grief and heat ends at last in Fort Cochin. Mother, how can I count the victims?" The history that piles up around Purushan is indeed catastrophic, each new story appearing as "one more incident in a long list of defeats." Stylistically, images of past rebellions rise up and interrupt the present-day narrative in a manner quite similar to the presentation of the memories of Hari. The past and the present thus overlap and intertwine as current acts of rebellion co-exist alongside past struggles. Purushan's journey reawakens these ghosts, bringing them into the present and keeping them there through his melancholic engagement with the loss that they entail. The sense of suffering and loss that permeates these incidents thus becomes the basis for a non-teleological historical knowledge where these struggles co-exist as different and specific

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[94] Toyi-toyi is the name of a South African dance traditionally used as a form of protest.

[95] In 1982, over seventy people died and hundreds more went blind or developed deformities after drinking poisoned liquor purchased from Government arrack stores. Legal petitions to the state argued that the lack of government oversight allowed contractors to cut their product with illegal substances in order to increase profits (Ahuja 628-29).

instances that, although all part of a larger history, need to be considered non-linearly, that is, not as stepping stones on the long path towards revolutionary victory but as singular sites of suffering.

This historical orientation produces a multiform sense of revolutionary action. Devi maintains that the mixing of documentary footage from current struggles with the fictional narrative produces a sense of urgency:

> Such moments, extraneous to the narrative frame, invest the diegesis with a historical urgency, an urgency to narrate symbolically the real, to fictionalize and narrate so that the imaginary becomes an episteme, an object of knowledge, and thus an agent of activism. *Amma Ariyan* offers no solutions to the problem of class exploitation, but in its reluctance to foreground a narrated subject on screen, its refreshing use of interviews and voice of the people, *Amma Ariyan* does abide on the side of the exploited, the tortured, and the murdered. (182)

Devi's argument about the urgency of the film reinforces the claim that its melancholia is not about passivity. Indeed, the history of struggle as suffering that it lays out demands recognition so that sites of suffering become, as they return, potential sites of rebellion. However, to claim that the film, although sympathetic to the marginalized classes, does not provide a solution to the problem of class exploitation is to critique it according to the logic of revolutionary struggle that it is arguing against. Indeed, the idea that there is a singular solution that could be provided is grounded in the belief that the outcome of action can be calculated in advance and that, consequently, there is a correct revolutionary position from which to struggle.

Against this logic, *Amma Ariyan* insists upon the multiplicity of forms of action that counter the problem of class exploitation in the myriad ways that it is enacted. Reminiscent of

the multivalent presentations of revolution that we discussed in chapter two, here revolution is similarly presented as asymmetrical, contingent, and without the unifying narrative of a determining ideology. The various forms of action that the film presents, with their attendant successes and failures, thus combine as a non-totalizable response to exploitation, a response that refuses to align these actions or reduce them to the teleological narrative of an eschatological victory. As the group testifies as it concludes its journey, victory is neither immanent nor assured and there are no historical lessons to learn that will ensure our progress towards the final battle: "The people's discussions gave rise to hopes. These were not fulfilled. The medical students fought against privatization. Workers fought for Kanippuswami and won. The people of Koottapuram overthrew the black marketers. What did these fights teach us? That our victories are short lived."

Purushan's group functions as an example of the political collective that this new sense of revolutionary action enables, based as it is in this shared affective response to loss rather than a predetermined class solidarity. Such a collective is grounded in affiliations generated by affect that are neither permanent nor essential. As such, the group is resolutely non-institutionalized, a move which would render the transiency of these relationships permanent and ideologically stable. In the film, institutionalized politics are at the root cause of much violence (most obviously the Naxalite movement, but also the deaths of four fishermen in Cochin that were the result of two opposing workers factions and the 1953 Cochin uprising, which was staged by the United Workers Party and resulted in the execution of several men). Indeed, the film constructs an unofficial history. As Devi points out, it focuses on rebellions that have typically been left out of institutionalized narratives: "Purushan's perambulations take the audience to the margins of the society, where the camera usually does not go" (182). In this populist vein, the group itself

operates in opposition to the government who send their own official representative to visit

Hari's mother. Unlike this official, who quickly reports the death as a matter of professional

"duty," Purushan is motivated by his own ethical imperative and struggles for most of the film

over the best way to break the news. This alternative form of political collectivity is thus

motivated by ethical imperatives that arise from its melancholic relation to history, not by an

institutionalized sense of duty or an abstractly determined code of action based on a calculation

of the future. As such, this imperative can change according to the historical relations it conjures

and is thus localized, contingent, spontaneous, and non-instrumentalizing. Indeed, what is to be

gained from Purushan's trip to Cochin is unclear; it is not a means to a political end. We are

reminded once again, then, of Derrida's New International as "a link of affinity, suffering, and

hope […] an untimely link, without status, without title, and without name, barely public, even if

it is not clandestine, without contract, 'out of joint,' without coordination, without party, without

country, without national community […], without co-citizenship, without common belonging to

a class" (*Specters* 106-07).[96] In *Amma Ariyan,* the New International is a truly melancholic

alliance.

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[96] Derrida's full description of the New International reads, "The 'New International' is not only
that which is seeking a new international law through these crimes. It is a link of affinity,
suffering, and hope, a still discreet, almost secret link, as it was around 1848, but more and more
visible, we have more than one sign of it. It is an untimely link, without status, without title, and
without name, barely public, even if it is not clandestine, without contract, 'out of joint,' without
coordination, without party, without country, without national community (International before,
across, and beyond any national determination), without co-citizenship, without common
belonging to a class. The name of new International is given here to what calls to the friendship
of an alliance without institution among those who, even if they no longer believe or never
believed in the socialist-Marxist International, in the dictatorship of the proletariat, in the
messiano-eschatological role of the universal union of the proletarians of all lands, continue to be
inspired by at least one of the spirits of Marx or of Marxism (they now know there is *more than
one*) and in order to ally themselves, in a new, concrete, and real way, even if this alliance no

In India in general, and in the south most particularly, cinema has played a substantial role in political campaigns, candidate election, and the formation of various kinds of political communities. As such, *Amma Ariyan'*s investment in the formation of alternative political collectives is bound to the cinematic culture of the region. In her article, "The Politics of Adulation," Sara Dickey examines what she terms the "long history of mutual involvement" of politics and cinema in south India: "Parties and movements have converted films into propaganda forms by inserting political ideologies, symbols and allegories. Cinema personnel have built on their reputations to become elected leaders" (340). Although Dickey focuses primarily on Tamil Nadu where the last five chief ministers have had film connections (most famously MGR who served in this position for over ten years), her claims about the relationship between mainstream film culture and the production of political heroes outline a national tradition of political cinema. Dickey critiques the processes by which actors use their film personas to develop their political image and the film distribution networks to circulate this image in parts of the country where access to voters through other forms of mass media is typically limited. Central to these election victories, Dickey argues, was the role that fan clubs played in fostering local support for candidates by providing "a preexisting network of supporters, often highly organized, that can easily be transformed into a political cadre. Their activities frequently operationalize the image of the star" (342). The film/politics nexus in India is thus dominated by a mainstream cinema that manipulates star personas to deify candidates and

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longer takes the form of a party or a workers' international, but rather of a kind of counter-conjuration, in the (theoretical and practical) critique of the state of international law, the concepts of State and nation, and so forth: in order to renew this critique, and especially to radicalize it" (106-07).

reinforce institutionalized political systems that do little to serve the interests of the marginalized classes that these film stars purport to defend.[97]

In opposition to this mainstream alliance, Abraham envisions a different kind of political cinema – a people's cinema that eschews both institutionalized forms of politics and filmmaking in favor of more direct participation. In order to operate outside of mainstream cinematic and political ideologies, *Amma Ariyan* was produced as part of the Odessa Collective film cooperative. Beginning in Kerala in 1965 with Gopalakrishnan's Chitralekha Film Cooperative, these organizations furnished struggling filmmakers, especially those whose investments lay outside the mainstream, with alternative production options.[98] Cooperatives often also incorporated a social element related to distribution and exhibition and organized film screenings and educational opportunities. More than a hundred such societies sprang up rapidly as part of the political climate of the 1970s, offering access to local, international, and non-mainstream

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[97] Dickey's primary example of this is MGR, who used his film persona as a man of the people fighting for the rights of the oppressed and marginalized to curry favor with the working and peasant classes. Dickey points out that through the valiant roles he played in cinema, MGR was seen as the champion of the poor and, through his ties with the DMK party, the same in real life as he was on screen: "His image was so strong that the actual effects of his economic policies, which arguably were ultimately detrimental to the poor and beneficial to the rich […], went unnoticed by most voters" (357).

[98] Shankaranarayanam credits the formation of the cooperatives with the qualitative transformation of Malayalam cinema: "Around this time there was a qualitative growth in the sphere of Malayalam Cinema in the form of Film Cooperatives, the harbinger of which was the Chitralekha cooperative which commissioned a full-fledged production complex for struggling film makers on the outskirts of Trivandrum. Credit facilities were offered to young, visionary film makers. From then on, the mechanical aspects of film making underwent a change. Previously, the Malayalam film maker had to make his inevitable pilgrimage to Madras, the illustrious Hollywood of the South for studio and processing facilities. In the 80s these facilities were available in Kerala. Another change was the texture of films - from high budget to low budget, from studio shooting to outdoor shooting. Thus, Malayalam Cinema severed itself from the umbilical cord of the Madras film industry and established its own identity in Kerala" (8).

cinema in more remote parts of the state. Within this system, Bandhu argues, the Odessa Collective was unique; it had no formal legal structure and no political or financial backing. As such, it operated as a collective in the true sense of the word – as an adaptable affinity group based around shared investments rather than a deterministic, institutionalized ideology. For Abraham, the Odessa Collective marked a non-institutionalized means of production that not only ensured artistic freedom but also the opportunity to foster local interest and investment in film: "John conceived Odessa Movies as a movement for good cinema for the people. He correctly identified that the structure of the industry as a whole is greatly responsible for the alienation of the people from this most potent medium, and he was convinced that an alternate system of production and distribution is a necessary condition for liberating cinema" (Bandhu 66-67).[99] Much like Jorge Sanjinés's Ukamau Group, the Odessa Collective was an attempt to address the problems of film making on all levels simultaneously by encouraging people's participation. *Amma Ariyan* was produced according to this logic: it was entirely financed by small individual contributions from Keralan citizens capped at INR 500 (around $11), which were raised by the group travelling the state playing drums, discussing the film and asking for donations, and by screening Chaplin's *The Kid*, Girish Kasarvalli's *Ghatashradha*, and Anand Patwardhan's *Bombay Our City,* as well some of Abraham's own work (Kasbekar 238). The film

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[99] Bandhu is clear to note that the history of the Odessa Collective needs to be separated into its early formative period and a later phase marked by the decline of its political commitment: "Within no time after its first (and only) film production *Amma Ariyan* (Report to Mother), its core activists split up into two contrary currents: one striving for the institutionalisation of Odessa Movies on lines already found to be redundant through the existence of the film society movement and its institutional trappings, and the other swimming against the tide. After the death of John in 1987 the role of Odessa Movies as a movement for good cinema has dwindled into oblivion" (66, n).

thus marked the cooperative's attempt to produce a people's cinema capable of fostering non-institutionalized political collectives.[100]

Amma Ariyan's opening credits establish the film's relationship to a people's politics: "Odessa tries to communicate the reality of how a film cooperative can reach out to the people." In discussing *Amma Ariyan*, Abraham reinforces this position by highlighting the reciprocal nature of this kind of political cinema: "The way I see it, films should speak to the people and people should speak through Cinema. The cinematic experience should rouse the social consciousness of the audience'" (qtd. in NFAI 13). Importantly, this is not the evocation of a predetermined social consciousness; *Amma Ariyan* is not invested in fostering a particular ideological position or provoking a specific form of political understanding or action. Rather, it is an attempt to produce the kind of transient political collective that Purushan's group represents.

This is done through the shared engagement with loss that cinema can provoke. Thus, at the end of *Amma Ariyan* after Hari's mother has wiped her eyes for the camera, the film cuts to show the projection of this scene from the film being played on a screen. The camera then pans left and tracks through the crowd of people watching, before settling on Purushan's mother, who then gets up and walks away, followed by the rest of the crowd. Significantly, it's this scene of shared mourning that is replayed (three times in fact, twice in the film and then a third time as the projection of the film within the film). When Hari's mother shares her loss, a large crowd forms around her, which at the same time produces another crowd: the audience of the film

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[100] Abraham's personality and lifestyle reinforced this idea. He lived as a nomad with very few possessions and travelled the state, staying with local villagers and workers. Referred to in the media as *Ottayan* (The Lone Elephant), Abraham was seen as a romantic anti-establishment figure.

within the film who are watching this scene. What we learn in these closing moments, then, is that the film itself is Purushan's report to his mother. As such, we have been occupying the position of his mother for most of the film and it is only in this closing moment when her gaze is revealed, that we realize we have been watching through her eyes all along. Consequently, just as she has been brought into this collective mourning as a mother concerned for her son and as the recipient of Purushan's melancholy report, so too have we as we occupy her position as viewers of the film. This kind of revolutionary film, then, through its backwards gaze, provokes our engagement with this history of suffering. What the future consequences of this will be are unknown and must remain so, for the evocation of a specific future becomes a means of controlling the present and shutting down the possibilities that the past presents. Rather, the film opens up the space for this kind of engagement with the past by sharing in this experience of suffering and loss. It is this shared memory of past suffering that makes revolution possible anew. As Fritsch argues,

> A logic of certain victory has overtaken and absorbed the indignation at suffering and oppression, a logic that is willing to trade off a memory of the oppressed in favor of the speculative appropriation of the victims' alienated works in and for the future, in the form of technological advances and the creation of a universalized humanity. Rather than the promise of certain victory, it is the memory of past victimization, and the uncovering of "barbarism" at the heart of the material and cultural richness of tradition, that are essential to motivate resistance in the present. (6)

Amma Ariyan, much like *Ici et ailleurs,* works to bring an awareness of this suffering to the surface. And, if the "total redemption of humanity" begins in "the actual suffering of real men

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thus exposed" (*Modern Tragedy* 77), that is to say, if the recognition of suffering is the condition from which revolution is born, the film asks, and continues to ask, that we act, although how remains up to us.

Conclusion

In looking back over the history of the long 1968, both *Ici et ailleurs* and *Amma Ariyan* bring the idea of revolutionary cinema full circle. Indeed, these films both return to the problematic ideology of teleological revolution and, in response, formulate an alternate temporality for thinking revolution that is similarly bound up with ideas of repetition and return. Performing what I argued in chapter one was one of the fundamental revolutionary features of repetition – the ability to go back and rethink and reformulate revolution – these films, in this reflective return to repetition, transform it into something new. What was cast before as a kind of systematic endlessness of revolutionary struggle, however, is now reformulated as a melancholic return that reinstates suffering as a fundamental part of any attempt to think a revolutionary politics. Moreover, what repeats is not the continual work of theoretical interpretation but the perpetual intensification of suffering where the inability to ever realize victory only ensures that more suffering piles up.

Both *Ici et ailleurs* and *Amma Ariyan* also return to the aesthetic and affective investments discussed in chapters two and three as constitutive features of second wave cinema. Neither film clearly represents what constitutes revolution; rather, they proliferate the possible forms that this action could take. As in *Tout va Bien* and *Terra em Transe,* then, what constitutes revolution becomes a matter of interpretation that remains the responsibility of the spectator. In *Ici et ailleurs,* this polyvalent aesthetic is developed through the exploration of new editing

techniques made possible by digital technology, the film thus continuing *Tout va Bien's* investment in an aesthetic that opens up new ways of drawing connections between things that are multiple, complex, incomplete – even contradictory. Alternately, *Amma Ariyan* incorporates elements of the surreal by destabilizing the boundaries between the past and the present, between memory and reality, and between reality and the imagination. In this sense it projects an oneiric quality, not unlike *Terra em Transe* with which it also shares a poetic narration. *Ici et ailleurs* and *Amma Ariyan* also both adopt negative affective registers, turning to the ugly feelings of anxiety and melancholia that undo the optimism embedded in a teleological understanding of revolutionary transformation. Like Makavejev's disgust, these feelings are not affirmative; they offer no endorsement, either directly or through their inversion, of a "correct" revolutionary politics. More than anything, though, the melancholic tone of these films seems to diagnose the affective experience of hauntological revolutionary philosophy.

For Godard, a spectral relation to history is about the restoration of old political ideas seemingly lost to history. Thus when the failures of revolution call forth its victims, at the same time they bring with them a restored sense of possibility. For Abraham, spectrality produces a melancholia that functions as the foundation of an alternative form of political collective action. As such, *Amma Ariyan* moves outside of the metacritical aesthetic and affective concerns laid out in previous chapters to imagine a cinematic practice that could operate as part of a politics of collective organizing. This investment in the possibilities of cinema to foster collective political action is tied to the specifics of south Indian film culture and, as such, it represents a version of revolutionary cinema bound to a specific set of regional conditions. At the same time, however, it does mark an attempt to imagine a different effect that second wave revolutionary cinema could have.

As reflections on the history and failure of second wave revolution and revolutionary filmmaking that engage the philosophical, political, formal, and emotional concerns of the period, *Ici et ailleurs* and *Amma Ariyan* present a kind of summary definition of the genre. Second wave cinema is a contingent and ambiguous cinema, one that insists upon yet declines to directly represent revolution. This refusal to define content, to declare an end to struggle, or to mobilize hope or optimism results in a fundamentally ambivalent cinema, one that must confront the limits of its own ability to incite action. In a certain sense, then, the melancholia of these two films as they reflect back on the never-ending history of struggle as loss, as the piling up of a history of suffering, perhaps implies a slowly encroaching sense of hopelessness. Indeed, while these films try to find a way through these various aesthetic and affective impasses to maintain a sense of revolutionary possibility, there is the sense that they are perhaps more symptomatic of what seems to be the impossible project of a revolutionary cinema that at the same time insists upon a self-determined spectatorship and upon the urgency of action. In this sense, revolutionary cinema is thus perhaps best characterized as a project of radical futility, one that recognizes its impasses, contradictions, and impossibilities, but keeps on trying anyway.

AFTERWORD

Legacies of '68

New Revolutions

Screening the Impossible is an attempt to develop a history of revolutionary filmmaking in the years around 1968. This is a history in the Althusserian sense of the word; the project is not the reproduction of a "real" or "true" history of what this cinema was, how it worked, or what it meant. Rather, it lays out a history that recognizes its own ideological investments and underpinnings. To this end, the project is perhaps better described as an attempt to write a history of second wave revolutionary filmmaking that is useful for contemporary Marxism and current engagements with the possibilities of social transformation in the west.

As a project that is, on one level, invested in the revolutionary possibilities of the contemporary moment, why, one may ask, does it return to the past of revolutionary filmmaking? Why go back to the 1960s? The answer to these questions lies partly in the desire to look back at a moment when the radical Left was propelled by a real sense of urgency and of possibility. 1968 had momentum; the idea of the fundamental transformation of economic, political, and social structures seemed not only possible, but also imminently attainable. After all, the 60s were a time of protest, praxis, and action; it was a time when people took over the streets and occupied buildings. In short, a lot of people *did* something, and this something appeared pregnant with the possibility of remaking the world anew. So, on one hand, my return to this period of Leftist history betrays my own revolutionary romanticism and nostalgia for this sense of possibility. Indeed, despite the vociferous cries that the current Occupy movement has recaptured the radical spirit of the 60s, the present moment, at least from a western point of view,

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seems tragically *without* possibility as action seems to carry little, if any, revolutionary

consequence. Indeed, while one could cite the Arab Spring as a demonstration of actually

existing revolutionary energy, from a Marxist point of view, the outcome of the recent elections

in Egypt calls into question the idea that this is any kind of victory for the Left. Rather,

capitalism demonstrates itself to be ever more adaptable and expandable, its ideological noose

ever tighter, so that despite the deepening economic crisis and the fear of international market

meltdown, it still seems almost impossible to imagine halting the tidal wave of corporatization

and globalization. The current moment feels starved of revolutionary imagination, so much so

that the turn back to the 1960s becomes an expression of the longing for a revolutionary energy

so bold and uncompromising that it demanded the impossible. To look back at a moment that

was defined by a seemingly impossible politics that still somehow registered on a global scale,

then, is to try and recuperate that sense of action and possibility.

On the other hand, this is also a look backwards at a moment and a movement that failed

to accomplish its goals. As I outlined in the last chapter of the project, the powerful and

imminent sense of revolutionary change so fondly remembered as 1968 evaporated quickly, only

to be replaced by a more fervent conservatism and more pervasive capitalism. Indeed, the

movement's radicalization of revolution as a decentered process – what this project presents as

one of its most powerful contributions to revolutionary theory – is also frequently cited as the

very reason why the movement failed to capitalize on its momentum and realize any real

Communist transformation. As the editors of *Social Text* so clearly put it,

> The revolt was so radically decentered – marking the triumph of molecular
>
> politics over its arch rival, the central committee, the principal contradiction, the
>
> key sector – that organs of coordination were difficult to keep up, not only for

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technical reasons but also because they were ideologically suspect. So the rhetoric

of "let the people decide," "all power to the imagination," "refuse authority" often

turned into babble. The antimass became the countermyth to that of the

proletariat. (4)

And so perhaps, as Žižek has recently argued, the actual legacy of '68 is not an increase in

political and social freedom, but the consolidation of a new form of capitalism, one "that usurped

the left's rhetoric of worker self-management, turning it from an anti-capitalist slogan to a

capitalist one." Citing Lacan's infamous critique of the '68 protestors – "as revolutionaries, you

are hysterics who demand a new master: you will get one," – Žižek argues that "we did get one,

in the guise of the postmodern 'permissive' master whose domination is all the stronger for being

the less visible."

Moreover, Paolo Virno makes a similar argument in his claim that the contingencies of

life, which found expression in 1968 in ideas of spontaneity, self direction, and perpetual social

transformation, have now been fully coopted by the post-Fordist productive process. This claim

extends further than the assimilation of the values of self-direction and direct participation into

the bourgeois logic of the Self-made Man, where anyone can succeed provided they are willing

to go out into the world and try. For Virno this intensified domination has successfully colonized

the "sentiments of disenchantment," bringing opportunism, fear, and cynicism into the

productive process in the guise of flexibility and adaptability to the contingencies of the labor

market. Thus the key fundamentals of the 60s movement – its most radical call for self

emancipation and direct action – have since been assimilated into capitalism as desirable

personal skills in the workforce. Thus as self-determination gave way to individualism, solidarity

to bourgeois moral indignation, and spontaneity to flexibility in the workplace, the legacy of '68

seems to solidify as the transformation of radicalism into libertarian capitalism, a transition epitomized for Žižek in the founders of Ben and Jerry's ice-cream.

What we can hope to accomplish in this return to the past, however, is the preservation of the impulses of 60s radicalism in a way that does not necessarily lead to their transformation into a further tightening of the screws of capitalism. As I've laid out in the introduction, the conversations that the dissertation engages with – the globalization of '68 and the reinvigoration of Marxism – can collectively be seen as an attempt to begin this process of recovery. And such a process of recovery is possible if we can separate out the contemporary capitalist manifestations of revolutionary ideology from the ideals of the '68 movement, reminding ourselves in the process that their current expression is neither natural nor essential. Thus, while the self-direction of second wave revolution has morphed into the ideology of liberal individualism, this transformation is not inevitable and certainly not the end of the issue. As Virno goes on to note,

> the "truth" of opportunism, what might be called its neutral kernel, resides in the fact that our relation with the world tends to articulate itself primarily through possibilities, opportunities, and chances, instead of according to linear and univocal directions. This modality of experience, even if it nourishes opportunism, does not necessarily result in it. It does, however, comprise the necessary background condition of action and conduct in general. Other kinds of behavior, diametrically opposed to opportunism, might also be inscribed within an experience fundamentally structured by these same possibilities and fleeting opportunities. (34)

Reaffirming and recapturing this sense of possibility is the basic foundation of any

transformative politics. Indeed, the sense that the current capitalist system is "too big to fail"

derives, in part, from the naturalization of the kinds of transformations that Žižek and Virno

point out. Thus, just as the second wave argued that the seemingly natural rhythms of

everydayness were far from natural, so, now, we must remember that the current state of things

is a similarly contingent outcome of the revolutionary politics of 1968, and while transformation

is certainly not easy, neither is it impossible. We need to recover what Virno terms the "degree

zero" of the modes of action and feeling that the '68 movement foregrounded (22), to see beyond

their seemingly monolithic articulation as modes of late capitalist being and recover the sense of

possibility that they embody. Thus, while it may well be the case that a return to the

revolutionary politics of 1968 may once again lead us back into a more adept and totalizing

capitalism, at the same time, they may well bring forth new and urgent demands for

revolutionary transformation.

New Cinemas

The same burgeoning interest in the global manifestations of 1968 in the cultural

criticism of the last five years is mirrored in a concomitant cinematic investment in exploring the

revolutionary politics of the period. Indeed, the last decade has seen such a proliferation of films

dealing with the political movements surrounding 1968 that this thematic resurgence constitutes

a mini-genre all of its own. On one hand there is a series of popular films that make use of 60s

radicalism as a compelling backdrop for Hollywood-style genre films. Such titles include

Invisible Circus (Brooks 2001)*, where Cameron Diaz joins the French Red Army, *Waking the

Dead* (Gordon 2000), about the reappearance of Jennifer Connolly, who supposedly died in a

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Chilean protest, at her former boyfriend's political rally, and the historically inaccurate gangster-style biopic *Baader* (Roth 2002). On the other hand, there is another set of contemporary films that take the long 1968 more seriously and addresses its politics more directly, this latter set being divisible into two principle groups. Interestingly, this division reproduces the same tension in understanding the legacies of '68 as discussed above. The first group brings together films that emphasize a personal political journey. Presented as explorations of the effect of the movement on the lives of individuals, they tend to reproduce 1968 through the lens of a bourgeois liberal ethics of individualism. Most famous from this genre, perhaps, are Bertolucci's *The Dreamers* (2003) and Philip Garrel's epic response, *Regular Lovers* (2005). To this group, we could also add *Blame it on Fidel*, Julie Gavras's presentation of the development of a spoiled young girl's leftist consciousness as her parents participate in the anti-Franco and Women's movements of 1970s Paris, and *Born in '68* (Ducastel 2008), which counterpoises one couple's life as part of a socialist commune in the late 60s with their children's growing radicalism as the next generation protests the WTO and AIDS discrimination in the 1980s.

Perhaps the most expansive trend in cinematic presentations of 60s radicalism, however, is the preoccupation with the rise of radical leftist militancy and groups like the Red Army Faction (more familiar as the Baader-Meinhof Gang), the Naxalites, the Weather Underground, and various international incarnations of the United Red Army. This group of films by and large side-steps the romantic, poetic version of 1968 to focus on its violence, thereby presenting a history that is typically left out of many rose-tinted, glossier historical reconsiderations. Indeed, 1968 is certainly more fondly remembered for its poetic idealism than its terror campaigns. Films that take up the violent manifestations of Left radicalism include Steven Soderbergh's two-part biopic *Che* (2008), which restages the Cuban and Bolivian revolutionary campaigns that

cemented him as the figurehead of the militant Left, as well as Olivier Assayas's mini-series *Carlos* (2010)*,* which tells the story of the infamous Venezuelan Marxist-cum-terrorist, Carlos the Jackal, by all accounts to his absolute disgust. Numerous films draw inspiration from the German Red Army Faction, most notably the award-winning epic *Baader-Meinhof Complex* (Eder 2008)*,* which charts the rise and fall of the first two generations of the German arm of the RAF. Treading similar thematic ground, there is also *The Legend of Rita* (Schlondorff 2000), which follows the life of a West German Marxist-Leninist radical affiliated with a fictional group reminiscent of the RAF as she moves to the DDR, and *The State I am In* (Petzold 2001), which tells the story of a family of German left-wing terrorists on the run for fifteen years. Koji Wakamatsu's *United Red Army* (2007) traces the history of the Japanese arm of the Red Army, culminating in the ten-day siege at the Asama Sanso lodge, while in a similar vein, Marco Bellochio's *Good Morning, Night* (2003) focuses on the 1978 kidnapping and murder of the Italian politician Aldo Moro by the Red Brigade. And in India, several films have been made about the 1967 rise of the Naxalite movement, including the Tegulu film *Sindhooram* (Vamsi 1997), the Hindi films *Hazaar Chaurasi Ki Maa* (Nihalani1998) and *Hazaaron Khwaishein Aisi* (Mishra 2005), and the Malayalam film *Thalappavu* (Janardhanan 2008), which recounts the true story of the shooting of the Naxalite Arikkad Varghese by the police in Kerala in 1970.

Offering a range of perspectives on this global wave of leftist armed struggle, these films frequently begin by situating the movement that is their specific, often national, focus in relation to the larger global network of protests and struggles, many making use of the same infamous archival footage – the tanks rolling through the streets of Prague and Mexico City, the street riots in Chicago and Paris – and other images that have become so canonical to the period. As such, together, the films overlap and intersect to produce a larger transnational cinematic text

comprised of a series of interrelated national moments encapsulated in specific filmic articulations. What emerges, then, is an allegorical cinematic amalgam of the global revolutionary war that fueled these movements as they fought for and against their specific national-*cum*-transnational concerns under the rising tide of global late capitalism.

On one hand, we can understand this international preoccupation with leftwing terror groups as part of a more general interest in terrorism, an investment which has increased exponentially since 9/11. With the proliferation of "terror studies" and an all-round general hysteria concerning an amorphous yet imminent danger, the potentiality for an upsurge of Left-wing terrorist groups forms another branch of this pervasive threat to the status quo. But the preponderance of such films also seems to mark, once again, a kind of nostalgic desire for this level of radical political commitment. Indeed, the sympathetic portrayal of these extremist groups, even in films like *United Red Army*, where the militant faction brutally murders most of its own members, articulates the need to go back and seriously consider the significance of this kind of militant thinking. While benefitting from hindsight, these films are certainly critical of the weaknesses and failures of Left-wing militancy, yet at the same time they demand a more careful consideration of its desires and motivations and offer a counterclaim for their legitimacy.

Thus, one way of understanding the films taken up in this project is through their shared desire to give voice to a politics consistently marginalized and dismissed by a conservative media. Today, when the crises of capitalism have seemingly transformed from exception to the normative state of the everyday and mainstream media become even more conservative, this return to '68 as the last major moment of revolutionary possibility marks a similar compulsion to make sure that it is not forgotten. In this sense, they mark the return of the repressed – what capitalism, through its media sway wishes to banish from modern memory, thus effectively

hiding the conditions within itself that lead to the necessity of revolution. As Kristen Ross has argued, "an enormous amount of narrative labor – and not a shroud of silence – has facilitated the active forgetting of the events in France. […D]iscourse has been produced, but its primary effect has been to liquidate – to use an old 68 word – erase, or render obscure the history of May" (3). If we are at risk, then, of losing the kinds of political commitment reflected in the militancy and scope of the global '68 conjuncture, of forgetting the sense of promise and possibility that it engendered, these contemporary films work against this cultural amnesia by attempting to restore to popular memory the belief that things could be otherwise. As Sartre famously asserted about 1968, "What is important is that the action took place at a time when everyone judged it to be unthinkable. If it took place, then it can happen again."

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